

Series: The Missing Half	Reference: <i>Various Scriptures</i>	Title: Missing God's Will	Date: 4.11.2021
Website Writeup: At times individuals & whole groups of people miss something so glaring right before them. Are we missing half the message God wants to speak to us?			

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

Today we begin a 4 week series, *The Missing Half*, beginning with the question, might we be Missing God's Will? This is a followup to the The Story series from 4 weeks ago. If you weren't here for that, you can always watch them on Facebook, or Youtube.

In that series we learned to look at the Bible as one book with an introduction, story & conclusion. In the introduction, Genesis 1-11, God creates diversity of language & ethnic groups (nations as Scripture refers to them). The story starts in Gen. 12 & runs through Rev. 4. In that story God's in the process of unifying all diversity under Himself revealing His greatest glory, which is when we'll have our greatest joy! We see this in the conclusion found in Revelation 5 to the end of the Bible. So, we're referring to God's desire to reveal His greatest glory for our greatest joy, as the Story of the Bible.

The Story begins in Genesis 12:1-3 with a two-part covenant promise to Abraham. Where God says, "Abraham, I will bless you (we call that the top line of the covenant) and I want you to turn around & be a blessing to all the nations on the face of the earth" (the bottom line of the covenant). And in this story, God has a profound global role for us in reaching the nations. Which in the end yields our greatest joy since we see God's greatest glory as He unifies all the diversity of the world. In Christ He brings reconciliation to all who'd come to Him! We will see the nations of the world worshipping the Lamb before the throne of God!

The problem is, it IS possible to miss God's will for our lives by only focusing on one part of the covenant! There are three ways to see God's Promise to Abraham. First, we could view the top line as greater than the bottom line. Or, we could view the top line as less than the bottom line. Or, we could view the top & bottom line as equal.

If the top is greater than the bottom, then what God said to Abraham was: "I want to bless you. I want to be your God & I want you to be my people. And if some of this blessing happens to spill out to all other nations, that's alright. But what I'm primarily concerned with blessing you!" In other words, God had a greater desire to bless the Israelites than all the nations!

But if the top's less important than the bottom, then what God said to Abraham was: "I've decided to use people to reach people. When I drew lots it fell on you. So, I'll make you a deal. I'll bless you, but I'm primarily concerned about you blessing all other nations! It's them I'm concerned about. If you bless them, I'll bless you." In other words, God had a greater desire to bless all the nations than he had to bless the Israelites! But

there's way too much Scripture talking about Israel being the "apple of His eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10) and a "royal diadem in the hand of our Lord" (Isaiah 62:3). The second one's simply not an option. But there IS a third option. The top line can be equal to the bottom line.

If the top's equal in importance to the bottom, what God said to Abraham was: "I want to bless you. I want to be your God & I want you to be my people. And, just as important, I want you to be a blessing to all other nations. Because I love them as much as I love you!" In other words, God loved the Israelites just as much as He loved the Hittites, Jebusites, Philistines, Babylonians, Egyptians & all other peoples on earth. God loved everyone equally. So really there are only two options.

Maybe Abraham wondered, "Is the top greater than the bottom, or equal to it?" Well, in Deuteronomy 7:6, we read: "*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*" That sounds like God's love for Israel was greater than his love for the nations, but let's skip on down a few chapters.

In 18:4-5, God references the Levites & the tithe which was to go to them. The Levites could be equated with full-time Christian workers today. Pastors, whose job it is to teach & direct towards Christ. The Levites were one of the 12 tribes of Israel & it was their prescribed task to lead all the the other tribes of Israel into the presence of God. It says: "You're to give them the first-fruits of your grain, new wine & oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep, for the LORD your God has chosen them & their descendants out of all your tribes to stand & minister in the Lord's name always."

So, God asked the Levites to minister to the other eleven tribes of Israel. But we don't take that to mean God had a greater love for the Levites than the others only because he separated them out for a task. He merely had a special purpose for them. We apply that same thinking to Deuteronomy 7:6, knowing God doesn't have a greater love for the Israelites. But it does mean God has the special purpose to use them to bless the nations. Which is exactly why God called Israel to be a kingdom of priests!

There were two priesthoods in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). There was the specific priesthood, the Levites, who ministered to the other eleven tribes of Israel. But there was also a general priesthood where the entire nation was to be a priesthood leading Gentiles into the presence of God. In Exodus 19:6 God says to all Israelites, "*You will be for me a kingdom of priests & a holy nation.*" We talk of the Church being a priesthood of believers now, same concept - we may have pastors, but we're all priests in God's Kingdom. Priests are simply bridge builders to God. We can also think about Mark 11 where the Israelites were to be drawing the nations into the outer court of the Gentiles, to reveal God's glory to them! They were to be acting as priests to the nations.

The top is equal to the bottom. God loved the Israelites, Hittites, Philistines, Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, or any other people group equally, then & now. God loves Americans just as much as he loves Israelis, Syrians, Chinese, Nigerians, Iranians,

Saudis, Pakistanis, even terrorists. God always has loved all peoples equally. Knowing this will help us understand God's will for our lives. Not knowing it may keep us from understanding His will....

Unfortunately...most of us are living a top-line-greater-than-bottom-line lifestyle & don't fully know God's will for our lives. We sometimes are more focused on being blessed by God than being a blessing to others, especially when it comes to the nations. It's just very natural. One way to find out if we're more focused on the top is by taking a simple Scripture memory test.

If I said the beginning of this verse...*Be still and*...what would you fill in after that?

Be still and know that I am God. In other words, "Come into My presence, know, worship & enjoy Me." God says this to each one of us & it refers to the top line of the covenant - the blessing. But if we stop there, we flunk the test, because we only quoted the first third of Psalm 46:10, not the whole verse. In church life we often hear that quoted, but in its entirety it says, "*Be still & know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.*" The complete verse reflects both bottom & top lines of the covenant.

Remember getting your yearbook in high school? The first thing we did was flip through the pages looking for our picture. Sometimes we do the same with the Bible. We flip through Scripture asking, "Where am I in this?" Which is fine & natural, but it doesn't go far enough, but it is how many of us have been led to read our Bible. We open it up & ask one question: "How does God want to bless me?" Or, what's God's will for me?" That's not a judgment, it's natural. The problem is, instead of studying Theology (The study of God), we study Me-ology! It becomes about me! As a result, we're only reading half our Bibles. We're so focused on the top line, we miss the bottom. Let's go over some "Meology" & see how we're missing half of what God reveals.

Think about the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den. Daniel gets thrown into a lion's den for not being willing to pray to the king. While inside the den, the lions don't eat him. The king then finds out who the bad guys really are, runs out early the next morning & says, "Daniel, are you all right?" Daniel says, "Yes, my God has shut the mouths of the lions." The king pulls Daniel out & throws the bad guys in & what've we learned? That God will take care of us in tough times, which refers to the top line of the covenant. Not incorrect, but it is incomplete. It's not wrong to look for God's direction & blessing for you in the Scriptures, but if it stops there it doesn't go far enough.

What's the bottom line to that story? It's been there the entire time, we just miss it! Let's read what the king does after he pulls Daniel out. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations & men of every language throughout the land: "May you prosper greatly! I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear & reverence the God of Daniel." So, you've got a gentile king so impressed with the God of Daniel that if he were alive today he'd go back to his office & text all other kings on the face of

the earth & say, "Worship the God of Daniel. He's amazing!" And what we had was a Gentile king evangelizing the gentile world!

What's the lesson for us today in that? That those of different people groups which live among us & we have influence on, can be so impressed with how God takes care of us, they may go to tell others about Jesus! For instance, it's very common for Muslims, when moving to another country, out from under control of Muslim society to become open to the Gospel. Many internationals moving to the States have never had a relationship with a Christian, it's their first time to read the Bible of your life.

So what's the Bottom-line application in that? Are their internationals who may be watching what God's doing in us? I don't think many of us have ever been taught a lesson like that from Daniel. This means what we've learned in church isn't necessarily incorrect, but is sometimes incomplete! Lopsided or one-sided - one rail of the railroad track. And it's no wonder many Christians struggle to understand God's will for their lives. We may have another entire half of our Bible to get to know!

Let's look at another story, the Ten Plagues. What lesson do we learn there? God wants to redeem us as He redeemed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. What's got us in bondage? Work-a-holism, alcoholism, pride, pornography, whatever it is, God wants to redeem us from bondage. True. It's top line. Not incorrect, but it is incomplete. What's the bottom line of the story? The Egyptians had ten key gods reflected in each plague. As the Egyptians watched them defeated one-by-one, they probably asked themselves, "Are we worshipping the right God?"

Then the Israelites left Egypt. Let's look at Exodus 12:37-38. *"The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women & children. Many other people went up with them..."* These other people were Egyptians going with the Israelites because they had seen the power of God. Imagine Egyptians leaving homes, family, friends, jobs & security to follow this newfound God. These are people we'll see in the final fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven - convicted converts to the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob!

Here we are in the second book of the Bible, Exodus, already seeing Gentiles come into God's kingdom! You may've thought Gentiles didn't come to faith until the New Testament. That's because we've been reading our Bibles as 66 independent books without a consistent story within them, and as a result, we thought Jesus gave the Great Commission. But He didn't, it began in Genesis chapter 12 & forms the foundation for the entire story of the Bible. From the very beginning God's been reaching out to Gentiles, because the top equals the bottom line! God has loved all peoples equally from the beginning!

What's the bottom-line lesson from the Ten Plagues? God's doing major things in the world to bring individuals & people groups to Himself. What's the bottom-line application? Maybe we should be praying through the news! Do we see what comes to us via the news as God's way of broadcasting to the body of Christ how He's advancing His

kingdom? That in world events, there's a spiritual battle being waged against false gods in the world? That through these things, God may be working to dismantle false belief systems & bring people into His kingdom? That's exactly what He's doing.

What could God be doing in situations of Islamic extremism? How could that be God working to fulfill the bottom line? Could stories arise out of that of Christian love towards their captors? Christians who died valiantly at the hands of Islamic terrorists, praying for their victimizer up until the very end? I think so. Could formerly devout Muslims be convicted the Islamic verses from the Al Quran & Hadith which drive terrorists are nothing but fear mongering, control & hatred, and then turn towards the true God of Grace & Mercy? In Syria, Muslims becoming disenfranchised with Islam & its practices are posting against extremists. We're seeing Muslims convert to Christ in heavy numbers as a result - but the news doesn't report that.

Let's look at another story in which we may be missing half of what God wants to teach us, David & Goliath! We know the story. David takes on Goliath in the Lord's power & wins, cutting off the giant's head. Israel ends up defeating the Philistines as a result. What lesson do we learn in Sunday School? We can take on giants in our lives! What is it that's standing between you & doing what God wants you to do? God's saying, "Go for it! I'll be with you! Take on your giants in my power, they can be slain & you can find freedom!" That's true & real. It's top line. It's not incorrect, but it's incomplete.

What's the bottom line to David & Goliath? In 1 Samuel 17:45-46 we read: *David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel."* Now, is this an exaggeration on David's part that shouldn't be taken literally? Or did he really mean it? Would the whole world hear about it & if so, how?

Remember, traders were coming through Israelite territory in constant contact with them. The Jews couldn't keep this story to themselves! Who wouldn't share the story of David defeating the Giant & his God who gets the glory? Traders would, in turn, tell others who'd tell others...and word would've gotten around the world through human traveling newspapers! God's glory gone viral!

What's the bottom line to the story? Others will hear about the great things God does in & through us! His glory will be shown among the nations! What's the bottom-line application? It's to do everything for God's glory! Wash the dishes to glorify God. Work at the office to glorify God. Drive in a way to glorify God. Make your bed, live your private life, love your wife & kids, all in a way which glorifies God - because everything's spiritual! Do everything to glorify God!

We could name story after story after story in the Bible, and everyone would know the top-line lesson! We've been trained to. But we probably don't know the bottom line

lessons. We may be missing half God's message! And if you've only got half the orders from the Commander in Chief, you won't be making very good decisions for life. In fact you can miss God's will because you only knew half of God's message.

It's possible for even whole groups of people to miss a message or concept in the Scriptures. Societal groups & cultures are like individual people, we get stuck on one way of seeing things, we do this all the time. Even as groups, and whole countries we grow myopic. Look at political parties & how they adopt one ideology, or way of thinking & can't see something directly before them.

When Martin Luther was brought before the Diet of Worms to be scrutinized & to get him to recant his views, one person made him think hard when he asked Martin Luther this question, "How is it, Martin Luther, that you, out of all the theologians, are right?" The church had been all reading the same bible for a long time, great men had studied it! There were a plethora of other very smart theologians out there! How did one guy see through all the subcultural baggage, the pomp & pageantry of the church, to glean the very essence of grace in its pages, something we protestants take for granted now? Something we think is so simple & core to the Gospel message, salvation by grace through faith alone - Sole Fide.

It was at that moment, when that other man had asked him that question, that Martin Luther asked for a break. He went & prayed. The next day he came back into the room & that's when he said his famous quote, "Here I stand, God Help me, I can do no other." And as a result, we all read scripture differently, because Martin Luther had the spiritual muster to read more critically, to allow the Holy Spirit to speak beyond all the cultural baggage of the church.

Hopefully, today we have seen that we can go our whole lives reading only into the top line of the Abrahamic Covenant - that we're a blessed people. That we can be very individualistic in our view of the Gospel. We may logically agree we need to bless 'others', but we haven't fully understood the all encompassing call of the phrase to bless the nations. That God has a role for us in revealing His glory among the nations & unifying the diversity of the world under Jesus.

Hopefully, we'll be convicted & transformed over the life of this series.