



# Understanding Mission

with **Langham**  
PARTNERSHIP

## Session 1 - Reading the Whole Bible for Mission (Transcript)

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And you connect those words to verses of the Bible. That's very much how I was taught growing up in the Presbyterian church here in Belfast. Even as a teenager, we were learning the doctrines of the faith, and we knew how to defend all those doctrines with good Bible teaching.

Wonderful. I'm grateful for that, but it's not what the Bible is. And then thirdly, the Bible's not just a book full of rules. I remember my son Tim, once saying to me, he was in conversation with a fellow teacher at the school where he was teaching, and they were talking about different religions.

And my son had to say to this friend, you know, the Bible's not just a Christian's rule book. And his friend said, oh, I thought that's what it was.

I thought, just, you have to do everything by the book, as it were, because it's, it's your rule book. He said, no, no, it's not just a rule book. Although of course there are lots of rules and commandments in the Bible.

So the Bible's not just any of those things. What is the Bible if fundamentally in the form, God has given it to us? The Bible is a grand story. It has a beginning.

In the beginning, God created the world. It has an ending. Then I saw a new heavens and a new Earth. And in between that beginning and that ending, miraculously, God has put together a library of books which tell a story, the story of God and the story of the universe, the true story of all reality.

So don't think this is just, you know, here's my Bible. I can read it and think this is a wonderful story as children's Bible story books. You know, this is just a good story.

It is a great story, but this is the story. This is God's story and miracle of miracles. God says, Hey, I want you all to be part of my story.

I want you in what I'm doing. We participate, we're in the Bible, right? So let's try to think about this from the beginning. Act one, of course is the creation.

And I often have portrayed this like this triangle simply because it sort of helps people to say, yeah, in the beginning, God, the one true living, God created the heavens and the earth.

And as far as we are concerned, it's the earth, which really matters because that's where God has put us, the human beings, the human race made in the image of God.

So here is a kind of a pattern or a structure of reality, God, the creation and ourselves, which is fundamental to all the rest of the story. This is the platform.

And then it spreads wider into society with corruption and evil affecting the whole human community, all the nations as well in its sense, eventually spreading to the tower of Babel and the whole human project in arrogance against God as it were.

And God says, because you have done this, cursed is the earth because of you. So the very ground in which we live fights back against us. So all of those relationships between God and humanity and creation are all being twisted and broken and spoiled here because of the entry of evil into human life at this point.

So it's very important, again, I think for us to get hold of this act two of the Bible story, this radical diagnosis of human sinfulness. Because again, unless we understand the depth of the problem that the Bible shows us, we won't begin to understand the depth and the scope of the solution, the gospel.

And one reason why it's sometimes easy to have a reduced, somewhat narrow and simplistic understanding of the gospel is when people haven't explored the whole depth and breadth and scope of the effect of evil in human life, in personal life, in relational life, in society, in the structures of

economics and politics and everywhere else, and indeed in the creation itself.

And when we get a hold of that, all that that has created in the world, then we need to say, God, you've gotta have a pretty big answer to this problem.

And God says, yes, actually I do. And it's a very big answer that will take the whole of the rest of the Bible to explore, which is where we're going next.

Sometimes when I used to be teaching this in a Bible college, I used to say, we all know when we come to an exam that the answer to the questions on the examination paper really needs to be a bit longer than the question.

So the kingship in Israel has this ambiguity of being a human institution with flaws and failures galore, and yet somehow being the instrument by which God can talk about his own kingship, that he is the true king and shepherd of his people, so that the story then moves forward.

And alongside those narratives, of course of the judges and the kings you get the the prophets who bring God's word to his people, exposing idolatry, exposing social evils, wickedness, oppression political abuse of power and so on.

And showing the people that if they go on living like that, then God will bring judgment, which he does into exile in Babylon. But then God's great promises of restoration to bring the people back to their land and back into relationship with him, which he does, still flawed, still sinful as we see in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophets after the exile, like Malachi and so on.

But still, God is moving on. He's still got this purpose. And alongside the prophets, we also see books like the Psalms and the wisdom literature, which accompany this journey all the way forward.

But as it says at the bottom of the screen, do remember this is a journey. This is something that's constantly moving forward. There's always this sense of hope, of expectation, and sometimes it's very explicit in the Psalms of the prophets.

You get God talking about, you know, proclaim among the nations that the Lord reigns, the Lord is God of all the earth and he'll be praised at the very ends of the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting and so on.

And I sometimes wonder when I'm reading the Psalms and you read that kind of language, this universal rule of Yahweh, the God of Israel, and that his name will be known to the very ends of the earth.

And you are witnesses of these things. And that's what now begins to happen. And so mission to all nations cross-cultural, international, what we would tell missionary work roots here, it's been foreseen in the Old Testament.

It's not something completely unprecedented and new, but now it's actually on the move and has been on the move for the last 2000 years, hasn't it? And some of you I know have been involved in that cross-cultural crossing, barriers, going to other nations, seeking to serve God in other places, and that is part of the very DNA of the church and always will be.

And nothing that I say today about the more integrated understanding of mission later, none of what I will say then in any way dilutes or denies that reality of the importance of mission, including being sent, going to the nations mission to all nations.

And then, because of course, what happened was that these little communities, these little churches that Paul and Barnabas and his other helpers had founded, they needed to know who they are.

What have we become if we've chosen to say Jesus is Lord, not Caesar, if we've chosen to believe that we have now entered into the people of God by believing in Jesus, we're part of his covenant people, we are the children of Abraham?

Well, what does that mean for us? What is now our identity? We're still Roman citizens. We still have to live in the Roman Empire. But we now live as it were, under a different flag.

As Paul says in Philippians, our citizenship is in heaven, by which he doesn't mean by the way. So don't worry, folks, we're all off to heaven. Eventually you'll get there sometime.

So yes, that is an important part, that we do want to try to make things better, but we can't save the planet. We are not the final savior of the world. God is, Jesus is.

And our biblical hope is the expectation that at the end of the day, it will be God who will return to put things right and make all things new. And that is the story we are in.

That's the story we're participating in. And that is the ultimate future to which we are appointed. And therefore, what we should be facing is not when's all this going to happen?

Though some people get really obsessed with that. But Jesus says you won't know when it's going to happen. But rather, what kind of way should I be living now in the expectation of that?

If this is what's gonna be like, then how should I be living now? And that's what Revelation makes clear, doesn't it? You know, there'll be no more evil.

There is no more cheating. No more lying. No more lust, no more idolatry. And so basically it's saying if there, if those things won't do, then they won't do now.

We shouldn't be involved in those things as we live now. Let's live in the light of what we know is coming. So there's the whole Bible story as one story.

That's what we're trying to, to get hold of. What we're going to look at after after we've had a a little bit of a stretch break is what does that do?

Reading the Bible like that. I just want to suggest three or four things that I think this ought to do to the way we think about ourselves, about our life, about the Bible, and about our mission.

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