



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

THE CHRONICLES OF YAHWEH, PART 2 • Rick James

Israel

If you locate Israel on a map, you'll notice something significant: it is the shared love handle of two obese land-masses (Africa and Eurasia). This is no accident. God wanted Israel to be "a city on a hill," (Matthew 5:14) the only tourist attraction on the only turnpike between the continents. He wanted people from everywhere in the known world to pass through and see the Magic Kingdom, where God's reign and rule were on display. Israel was God's missionary outreach to the world, the base of operations from which to expand his kingdom to the world.

Consider the genius of the plan. After the tower of Babel, the world had been tribalized: hundreds of little nation-states comprised of clans and families, each in a state of rebellion, autonomous of God. No longer would a single man, woman, or family provide a sufficient witness. What was needed was a lighthouse, not a light: a beacon with sufficient wattage to illuminate the distant, ever-sprawling nations. What was needed was a nation, a godly super-power to draw all nations back to God.

It's just a shame that no such nation existed. The nations spawned in the judgment of Babel were darkened and degenerate, providing as much light as a flashlight powered by a AAA battery. So God would bake a nation from scratch, using a righteous man named Abram as dough (the name Abram means "exalted father" and would later be changed to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude"). It is not incidental that the first citizens of this new nation—Abraham and his wife, Sarah—were roughly seventy years of age, for the birth of their offspring, like the birth of the nation, would be a God-created miracle: life out of death.

In Genesis 12 we read how God told Abram to leave his home in Babylon and go to Canaan so that in due time he and his descendants would become a nation serving as a lighthouse to the world, calling all people and nations back to God. Israel was to be a gospel tract plunked down in the center of the world coffee table. Here are the specific instructions and promise that Abraham received from God:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:1-3)

Please note the goal of the plan put forth in Genesis 12:1-3, the reason for which God created the nation of Israel. It was so that all peoples on earth would be blessed through them and come to know the one true God. They were blessed in order to be a blessing, in order to expand God's kingdom to the world.

Thus God's dealings with Israel in the centuries that followed, and in the following thirty-eight books of the Old Testament, all in some way related to the development of this plot and story line. Let me just pull some verses as we flip through the Old Testament on our way to the New, so you can track the arc of the story.



Keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 28:9-10)

The Lord your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God. (Joshua 4:23-24)

Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. (1 Samuel 17:46)

Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel. (1 Kings 8:43)

Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God. (2 Kings 19:19)

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. (Psalm 67:1-2)

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6)

“If you will return, O Israel, return to me,” declares the Lord. “If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, ‘As surely as the Lord lives,’ then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory.” (Jeremiah 4:1-2)

All in all, the plan was a spectacular one; Israel’s performance in the lead role, less so. Like some of the God-wants-to-bless-you-with-a-fleet-of-Humvees religious broadcasting we see on television, Israel’s portrayal of life in the kingdom was a distortion and often a mockery of that reality. They fell into idolatry, worshiping the gods of other nations; they failed to trust God through their national and international crises; corruption reached all levels of political and religious governance; and their spiritual life was rife with legalism and hypocrisy.

Needless to say, none of this makes for a particularly enticing advertisement for God’s kingdom—just another ugly billboard on the throughway between Africa and Eurasia. In this respect you’d have to say that Disneyworld has done a better job of drawing all nations to a bright and shining vision of a new social order.

Jonah

Of all the books of the Old Testament, Jonah provides the clearest, most unhindered view of the internal wiring responsible for Israel’s failure to generate light to the nations.

From history, we know that Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, stretched the definition of decadence to the word’s limits. From the book of Jonah, we know that God mercifully sought to warn the great city of its impending judgment. And so God called a prophet from Israel, one named Jonah, to go to Nineveh with this cheery telegram: repent or perish. Upon receiving his mission, Jonah promptly booked a voyage on a boat heading in the opposite direction from Nineveh—Jonah was on strike. God persuasively convinced Jonah of the imprudence of his decision, and Jonah reluctantly headed off to preach to Nineveh . . . just as soon as the whale vomited him back up. At the hearing of Jonah’s warning, a miracle happened: Nineveh repented—the entire city!



It was one of the greatest evangelistic campaigns in history. And here we witness Jonah's celebration of the event:

Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:1-3)

Jonah was not happy, not happy at all!

Now for my point: Jonah is a picture of Israel. What Israel wanted was for God to level the city of Nineveh, reduce it to a Stonehenge condition and annihilate its ungodly citizens.

The Israelites had succumbed to nationalism. They presumed that their favored status as a nation was because of their righteousness. It wasn't. Their blessing by God had been unmerited and for the purpose of blessing other nations. Instead, an us-versus-them mindset fueled national pride, prejudice smoldered as they bunkered down waiting, praying for an air strike from heaven—kill 'em, kill 'em all.

Israel, ceasing to be a channel of God's grace, was now a roadblock to the mission and a spoiler of the plot. They were the recipients of God's blessings, unwilling to share it. There are many precarious positions to find oneself in as a nation, but being a hindrance to God's kingdom is not a desirable state of affairs, putting you at the top of God's list of "things that need replacing."

But we get ahead of ourselves. Maybe when the Messiah came, Israel would respond and through them all the nations of the world would hear the glorious gospel of the kingdom. Maybe they would embrace the plot. Yeah, maybe.

Excerpt from *Mission Impossible: The Plot of History and the Drama of Today* (Critical Concepts Series, Volume 1), Rick James. © 2008 CruPress. All rights reserved.

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