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The Mission Given to Israel

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Source: *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology (2nd Edition)*

Editor(s): John W. Welch

Published: Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1996

Page(s): 171–180



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The Mission Given to Israel

Enumeration of mission items. This was the mission given to Israel by his revealed religion: To testify to the reality of God; that he is Creator of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are; that he is the eternal cause of events within the universe.

To testify to the unity of God, but a unity arising from harmonized personal Intelligences, each the incarnation of the one God Nature. And yet such a unity as will warrant the prophet's ringing message, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord [our] God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). For ~~them~~ *Israel* and *for* this world there is no other.

To testify of the definite form of God—of all divine Intelligences, who are but incarnations of the one God Nature; that man was made in the very image and likeness of God; and that man possesses this form of God, as well as the moral qualities, mind, or intelligence, and a will.

To testify that men are "the children of the Most High." That a redemption was promised through a Messiah, that was to come, and who would save "that which was lost" through disobedience to law: that the original **innocence?** righteousness of man might be regained; and redemption from physical death would be secured through resurrection from the dead.

This the mission given unto Israel. This the means through which the seed of Abraham would be a blessing unto all nations of the earth; because through his seed these several things would be made known to the world, and through his seed would the Messiah come to earth.

Israel not always faithful to his mission. It must be confessed that Israel was not wholly true to this high mission. There is throughout, after his deliverance from Egypt, a tendency to play fast and loose with this mission. He was not sufficiently faithful to warrant God giving to him a complete victory over the land of Palestine which had been promised as an heritage to him. Remnants of old tribes remained in the land to plague Israel; and it was not until the reigns of David and

Solomon that the Israelites won entire possession of the land, and when they so possessed it, it was but for a short period. With the close of Solomon's reign came the revolt of the ten tribes against Rehoboam, resulting in the establishment of the Northern Kingdom; which in 722 B.C. was overthrown by the Assyrians. The Northern Kingdom destroyed, its population carried into Assyria, and from there led away, and finally lost among the northern peoples of Europe; and ever since they have been spoken of as "the lost tribes."

Judah, and half of the tribe of Benjamin which remained with him, continued 135 years longer and then that kingdom was also overthrown; and the king and the people carried away captive to Babylon, where they remained until delivered under Cyrus; but not again to become an established sovereign and independent people. They became victims first to one of the neighboring kingdoms, and then to another; and finally came under the jurisdiction of all-conquering Rome. Such their political condition at the time of the coming of their Messiah.

This the outline merely of the melancholy history of Israel. During the early centuries of their existence in Palestine, including the reign of the Judges, there was all the while an inclination to follow after the false gods of the lands which they took possession of; and the chief messages and preachments of their prophets were against this infidelity and sacrilege of the chosen people. Then just at the time when the great climax of their revelation was about to be reached in the advent of their Messiah, they were in the lowest state of their apostasy from God, and neglect of the high mission given to them.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. The fact **of this apostasy** is noted by many historians and scholars. Among them Alfred Edersheim, the author of a ~~splendid~~ two-volume work on *The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah*. He holds as a preliminary to the turning away of Israel from his high mission, and as contributing to it, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scripture usually called the Septuagint, or the "LXX."^a This latter name is given to the version because of the tradition that the translation was accomplished by seventy elders of the Jews. The most generally accepted theory concerning it, however, is that it was a work accomplished at various times between 280-150 B.C. The books of Moses were translated as early as the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus, 284-246 B.C. The prophets and psalms were

^aThe translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek in the third century B.C. was apparently intended to serve many public or secular purposes, as well as religious and liturgical functions.

translated somewhat later. After mentioning “clerical mistakes” in the work, “misreadings” and “making allowance for errors of translation, ignorance and haste in the performance of the work,” Edersheim says:

The distinctly Grecian elements, however, are at present of chief interest to us. They consist of allusions to Greek mythological terms, and adaptations of Greek philosophical ideas. However few, even one well-authenticated instance would lead us to suspect others, and in general give to the version the character of Jewish Hellenising. In the same class we reckon what constitutes the prominent characteristic of the LXX. version, which, for want of better terms, we would designate as rationalistic and apologetic. Difficulties—or what seemed such—are removed by the most bold methods, and by free handling of the text; it need scarcely be said, often very unsatisfactorily. More especially a strenuous effort is made to banish all anthropomorphisms, as inconsistent with their ideas of the Deity.¹

It was this version of the Hebrew scripture that became really the people’s Old Testament to that large Jewish world through which Christianity was afterwards to address itself to mankind. “It was part of the case,” says Edersheim,

that this translation should be regarded by the Hellenists (Greeks) as inspired like the original. Otherwise it would have been impossible to make final appeal to the very words of the Greek; still less, to find in them a mystical and allegorical meaning.²

This translation of the Hebrew scripture laid the foundation for a superstructure of false philosophy, and there was not wanting builders who were anxious to place a pagan structure upon it. About the middle

¹Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* 1:28. [With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it is apparent that the transmission of the LXX is much more complex than had been supposed. Many of the translations that had been deemed to be “free handling of the text” are really translations of various Hebrew textual traditions. In other words, many of the textual variations had already occurred in Hebrew before the Greek translations were made. For discussion see R. A. Kraft, “Septuagint,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible Supplement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 807–15. Likewise, the charge that in the Septuagint “a strenuous effort is made to banish all anthropomorphisms” has been shown to be overstated. While attempts to de-anthropomorphize God are found in Jewish and Christian religious traditions that used the LXX, examples in that text of the Bible are not as widespread as has been argued. In fact, probably as many examples of anti-anthropomorphism exist in the Hebrew as in the Greek tradition of the Old Testament. See Harry M. Orlinsky, “Introductory Essay: On Anthropomorphisms and Anthropopathisms in the Septuagint and Targum,” in Bernard M. Zlotowitz, *The Septuagint Translation of the Hebrew Terms in Relation to God in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: KTAV, 1981), xxv–xxvi.]

²Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* 1:29.

of the second century B.C., one Aristobulus, a Greek Jew of Alexandria, sought to so explain the Hebrew scriptures as to bring the Peripatetic philosophy (the philosophy of Aristotle, Greek philosopher, who flourished in the 4th century B.C.) “out of the law of Moses, and out of the other prophets.” Following is a sample, according to Edersheim, of his allegorizing: “Thus, when we read that God stood, it meant the stable order of the world; that He created the world in six days, the orderly succession of time; the rest of the Sabbath the preservation of what was created.” And in such manner could the whole system of Aristotle be found in the Bible. But how was this to be accounted for? Of course, the Bible had not learned of Aristotle, but he and other philosophers had learned from the Bible. Thus, according to Aristobulus, Pythagoras, Plato, and all the other sages had really learned from Moses, and the broken rays found in their writings were united in all their glory in the “Torah,”³ meaning the Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses, “the Law.”

Philo of Alexandria: His mischievous interpretations. Following Aristobulus in the same kind of philosophy was Philo, the learned Jew of Alexandria, born about the year 20 B.C. He was supposed to be a descendant of Aaron and belonged to one of the wealthier and most influential families among the merchants of Egypt. He is said to have united a large share of Greek learning with Jewish enthusiasm. According to him the Greek sages had learned their philosophy from Moses in whom alone was all truth to be found. Says Edersheim:

Not, indeed, *in* the letter, but *under* the letter, of Holy Scripture. If in Numb. 23:19 we read “God is not a man,” and in Deut. 1:31 that the Lord was as a man, did it not imply, on the one hand, the revelation of absolute truth by God, and, on the other, accommodation to those who were weak? Here, then, was the principle of a twofold interpretation of the Word of God—the literal and the allegorical. . . . To begin with the former: the literal sense must be wholly set aside, when it implied anything unworthy of the Deity, anything unmeaning, impossible, or contrary to reason. Manifestly, this canon, if strictly applied, would do away not only with all anthropomorphisms, but cut the knot wherever difficulties seemed insuperable. Again, Philo would find an allegorical, along with the literal, interpretation indicated in the reduplication of a word, and in seemingly superfluous words, particles, or expressions. These could, of course, only bear such a meaning on Philo’s assumption of the actual inspiration of the LXX. version.⁴

³Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* 1:36.

⁴Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* 1:40–43; italics in original.

It is not necessary to enter ~~the~~ *into* further details as to Philo's method except to note what another has said in relation to the results growing out of that method. This "other" (in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*) says: "So far as we can judge . . . his (Philo's) aim was to put upon the sacred text a sense which would appeal to Greek readers, and in particular to get rid of all anthropomorphic utterances about God."⁵

Philo's false doctrine of God. Philo's doctrine starts from the idea that God is "Being," absolutely bare of all quality.

All quality in finite beings has limitation, and no limitation can be predicated of God, who is eternal, unchangeable, simple substance, free, self-sufficient, better than the good and the beautiful. To predicate any quality of God would be to reduce him to the sphere of finite existence. Of him we can only say *that* he is, not *what* he is, and such purely negative predications as to his being appear to Philo . . . the only way of securing his (God's) absolute elevation above the world (that is, above and outside of the material universe). . . . A consistent application of Philo's abstract conception of God would exclude the possibility of any active relation of God to the world, and therefore of religion; for a being absolutely without quality and movement can not be conceived as actively concerned with the multiplicity of individual things. And so, in fact, Philo does teach that the absolute perfection, purity and loftiness of God would be violated by direct contact with imperfect, impure, and finite things.⁶

Of which it will be sufficient to say, that such is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, nor of Moses, nor of the prophets of Israel, nor of the Bible or any part of it.

In all Philo's wresting of the Jewish scriptures, one sees only too plainly the efforts to harmonize Jewish theology with Greek philosophy—an effort to be rid of the plain anthropomorphism of the Hebrew scriptures, for the incomprehensible "being" of Greek metaphysics. And thus the Jews, the people who had been chosen witnesses for God to the world, appeared to have grown weary of the mission given to them, tired were they of standing in a position where their hands seem to be raised against all men, and all men's hands raised against them, because of this message of theirs. They had lost the spirit that had supported their fathers, and hence were searching out these cowardly compromises by which harmony could be shown to exist between the philosophy of the Gentiles and the revelation of God to their fathers.^b

⁵*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., s.v. "Philo."

⁶*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., s.v. "Philo."

^bIt is ironic that Philo had very little impact on Rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism that survived the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. The hellenization of Judaism,

This ends our survey of the ancient religions including this Hebrew religion which more emphatically than any of the others is founded upon direct revelation from God. And as to that, we must have seen that the people to whom the positive and direct revelation of God was given, often appeared to be unfaithful to the trust imposed in them, and from the beginning gave evidence of an inclination to follow after other gods, the gods of the heathen; and in the last phases of their national existence, philosophized themselves out of the robust religion contained in their scriptures to accept the attenuated, hair-splitting metaphysics of the subtle Greek mind, substituting these speculations for the revelations of God, until we shall presently see, when the supreme moment had arrived for the complete manifestation of God in the flesh, their minds were prepared to reject him and to cry blasphemy when he proclaimed himself God, “the Son of God,” and “God manifested in the flesh.”

Earth advent of Messiah. It was in the midst of these conditions as to the affairs of Israel, that the promised Messiah of the chosen people was born in Bethlehem of Judea, two thousand years ago: The greater part of Israel (ten tribes) more than a century ⟨?⟩ before had been carried captive into Assyria; thence led away and dispersed among the peoples of northern Europe. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin after captivity and varied national experiences, arising chiefly in being subjected to one or another of the neighboring kingdoms, were now in complete subjection to Rome, shorn of national glory ⟨?⟩, in a state of apostasy against God and indifferent to their mission as God’s witness to the world.

Preparation for the revelation of God: Betrothal of Mary. The betrothal of Mary of Nazareth in preparation of the birth of the “only begotten Son of God” ***in the flesh***, was conducted by the angel Gabriel, the account of which is given in St. Luke’s gospel in the most delicate terms. The angel said to Mary, after his gentle “all hail” to her,

blessed art thou among women, . . . for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive . . . and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest. . . . The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the

especially as represented by Philo, ultimately exerted more influence on Christianity than in Judaism: “Philo remained almost unknown in Jewish tradition until the 16th century. It was the Christian Church which preserved and adopted Philo under the heading of ‘Philo the Bishop.’” Peter Borgen, “Philo,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992), 341.

power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:28-32, 35)

And, of course, he will be what he is called—the Son of God!

Witness of the shepherds. At his birth, in the humble quarters of the stable at Bethlehem, God sent his angels to bear witness of the fact of it to the shepherds who were watching their flocks in the fields by night. The angel of the Lord came to them, and assured them of good tidings—“Christ, the Lord was born” (cf. Luke 2:8-11). Then came other angels with their song of “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to[ward] men” (Luke 2:14).

Later the shepherds found the babe in the manger, as they were told they would; and they made known the great message which had been revealed to them: Christ the Lord had been born in the city of David—Bethlehem!

The witness of the Magi. From afar came other witnesses and of a different class. These were learned men from the East who had seen his star which they followed and had come to worship him. They, as befit their station, called at Herod’s palace in Jerusalem, and desired to know where “he that \langle was \rangle [is] born King of the Jews” (Matt. 2:2) was to be found. The palace could give them no information, so they followed the “star” until it stood where the young child was, and there, where the humble shepherds had first found him, the wise men also found him and paid him royal, if not divine, honors with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Warned in a dream not to return to the palace to disclose what they had learned, the birth of him who is destined to be King of the Jews, and of all the earth, they departed to their far-off homes which some traditions place respectively in Persia, India, and Egypt (cf. Matt. 1:1-12).

Thus began the life of God’s Son in the earth. Childhood was spent in Egypt, until the passing of those who in their jealous hate sought his life. His youth was spent in the humble village of Nazareth, until the beginning of his formal ministry, which opened when he was about thirty years of age, a ministry in which was proclaimed the full message and mission of God’s Son.

The message of the Son of God. That the “Word” which was in the beginning with God “and which was God” was now made flesh, and dwelt with men, and was “the only begotten of the Father in the flesh” (cf. John 1:1, 14).

That Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Son of God (John 10:36).

That Jesus and the Father are one (by being alike in nature and power and knowledge and wisdom and glory—one, i.e., alike, in all things) (John 10:30; 17).

That Jesus was God manifested in the flesh—i.e., revealed in the flesh (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16).

That Jesus is the Savior of men and that he is the Redeemer of the world; that no other name under heaven is given whereby men may be saved (John 3:14–19; Acts 4:12).

That men through him must be born again of the water and of the spirit in order for entrance into the kingdom of heaven (John 3:5).

That Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and that through him all men will be raised from the dead in their order; “For as in Adam all die, [even] so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22; cf. Matt. 27:50–53; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20 and 21; Acts 1:1–11; 1 Cor. 15:1–26).

The mission of the Son of God. (Of course the message above overlaps in places the mission, since they are so closely allied.)

To bear witness to the truth (John 3:11; 18:37).

To “teach all things,” and witness the truth that Jesus was the Son of God.

Woman: I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

Jesus: I that speak [un]to thee am he. (cf. John 4:25–26)

Jesus: (to one whom he had healed) Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

The Man: Who is he, Lord, that I may believe?

Jesus: Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee!

The Man: Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. (cf. John 9:35–38)

“To preach good tidings unto the meek; . . . to bind up the broken-hearted. . . . To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God” (Isa. 61:1–2).

“To comfort all ⟨who⟩ [that] mourn” (Isa. 61:2).

Messengers from John the Baptist: Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

Jesus: Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. (Matt. 11:3-6)

“To proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isa. 61:1).

Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached [un]to the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah. . . . For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. (1 Pet. 3:18-20; 4:6)

To be a Light to the Gentiles, as well as to Israel, and a universal savior:

Prophecy as to the Messiah—the Christ:

It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. (Isa. 49:6)

Jesus: Father, glorify thy name.

Voice: I have **both** glorified it, and will glorify it again. (The people heard the voice. Some thought it thundered and others said an angel spake to him.)

Jesus: This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth (i.e. upon the cross), will draw all men unto me. (cf. John 12:28-32)

This in outline [is] the message and the mission of the Christ, which message and mission is testified of in the collection of books known as the New Testament and which, when united with the prophetic message of the Old Testament, makes up the whole mission of Israel to the world. **Add “other sheep I have”—Christ mission to western continents. St. John. 10 ch.**

At this stage in the development of our theme, we shall concern ourselves next with developing the fact of the true deity of the Christ, as that truth is set forth in both the Old and in the New Testament, leaving the other phases of the message and mission of the Christ to be dealt with under the middle title of our three-fold theme, the Truth, the Way, the Life.

Further references recommended by Roberts for this lesson: Josephus, *Works of Flavius Josephus*; Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible*; and *Jewish Encyclopedia*.