

## Culture Bible Study 1: **God's Kingdom Purpose**

Sin is often imaged scripturally as blindness, for it keeps us from seeing God and his plan for us clearly. When we begin to seek the reconciliation of all races and cultures, we will find that years of sinfulness—of separation, prejudice and cynicism—have rendered many, even fellow believers, blind to the work of God. Skepticism arises on one side as we speak about all living and worshiping together in peace and mutual affirmation. On the other, we encounter either an attitude of mere toleration or a naïveté about the problems we face in seeking true reconciliation.

Yet we must steer clear of these wrong attitudes and align ourselves with God's intentions, knowing that his salvation plan will one day be fulfilled. We can enjoy the blessings of faithfulness now and forever, for nothing can thwart our Lord's purposes. Such a task, however, requires the renewal of our hearts and minds, a lifting of the veil of sin. This transformation of our vision takes place as we begin to understand how God has worked in the past and where he is going in the future. With this reality—the only reality—burned into the consciousness, we can decide how to participate with Jesus in the present.

### **Read Isaiah 49:1-6.**

1. The servant in verse 3 is not literally the nation Israel, but is the Messianic servant. What is the promise in this verse?

2. How does the prophet respond in verse 4?

3. This passage has been called the "great commission of the Old Testament." How will the Israelites carry out their mission as a light for the Gentiles?

4. Think about pagan worship versus the worship of the Lord of Israel. When Israel fulfilled its purpose as light, as the people with whom God dwelt, what kind of God did other nations see?

5. What did God promise to accomplish through the servant of the Lord (v. 6)?

### **Read Acts 2:1-35.**

6. Here we have described for us the first act of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The first church of Jesus Christ is born. Describe it.

7. The New Testament refers to this emerging church as the "new Israel." Contrast it with the old.

8. What fundamental lessons are learned here concerning the language, race and culture of this new Israel (vv. 5-11)?

9. How did these Jewish and gentile converts of all races feel, hearing the gospel proclaimed in their own languages (vv. 6-7, 12-13)?

10. How does Peter respond to their doubts (vv. 15-17)?

***Peter continues his sermon on Christ's life, death and resurrection.***

***Read Acts 2:36-41 for his conclusion.***

11. How do the people then respond to Peter's message about the risen Christ (vv. 36-37, 41)?

12. Christians are called to serve as the "light" to all people. Rather than one physical house, the church as a whole receives God's Spirit and functions as the center of worship and celebration. With this understanding, examine your experience of the church today. What do our religious practices communicate to outsiders?

12A. How might nonbelievers regard our beliefs about cross-cultural, cross-racial relationships?

13. *Response:* How can we change our "language" so as to communicate the gospel to people of other cultures, races and subcultures?

Pray that you can participate in the joy of God's diverse creation.

This study is available online at: [www.intervarsity.org/ism/article/8209](http://www.intervarsity.org/ism/article/8209)

*For Further Study:* Isaiah 42:5-6; 56:3-7.