

*Mission in the Old Testament: Israel a Light to the Nations* by Walter C. Kaiser. Rev. ed., Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, Michigan 2012; 107 pp. Reviewed by Andrew Mkwaila.

Walter Kaiser seeks to demonstrate that mission is the central story of the Old Testament and that God's desire was that both Israel and the Gentile nations come to a saving knowledge of the Messiah who was to come. In this brief but engaging text Kaiser first sets the context by exploring this subject as it unfolds in Genesis 1-11. Three man-made tragedies are described; the fall, the flood and the dispersement following man's conspiracy to construct the tower of Babel. These three tragedies precipitate three gracious counter words of Blessing. The promised blessings center around the coming of the Messiah. The Blessing promised in these early chapters forms the kernel of what follows in the rest of scripture.

A central expression of the promise in the Old Testament is made to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3. Abram was promised that he would become a great nation, that God, would personally bless him and that his name would be made famous. Kaiser argues that the hermeneutical key for interpreting these verses and thus the overall promise of blessing that Abram received is found in vs 3 when God states that God will bestow the threefold blessing on Abraham so that all the peoples of the earth may be blessed. Kaiser further argues that all peoples of the earth from nations to tribes would come to partake of the blessing as God extended to them when they exercised faith in the promise.

God's manner of dealing with Abram in fact becomes programmatic for his dealing with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. God's intent in blessing Israel was that Israel might become the agent through which that blessing is extended to all peoples of the earth. This is manifested not only on the level of Israel's interactions with various other nations but also significantly in the lives of individual Gentiles such as Melchizedek, Ruth and Naman. Kaiser makes the argument that saving faith required that conscious knowledge in the promise of the Messiah was necessary for saving faith and that the evidence strongly suggests that these individuals and others came not only to acknowledge Yahweh the God of Israel as the true God but also came to trust in the promise of the seed.

Kaiser concludes his text by a discussion of the role of the Old Testament in the missionary mandate of the Apostle Paul. Paul's understanding of his own mission as one to the Gentiles and to the ends of the earth is one which he explicitly rooted in multiple Old Testament texts. Thus indicating that the Gentile mission was not an addendum to God's plan rather it was evident throughout the scripture, albeit at times only in embryonic form.

Mission in the Old Testament has two main strengths. First is the clarity with which Kaiser makes his arguments. He succeeds in painting a portrait of mission in the Old Testament as a whole without being mired in any particular episode. Rather he demonstrates from various characters, genres of literature and periods in the Old Testament, that the promise of blessing is a theme that is continuously developed and reiterated and forms the basis of mission throughout the scripture. The other strength of the text is Kaiser's solid exegesis of the Hebrew text. His argument is supported by forceful explications of key texts related to the promise of blessing. It is to his credit that he does this while still maintaining the flow of the overall book. Some may take issue with the extent to which Kaiser argues that the nation of Israel had a missionary mandate

to the nations rather than functioning merely as a positive illustration of God's reign, however the careful exegesis mitigates against such criticism.

Kaiser's work has pressing significance for theology and ministry in Africa. This importance stems from his treatment of issues related to blessing. The concept of personal blessing and prosperity continues to be the driving force behind much of contemporary Christianity in Africa. Kaiser's exploration of mission in the Old Testament articulates through careful exegesis that the concept and purpose of blessing is to be understood through the rubric of God's salvific intent not only for the recipient but for all people of the earth.