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Today we look at how Israel was always meant to be a Great Commission Nation, and how that legacy is continued by the Church today. We look at 6 different ways God communicates this to Israel & us... Swearing (making an oath), Repetition, Imagery, Nature, Strategic Growth & finally, Leadership.			

(This material is largely derived from UnveilinGLORY's YouTeach series.)

This is our third sermon in a four-part series called, *The Story*. Today we'll discuss *Israel as a Great Commission nation & us as a Great Commission Church*. Continuing to understand the Story of the Bible as God working to reveal His greatest glory for our greatest joy.

Viewing it, not as 66 individual books, but as one book with an introduction, story & conclusion. God makes a promise in Genesis 12:2-3 & fulfills it in Revelation 5:9. In the introduction, God creates diversity. God's in process of unifying diversity in the story (not erasing) & in the conclusion God's greatest glory is seen & our greatest joy is experienced as all diversity is brought under Christ with all its various expressions!

Each time we go to the Scriptures, we should be seeing God's heart for the world & the big picture of how God wants to use our lives in revealing His greatest glory! We have a role in the story, the central purpose of our lives. We're blessed to be a blessing to all the nations on the face of the earth & all based on a two-part promise to Abraham. Those two parts are the top line (God wants to bless us) and the bottom line (God wants us to be a blessing to all the nations on the face of the earth).

Today we'll see how this promise made Israel a Great Commission Nation charged with taking God's glory to the ends of the earth! Looking at six ways God emphasizes his Great Commission Promise to Abraham. There are more ways God did this, but we'll focus on six, which are...Swearing (making an oath), Repetition, Imagery, Nature, Strategic Growth & Leadership.

The first way God emphasized His promise is by **swearing/making an oath**. In the Old Testament, if you wanted to promise something important, you'd swear on it. Like swearing on a Bible in court, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth & nothing but the truth so help me God". Hebrews 6:16 speaks of this...*"For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation."* In the Old Testament you'd swear by something or someone greater than yourself...like the altar, by heaven, or by God. In doing so, you were making a formal commitment to your word. So...how's this apply to God's promise to Abraham?

Hebrews 6:16 continues...*"So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchanging character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath..."* God gave an oath - or swore when He was talking to Abraham about the top &

bottom line of the covenant promise. He wanted Abraham to see how important this promise was. But there's no one greater than God Himself to swear by! The only possible option, if God wanted to make sure Abraham & future generations understood His promise, is found in Genesis 22:16...*"I swear by myself, declares the Lord."* But what's the context & what's God swearing? What does He want to make so clear in a promise? Look at the next verse, Genesis 22:16-17...*"I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this & have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you & make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky & as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies..."*

Blessing...making their descendants as numerous as stars in the sky & as the sand of the seashore, cities, etc., all refers to the top line of the covenant. With all these blessings, we know they're followed by a bottom line responsibility of the Covenant promise, which is found in v18, *"...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."* God's restating the covenant. The Israelites & their descendants were to be a Great Commission Nation!

The context of this promise is right after Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. If you remember the story, He begins to go through with it, and just before Abraham brings the knife down, an angel appears & stops him. Then God gives him the Abrahamic Covenant a third time. What's happening? God was basically saying, "Abraham do you love your son more than me?" Once God saw Abraham's willingness to demonstrate this, God basically said, "Now that you've demonstrated I come before all things, even your son, I want to reemphasize my great promise. Not only will I tell it to you a third time, but I'll confirm it with an oath & swear by myself. You & your descendants are to be a Great Commission Nation bringing my glory to the nations."

This was the third time, which points to the second way God emphasizes the promise - Repetition. God gave this promise to Abraham & his descendants five times. Three times to Abraham (Gen 12:2-3/18:17-18/22:16-18), once to Isaac (Gen 26:3-4), and once to Jacob (Gen 28:13-14). Like any good teacher, God uses repetition as an attention-focusing device, communicating to us all, "This is so important, I'm repeating it 5 times." And five times in Genesis, the very first book of the Bible. Which means God's trying to shake His people up by saying, "Wake up! I not only repeated it five times, but I put it in the very beginning of my story. This is central to your purpose for being here & what the rest of the story's all about! The rest of the book is about you helping fulfill this promise I gave to Abraham! I want to bless you, and I want you to be a blessing to all the nations on the face of the earth! Get it into your DNA! You're a Great Commission Nation!" This promise is really important to God & therefore important to us.

The third way God emphasizes this promise is through imagery. Let's take a closer look at the third time the Abrahamic Covenant is given in Genesis 22:16-17...(God) said, *"I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this & have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you & make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky & as the sand on the seashore."*

God was saying to Abraham, "I'll make you tremendously numerous! Great numbers & nations will come from you!" The top & bottom line blessing. Stars fill the sky shining & giving off light. If you've ever camped away from a city, it's amazing how many stars there are in the night sky, and how much light there is. The Israelites were to be shining the glory of God to other nations that they might see God - a Great Commission Nation! They were to spread out among all nations, taking the news of God's glory everywhere - a Great Commission Nation! Paralleling Jesus' words, "Go therefore & make disciples of all nations..."

When we think of the sand of the seashore, we think, "We can't count it." Going hand-in-hand with the top line blessing of stars in the sky. Over centuries of time, sand shifts from shore to shore. The sand Christopher Columbus set sail from, probably hit our shores about 50 years ago. Sand shifts & moves. It covers the globe just like stars. Abraham & his descendants were to go shore to shore with the message of God's glory!

God uses a third analogy to show how the Israelites were to be spreading His glory. They were to be like dust as seen in Genesis 28:14a... "*Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth...*" Dust in our houses spreads everywhere, but this refers to a tremendous dust storm. It says, "...*And you will spread out to the west & to the east, to the north & to the south.*" (Gen 28:14b) In every direction of the Promised Land - where all other people groups are located! Biblically, 'north, south, west & east' is another term for 'all nations' & 'spread out' is another way of saying 'go'. God's saying your descendants are going to be like a huge dust storm spreading to every nation on earth. And that verse ends... "*All peoples on earth will be blessed through you & your offspring.*" (Gen 28:14c)

The bottom line of being like dust...all nations on the earth shall be reached. Stars, Sand, Dust...God communicating through imagery, Israel was to be a Great Commission Nation. The church needs to place high priority on sending people to the nations as well!

Another one of God's ways of communicating Israel was to be a Great Commission Nation is through nature. Before we look at nature, let's review the numbers 70 & 12. If you'll recall, we found 70 different linguistic groups created at the Tower of Babel. Counting them up in Genesis chapter 10. (Genesis 10 & 11 are two accounts explaining what happened at the tower of Babel. This is how Hebrew writers commonly wrote & is why there are two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 & 2.) In the Bible, the number 70 often represents the nations. The number 12 represents the 12 tribes of Israel.

Let's look at Exodus 15:27 to understand where in nature God uses these numbers to communicate Israel was to be a Great Commission Nation... "*Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs & seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.*" Twelve springs, representing Israel, watering & giving life to 70 palm trees, representing the Nations. God, non-verbally communicating through nature, Israel was to be a blessing, giving life to the nations! God communicating the Great Commission through nature.

The fourth way God communicates His desire to have Israel reach out to all the nations was by placing them strategically in the Promised Land. Remember the bottom line to the Promised Land was that it was a strategic location where the nations came through trading, and where Israel could share their faith with the Gentile people groups.

Sharing with Gentile after Gentile about their God. Strategically located. But it wasn't just their location. Let's look at an interesting passage in Deuteronomy (32:8) which speaks, not of their location, but of their growth...*"When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel."*

This text could have one of two meanings. Firstly, as the nations increased in size & acquired more land, so the Lord let the Israelites grow, gaining land in a proportional amount. Or secondly, as the nations increased in population growth, so the Lord allowed Israel to increase proportionally in population growth.

In light of the Abrahamic covenant, the second option makes more sense. God allowed Israel to grow proportionally in population with the nations. They were to be a Great Commission Nation. If there were ever a point in time when revival would've broken out among the Jews, they would've had enough missionaries to go to the nations & tell them about God's glory! God's always been prepared to reach the nations with His people. There have always been enough. All we need is conviction of the Holy Spirit & obedience to the Lord to take His glory to the nations.

If God's people today were to have a revival around the globe, there'd be enough Christians to go & take the gospel to every people group on the face of the earth. God's always kept that in mind! Which continues to show how concerned God is for seeing His Glory go out to the nations!

The final way God emphasizes His promise is through leadership. God gave insight to some of the kings who truly sought Him with all their heart. We can look at three leaders: King David, King Solomon & Isaiah. Let's start with King David in 1 Chronicles 16:23-24...*"Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare His glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples."*

This is King David celebrating the Ark of the Covenant being brought back to Israel. In his celebration, he declares God's glory is to go to the nations! The Great Commission clearly stated by Israel's second king.

Next let's look at David's son, King Solomon. When Solomon dedicated the Temple after it was finished being built, he prayed a very specific prayer when dedicating the outer court, which was the court of the Gentiles (remember Mark 11). This prayer definitely showed Israel was to be a Great Commission Nation, making God famous to the ends of the earth! It's found in 1Kings 8:41-43...*"As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name - for they will hear of your great name & your mighty hand & your outstretched arm - when*

*they come & pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name & fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.”*

Solomon knew they were to be a Great Commission Nation living for God in such a way people from other nations would hear & come check it out!

We'll look at one more leader of Israel who knew they were to be a Great Commission Nation, but that they blew it. The prophet Isaiah in 26:17-18 of the book bearing his name...*“As a woman with child & about to give birth writhes & cries out in her pain, so were we in your presence, O LORD. We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world.”* Isaiah knew they were to be a Great Commission Nation, but had blown it.

Three leaders, King David, King Solomon & Isaiah. All recognizing Israel as a Great Commission Nation. God clearly intended to use Israel to reach the nations, and in doing so, He'd reveal His greatest glory & we'd receive our greatest joy!

God had two strategies for the Israelites to accomplish this. The first was for the Gentiles to come to them as they were strategically placed in the center of the nations to receive them! Today, this means reaching out to internationals God brings into our towns & cities. The second was for them to go to the nations (like the stars, dust & sand) with God's glory! This means some of us are called to go, and the rest are called to send!

God emphasized His promise to Abraham in six ways, by swearing, repetition, imagery, nature, strategic growth & leadership, all making Israel a Great Commission Nation. But let's ask this question...why did God want Israel to be a Great Commission Nation? Why not wait & give the Great Commission when Jesus came to earth & kick it off right? Why begin way back in the beginning of the Bible?

Imagine if God didn't give the Great Commission to the Israelites in the Old Testament & Jesus only gave it at the end of His three-year ministry. What difference would that've made? That would've communicated missions is only a very small part of the Bible. This means God didn't love, or want the nations for the majority of the time. Therefore, **missions mustn't be a large priority in God's mind!** But because He did put it in the very beginning of the Bible, we see it as His largest priority. It flows through almost every book of the Bible. God's pursuing His greatest glory for our greatest joy! We need to see God's heart for all nations from Genesis to Revelation showing God's priority for reaching the nations with His glory. It's why Israel was called to be a Great Commission Nation. And why, if we should want to work toward the goal of receiving the greatest joy for all eternity, we as a church should be a Great Commission Church.

If reaching the nations is found throughout the entire word of God, shouldn't it be found throughout our entire lives & in the churches we attend? So we as a church must be

thinking intentionally about how we're to be reaching the nations, both locally & globally. That's why we support our missionaries, are involving ourselves in the Kinship Network, and are doing this series now.