

Old-Testament Era

The concept of world mission has always been difficult for God's people to comprehend and to act upon. In a covenant with Abraham, God gave him and the Israel people three great promises: a great nation, great blessings and a great name. God also said: "*All people on earth will be blessed through you.*" But Abraham and his descendants seemed to have noticed only the first half of God's promises (they themselves will be blessed), and not the second half (they in turn will be a blessing to others).

The people of Israel have never truly, actively, intentionally and systematically proclaimed the name of Jehovah and His love to other nations. The fact they were the "chosen people" did not give them a "sense of commission", but only an attitude of pride and discrimination against others. Their prophets, such as Jonah, even refused to communicate God's message to the Gentiles. Instead, when the entire city of Nineveh repented of their sins, Jonah "*was greatly displeased and became angry.*" (Jonah 4:1)

Although the Israelites on occasions brought blessings to Gentile nations, those events did not occur out of their intentional good will. For example, Joseph, a son of Jacob, was put in charge of Egypt and saved the entire nation from a seven-year famine. He did not go to Egypt to bring blessings to the Egyptians out of his family's goodwill so to fulfill God's word that "*all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you*". He went to Egypt as a slave, having been sold by his brothers out of jealousy because of his father's favoritism. It started out as a family tragedy, but God turned it into a blessing.

Similarly, the prophet Daniel attained a high position in Babylon and ruled the nation with his three friends. He brought great blessings to the Babylonians. But his going to Babylon in 605 B.C. was not an expression of the love of the Israelites to the Gentiles. Daniel was exiled to Babylon. Again we see that God turned a tragedy into a blessing.

Yes, some Psalmists did cry out for global missions, such as, Psalm 67: "*that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations*", and Psalm 96: "*Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*" These beautiful verses sound much like the words of William Carey, "Father of Modern missions" in the 18th century! God reminded the Israelites of their global responsibility through the psalmists with such clarity and forcefulness, it did not wake up the stubborn Israelites to take any real action.