MISSION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Posted on February 25, 2016 by Eddie

Yes we have to obey Christ's command at the end of Matthew's Gospel, just as we have to obey all his commands. But the Bible's story of mission doesn't start and end there - and nor should ours.
Category: Mission

Over the last couple of weeks, I've been doing a fascinating bit of research into the way in which our concept of mission has changed over the years. Well, I think it's fascinating!

I've been comparing two key documents in mission thinking; the Lausanne Covenant and the Cape Town Commitment. The first of these, as the name suggests was produced at the Lausanne Congress in 1974, while the second, was produced at the third Lausanne meeting, which was held in Cape Town.

There is a great deal that could be said to contrast and compare these two documents. They were produced in very different contexts and have different aims. I'd just like to focus on one aspect; the use of the Old Testament.

The Lausanne Covenant mentions the Old Testament only once and that is in section two on the authority and power of the Bible. The first part of the Cape Town Commitment (the confession of faith, which compares most directly to the original Lausanne document) has, in contrast, 17 overt references to the Old Testament as a whole or to incidents in the Old Testament.

If you compare the Bible passages which are quoted in the footnotes,Â 8% of the citations in the Lausanne Covenant are from the Old Testament, compared toÂ 34% of those in the Cape Town Commitment.

This shift in emphasis between the two statements is significant as it represents a change in our understanding both of mission and of the Bible. Chris Wright, who (not coincidently) was the editor of the Cape Town Commitment, puts it this way:

> *I wanted them to see not just that the Bible contains a number of texts which happen to provide a rationale for missionary endeavour but that the whole bible is itself a "missional" phenomenon. The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God. The Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation. The Bible is the drama of this God of purpose engaged in the mission of achieving that purpose universally, embracing past, present and future. Israel and the nations "live the universe and everything" and with its centre, focus, climax and completion in Jesus Christ. Mission is not just one of a list of things that the bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in that much-abused phrase "what it's all about".*

From the introduction toÂ The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative.

It is sad, then, that all too often, people talk about mission purely as "fulfilling the Great Commission". Yes we have to obey Christ's command at the end of Matthew's Gospel, just as we have to obey all his commands. But the Bible's story of missionÂ doesn't start and end there. This is clearly captured

in the change in emphasis between Lausanne and Cape Town - sadly, much of the mission world has yet to catch up with the implications of this.

*In passing, if you want to know why I'm so allergic to the phrase "fulfilling the Great Commission", you might read this*Â *(make sure you read the comment below my piece).*Â