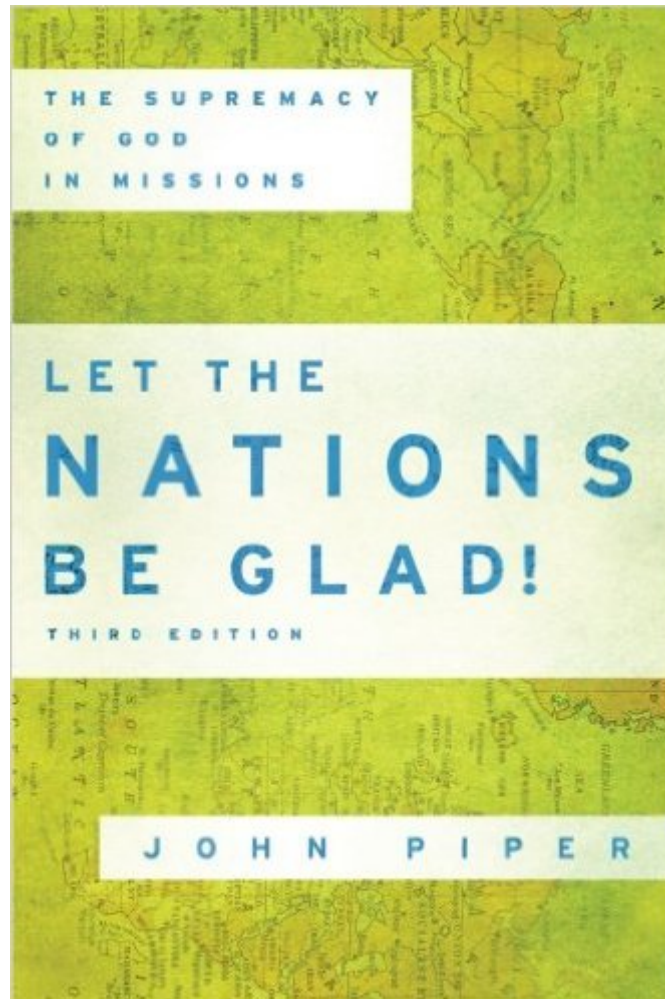


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# Let The Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy Of God In Missions



## Synopsis

This third edition of Piper's bestselling book shows that worship is the ultimate goal of the church and provides readers with a sound theological foundation for missions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This review originally appeared on [...] on 7/26/10. Special thanks to Caitlin of Baker Books for a review copy of this book. John Piper's book, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (hereafter LTNBG) has been a hit since its first edition came out back in 1993. Our discipleship and missions training school has been using the 2nd edition since it came out in 2003, and for good reason. But not only is there a new edition, which I'm reviewing here, but there's also a DVD with 6 Piper sermons on the topic of missions and a Study Guide. The DVD and Study Guide will be reviewed separately, but for now I'll say that I applaud Piper and Baker for trying out a multi-media approach to this excellent and needed guide to the biblical theology of missions. To organize my thoughts, I'm breaking this review down into 3 sections: the Good, the Bad and the Piper. The Good<sup>1</sup>. Piper openly admits that this book focuses on "biblical reflection rather than methodological application" of missions (p9), a decision I appreciate. It's not the only book you should use in training missionaries, but it gives an excellent theological basis for why we should do missions in the first place.<sup>2</sup> The main difference between the 3rd edition and the previous one is found in the introduction. Piper not only surveys the changing face of global Christianity (with insights from Philip Jenkins and Mark Noll), but extends a plea to preachers of the so-called 'prosperity gospel.' At first my thought was 'this seems out of

place in a missions book,' but Piper argues (and he is largely correct) that the prosperity gospel teaching of some American preachers has infiltrated parts of the "Global South" and is doing damage to the church there, particularly in Africa.<sup>3</sup> Chapter 1 is worth the price of the book alone. In fact, I rarely read past the first page of the first chapter without stopping and thinking more deeply. The central thesis: "worship is the fuel and goal of missions." I won't go into detail (get the book!), but I appreciate that Piper makes God the center of missions rather than anything else.<sup>4</sup> From the perspective of a teacher, I really appreciate Chapter 4, where Piper tackles three heavy issues: the eternality of hell, the necessity of Christ's work, and the necessity of conscious faith in Christ. These are difficult waters to navigate, and I have found it helpful to have everyone read this chapter and come ready to discuss in class. Piper makes a strong, biblical case for his answers, and I've told students over the years that if they plan on disagreeing with him, they better come prepared to argue their case biblically just as he does.<sup>5</sup> Piper offers a number of great thoughts on suffering and prayer, as well as laying out the Bible's teaching on people groups.<sup>6</sup> Piper draws from a fairly wide range of writers, preachers, etc., in this book. You get theologians like Jonathan Edwards, missiologists like Ralph Winter and pastors like John Dawson. In other words, he reaches outside of his camp (Reformed Baptist) and pulls from a broad spectrum. There is more I could say about what is good in this book, but suffice to say the good far outweighs the bad.

The Bad

1. My biggest complaint about this book, and the primary complaint I get every year from students, is that it is longer than it needs to be. Piper has a habit of taking twice as long as he needs to in making a point. Sometimes this is because of his rampant use of proof-texting. Other times Piper seems so intent on making his point that he marshalls every bit of evidence he can, rather than simply selecting the best to support his case. Either way, this book could probably be 33% shorter and not miss a thing.<sup>2</sup> I'll put this here, but I'm not sure I'd call it 'bad,' but John Piper can come across very strong for some. I don't mind this, but some are put off by it. So even if someone may agree with Piper's reasoning, he communicates- even in writing- in a way that some (again, not me) find a bit short and condescending. I only mention this because there are some churchgoers who are not accustomed to reading books where someone seeks to make a strong case for something. If that sounds like people in your church, you may need to address this issue up front if you use this book.

The Piper

John Piper has some idiosyncracies that show up in most of his writings, and LTNBG is no exception. They don't bother me, though some may not like it (but mostly if you're already prone to dislike some of his writings). Anyway, I get a kick out of them, so here are a few:

1. Over-hyphenization: "My passion is to see people, churches, mission agencies, and social ministries become God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-powered, soul-satisfied, Bible-saturated,

missions-mobilizing, soul-winning, and justice-pursuing""Where do such God-centered, Christ-exalting, missions-driven people come from?""There is a God-enthralled, Christ-treasuring, all-enduring love...""There is a distinct God-magnifying, Christ-exalting mindset""It cannot make peace with God-ignoring, God-neglecting..."And those are just from the 4-page preface.2. Jonathan Edwards. Piper is known for his love of Jonathan Edwards, and apparently couldn't resist having an entire chapter dedicated to him. I appreciate it because Piper breaks down walls that are dangerously erected, in this case theology and missiology. But a chapter on Jonathan Edwards in a missions book is definitely something that only John Piper would do.3. For those who are in no way convinced of John Piper's belief that God's glory is the central concern of His own heart, and should be ours, you may struggle a bit with this book. In my opinion, he doesn't hit it as hard here as he does elsewhere (and I think he may overstate his case anyway). I don't think anyone from my training school has ever said anything about it, but I throw it out there.

Conclusion This is one of the best biblical-theological books on missions I've read (which is why we use it in our school). Piper deals with heavy issues in a pastorally sensitive way, making it appropriate for audiences ranging from laypeople to seminary classes. He does not cover the entire Bible's teachings on missions, but summarizes and clarifies the main themes and issues at hand. I have used the 2nd edition with great success over the years, and look forward to the 3rd edition being just as big a blessing.

This is an awesome book about the awesome task of an awesome God. Piper relates missions to the supremacy of God by insisting that missions is not the chief end of the church, worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship therefore is the goal of missions. But even more than that, the impetus behind true missionary zeal is a heart that is satisfied in the glory of God above all things. Therefore, worship is also the fuel of missions. Then Piper shows the key role that prayer plays in missionary effort. Prayer is a wartime walkie-talkie given by our Commander-in-Chief so that we can call Him for air cover when we are on the frontlines of the battle. The problem with most of us is that we have turned this wartime walkie-talkie into a domestic intercom by asking for more worldly comforts instead of help for Kingdom work. A third chapter (in part one) shows the role that suffering plays in missions by expositing texts like Col. 1:24. This is a powerful and insightful section that will inspire and encourage you - as well as make you count the cost of following Jesus down the hard road of love. The second part of the book deals with theological issues that are essential to a Biblical understanding of missions, such as the eternity of hell, the necessity of the atonement, and the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation. This book is a Calvinistic call to missions that exceeds anything I have ever read elsewhere! I recommend it heartily!

Piper is a very interesting writer and if you are a Reformed Baptist, I'm sure you have enjoyed his writings. More broadly speaking, I'm sure that if you have been even remotely involved in church ministry, you have either heard of him in some capacity, read his books, or both. This book, dealing with missions, was an interesting read for me. I was required to complete a critical analysis paper on the missiological and theological implications in this book, set forth for the fulfillment of Christian missions. This was completed for my World Missions course at Dallas Theological Seminary; this obviously is not the paper, only a few notes.

The Great: Piper's book, 'Let the Nations Be Glad!' excels in a few areas throughout the book. Its strength is found in his passion for Christ and its love of God. I also found Piper's views on prayer, suffering, and even 'worship as the fuel of missions' very refreshing and encouraging. His treatment of the question of eternal, conscious torment in hell for unbelievers was excellent as he primarily engages with the Annihilationism of Anglican Evangelical John R.W. Stott. I also enjoyed his brief explanation of the 'essence of missions and worship' towards the end of the book. In these areas, Piper is excellent.

Piper, being a "7-pt." Calvinist (as he describes himself to be), truly is an interesting one at that. He is one of the most passionate people you can read and I believe that is why so many people enjoy his writing, even if his writing style is relatively weak at times and his writings reflect the particular views of a Reformed Baptist (though it's been accurately questioned how faithful he truly is to Reformed Theology, and Protestant distinctives at that). I believe his overall passionate approach is thoroughly engaging to the reader which makes for quick read of his work.

The Concerned: Piper's desire is to pursue missions for the 'entire world', yet His entire world is seen as 'the Elect'. His 7-pt. Reformed theology is devastating at times and truly problematic to many areas of theology (especially Soteriology/Missiology). He has so many assumptions already formulated that his best motivating point on missions (essentially to 'the elect' alone) is that we should be incredibly motivated to bring this message to them, so that those already elect 'will come' (though we never truly know who they are until the end). I honestly find this central principle difficult to be motivating, unless you are coming from a theological system where that is essentially the best motivation. I find his presuppositions of these motivations to be problematic. I understand that this work is one of missional practicality to some extent, but it must also be rooted in exegesis. On this point you will find little done, only page after page of scripture meant to back his beliefs. Unless you've already concluded your beliefs, this type of proof-texting does little to convince. Some will react and say - 'No, but His greatest motivation is God's glory!' Yes, but it's God's glory by the 'ingathering of the Elect'; so thus, the best motivation seen here is in bringing the message of salvation to 'the elect'.

Thus, God's glory is seen strictly within the framework of soteriology. Concerning God's glory being most revealed in man's redemption: I find this statement much less problematic than the first concerning his understanding of 'the elect', but it still remains an issue because God's glory is more concerned here with 'Man's salvation' than His own personal glory through rulership in the Son. I see the greatest purpose in scripture as 'God revealing His glory' through the Rule of His Son, Jesus Christ, on Earth and Eternity. This view sees God's Glory as less concerned with the Redemption of Mankind and more concerned about His personal rulership in the Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal State. Am I saying that God is not concerned about people's salvation? No, not at all. God is extremely concerned about everyone coming to a saving knowledge of Him, but what seems to be of greater concern in God's glory is the Rulership of His Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord, and the faithful redeemed ruling with Him over the New Heavens and New Earth for all of eternity. Clearly, this is a much smaller disagreement here, but still, I disagree. It's God's glory through the rule of the Son in the outworking of His Universal Kingdom, not essentially God's glory bracketed through the Redemption of man. Both of these are interrelated in many facets, but the promises/covenants are powerfully connected to the rule of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. We simply benefit from these in our redemption, which is clearly subservient to the purpose of God's Glory, best understood in the eternal rule of Christ as King over the Kingdom of God. The rule of the Son is certainly primary to the concern and expression of Piper both theologically and missiologically. If asked these specific questions, Piper may respond favorably to some of this, but because of his theological views (seen through his writings), I doubt he would frame it as such. However, even though I disagree here, these are areas of smaller concern within view of the whole.

**The Questionable & Very Concerned:** When it comes to telling the elect 'The Gospel' message, Piper sets forth no less than 10 different messages that are apparently 'The Gospel' throughout this book. I find it hard to be motivated to 'bring the message to the elect' when I'm confused on what the message(s) is/are. Piper is so unclear at times I actually question if he understands what the Gospel message/response is. I do not say this pejoratively, I say it very concerned. Throughout his book, if you're looking for a central Gospel message/response, you will not find one. It is very blurry here, to put it kindly. I do find that Piper deals with the minor tensions in His missiological convictions well ('to all peoples', not just 'nations', he dialogues this in beautiful detail and has an excellent word study on this in the book). However, as stated before, he does not interact with his major theological assumptions, such as Election to Salvation/Reprobation ('in the same manner'), Predestination within the Person of God and His Decree, Hypothetical and Effective Call, Limited Atonement, Perseverance of the Saints, etc. All these assumptions cannot merely be

overlooked and passed by as one discusses missions. This is clearly too much to overlook for the undiscerned reader. In conclusion, if you already know about these issues concerning Piper it's a good read because it's filled with passion for God, for us to become less, and for Him to be ultimately lifted up in our lives. However, I would not recommend this book for undiscerned readers. I say this because the lack of discussion concerning his theological assumptions are so minimal, one could easily be led to believe this is the position all evangelicals agree on for theology and its missiological implications, when it certainly is not. Am I saying that Piper is absolutely wrong? No. What I am saying is that since we serve a missional God, a God always on mission, it should be important to explain what is foundational for our belief in doing them. Piper can hold to his own views, that's fine, but he must explain and exegete the scriptures as well when coming to these types of views. These are very important points which he should clarify, since the majority reading this book will not understand the foundational theological conclusions he's already come to. I would read his deeper theological books, with a bible in hand, before I begin reading his books on missions. I would think this is the best way to approach an accurate evaluation of someone's work (not just Piper) in comparison to the bible. So, before reading a more practical book like this, I would first read his most theological book on these issues: 'The Justification of God', his exposition of Romans 9. This is a very academic book, so if it's too much, try a few of his others, such as 'The Future of Justification', a bit easier to read. I would then read a few other books such as 'Future Grace', 'Counted Righteous in Christ', and his classic, 'Desiring God'. I think these books paint a clearer picture of where he's coming from. However, while doing this I would read from other works outside his own convictions on these same issues. A couple are 'Chosen But Free' (by Dr. Norman Geisler), 'The Other Side of Calvinism' (by Dr. Laurence Vance), 'The Dark Side of Calvinism' (by George Bryson), 'God's Strategy in Human History' by Roger Forster, 'Election and Predestination' by Samuel Fisk, and 'Beyond Arminianism and Calvinism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation' (by C. Gordon Olson). The last book has an extensive section on these implications for the area of missions, as Dr. Olson was a professor of missions for over 30 years and worked in Islamic countries for nearly a decade. Let Christ Be Praised. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." (John 5:24)

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