

## EVANGELISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

*“and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”  
These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” Exodus 19:6*

### THE POINT:

The study of evangelism should start in the Old Testament in order to understand the mission God has given his New Testament people.

### GOALS:

In this Lesson, we will...

- Examine how evangelism is a major part of the big picture in the Bible
- Assess several examples of evangelism in the Law, Prophets, and Psalms of the Old Testament
- Study God’s heart for evangelism in the book of Jonah

### KEY THOUGHTS:

- Nearly every major story in the Old Testament is a picture of the Gospel.
- Being uninformed of God’s mission in the Old Testament leads to a shallow understanding of his mission in the New Testament.
- It is God’s intention to receive the praise and glory that are due his Name from every people group on earth, throughout history.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

Ask students to keep the following questions in mind throughout the lesson...

- How does each section of biblical history connect as one overarching story of God’s mission?
- What elements of the Old Testament laws and prophetic messages point forward to Jesus?
- What types of people do you naturally fear or steer away from? Are you willing to share the Gospel with them?

### INTRODUCTION:

Today we are looking into the Old Testament to teach us about evangelism. The Old Testament comes way before Jesus ever told us to share our faith. Why begin here? The Old Testament lays the ground work for all of biblical history. It makes sense in many ways to begin in the Old Testament in order to understand God’s command to evangelize that was later given in the New Testament.

The account of God’s works in the Old Testament is not accidental or a jumbled together collection of stories. Each account is an important part of one grand narrative that displays God’s plan to bring His son Jesus into the world to atone for our sins, for all nations and for all generations. The Old Testament gives us the foundation of the Christian worldview and a mission that shows God’s view of reality and purpose, not that of our own.

Lastly, the Old Testament helps us understand God’s heart for all peoples in every generation while concentrating on a tiny insignificant nation in the eyes of the world, the nation of Israel. We get to look back and see God’s plan to send the Messiah, and understand that He would be the center of the greatest mission the world has ever seen. The Old Testament also reveals God’s intention to receive the worship due to Him from every person He has ever, or will ever create in all of human history. After we understand these concepts, we will see evangelism as more than just something that Jesus told us to do in the New Testament. It allows us to see that the task of evangelism actually sums up everything God has been accomplishing from the beginning of time.

### BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITY:

**Watch:** “Snow White – She’s the One” (0:50)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uFGKW3rOoI>

**Discuss:** In the movie Snow White and The Huntsman, Snow White is the only person in the land fairer than the evil queen. Unable to tolerate the insult to her vanity, the evil queen decides that Snow White must die. The queen sends a huntsman to kill Snow White. However, the huntsman finds himself unable to murder the innocent young woman, and

instead ends up training her to become a warrior capable of threatening the queen's reign. In today's lesson we will learn about the greatest threat to the devil's reign on the earth, the Messiah Jesus.

The Bible helps us to understand that the devil is the Prince of the Earth. Ever since he was cursed in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) he has known of the Messiah to come and has been scheming to destroy Him and God's plans. Obviously, the devil's schemes have not and will not prevail against God's perfect plan for humanity. The devil has been trying to use mankind to destroy God's workings from the beginning. God has turned his plans upside down again and again by taking plans for evil and turning them into good. The devil himself has played into the plot of God receiving even more glory for Himself.

#### **THE LESSON:**

*Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" - Luke 24:44-48*

Jesus spoke these words right before he ascended into heaven. He obviously knew the Bible was not a random collection of stories and rules to live by. All of it was pointing to Himself. The entirety of scripture points to Jesus being the center of the mission of God. It is also impossible to separate Jesus from God's mission and God's mission from Jesus, for they are one in the same.

Since the Bible is such a large book, we tend to read individual stories in isolation from each other. It is important to read them in context, as one large connected story, in order to really understand God's message to us. When we do this, we see clearly that the Bible is about God, not about us. He is before, behind, all throughout, and the end of all things. It is by His grace that we get to be a part of His story. God's story has important sections that we can only understand by looking in both the Old and New Testaments.

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." - Genesis 12:1-3*

Jesus said that he was the fulfillment of the Law, Prophets, and Psalms. The Law is the first five books of the Old Testament. In the pages of the Law you will find the history of creation, the flood, the tower of babel, Abraham and his family, and the exodus from Egypt. The Law also helped the Israelites know how to obey and worship God in a way that pleased Him.

What does that have to do with evangelism? It created the setting for the mission. We wouldn't understand why we need Jesus unless we first grasped the rebellion and sin of mankind. The Old Testament also helps us understand that our sins cannot be removed by religion and good deeds. The Old Testament helps us to recognize that our faith and reliance on God is how we are made righteous. One of the main characters of the Old Testament is Abraham. He and his faith are mentioned hundreds of times throughout the Bible. Abraham's faith was placed in God's sacrifice, not in his own ability.

*That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, - Romans 4:16*

God also made many promises to Abraham. The most important one being that the Messiah (Jesus) would come through him. Did that mean that God's mission would finally start when Jesus arrived? Absolutely not. God said that He would raise up Abraham and his descendants to be a light for all the nations of the world so His salvation would reach the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). The Old Testament reveals that God speaks to and uses people for His mission.

Moses and those after him were a great example of this. Exodus 19:6 says “*and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” Abraham and Moses are followed by many other examples of people God has used throughout Old Testament history to evangelize the world.

Jesus said He is the fulfillment of the Law, but also of the Prophets. The prophets in the Old Testament weren’t foretellers with crystal balls gazing into the future. They were more like prosecuting lawyers making God’s case against his people for breaking his covenant with them. God sent these Old Testament prophets to call His people back to himself and let them know how to be made right with Him again. Jesus is the ultimate expression of a prophet by declaring the way to the Father and calling all people to repent.

God’s message is so good that He is worth the praise and worship of every nation and people on earth. The Psalms paint the picture for this, as Israel’s evangelism manual. The Psalms commanded the Israelites to declare God’s message not just to their own nation, but to the whole world. The Israelites struggled with evangelism just like we do today. The Old Testament book of Jonah is one of the most well-known examples of this.

The point of the book of Jonah was not about a man being swallowed by a huge fish. It is ultimately about God’s love for all people and all nations. Even those that we might dislike. God was concerned that Jonah didn’t share His heart for the lost (Jonah 4:11). God has compassion for every nation, people group, and person on earth. None of them fall outside or beyond His saving grace. We should have that same heart and be willing to share the Gospel with anyone God puts in our path.

#### **RELEVANCE:**

How did the Old Testament lay the foundation for God’s global mission to all people, for all time, including me?

#### **DISCUSSION:**

*Instruct students to answer the following questions about evangelism in the Old Testament in their groups.*

- How often do you view the Bible as one connected story with Jesus as the main character of both Old and New Testaments?
- What foundational insights does the Old Testament provide that make the Gospel make sense?
- Who are the people around the world and in your personal life today that are hard to reach with the Gospel?

*Ask students to pair up and take turns identifying Old Testament stories that symbolically or directly talk about Jesus and His mission.*

**Ask:** What are some ways you can use these Old Testament stories in evangelism conversations today?

#### **HOMEWORK:**

In your own words, briefly describe how God’s mission of evangelism is woven throughout the Old Testament in the following three sections.

1. The beginning of mankind. (Creation, Fall, Noah, Tower of Babel)
2. The establishment of the nation of Israel. (Abraham, Moses)
3. The successes and failures of the nation of Israel. (Judges, David, the exile and return from exile)