

REVIEW

THE MISSION OF GOD: UNLOCKING THE BIBLE'S GRAND NARRATIVE

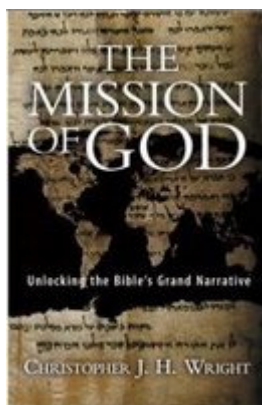
Christopher J. H. Wright

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Christopher J. H. Wright has given us another masterpiece. It is beyond peer in my opinion, by far the most comprehensive and up-to-date theology of Christian mission in print. As a well-respected OT scholar with a PhD. from Oxford, Chris Wright possesses sterling credentials to present his basic thesis. Christian mission is not man's mission but the mission of God, specifically the mission of the triune God. The volume comprises four parts and fifteen chapters that organize *The Mission of God* according to the three foci of Israel's worldview: first God, then his people and last God's earth. "Part I: The Bible and Mission" is introductory. "Part II: The God of Mission," demonstrates our God's desires to be known and praised by all peoples in all of the earth. "Part III: "The People of Mission" delineates the purpose for believers remaining upon the earth. In this section, Wright discusses how themes such as election,

redemption, covenant and ethics apply to mission. Last, “Part IV: The Arena of Mission” opens up such motifs as earth keeping and the nations in relation to mission.

Beginning in the OT, Wright first develops the missional hermeneutic found in Lk. 24 that springs directly from our Lord’s own summary of the “*messianic* centering of the Old Testament Scriptures” and their “*missional thrust*” (Wright 2006, 29; see e.g., Lk. 24:25-27,44-48). He adds that Christians throughout history have been excellent in their discoveries of messianic passages in Scripture but have been almost blind to the obvious missional characteristics of the Messiah! The missional nature of Messiah as Suffering Servant flows out of the whole Grand Narrative of Scripture. “Was it not necessary that the Messiah must suffer . . . and that repentance resulting in forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the peoples” (Lk. 24:26,46-47). The doctrines of the pre-existent triune God, his creation, man’s Fall in Adam, the redemption in Christ, and the coming consummation are all inextricably missional, Wright shows. God has called his people to be a missional people, who participate in God’s very own mission. The Lord has planned that all the clans and peoples of earth will be impacted and transformed by God’s very own mission, in which his people participate.

Grounded upon this perspective, Wright traces how all of Scripture gives believers a rock-solid foundation for holistic mission.¹ “*Fundamentally,*” he writes, “*our mission . . . means our committed participation as God’s people, at God invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation*” (Wright 2007, 22-23, emphasis in the original). God’s mission thus is not dualistic that is it is not merely spiritual, leading to a merely personal salvation. Salvation that God’s mission brings is totally comprehensive just as the Fall of Adam brought a totally comprehensive ruin to all creation.

¹I prefer the spellings “wholistic” and “wholism.” Holism is an evolutionary term derived from a modern form of neo-Platonism, which teaches that all things are evolving to an ever-greater oneness. Ultimately holism denies Trinitarian doctrine.

God's mission then is to restore both the whole human creation and the whole of the non-human creation. Because Adam was the head over all creation, his Fall affected the whole of creation. Hence redemption in King Jesus must apply to all creation since He is the Second Adam. God's people, in the second Adam, have a designated role to play in that redemptive mission.

This (w)holism leads to the interpretative key, which can discover mission in the totality of Scripture: "My major concern has been to develop an approach to biblical hermeneutics that sees the mission of God (and the participation in it of God's people) as a framework within which we can read the whole Bible. Mission is, in my view, a major key that unlock[s] the whole grand narrative of the canon of Scripture" (Wright 2007, 17). The whole story, not as *Geschichte* (saga, myth, or legend) but *Historie* (a true account of what actually occurred in time and space), gives a metanarrative provided by the Master storyteller himself. Christ himself provides this "whole-Bible perspective" (Wright 2007, 41), giving "hermeneutical coherence" to the whole Bible. In the Old Testament, then, Jesus reveals his Father's mission. The Father chose Abraham's family—the people of Israel as a people involved in God's mission. This mission in turn leads to him as Messiah and from him to mission for the new covenant children of Abraham, including both Jews and the gentile peoples, in Christ.

This then leads directly to the second section of Wright's book: "The God of Christian Mission" (Chapters 4 and 5). This God reveals himself graciously and salvifically by calling his people out of Egypt by means of the Exodus. He also reveals himself as the impartial God of justice through judgment and exile visited upon his rebellious family. This provides the backdrop for Wright's magnificent exposition of Christology in Chapter 4: "The Living God Makes Himself Known in Jesus Christ." Jesus shares the identity of YHWH and performs the functions of YHWH and hence "fulfills the mission of YHWH." He is Creator, Ruler, Judge,

and Savior through whom the Father exclusively makes himself known to all as the one true God who is to be praised by all peoples and nations. The unique and inimitable God confronts the idol-gods theologically, evangelistically, pastorally, and prophetically. This second section is one of the most remarkable aspects of the book, well worth being reprinted separately.

“Part III: The People of Mission” discusses how this missional God grants his family—his chosen people—the Abramic blessing found in Genesis 12:1-3. This blessing, which Wright penetratingly exegetes, counters Babel. Just as the “whole earth” (Gen 11:1,4,8,9) is again in total rebellion after the Flood, the one God prophesies that he will again restore the whole earth of peoples (discussed in Gen 10) through the Gospel given through Abraham and his Seed. “The mission of God will be to preserve and maximize the blessing that is inherent in the multiplication of the spread of the nations while removing the blight of human sin and arrogance represented by Babel” (Wright 2007, 203). I believe Wright correctly translates Genesis 12:2: “Go, be a blessing,” (Wright 2007, 211). However, I also believe that this ought to have become a collective, centrifugal command to the descendants of Abraham, though Wright common with most in the English speaking nations outside the USA still denies that Israel had such a centrifugal command.² We will discuss this more extensively later.

Even though I disagree with Wright’s analysis at this point, the remaining chapters of this section are so outstanding that they cannot be neglected. Wright discusses the comprehensive

²“In my view (which is not agreed on by all), Israel was not mandated by God to send missionaries to the nations” (24) and “There is no centrifugal missionary mandate” (132). See his extensive discussion in chapter 15 in which he interacts with Walter Kaiser’s book *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*. I do not believe that he disproves Kaiser’s contention. My own dissertation now in print in slightly modified form comprehensively substantiates Kaiser’s view (see Mark R. Kreitzer, *The Concept of Ethnicity in the Bible: A Theological Analysis*. With a Foreword by Enoch Wan [Edwin Mellen Press, 2009]. Dr. Kaiser himself agrees with and recommends my volume’s thesis. “The research findings are relevant to the cultural landscape of the twenty-first century with practical implications for Christian ministry in multiple cultural contexts.” - Prof. Enoch Wan Western Seminary “[The volume] ... show[s] the centrality of the work of mission in the Old Testament and its critical movement outward to the peoples of the world, despite the strong skepticism on this subject by so many writers heretofore.” Prof. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary” (http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0773448985/sr=8-1/qid=1237337293/ref=olp_product_details?ie=UTF8&me=&qid=1237337293&sr=8-1&seller=)

political, economic, social, and spiritual implications of the “model of redemption: The Exodus.” Here, he engages with liberation theology and develops a much more balanced application of this theme than that of his Marxian-based interlocutors. My great regret is that he does not equally engage with the libertarian influenced neo-puritan rivals as I stated in my review of his volume on OT ethics (e.g., Schaeffer, Rushdoony, Nash, Perks, North, and Beissner). Wright, common with many UK evangelicals, seems too bewitched by the siren song of social democracy. Social democratic evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic (e.g., Sider and Wallis in the USA) propound a much more powerful state than that allowed by the covenantal, biblical exegesis of the Anglo-Scot Puritans. Their descendants wrote the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Strict constitutionalist scholars presently are propounding a return to the original Constitution, which would result in a vastly released economy and strictly limited central state (e.g. Ron Paul, Von Mises Institute at Auburn University, Chalcedon Foundation, etc.). We don’t have to agree with all they teach to find a deep biblical wisdom in great economic freedom in a limited state governed by Christian Anglo-American common law and a precious metal based currency, exactly as the US Constitution mandates.

Next, Wright deals with the testy area of the Jubilee legislation. He analyzes the familial and kinship aspect of the system (The Social Angle), the economic aspect of land tenure, the theological angle that God is ultimate owner of all land and man is merely a tenant though with real property rights under God, and the practical aspects. Wright is fairly balanced and does not go to the extremes of social-democratic redistribution that Ronald Sider and Wallis offer.³ The

³See e.g., Jim Wallis, *God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It* (New York: HarperOne, 2006) and Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. 20th Anniversary Revision. With a Foreword by Robert Seiple (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997). For a libertarian-Christian response see e.g., David Chilton, *Productive Christians in An Age of Guilt Manipulators A Biblical Response to Ronald Sider* (Tyler, TX: Institute of Christian Economics, 1981—now desperately in need of updating, and Stephen Perks, *The Political Economy of a Christian Society* (Taunton, Somerset, UK: Kuyper Foundation, 2001).

Jubilee is not about such things as a socialist progressive income tax and welfare net as many social relevant evangelicals propose but about a fair distribution of land. God desires a vast majority of citizens owning freehold rights on land and vehemently rejects a landed aristocracy with an enserved populous. This has definite implications for Latin America (and other areas of earth), which is still built on the rejected aristocratic ideal. Wright then demonstrates how this vision is fulfilled in Christ and his teaching. Dr. Wright does not platonize the Jubilee as do many, by claiming that it is fulfilled in Christ and has no contemporary earthly ramifications. Instead he gives practical guidelines for applying the Jubilee to mission and subsequent culture transformation. This is not the last word on the subject by any means but is a very valuable contribution.

The next two sections are especially valuable to covenantal Christians as the author traces mission through the Noahic, Abraham, Sinaiatic, Davidic, and New Covenants. My only regret is that he does not go back to the original creation, its Dominion Covenant (Cultural Mandate) and then onto an exposition of the Fall. In no way does he deny the Fall but he has no systematic exposition of the Fall. His short exposition on 429-430 is excellent but much too brief and too late in the volume. This is a huge lacuna and a glaring weakness of this otherwise excellent book. Without a comprehensive exposition at the beginning of the volume of the very good creation, the comprehensive deprivation of the Fall, and its all-encompassing curse, the people of God are hard pressed to understand a comprehensive doctrine of redemption such as he so manifestly desires to develop. I only hope that he will remedy this in a subsequent edition.

Going back to the legal creation covenant would demonstrate that mission was intimately involved in Adam and Eve's task before the Fall (prelapsarian), not was not merely given post-Fall. In fact, Wright does not unequivocally mention that Adam and Eve were literal persons

specially created “in the beginning” as our Lord states (see e.g., Mk. 10:6; Mt. 19:4; note small section on page 195 and compare 326, 334, 398). I must grant that he seems to presuppose their literal existence but this could be in his view merely a literary device in a Barthian sense for a generalized fall of humankind. He does mention that the creation was pronounced “good” by the Scripture, an essential element in a redemptive and restorative view of mission (see 398). This is well and good. But the literalness of the creation and the Fall accounts and the creation’s literal goodness before the Fall affects how we see present sickness, animal predation, and such natural evils as tornadoes and hurricanes. With billions of years of animal death, nature “red in tooth and claw,” the survival of the fittest, the strong tearing and destroying the weak, and the bigger crushing the smallest, God’s wisdom, goodness, and glory are vastly diminished, if not destroyed.

The God of Scripture, on the other hand, reveals himself as a Being of totally different character. He is the God who always supports the weak, defends the helpless, and is Helper and Servant to his creation (Ps. 146). He has compassion upon even his tiniest creatures and does not delight in their suffering. In fact, he delights in letting the first be last and the last first. To me, these two views of divinity are irreconcilable and antithetical. I pray that Wright would adopt a literal creation view but I fear not. Most British evangelicalism rejects such a view, emasculating the Gospel’s comprehensive power unto a complete salvation, in my view. Therefore, the remedy in Christ is also spayed. This redemptive restoration irrupts into the present age with the power of the future Resurrection Age by means of the Spirit working through Messiah and his community (e.g., Mt. 12:28

Second, going back to a literal, good creation and a literal Fall at the beginning of earth history demonstrates that mission has always been comprehensive (i.e., (w)holistic). After the Fall, the redemptive element must be added as well as the priority of the message of repentance

and conversion without neglecting all other aspects of God's mission. If Wright had gone back in his exposition to the literal creation and Adam's lapse at the beginning as I am recommending, then the definition of the *missio Dei* before the Fall would be something along these lines. "The Trinitarian movement of God to create, then enter into fellowship with the man and woman he created, in order to form their emerging culture into the likeness of His culture within the Trinitarian community of the Godhead, to His ultimate glory." The priority here was upon culture formation under the Lordship of the Creator. Only after the Fall did the *missio Dei* become conversion-redemptive in priority, but not in final goal. I would propose the following changes in the definition of the *missio Dei* after the Fall. "The Trinitarian movement of God to redemptively re-enter into fellowship with *fallen* mankind in order to *transform* their fallen ethno-cultures into the likeness of His unified-yet-diverse culture within the Godhead, to His ultimate glory."

Wright seems to waver on the concept of such a priority though he does include an excellent section on the centrality of the cross before his discussion of "Priority or Ultimacy" (316). "*The cross is the unavoidable center of our mission. All Christian mission flows from the cross—as its source, its power, and that which defines its scope*" (Wright 2006, 314; emphasis in the original). To this he adds his "passionate conviction that holistic mission must have a holistic theology of the cross" by which he means that the cross must be the very center of "social engagement . . . [and] evangelism" (Wright 2006, 315). He then adds these remarkable words: "There is no other power, no other resource, no other name through which we can offer the whole Gospel to the whole person and the whole world than Jesus Christ crucified and risen" (Wright 2006, 315-316). Amen!

He states further that he has great sympathy to those who hold to comprehensive mission with the emphasis upon the priority of church planting and evangelism as I do. He states that he desire to provide a “few gentle questions” to those holding this priority rather than a “severe critique” (Wright 2006, 317). I believe his conclusions after these questions are very appropriate. I agree substantially with him if evangelism and church planting remain the top normal priority for resources and time. Donald McGavran’s works—ever timely—constantly re-emphasized how resources and time are always eaten up by non-priority missional works. Historically, evangelism and church planting almost always end up being put on the far back burner with few resources and personnel being allocated to these priority tasks.

Having said this, however, hear Professor Wright with some of my commentary. “Almost any *starting* point can be appropriate, depending possibly on what is the most pressing or obvious need” (Wright 2006, 319). I agree but note that any person’s eternal relationship with the Father is always the most pressing need. Food, literacy, or medical care may temporally come first because, for example, a terrible famine is occurring or a Muslim or totalitarian state may not allow any other first step. But proclamation of the cross leading to repentance is commanded by our King as his number one priority without ever neglecting all other aspects of (w)holistic mission (see Mt. 28:17-20; Lk. 24:46-48; Mk. 16:15; Jn. 20:21; Acts 1:8, 22:21, 26:17-18, etc.). He continues:

We can *enter* the circle of mission response at any point on the circle of human need. But ultimately we must not rest content until we have included without own missional response the wholeness of God’s missional response to the human predicament—and that of course includes the good news of Christ, the cross and resurrection, the forgiveness of sin, the gift of eternal life that is offered to men and women through our witness to the gospel of the hope of

God's new creation. That is why I speak of ultimacy rather than primacy. Mission may not always begin with evangelism. But mission that does not ultimately *include* declaring the Word and the name of Christ, the call to repentance, and faith and obedience has not completed its task. It is defective mission, not holistic mission. (Wright 2006, 319)

The last section, "Part IV: The Arena of Mission" demonstrates how our Triune God desires that the whole creation (e.g., physical, social, economic, legal, and spiritual) would partake in the restorative aspects of Christ's redemption. Wright builds his case through careful exegesis of passages throughout the whole of the Scripture demonstrating that there is continuity between covenants in each of the areas he covers. First, he deals with earth keeping as part of our missional responsibility. He next has an important and very relevant section on the image of God in man, how it affects humankind in rebellion against God, with further implications for his judgment. He asks important questions about our missional responsibility in the HIV/AIDS epidemic and how this relevant discussion interfaces with judgment, the image of God, and disasters in general.

A very relevant discussion of ethnicity in Scripture follows ("God and the Nations in Old Testament Vision" and "God and the Nations in New Testament Vision"). This is a special, decades long interest of mine and the subject of a recent volume just published.⁴ I strongly agree with his thesis: "It is God's mission in relation to the nations, arguably more than any other single theme, that provides the key that unlocks the biblical grand narrative" (Wright 2006, 455). Contrary to classic medieval thought, he states categorically that "the Bible does not imply that ethnic or national diversity is in itself sinful or the product of the Fall. . . . He created them in the

⁴See note 2. Two other fine works on the subject, though not as comprehensive, are J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003) and Dewi Hughes, *Castrating Culture: A Christian Perspective on Ethnic Identity from the Margins* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2001).

first place” (Wright 2006, 455-456). The goal of the new creation, he continues, is not “a homogenized mass or . . . a single global culture. . . . The Bible’s portrait of the nations is not a melting pot . . . but a salad bowl. . . . The mission of God is not merely the salvation of innumerable souls but specifically the healing of the nations” (Wright 2006, 456).

He then goes on to echo several other themes of my own research. First, God deals with ethnies and nations “as wholes” (457). Egypt, he explains, is paradigmatic of a theme continued throughout the rest of Scripture. Actually, he neglects to mention two other previous paradigmatic ethno-nations—Babel and Sodom/Gomorrah. The following sub-points are excellent application of biblical ethno-theology: “Any nation can be the agent of God’s judgment” or alternatively “Any nation can be the recipient of God’s mercy.” “All nations’ histories are under God’s control” so that he does with them as he wishes for his own glory. He then discusses a key Isaianic theme: “The Nations as Witnesses of Israel’s History.” God does all things with Israel in the theater of creation against the background of all ethnies and nations as the observing audience.

Next, Wright adds two very optimistic biblical themes utterly neglected and often rejected in the last 150 years in Anglo-American evangelicalism: “The nations as Beneficiaries of Israel’s Blessings” (Wright 2006, 474) and “The Nations Will Worship Israel’s God” (Wright 2006, 478). Wright is very clear, agreeing again with the conclusion in my volume: “That the nations will one day bring all their worship to the only true and living God is left in no doubt. The sheer volume of texts that envision it is quite remarkable” (Wright 2006, 478). The last point is “The Nations Will Be Included in Israel’s Identity” (Wright 2006, 489). His holistic language of inclusion, however, I believe is mistaken. Wright speaks of the “distinction between Israel and the nations will eventually be dissolved in a multinational community” and “But the

mission of God was that the distinction would ultimately be dissolved as the nations flowed into unity and identity with Israel” (Wright 2006, 500). The concepts of “dissolved” and “distinctions removed” simply are not found in the passages he cites from the Old Testament nor in the New Testament. I labor extensively to demonstrate this. Wright subconsciously, in my opinion, follows an anti-Trinitarian presupposition here. In the first creation there is true unity and real diversity—in rebellion against YHWH. The same is true in the new creation, but now in faith and obedience. The New Jerusalem is Israel the bride, but an Israel expanded to include not only ethnic Israel but all the other ethnies as well. The term “Israel” is then dual in meaning depending on the context, sometimes ethnic Israel and sometimes a metaphor for the one pluriform, new people of God. As Calvin comments, “Israel” in the new covenant is one people of God with many nations. Thus, just as God is in himself true-unity-and-real-diversity, so all creation will come to reflect his glory.

This section, however, consists of many strengths but also several weaknesses, some more important than others. First, as I have mentioned, Wright emphatically believes that Israel did not possess an OT centrifugal mission imperative. This is shared by most missiologists in the UK, Australia, and the RSA (e.g., Scobie, Goldsworthy, C. Wright, D. Bosch, et al). “There is no clear and explicit command that Israelites should go to the nations. . . . So if YHWH’s intention had been that they were to organize missions to the nations, instructions to that effect would surely have been framed. But we find none” (Wright 2006, 503). What he means is that God’s particular OT people were to be a universal, shining and attracting light to the surrounding peoples. I certainly agree. However, this perspective is not completely adequate, in my opinion. Israel was uniquely gifted with the knowledge of God so that they may “proclaim good news of his salvation to the ends of the earth” (see Ps. 96:1-3)—the Great Commission of the Old

Testament. This, and several other passages in the OT, are clear imperatives to “Go” even if the word “go” is not mentioned. How can one “proclaim” to the ethno-nations without going to them.

Second, Wright states that there were no instructions in the OT for centrifugal mission. Psalm 96 again gives such instruction: An imperative, a message (YHWH reigns and judges while all the gods are non-existent) and an invitation (“come to the temple”). This actually is more complete than the NT’s Great Commission. Third, Wright states that there is no “explicit condemnation in the prophets for Israel’s manifest failure to undertake such missionary activity” (Wright 2006, 503). However, this is exactly what Isaiah does in the Servant Songs. Israel was supposed to be YHWH’s witness but they were instead blind and deaf witnesses! I explain this carefully in my volume. Jesus echoes this Servant Song theme explicitly in Luke 24 and Acts 1. A witness, according to biblical law, must speak the truth to others. Israelites believed already, so the “others” must have been the gentile peoples as Isaiah explicitly mentions in the Servant Songs: “Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth. For I am God and there is no other” (Is. 45:22). Thus Israel ought to have been speaking the truth to all peoples and nations, drawing them into the Temple to worship for that house was to be “a house of prayer for all peoples” (Is. 56:79; see Mt. 21:13). The centrifugal message is clearly there for those who have eyes to see it.

Israel as a people, therefore, was to be completely missional. Israel was supposed to be a people who both engaged in centripetal and centrifugal mission, that is Israel’s task was both to go out to proclaim and to attract the ethno-nations into the center to “come and see.” The mission of the old covenant assembly of YHWH is similar to the post-Pentecostal assembly of Messiah except there is a reversal of emphasis. Much more emphasis is placed upon centripetal mission in the old covenant than in the new covenant but both emphases were and are present in

each of the two covenantal eras.⁵ The problem with OT Israel was not the lack of a centrifugal imperative. They did indeed possess one. But they were failures at fulfilling their task as a holy, royal-priestly nation, which was supposed to proclaim the excellencies of God to the gentile peoples (see 1 Pt. 2:9-12). God designed history so that Israel would fail (see Rom. 11) and that the only One to succeed would be Yeshu’—the true Israel, Suffering Servant, and True Vine. He succeeded where national Israel failed. He is the blessing to all clans and peoples, which Israel was supposed to be (Gal. 2:1-16). Only when he came could Israel’s duty and task be fulfilled. Our Lord then gave that task to the Israel of the Spirit, the universal assembly (church, ekklesia) in Messiah Jesus. Upon that Assembly, Christ poured out his missional Spirit to succeed where OT Israel failed. Both assemblies—the assembly of YHWH and the assembly of Messiah possessed the same task and purpose.

Last, Wright’s excellent volume has a few other minor weaknesses that by no means destroy the value of the book but could be improved in future editions. For example, Wright accepts “global warming” theory, which is far from established scientific truth. There are many very able skeptics who have impeccable scientific credentials. Sadly, this shows a naivete that I find too often among many UK evangelical scholars who desire to be relevant to modern culture. (Sadly, it is found among too many of the emerging American evangelical elite scholars as well). No scientific theory is absolute. Only Scripture’s truth and worldview is.

Wright concludes with a challenging statement: “If, then, it is in Christ crucified and risen that we find the focal point of the whole Bible’s grand narrative, and therein also the focal point of the whole mission of God, our response is surely clear” (535). Since the mission of the triune God mission is the complete—wholistic—redemption of all mankind because of King

⁵I discuss this extensively in *The Concept of Ethnicity in the Bible: A Theological Analysis* (see note 2).

Jesus' death and resurrection, the only proper response of the redeemed to it join him as the Suffering Servant and his people in the *missio Dei*. Hear again, Dr. Wright concluding words:

When we grasp that the whole Bible constitutes the coherent revelation of the mission of God, when we see this as the key that unlocks the driving purposefulness of the whole grand narrative (to cite our subtitle), then we find our whole world view impacted by this vision. As has been well documented, every human worldview is an outworking of some narrative. We live out of the story or stories we believe to be true, the story of stories that 'tell it like it is,' we think. So what does it mean to live out of this story? Here is The Story, the grand universal narrative that stretches from creation to new creation, and accounts for everything in between. This is The Story that tells us where we have come from, how we got to be here, who we are, why the world is in the mess it is, how it can be (and has been) changed, and where we are ultimately going. And the whole story is predicated on the reality of this God and the mission of this God. He is the originator of the story, the teller of the story, the prime actor in the story, the planner and guide of the story's plot, the meaning of the story and its ultimate completion. He is its beginning, end and center. It is the story of the mission of God, of this God and no other. (Wright 2006. 533)

All in all, this is a very deep and thought-provoking volume with many useful tables and diagrams. I appreciate his own personal translations of classic passages such as Genesis 12:1-3. He is judicious in his use of careful scholars and he always engages with them graciously whether he disagrees or agrees. I find the indexes excellent but the outline pages at the beginning, unfortunately, do not provide page numbers, making it a bit more difficult to locate key sections. Last, I believe that actually a key purpose of this volume is principally Chris Wright's delight in declaring the nature and character of the triune God of mission and his joy in describing how God's mission becomes our mission. Only as we all share that same joy and delight can we impact the totality of the world's ethno-cultures with the Gospel. The goal of the mission of God is that all peoples become joyous and delighted worshippers of our Father through Christ our Lord.