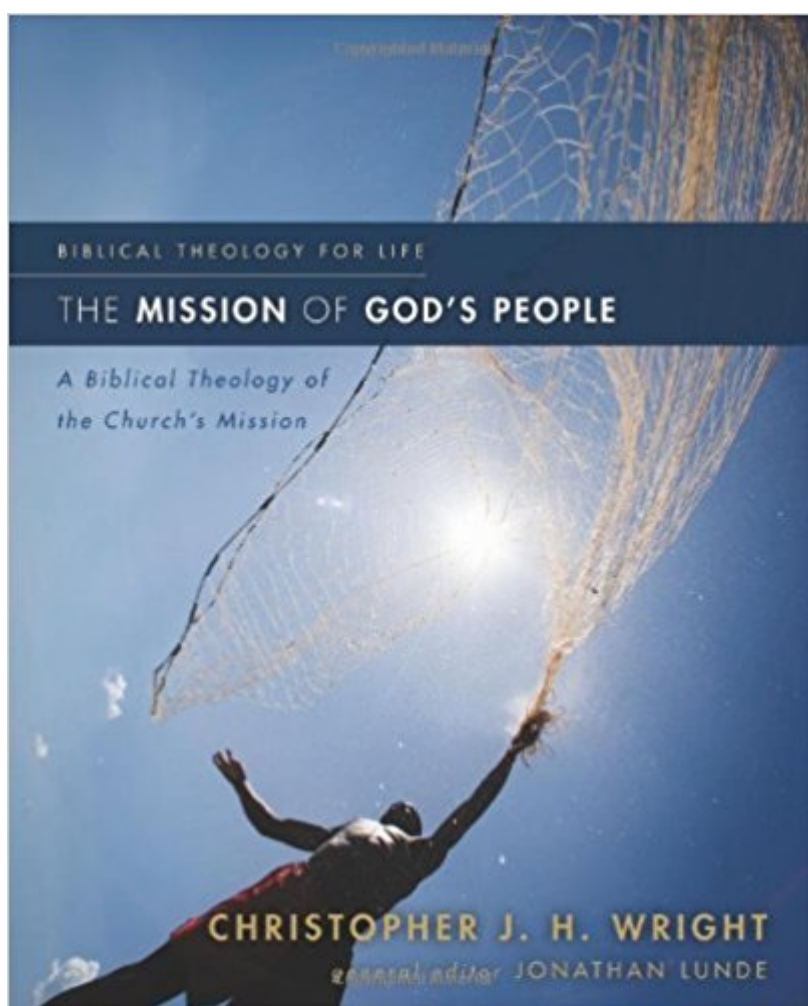


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# The Mission Of God's People: A Biblical Theology Of The Church's Mission (Biblical Theology For Life)



## Synopsis

Chris Wright's pioneering 2006 book, *The Mission of God*, revealed that the typical Christian understanding of "missions" encompasses only a small part of God's overarching mission for the world. God is relentlessly reclaiming the entire world for himself. In *The Mission of God's People*, Wright shows how God's big-picture plan directs the purpose of God's people, the church. Wright emphasizes what the Old Testament teaches Christians about being the people of God. He addresses questions of both ecclesiology and missiology with topics like "called to care for creation," "called to bless the nations," "sending and being sent," and "rejecting false gods." As part of the *Biblical Theology for Life Series*, this book provides pastors, teachers, and lay learners with first-rate biblical study while at the same time addressing the practical concerns of contemporary ministry. *The Mission of God's People* promises to enliven and refocus the study, teaching, and ministry of those truly committed to joining God's work in the world.

## Book Information

Series: *Biblical Theology for Life*

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Zondervan; 1 edition (August 11, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0310291127

ISBN-13: 978-0310291121

Product Dimensions: 7.4 x 0.8 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 57 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #33,606 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in *Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Ecclesiology* #21 in *Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Missions & Missionary Work* #367 in *Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Bible Study*

## Customer Reviews

A wonderfully kaleidoscopic biblical overview of the privileged role afforded to all of God's people in fulfilling the *Missio Dei* in the world. Chris Wright demonstrates that the theme of the mission of God and his people is a prominent and unmistakable thread running through the

elaborate tapestry of the whole of Scripture. In so doing, he provides a ringing affirmation that it is the responsibility of the whole church to bear witness to Christ and his kingdom in every area of the world geographically, as well as in every sphere of society. -- Lindsay Brown, Director

What a marvelous author Chris Wright is! Here you get the distilled insight of someone who knows mission and knows the Scriptures---and because he is an Old Testament specialist, he gives that major part of the Scriptures the prominence it deserves, even (especially?) when we are thinking about a subject such as mission that might seem to belong to the New Testament. And he doesn't confine himself to scriptural themes but enables us to get inside lots of particular Scriptures, all in easily manageable chunks. What do theology and mission have to do with each other? This book powerfully answers the question. -- John Goldingay, Professor

If Chris Wright's *Mission of God's People* is a harbinger of things to come in Zondervan's new series, *Biblical Theology for Life*, we are in for a treat. As the first in this series, this volume not only serves as a delightful sequel and complement to his highly acclaimed *The Mission of God*, but it has also put his holistic interpretation of the Scriptures into the hands of laypeople. This is biblical theology at its best. For too long biblical scholars, theologians, and pastors have driven a wedge between the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament by focusing on the discontinuities. Wright has shown us another way. Through his comprehensive reading of the whole Bible, he offers a robust portrayal of Israel's mission and our own. Just as Israel was called and sent out into the world to give witness to the grace of "the LORD" (Yahweh), so we are "the people whom God has loved, chosen, redeemed, shaped and sent into the world in the name of Christ" (p. 433). Thank you, Chris, for showing us that God's election is not about us; it is about the world. May this work inspire his church to greater faithfulness in giving verbal witness to God's redemptive grace for the cosmos, but also to greater ethical faithfulness as we embody his grace in the microcosms in which we live. -- Daniel Block, Professor

Following his landmark book, *The Mission of God*, Christopher Wright shows in *The Mission of God's People* that grounding missions practice in the prior action and plan of God does not render the church static or passive. In this masterful survey, Wright demonstrates decisively what happens when the whole church starts reading the whole Bible and reflecting the full scope of God's good news in all our life and witness in the world. This is the long-awaited road map that moves missions from the practice of a few elite professionals to the faithful witness of all of God's children. If want to help your church become a missional church, I cannot think of a better place to begin that journey than this book. I assure you, you will discover afresh who you are in Christ and what you are here for! -- Timothy C. Tennent, Professor

This is the first volume in a new series on

biblical theology. It is extraordinarily readable, written by a preacher who knows how to communicate simply, clearly, and fascinatingly. It is refreshingly adventurous, as it explores the theme of mission in biblical passages where you might not have expected to find it. It is excitingly controversial in discussing such matters as the relation of care for the planet to evangelism, but always in an irenic manner. It is also remarkably practical, being concerned with the theological underpinning for the church's action in the world. It is surprisingly relevant, concerned as it is with the central story of God's mission to the world as the template that must shape the work of the church. It is outstandingly down-to-earth in showing how our daily lives must be outworkings of our missionary calling. It is thus eminently commendable both for its own sake and also as setting a high standard for the other volumes to follow in this series. -- Howard Marshall, Professor

Chris Wright's pioneering 2006 book, *The Mission of God*, revealed that the typical Christian understanding of 'missions' encompasses only a small part of God's overarching mission for the world. God is relentlessly reclaiming the entire world for himself. In *The Mission of God's People*, Wright shows how God's big-picture plan directs the purpose of God's people, the church. Wright emphasizes what the Old Testament teaches Christians about being the people of God. He addresses questions of both ecclesiology and missiology with topics like 'called to care for creation,' 'called to bless the nations,' 'sending and being sent,' and 'rejecting false gods.' As part of the *Biblical Theology for Life Series*, this book provides pastors, teachers and lay learners with first-rate biblical study while at the same time addressing the practical concerns of contemporary ministry. *The Mission of God's People* promises to enliven and refocus the study, teaching, and ministry of those truly committed to joining God's work in the world.

This is potentially a life-changing book. Wright is a great author and speaker. He is a careful and diligent scholar, and I appreciate his opinions and views about Jesus and, in this book, the expanded view (the correct view--expanded in the sense that many make it too narrow) of God's mission for the church is a wake-up call many of us need. As a Christian Druid, I am particularly fond of his chapter about caring for the earth as part of God's mandate and its appropriate focus for mission. The book itself is attractive, includes sidebar quotes that add interest as well as evidence for his views, and indices for both subjects and Bible verses. The book has a pleasant type font and is laid out in an aesthetically pleasing manner. A summary of the book follows. I heartily recommend this book to all Christians. Summary Wright's goal for the book is to demonstrate

that biblical theology and mission are interconnected. As he puts it, "there should be no theology that does not relate to the mission of the church" and that all correct theology will have missional impact and serve as the foundation for that mission (20). Chapter 1 lays the foundation of the book, defining "mission" as the purpose of God for all of creation. The church has been created to help fulfill this mission via global outreach (24) to glorify the Lord. Chapter 2 (35-47) emphasizes the need to read the entire Bible and recognize the entire story as the mission of God, stretching from the Creation to New Creation, and that the purpose of the church is to play a role in helping Him achieve it. Because the church has such an important role, it is important to understand the significance of the entirety of the mission. Chapter 3 (48-62) details the breadth of the mission from Creation to New Creation, expanding on this feature of God's plan. The entire universe will be redeemed, including humans, of course, but not limited to humankind. The mandate to keep the earth was not revoked by the Fall, and creation will be redeemed along with us. Chapter 4 (63-81) explains how humankind, though not the exclusive agent of God's mission, is nonetheless the chief instrument He uses to achieve His plan. The covenant with Abraham is enacted so that this people group can serve as a blessing to all nations. Christians, via their place in Christ, are a part of the seed of Abraham (see Matt. 3:9; Luke 13:16; Rom. 11:1), thereby continuing and expanding the mission of God's people. Chapter 5 (82-95) focuses upon how God's people can maintain a proper relationship with the Almighty and ensure that His promise of blessing to all nations is fulfilled. The way of the Lord should be kept via the performance of righteousness and justice (see Gen. 18:19). This ethical dimension of lifestyle serves as the catalyst for our positive participation in God's mission. Chapter 6 (96-113) uses the exodus story of the Old Testament as an example of God's view of redemption. Broadly speaking, this redemption covers all dimensions of God's plan. More narrowly, the concept of redemption involves the complete liberation of the creation through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The redeemed are called to reflect both God's actions and the impetus of His actions by living in a redemptive manner in our relationships with other people. This concept is expanded in Chapter 7 (114-127) wherein Wright goes on to point out, using Exodus 19 and Leviticus 19, that the identity of the people of God constitutes a mission to bless the nations by acting as evidence of God via lifestyle. The ethical lifestyle demonstrates God and His traits to the world and draws the world to the God of the people who are so radically different, in a good way, from the rest of (fallen) society. Chapter 8 (128-147) continues the idea of drawing people to the Lord via lifestyle and redeemed status. Wright says,

“the mission of God’s people in the Bible is to be the people whom God created us to be and to do the things that God calls us to do” (149). The task appointed requires an in-depth understanding of God and His attributes. Chapter 9 (151-162) describes how the biblical gospel should be known and shared by Christians. Jesus Christ is the focus of the biblical narrative, with His life, death, and resurrection being the culmination of the story. Fulfilling this mission involves witnessing, which is the focus of Chapter 10 (163-178). Bearing witness effectively is a sharing of the message in the context of a righteous lifestyle. Chapter 11 (179-200) deals with the proclamation of the gospel. Wright pushes beyond the narrow view of the gospel as a strictly New Testament theme, and argues for the expanded view of Paul that recognizes the gospel as originating in the Old Testament. People were sent to both witness and proclaim. Thus, in Chapter 12 (201-221), Wright explores the theme of “sending.” Taking God’s revelation into the world and cooperating in His mission is the charge given to Christians. This is most often thought of as the work of professional missionaries, those with the gift of evangelism, and this is accurate. However, it is by no means limited to that, as Chapter 13 (222-243) demonstrates. Most Christians will serve as a witness to the world in the course of ordinary life and work; “ordinary” referring to the work of the majority of us who are not professional missionaries. The goal of all missions is to bring glory to God. Part of this mission is for Christians to offer prayer and praise to God. This is the topic of Chapter 14 (244-261). These two activities are fundamental and serve as the identifying and engaging characteristics of the redeemed. Wright closes in Chapter 15 (262-287) with a review of material covered in the book along with application for the contemporary Christian. He also has appended scriptural and subject indices for easy reference and completeness.

Christopher J. H. Wright’s *The Mission of God’s People* is a book that uncovers the biblical theology of mission and its implication for all Christians. It is a book from Zondervan’s *Biblical Theology For Life* series. The book has the stated purpose of uncovering the “so what?” question for all Christians and in Wright’s terms, to answer the question, “What does the Bible as a whole in both testaments have to tell us about why the people of God exist and what it is they are supposed to be and do in the world?”<sup>1</sup> Wright’s main thrust is that God’s mission has a broad redemptive agenda. The simplistic view of mission as just the proclamation of the gospel is tossed out and Wright offers a holistic understanding of the mission of God. This reviewer cannot help but sense Wright’s favorable view of holism in the prioritism versus holism debate of approaches to evangelization of the world.

Regardless of where we might stand in that debate, Wright's presentation of God's mission in this book deserves mention because it presents biblical evidence for a holistic approach to mission. Whether we are supporters or naysayers of a holistic approach to mission, we have the onus of examining the biblical data that Wright offers and give them due consideration in consolidating our own view of a biblical approach to mission. In the first half of the book, from chapters 1-8, Wright wrestles with what the Bible has to say about who we as God's people and what is our purpose in life as God's people. In the second half of the book, chapters 9-15, the author spells out the terms of what we ought to be doing in light of the biblical understanding of God's mission. As God's people, Wright argues that the mission of God entrusted to us is "God's determination, through the whole biblical narrative, to bring about the redemption of his whole creation from the ravages of sin and evil."<sup>2</sup> From this standpoint, Wright states that our understanding of mission should be informed by the whole counsel of God and we must therefore have a firm grip of the overarching Biblical Story of the Bible. Wright postulates that knowing the Biblical Story was a key impetus in motivating the early church in mobilizing for mission as they saw how they fit in God's redemptive story being rolled out in history. The author writes that we often explain the gospel as a series of propositions and focus in God's solution for dealing with an individual's problem with sin, and in doing so, we fall short of giving the full "biblical content" of the gospel. Towards that end, this reviewer agrees and has been invigorated to learn how to present the grand narrative of the Bible in a succinct and compelling manner. Wright also makes the point that missions is pervasively inclusive, covering a broad range of activities that God may send people to do including famine relief, action for justice, preaching, evangelism, teaching, healing, and administration. For Wright, everything that we do as an individual believer or corporately as church should be in conscious participation with the mission of God. This is paradigm shifting to those who contend that "if everything is mission, nothing is mission." This reviewer applauds Wright's exhortation for all to have a missional mindset but disagrees with Wright that "everything is missional". As Wright himself points out, the cross must be central in our social engagement as it is to our evangelism.<sup>3</sup> In practice then, this reviewer believes that an activity can only be deemed as missional if it is in some way efficacious in bringing people into the kingdom of God. For instance, activities that are geared towards the nurturing and maturation of believers are not missional. They are necessary but are usually not centered on God's mission, but if rightly purposed, centers on the primacy of worship of God, whereby mission is only but important facet of that worship. As another example, an activity that is socially beneficial is not missional if proclamation of the gospel is not an integral part of the activity. Going back to Wright's book, this reviewer also feels that the author overemphasize the motif of "everything is missional"

especially in his thoughts that creation care is a missional activity. Wright sees God's redemption is for his whole creation and thus concludes that ecological concerns and activities are legitimate endeavors of the mission of God's people. While this reviewer agrees with Wright that God has not rescinded his mandate for his people to care for the earth, it minimizes the costly nature of redemption, that is, Christ's life in exchange for sinners' when we include creation care as a valid thrust of the mission of God. Wright's emphasis on the ethical dimension of mission is to be commended, and in particular, his explanation of how God presents the doctrine of election, ethics, and mission in Gen 18:19 is very insightful. Ethics and God's mission are integrally bound. Wright states that mission "is ethical at the core, for it demands lives committed to obedience to the Lord...".<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this reviewer agrees with Wright that "the ethical quality of life of the people of God is the vital link between their calling and their mission."<sup>5</sup> In practice then, whether we are called into full-time ministry or the marketplace, our character speaks volume to the message of the gospel that we proclaim. It is the fusion of our behavior and verbal proclamation that effectively testifies to the God to whom we proclaim. The ethical dimension is also the integration of faith and obedience and thus includes bearing witness, proclaiming the gospel, and participation in the enterprise of sending mission workers. As we bear witness for Christ, not only are we bringing good news to the hearers, but it also reinforces the conviction of our faith (Isa 43:10). In the long and rich tradition of sending workers, we can be sending, going, and supporting mission endeavors. Wright recognizes that for the majority of his readers who are not going into the mission field, a major implication of a biblical theology of mission is to embrace a missional engagement in the marketplace by stressing the fact that work-life is also part of God's comprehensive redemption plan. This reviewer agrees that we must have a proper theology of work and demolish the false demarcation between the sacred realm of our faith and the secular realm of work. Finally, Wright also offer up a challenge to all his readers to be missional in our prayers, praise and worship. In practice then, churches that have tainted worship with consumerism must revive worship so that the mission of God is the syncopated rhythm of our prayer, praise, and worship.

1. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 17).  
2. *Ibid.*, 240.  
3. Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 111.  
4. *Ibid.*, 94.  
5. *Ibid.*

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