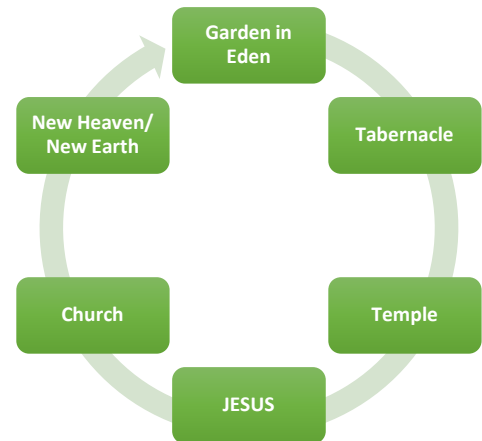


THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH

I. The Vision of God (Isaiah 11:9)

The whole of the biblical *Story* expands on, explains, and explores God's pursuit of his people for their joy and his glory. What begins in the Garden of Eden finds its ultimate fulfillment in the New Heavens and New Earth. The following chart seeks to explain the movement from Garden to Garden.

Let's briefly explore this *Story* from an aerial vantage point that allows us to see several major peaks within the mountain range of this narrative.



- **Genesis 1 and 2** is a description of the creation account, in which God creates man and woman and places them in a garden. The couple is commissioned with dominion of this garden paradise with the intent that it would eventually cover the entire globe and be populated with image-bearers who would know and experience God for their joy.
- **Genesis 3** describes how this plan goes horribly wrong as this couple rejects God in their own pursuit to be like God. It's within this failure that God graciously provides a plan for rescue and recovery through the promise of a Hero who will crush the Serpent and save the day (i.e. Seed Promise). However, this Hero will save the day in the most unlikely way – through his death (i.e. Blood Picture).
- **Genesis 12 and 15** describe how God chooses one man as the means by which this rescue mission would be realized. The promises made to Abraham involved layers of great blessing in which the entire earth would ultimately benefit.
- **Deuteronomy 4-9** describe the nation that God made from Abraham and why they were chosen as representatives of God to all other nations.
- **Isaiah 11** accents the **Vision God** will secure for himself as he works throughout human history.
- **Isaiah 42-55** further depict how this nation was meant to be a representative of God's blessing to the nations, how they failed to fulfill that responsibility, and how God would ultimately accomplish this through his chosen Servant, Jesus.
- **Matthew 28** continues the **Mission of God** through the church by making disciples from all nations who know and experience God for their joy. The entire New Covenant describes how this new people of God live in this grand *Story* as they await its culmination.
- **Revelation 5, 7, and 21** conclude how the **Vision of God** will one day be fully and finally realized as the people of God know and experience Him for their joy and His glory to the fullest.

We find ourselves within this narrative between Matthew 28 and Revelation 21. Let's explore a text which helps us see how we live within this *Story* as part of God's Mission to fulfill His Vision.

Isaiah 11 (ESV)

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. ⁹ ***They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.***

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

¹¹ In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

¹² He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. ¹³ The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim. ¹⁴ But they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put out their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. ¹⁵ And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the River with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals. ¹⁶ And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

II. The Mission of God is the Mission of the Church (Matthew 28:18-20)

This mission of God finds its apex in the incarnation of Jesus. This rescue mission that reconciles man to God and restores what was once rejected is on full display in the Gospel accounts detailing the sinless life, substitutionary death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. This mission continues as Jesus ascends into heaven and entrusts his followers to be his witnesses carrying this mission forward “to the ends of the earth,” “to the end of the age.”

*Two overriding purposes of the church can be delineated: **gathered**, ministering to the body, and **scattered**, ministering to the world.*
-The Moody Handbook of Theology

Matthew 28:18-20 *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Luke 24:44-49 *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 and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, **beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things**. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. **But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.**”*

Acts 1:8 *“...But you will receive **power** when the **Holy Spirit** has come upon you, and **you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**”*

III. The Church On Mission (*The Acts of the Apostles...to Today*)

The “Church On Mission” is on display throughout the New Testament. The book of *Acts (of the Apostles)* demonstrates the forward advance of the gospel, which is the mission of the church. *Acts* could be summarized by the following highlight reel:

- ...And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (2:47b).
- And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus (5:42).
- So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied (9:31).
- Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled...And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. And a great many people were added to the Lord (11:19, 21, 24b).
- So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily (16:5).
- ...he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and say, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ” (17:2-3).
- So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily (19:20).
- ...to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (26:18).

This Mission continues today amidst peace or persecution. This Mission advances through unlikely means and an “unbelievable” message. This Mission is unprecedented, so that only God can get the glory for what he does in and through the church.

Unlikely Means...Unbelievable Message...Unprecedented Mission

1 Corinthians 1:18–31 (ESV)

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Ephesians 2:11–22 (ESV)

¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 3:1–13 (ESV)

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to

light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰ *so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.* ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Ephesians 4:1–16 (ESV)

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

⁸ Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Unfortunate Circumstances

2 Timothy 3:1–9 (ESV)

¹ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. ⁶ For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷ always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. ⁹ But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

Hebrews 2:1–4 (ESV)

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

2 Peter 3:1–18 (ESV)

¹ This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, ³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” ⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. ¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸ ***But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*** To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM CHURCH HISTORY THIS YEAR?