

## God's Ultimate Purpose to His People: To be blessed and to be a blessing

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### Abstract

*When God called Abraham in Genesis chapter 12:1-3, He blessed Abraham with a promise. The promise of God is fulfilled and as he departs from the land. From this passage, the promise has spiritual aspect and temporal blessing, particularly the latter. God says, "I will bless you." It is an assurance of the Creator to His creation and through him, the nations will be blessed. In the context of the local church in Tondano, Indonesia, there are causes that hinder the development of God's mission such as the false assumption of what mission is, the lack of responsibility in doing the mission, challenges that come from inside and outside, lack of faith, and many others. If they know what the mission of God is as what is written in the Bible, they will realize that they are the people of mission, people who are chosen for a blessing because the mission of God is to bless his creation. As God selected Abraham as His messenger through whom to communicate the light to the world, he had no doubt and had confidence that the source of blessing was leading him. The local church in Tondano, Indonesia will have the same blessing as what Abraham had before and the servants of God in like manner must go forth to sow.*

**Keywords:** *blessing; mission*

### Introduction

This section presents the introduction of the topic concerning the issue of blessing and its connection to the mission in the story of Abraham. This section also provides the delimitation and the methodology of the paper which will be the guidance of the paper. The story written in the book of Genesis about the sending of Abraham gives a right perspective about the mission of God through His people and the purpose of the mission.

Christ Wright, in his book entitles *The Mission of God* explained about the responsibility of Abraham as a missionary that he will be a blessing and "the object of this blessing is at first unspecified (except that it will include the fact he himself individually will be blessed), then it progresses to those who bless him, and finally issues in blessing for all the kinship groups on earth."<sup>1</sup>

In the book of Genesis chapter 12:1-3 some scholar says that the blessing is not just seen in a context of material possessions but spiritual component as well which is about blessing to the

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher J. H Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 201.

nations.<sup>2</sup> In terms of mission, Wright clearly states that “the mission of God is to bless all nations on earth... Israel in the Old Testament was not chosen over against the rest of the nations, but for the sake of the rest of the nations.”<sup>3</sup> The local church in Tondano, Indonesia has a miscomprehension about what is the real mission of God. Therefore, when they meet the difficulties as they do the mission, they give up because of the lack of faith. They think that if there is a prosperity or welfare, that is a blessing.

The development of the economy, social and cultural is good enough in the Minahasa<sup>4</sup> region. The description of the church in Minahasa is Indonesia Protestant Church. The elders are involved in participating in every program of the church and some of the church members as well. Spiritual maturity, external (misperception on a Biblical mission) and internal (lack of faith) pressures are the barriers to do the mission.

This research paper is to explain the mission of God in the perspective of blessing in order to help the church members to understand the purpose of the mission as we live in this world through the evidence of blessing in the Old Testament, especially through the story of Abraham and the purpose of blessing that God has given to His people. There are some false assumptions about mission among the church members in this local church. The methodology used is good but the motive not, lack of attention about the mission, every people approach the Bible with their own set of preconceived ideas. Accordingly, the study will focus on the following question: What is the mission of God? What is the meaning of blessing concerning God’s mission?

The purpose of this study is to seek the meaning of God’s mission in the perspective of blessing that happened in the Old Testament through Abraham with the intention of changing the misperception of the local church in Tondano, Indonesia about what is the real mission of God, and to explain about the relation between the blessing and God’s mission in the context of local church in Tondano, Indonesia.

This research paper contributes to the Christian reader toward the understanding of God’s mission in connection to blessing. This study also seeks to benefit preacher, Bible teacher, and church pastor in general to have a better understanding of God’s mission in terms of blessing in the bible. Finally, this paper will provide the current literature in order to benefit the further research in the field of Old Testament.

This research paper focuses only to analyze the context of mission concerning the blessing of God to His people in the Old Testament associated with the meaning of blessing in the local church in Tondano, Indonesia. There are some biblical passages in which the research could be studied in order to get some more understanding of the meaning of blessing or the mission of God.

This study is to analyze the meaning of God’s mission in terms of blessing in the context of the sending of Abraham and its connection with the mission of the local church in Tondano, Indonesia. The Bible stands as the primary source. The general references such as missional dictionaries, concordances, and commentaries will be used. This study will use a library for collecting of the data. This study is organized according to the following structure:

The first chapter presents the introduction to the study. The question in the statement of the problem will become the framework of the study. The second chapter will discuss the elements of

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Bediako, “The Theological Character of Gen 12-50 (The Patriarchal History)” (M. A. Thesis, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, June 2013),

<sup>3</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 99–100.

blessing which are creational and relational. The third chapter is to see the purpose of blessing. Chapter four present the summary and conclusion of the study.

### **The Definitions of Blessing**

In the beginning of the book of Genesis especially in chapter 1-11 “Places all of world history in a context of creation/fall/Providence under a sovereign who at the same time is specifically the caring and covenantal Lord who calls Israel.”<sup>5</sup> The Lord God has a mission, and through the word from the Bible explained that “The God revealed in the Scripture is personal, purposeful, and goal-oriented”<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the purpose of God is to bless His people like what is explained by Yoder that God had a purpose as He called Abraham to leave his land because he would receive the promise which is the blessing from God where he must be a blessing to others<sup>7</sup> which has a meaning that “Humans will be purposeful creatures with a goal to accomplish.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Blessing is Creational and Relational**

God tests Abraham as He calls Abraham to get out from the land and the God starts “with a command, continues with a promise, and ends with a blessing.”<sup>9</sup> From the text in the book of Genesis chapter 12:1-3, there is a list of the good meanings of blessing that need to be discussed which are creational and relational. In terms of those concepts, Abraham as he leaves the land, there are some statements that arise and it is related to the questions of the mandate that has given to him. As written by Wright in his book that:

“On the one hand, he is to leave his land (the widest sphere of his identity), his wider kindred and then his immediate extended family. On the other hand, he is to be a blessing. The object of this blessing is at first unspecified (except that it will include the fact that he himself individually will be blessed), then it progresses to those who bless him, and finally issues in blessing for all the kinship groups on earth.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Creational**

God is the one who creates the whole universe is written repeatedly in the book of Genesis and no one can do like what He does.<sup>11</sup> In the creational element of blessing, to bless His people is the main purpose of God as he created human and it is explained by some scholar that “goodness of creation and the goodness of enjoying creation, are the central truths of the Bible. God wants his human creatures to enjoy the blessing of their creatureliness – all the blessings that God built into

<sup>5</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective* (InterVarsity Press, 2014), 49.

<sup>6</sup> Robin Martin and Mike Barnett, *Discovering the Mission of God: Best Missional Practices for the 21st Century*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 40.

<sup>7</sup> Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 49.

<sup>8</sup> Martin and Barnett, *Discovering the Mission of God*, 41.

<sup>9</sup> Francis D. (Ed) Nichol, *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Washington, 1953), 293.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 201.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel L. Akin, David P. Nelson, and Peter R. Schemm, eds., *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Academic, 2007), 244.

creation itself.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, God has a desire to bless His people and fill them with fruitfulness in all aspects.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, multiplication also parts of the concept of blessing and “blessing is identical with the survival of the family.”<sup>14</sup> Concerning the term “multiplication”, Barnett states that it “started when we committed ourselves to prayer and seeking God. But the glory belongs to the Lord. Prepare yourself to read stories and discover life-giving factors about how God multiplies His church.”<sup>15</sup> Hence, the church as they do the mission to be fruitful and multiply, they have to be ready to take a risk.<sup>16</sup> Concerning the multiplication of blessing, Wright states:

“As we read on in Genesis, the creational content of blessing predominates. In fact, the root *brk*, as verb or noun, occurs eighty-eight times in Genesis, which is just over a fifth of all its occurrences in the whole Old Testament. When God blesses someone, it normally includes an increase of family, flocks, wealth or all three. God’s blessing means enjoying the good gifts of God’s creation in abundance.”<sup>17</sup>

The meaning of blessing in connection with the creational element can be described as “what modern secular calls “luck” or “success” the Old Testament calls “blessing,” for it insists that God alone is the source of all good fortune.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Wright described the important presence of God among His people as:

“The highest of blessings (Lev 26:11-12). Material blessings are in themselves tangible expressions of divine benevolence. Blessing not only connects the patriarchal narratives with each other (cf. Gen 24:1; 26:3; 35:9; 39:5), it also links them with the primeval history (cf. Gen 1:28; 5:2; 9:1). The promises of blessing to the patriarchs are thus a reassertion of God’s original intentions for humans.”<sup>19</sup>

The correlation between the purposes of God to a human being and the meaning of blessing can be seen through the mission of God’s people “as redeemed humans who are being restored in Christ to the unspoiled image of God, we participate in God’s creational mission as well as God’s redemptive mission.”<sup>20</sup> It means that as a redeemed people, the church has a responsibility “not only the instrument of the extension of God’s kingdom (participating in God’s redemptive mission) but also the foretaste of it in all the way they bear witness.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher J. H Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God: Celebrating the Bible’s Central Story*. (Carlisle: Langham Creative Projects, 2013), 46.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia King, *31 Decrees of Blessing for Your Life*. (Broadstreet Publishing Gr, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, Overtures to Biblical theology 3 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Tommy Barnett, *Multiplication: Unlock the Biblical Factors to Multiply Your Effectiveness in Leadership & Ministry* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1997), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>17</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 209.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> John R. Franke and others, *Four Views on the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## Relational

Relational is defined as “of or relating to kinship or characterized or constituted by relations”<sup>22</sup> and this element has two parts which about vertical and horizontal.

In the vertical part of the blessing here describes that when God bless His people, they must know from whom all blessings flow and they should keep the close relationship with the fountain based on the experience of the ancient people in the Old Testament where they were trusting in God in building a personal intimacy with the Him.<sup>23</sup> Even though there will be many challenges that the people of God will face while they are waiting for God’s blessing but the key word is they must confess that God is the only source of blessing and maintain the relationship with Him.<sup>24</sup>

There are many obstacles that hinder God’s people when they want to serve and carry out the mission of God, whether it is a challenge from inside or outside of the church, but God’s guidance and blessing will always be with the people who have faith and close to God as described in the book of Genesis about the situation that Abraham and Jacob faced that:

“the final sworn confirmation of blessing comes only after the most severe testing imaginable (Gen 22) and the mysterious account of Jacob wrestling with God ends with him eliciting a blessing through a bruising face-to-face encounter (Gens 32:26-29). When blind and aged Jacob blesses the two sons of Joseph, he acknowledges that the blessing he now passes on is one that has attended his own life like a shepherd protecting a wandering and vulnerable sheep, and one that had marked the life of his father and grandfather as they walked before God.”<sup>25</sup>

Horizontally means that “the relational element of blessing reaches out to those around.”<sup>26</sup> In the context of mission that relate with the horizontal element of blessing, there is a purpose that God wants His people to do as they carry out the great commandment which in this context, there should be a contact with the person who has blessed by God as what is written by Nichol in explaining about what Abraham has done through his mission that:

“All nations and all ages are included. It was the “ground” that had been cursed after the Fall (Gen. 3:17), the same ground out of which man had originally been made. That curse had come because of the unfaithfulness of one man (Rom. 5:12), and now all families of the “ground” were to receive blessing through the obedience of one who was found faithful. As his spiritual offspring, Christians today share in the blessing imparted to Abram (Gal. 3:8, 29). The blessing vouchsafed to him would finally unite divided families on earth and change the dread curse pronounced upon the ground because of sin into a blessing for all men. All further promises to the patriarchs and to Israel either clarified or amplified the promise of salvation offered the entire human race in the first promise made to Abram.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Definition of RELATIONAL,” accessed October 17, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/relational>.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 209–210.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (Nashville, Tenn: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 210.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Nichol, *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 1:294.



Apart from the story of Abraham, there are people of God who have received the mission of God which is a blessing “through contact with those whom God has blessed.”<sup>28</sup> For example, “Laban is enriched by God’s blessing on Jacob (Gen. 30:27-30). Potiphar is blessed through the presence of Joseph (Gen 39:5). Pharaoh is blessed by Jacob (Gen 47:7, 10) ... and when Abraham himself is blessed by Melchizedek (Gen 14: 18-20; cf. Heb 7).”<sup>29</sup>

### God’s Address to Abraham

The mission that God has commanded Abraham to be doing contains a significance of goodness to His people. In the terms of “Go... and be a blessing, the words that launch both halves of God’s address to Abraham are both imperatives”<sup>30</sup> which means that there is a different significance of mission on each command.

### Blessing is Missional and Historical

In the whole story of the Bible explains that there is the role of the people of God especially as we look back in the book of Genesis that “they are chosen for the sake of the world”<sup>31</sup> to do the mission of God and as the minister or church members admit it as a calling, “God assigns us a responsibility in the mission Dei”<sup>32</sup> There are some aspects about blessing that will be discussed, specifically about missional and historical.

### Missional

The way people interpret the value of missional related to the church’s character in various ways. Concerning the church in missional aspect and the needed of faith, one author says that the “missional church is always reforming in relation to the historical Christian Faith.”<sup>33</sup> Gohan, tries to describe the meaning of missional as “the very essence and identity of the church as it takes up its role in God’s story in the context of its culture and participates in God’s mission to the world.”<sup>34</sup> However, in the missional<sup>35</sup> and historical aspect of blessing contain a different purpose in a length of time as Wright states:

“The first mission was geographical and limited. He was to leave home and go to the land God would show him. That mission is completed in a relatively short time in the next three verses—though of course the mission of taking possession of the land as promised in Genesis 12:7 would take many more generations. But the second mission is unbounded—“be a blessing.” And its scope is unlimited in time and geography. Abraham must leave his own land so that blessing will come to peoples of all lands. Blessing here as a command, as a task, as a role is something that goes

<sup>28</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 210.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>31</sup> Michael W Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 30.

<sup>32</sup> Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Baker Books, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Missional is the adoption of the posture, thinking, behaviours, and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the gospel message.

beyond the sense of creational abundance that we have seen so far in Genesis. “Be a blessing” thus entails a purpose and goal that stretches into the future. It is, in short, missional.”<sup>36</sup>

When the people of God do the mission that has already been explained above, they need to realize that it is for saving others from what they have done (sin) and it is a mission. Therefore, if there are a people who confess themselves as the servant of God but not fulfill the mission, they do not have faith and obedience to the Creator because “the obedience of Abraham is a key element in the confirmation of God’s covenant with him for the blessing of all nations (Gen 22:16-18).”<sup>37</sup>

As a result, the churches have to do the mission without hesitation and not just stay in the comfortable situation of their own place because “the church as missional is to define the entire Christian community as a body sent to the world and existing not for itself but to bring good news to the world.”<sup>38</sup> Moore also explains the role of a missionary in a way they work on a field that “what missionaries do on the field must be connected with where the people group is on a basic continuum. It ranges from no access to the gospel to lots of access.”<sup>39</sup>

## Historical

The blessing here is a historical dimension. Chris Wright in his writing describes historical part of the blessing that when God gives the mission to Abraham and his posters (be a blessing), “it necessarily takes on a historical dimension.”<sup>40</sup> He further explains the meaning of blessing as “a promise for the future “I will bless you” and by including blessing in a command to be carried on into the future “Be a blessing”, our text transforms it into a historical dynamic. Genesis 12:1-3 injects blessing into history. It launches a mission that holds hope for the future.”<sup>41</sup>

Thus, as we have seen through the story in the Bible, it declares the mercy of God to the people in all generation even though they rebel against God but through the history, we can see that “blessing received from God and blessing passed on to others.”<sup>42</sup> The task of the church is to share the blessing to others through their evangelism and if they do not listen to their calling “all of these blessings will become curses.”<sup>43</sup>

## Blessing is Covenantal and Ethical

Scripture will always be the standard of our faith and belief. Therefore, from the book “Genesis shows God blessing many others besides Abraham and his descendants”<sup>44</sup> and He will always continue to bless His people. The book of Genesis provides the evidence which the readers can find the explanation about the blessing that God wants His people to obtain.

<sup>36</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 211.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>38</sup> Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Steve Hoke and Bill Taylor, *Global Mission Handbook: A Guide for Crosscultural Service* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 71.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 213.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Minnie Knox Plummer, *Basic Bible Foundations: A Literacy Textbook and Study Guide of Old Testament Events* (Author House, 2006), 152.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 214.

God has promised His people that He will continue to bless them as they stay close to Him because it is part of His “covenant promise to His people”<sup>45</sup> and it is part of His plan”<sup>46</sup> In the other hand, some author states that the blessing of God “is not confined to the sphere of the covenant or redemptive history. The covenant includes God’s blessing, but God’s blessing is not limited to the covenant.”<sup>47</sup> Wright states:

“In all these things, Israel is called on to respond in the same way as the paradigm Abraham has set—in faith and obedience. Blessing within the covenant thus includes knowledge of who the only true and living God is (through the revelation of his name YHWH), and commitment to love and obey him in such a way that the blessing may continue to be enjoyed (Deut 4:32-40).”<sup>48</sup>

### Practical Applications for The Church

The research findings point out some practical things for the church in doing the mission regarding the meaning of blessing. This research shows that the effectiveness of knowing the mission of God and how to do it. However, this paper finds indicates the misperception of mission based on the book of Genesis chapter 12:1-3 which they should be introducing the gospel of Jesus to meet the needs of people in a social relationship, physical needs, and especially the ideology of the people around.

As a missionary, the local church must be a blessing in the way they spread the Gospel not only to achieve the target of baptism, but they do it because they know the mission of God that they should be a blessing like what Abraham did. Concerning the mission to being a blessing and be blessed, the church has to share the blessing that they have received from God so that it will not be a curse for themselves.

The healthy relationship with the Creator is the key point as the church do the mission so they can enjoy the blessing from above. When God gave a command to Abraham, on the other hand, He also gave a promise. It should become the strength of the churches as they proclaim the Gospel so they will have faith in God and not to be afraid when they meet challenges.

### Summary

This research paper explores the meaning of blessing concerning God’s mission present in the book of Genesis chapter 12:1-2, the story of Abraham as God sent him, and all the aspects of blessing itself that need to be known of the church before they do the mission. In chapter one, there is an introduction to the paper.

Chapter two discusses the concept of blessing, which is in the creational and relational elements, where we can see that there is a concept of multiplication, spreading, filling, and abundance that has been described briefly. Also, in relational elements, there are vertically and horizontally aspects there which the people of God need to have a close relationship with the source of blessing with worshiping Him like what Abraham does.

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<sup>45</sup> Tom Hale and Steve Thorson, *Applied OT Bible Commentary*. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 838.

<sup>46</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2011), 14.

<sup>47</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 214.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.



Chapter three is a God's address to Abraham which contains blessing is missional, historical, covenantal, and ethical and then the practical application for the church. The blessing that received from God has to be passed to others, the blessing will shower to all people but they need to respond with faith and obedience to Him.

### **Conclusion**

When God called Abraham in Genesis chapter 12:1-3, He blessed Abraham with a promise of Christ. The promise of God is fulfilled and as he departs from the land, no doubt in his mind. From this passage, we can see that the promise has spiritual aspect and temporal blessing, particularly the latter. God says, "I will bless you," it is an assurance of the Creator to His creation and through him, the nations will be blessed.

In the context of the local church in Tondano, Indonesia, there are causes that hinder the development of God's mission such as the false assumption of what mission is, the lack of responsibility in doing the mission, challenges that come from inside and outside, lack of faith, and many others. If they know what the mission of God is as what is written in the Bible, they will realize that they are the people of mission, people who are chosen for a blessing because the mission of God is to bless his creation.

As God selected Abraham as His messenger through whom to communicate the light to the world, he had no doubt and had a perfect confidence that the source of blessing was leading him. The local church in Tondano, Indonesia will have the same blessing as what Abraham had before and the servants of God in like manner must go forth to sow.