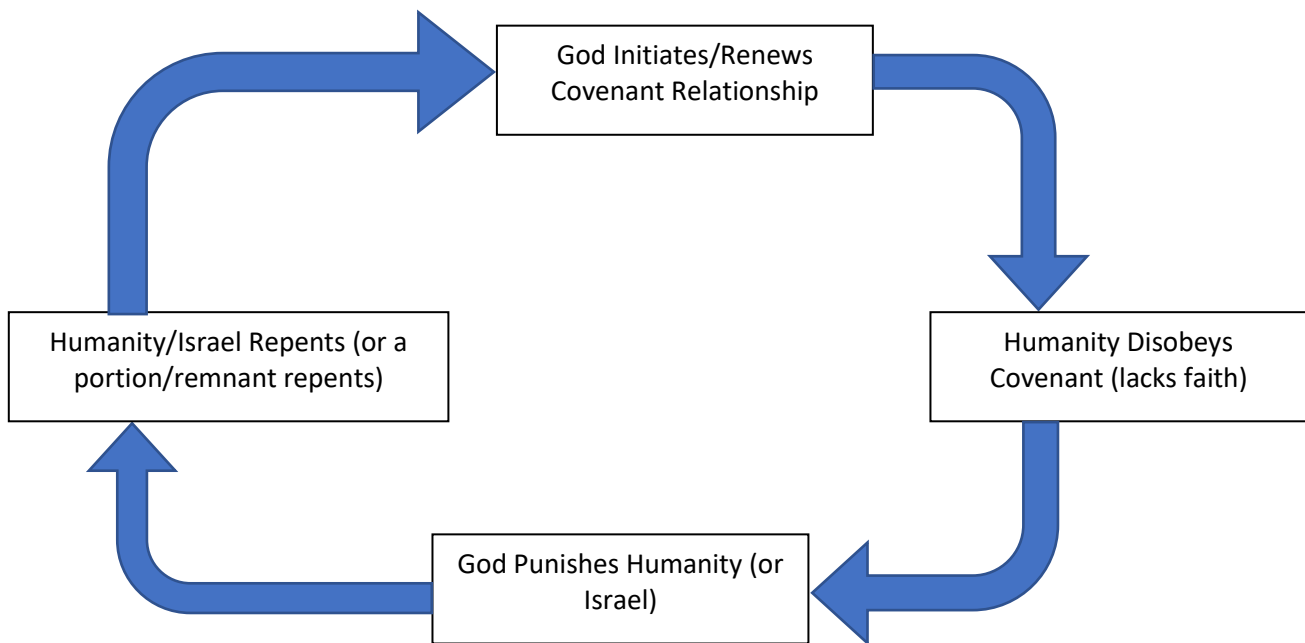


# Mission as the Initiative of God in the Old Testament

*By Kevn Sneed*

1. God takes the initiative in Creation (the beginning of mission)
  - God created the world out of nothing, creation exists totally by his choice and by his command (God began mission even before creation when he determined to create).
  - God undertook a special creation in human beings made in the image and likeness of God to represent him and his activity among creation.
  - Mankind cannot create itself – humanity is only able to exist by the desire of God who created man to enjoy his presence.
  - God sustains his creation, even the flood was sent as a redemptive rather than destructive act.
2. God takes the initiative in Redemption (the ongoing mission)
  - Before God pronounces judgement on sinful humanity he promises redemption in Genesis 3:15.
  - God illustrates the process of redemption by shedding the blood of animals to create a suitable covering for Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21.
  - God continues to interact with humanity (in covenant relationship) despite mankind's persistent sin both individually (as seen in Noah) and corporately (as seen in Babel).
  - God initiates covenant relationship with humanity for the purpose of relationship and redemption
    - A. Common (universal) Covenants
      - With Adam and establish relationship
      - With Noah to affirm the desire of God to be in relationship with mankind.
    - B. Special (specific) Covenants
      - With Abraham to establish a people through whom God may demonstrate and further implement his plan for redemption.
      - With Moses to further establish his people and reaffirm his commitment to them and the rest of humanity (calling Israel to be kingdom of priests).
      - With David to reaffirm his commitment to his chosen people for eternity and his promise for all humanity through them (messianic prophecies).
3. God continues his initiative even when his people fail (commitment to the mission)
  - The consistent pattern of sin and failure in the Old Testament is met by both God's judgement and God's faithfulness to redeem (see chart below).
  - The sacrificial system given in Leviticus offers a temporary solution to their ongoing pattern of sin.
  - The judgement of God on Israel (first the northern kingdom and then the southern kingdom) shows that God is both serious about their sin (he hates it) but committed to their redemption (he desires it).
    - A. Jonah illustrates how Israel failed to honor their calling by God

- Jonah was more concerned about his nation than the kingdom of God.
  - Jonah was more concerned about his comfort and his goals than the will of God.
  - Jonah was not willing to let go of his hatred, racism, and tribalism in order to minister to the people to whom God called him.
  - God revealed himself to a pagan people in spite of Jonah.
- B. Daniel illustrates how Israel should (and could) honor their calling by God – even in defeat and exile.
- Daniel was willing to serve even his enemies.
  - Daniel was willing to assimilate into his host culture as far as possible without compromising his own relationship with God.
  - Daniel never gave up on God’s plan even in hopeless situations.
  - God revealed himself to a pagan people through Daniel.



Conclusion- We do not have to search long to find missions in the Old Testament. The Old Testament itself is a testament of God’s Mission. In the Old Testament we see how God establishes his creation by his own initiative and immediately reveals his mission to redeem his creation when it falls into sin. Creation is not merely the setting for God’s mission, it’s the object of his mission. God’s mission is not occasional, its persistent. God’s mission is not limited, its universal. The Old Testament reveals a consistent pattern of failure on the part of humanity but a consistent pattern of faithfulness on the part of God. The faithfulness of God through the generations contained in the Old Testament are a demonstration of the faithfulness that God extends to humanity universally. Mission is not primarily the work of people, it is first and primarily the work of God. A blessing of having been saved through the redemptive mission of God is that we can participate in the mission by making known to the world what God is doing and has been doing

from the beginning. The ultimate demonstration of God’s faithfulness and commitment to his mission will be seen in Jesus in the New Testament. The Old Testament, however, is not just setting up the story of Jesus. The Old Testament demonstrates that Jesus and the Gospel is part of God’s ongoing mission and faithfulness towards humanity since creation began. The New Testament is not a great shift in God’s behavior but a great continuation of God’s plan. Thus, as we seek to participate in the mission of God through our own missional callings, we would do well to consider the pattern set by God throughout Scripture and not in one testament or select verses.

## Patterns Revealed in the Old Testament

Humanity	God
Acts selfishly	Acts Graciously
Seeks to exploit creation for selfish gain	Seeks to establish creation for all humanity
Seeks to rebel against God and one another	Seeks to redeem unworthy humanity
Unable to unite in the face of tribalism, racism, and hatred	Seeks to use one tribe in order to bless all people
Limited commitment, often wavering	Total commitment

## Mission as the Initiative of God in the New Testament

1. God continues to reveal and carry out his mission in the New Testament
  - The New Testament is not:
    - i. Opposed to the Old Testament
    - ii. In competition with the Old Testament
    - iii. An alternative to the Old Testament
  - The New Testament is:
    - i. Built on the foundation of the Old Testament (the Old Covenant even explicitly expects and fondly anticipates a New Covenant to follow)
    - ii. The continuation and fulfillment of the Old Testament
    - iii. The destination for anyone following the Old Testament
  - The Testaments work together
    - i. To show an unfolding and full picture of God’s mission (not a change or failure in God’s mission)

- ii. To provide a lens for reading the other
  - iii. To provide the people of God with the information, examples, encouragement, and challenges revealed by God regarding himself and his mission
    - A. This is the overall purpose of Scripture
    - B. Each book or letter was written to address specific people in specific situations with the
    - C. Through God's revelation of himself and his plan through certain writers through various times and circumstances we can draw out principles regarding God's nature, character, and mission to inform our understanding of God and his plans.
2. Jesus is the primary focus on the New Covenant
- Jesus is a self-revelation of God to humanity. Jesus reveals not who God has grown to be but who he always was and what he always intended to do.
  - Jesus comes to us through the incarnation
    - i. God the Son added to himself the flesh of humanity to be both fully God and fully human.
      - A. Jesus had to be fully human to serve as a genuine sacrifice for sin.
      - B. Jesus had to be fully divine in order to apply the effects of his achievement on the cross to all people at all times everywhere (universally).
    - ii. The incarnation was a humbling event for Jesus who voluntarily and temporarily deprived himself of his divine rights and privileges (or at least the independent use of them) in order to live (and die) as an authentic human being.
  - Jesus clearly proclaims the Gospel
    - i. The Old Testament established a standard that must be met in order to salvation to be achieved on the part of sinful, rebellious humanity.
    - ii. The people of the Old Testament (and indeed all people) have demonstrated that humans are unable to meet the righteous requirements of God necessary for reconciliation (and thus, salvation).
    - iii. Jesus comes with good news that we makes a way for humanity to enter into right relationship with God (reconciliation, salvation) through faith (genuine belief and trust) rather than works (perfect, perpetual law obedience). This is accomplished by:
      - A. Jesus perfectly and consistently obeying the law
      - B. Jesus giving his life as a sacrifice for sin (a perfect sacrifice not for his own sins but for humanity)
      - C. Jesus rising from the dead to demonstrate his power, victory, and authority.
      - D. Jesus sending the Holy Spirit to all believers (as a result of the righteous requirements of the law being fulfilled- the ripping open of the temple curtain and the day of Pentecost).
  - Jesus raises up and sends out disciples to be witnesses
    - i. Disciples also act incarnationally. That does not mean they become like God as Jesus became like man. Rather, they also willingly deprive themselves of certain right and privileges for the sake of effectively communicating the Gospel message.

- ii. The rest of the New Testament is the story of Jesus' disciples carrying out his mission.

### 3. The ongoing mission in the New Testament

- The New Testament people of God are now defined as those who have faith in Christ. The Jews have fulfilled their call to be the light to the nations through Jesus and now continue to be part of the ever expanding people of God (the seed had finally grown up for bore fruit – often in spite of themselves).
- The “People of God” as seen in the New Testament are:
  - i. Discipled (still need to grow – through both human and divine teaching)
  - ii. Diverse (coming from various ethnic groups and geographical locations)
  - iii. Deployed (messengers and witnesses to the mission of God – active participants in the mission of God)