



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Mission and Saving Purpose of God in the Torah: A Canonical-Theological Foundation for Old Testament Mission

Ellyazer Pada*

STT Rahmat Emmanuel, Indonesia.

Abstract: Contemporary mission theology has largely privileged New Testament paradigms, often marginalizing the Torah as merely a legal or historical precursor rather than a theological witness to God's redemptive mission. This study seeks to address that imbalance by examining the Torah as a foundational and coherent articulation of *missio Dei* within Old Testament theology. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate that the Pentateuch, read in its final canonical form, embodies a consistent missional logic rooted in God's creative purpose, covenantal initiative, and redemptive engagement with humanity. Employing a qualitative theological method grounded in canonical and narrative analysis, this study analyzes the theological movement of the Torah from creation and fall to promise, election, liberation, law, wilderness formation, and covenant renewal. The findings reveal that mission in the Torah is not expressed primarily through explicit sending commands but through narrative patterns that portray God as the initiating subject of mission and Israel as a covenant people formed for the sake of the nations. Mission emerges as universal in scope, ethical in expression, and formative in process, sustained by divine faithfulness rather than human consistency. The study concludes that the Torah is constitutive, not merely anticipatory, of biblical mission theology and provides the theological framework upon which later canonical developments build. This research contributes to contemporary missiology by offering a canonically grounded Old Testament foundation for understanding Christian mission as participation in God's redemptive work from creation onward.

Keywords: Torah; *Missio Dei*; Old Testament Theology; Biblical Theology; Mission

*Corresponding author:
Ellyazer Pada, STT Rahmat Emmanuel,
Indonesia

E-mail: ellyazer.pada@sttrem.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

In its ideal theological formulation, Christian mission is understood as participation in the redemptive activity of God for the sake of the whole creation. Contemporary missiology widely affirms that mission is not primarily an ecclesial program or a human initiative (Colberg, 2018), but is rooted in the very being, purpose, and action of God commonly articulated through the paradigm of *missio Dei*. Within this framework, Scripture is increasingly read as a unified missional narrative, revealing God's saving intention from creation to new creation (Wright, 2025). Ideally, therefore, all major canonical divisions of the Bible should be treated as integral theological witnesses to God's mission, including the Old Testament and, more specifically, the Torah as the foundational corpus of biblical theology.



Empirically, however, recent missiological scholarship demonstrates a persistent imbalance in how biblical foundations for mission are constructed. Despite the widespread acceptance of *missio Dei*, mission theology continues to be dominated by New Testament paradigms, especially the Great Commission texts in the Gospels and Acts. Major contemporary works in mission studies between 2020 and 2025 consistently prioritize New Testament material as the normative or primary locus of mission theology, while the Old Testament is frequently relegated to a preparatory or illustrative role. Studies by scholars such as Christopher J. H. Wright and Michael W. Goheen have sought to recover the Old Testament's missional significance, yet even within these contributions, engagement with the Torah often remains selective, thematic, or subordinated to later canonical developments (Gignilliat & Thomas, 2025).

Recent empirical analyses of missiology curricula and theological publications further confirm this tendency. Reviews of mission theology syllabi and journal articles published between 2020 and 2024 indicate that explicit engagement with Pentateuchal theology is comparatively rare, and when present, is often confined to isolated texts such as Genesis 12:1–3 or Exodus 19:5–6. The Torah is frequently approached as a historical backdrop for Israel's religion or as a legal corpus concerned primarily with cultic regulation and ethnic identity, rather than as a coherent theological narrative that actively articulates God's redemptive mission (Walton, 2019). As a result, the Pentateuch's narrative structure creation, fall, promise, liberation, covenant, law, wilderness formation, and renewal is seldom examined as an integrated missional framework in its own right.

This empirical reality reveals a significant theological problem. When the Torah is marginalized or reduced to a prologue, mission theology risks adopting a truncated biblical foundation that implicitly suggests that God's mission becomes fully operative only in the New Testament (Henry, 2018). Such an approach not only undermines the unity of the biblical canon, but also obscures the theological continuity between God's creative purposes, Israel's vocation, and the redemptive work fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Moreover, it contributes to a functional dualism in which law is separated from mission, election from blessing, and covenant from universal concern despite the Torah's consistent portrayal of these themes as inseparably linked within God's saving purpose.

Although several recent Old Testament scholars acknowledge the missional implications of Israel's election, their treatments often remain fragmentary or cautious. Scholars such as Walter Brueggemann and John Goldingay emphasize the theological integrity and ethical vision of the Torah, yet they tend to resist framing the Pentateuch explicitly in missional terms, partly due to concerns about anachronism (Brueggemann, 2012); (Goldingay & Goldingay, 2020). Consequently, while the idea that Israel exists "for the sake of the nations" is widely affirmed, insufficient attention has been given to how the Torah's final canonical form itself embodies a coherent missional logic rather than merely containing isolated missional motifs.

This situation reveals a clear research gap. What remains underdeveloped in current scholarship is a sustained, canonical-theological reading of the Torah as an inherently missional document that is, an interpretation that demonstrates how the Pentateuch's narrative structure, theological themes, and covenantal logic together articulate *missio Dei* at a foundational level. Nevertheless, the focus of this study on the final canonical form of the Pentateuch necessarily entails certain limitations (Davey, 2019). By privileging the Torah as the primary analytical corpus, the research does not fully explore the dynamic development of missional theology within other Old Testament traditions. The prophetic literature, with its emphasis on justice among the nations, and the Wisdom corpus, with its universal moral vision, offer rich trajectories that extend and deepen the missional logic already present in the Pentateuch. Acknowledging this limitation is not a weakness but an invitation for further inquiry.

Accordingly, this study positions itself as a foundational contribution rather than a comprehensive account of Old Testament mission theology. Future research should pursue a broader canonical synthesis that integrates the Pentateuch with the Prophets and Wisdom literature, thereby demonstrating the continuity and expansion of *missio Dei* across the Old Testament canon (Bekele, 2011). Such an approach would not only strengthen the theological coherence of biblical mission but also enhance its relevance for contemporary missiological reflection and practice.

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it seeks to demonstrate that the Torah is not merely preparatory or anticipatory, but constitutive of biblical mission theology. Second, it aims to provide a canonical-theological framework that integrates Old Testament theology and missiology without collapsing the distinctiveness of the Pentateuch into later New Testament formulations. Third, it contributes to contemporary mission theology by offering a more robust biblical foundation for understanding Christian mission as participation in God's redemptive work that originates in creation and unfolds through covenantal history. The significance of this research lies in its potential to correct New Testament centric tendencies in mission theology and to reaffirm the theological unity of the biblical canon. At a time when global Christianity increasingly emphasizes holistic mission, ecological concern, justice, and communal witness, a renewed engagement with the Torah's missional vision is both timely and necessary.

2. Research Method and Materials

This study employs a qualitative theological research design grounded primarily in a canonical-theological and narrative-analytical approach. This methodological choice is driven by the nature of the research problem, which concerns the theological structure and missional logic of the Torah rather than historical reconstruction or empirical measurement. The object of the study is the final canonical form of the Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy), treated as a coherent theological witness received and interpreted within the faith community. A qualitative approach is therefore methodologically appropriate, as the study seeks to interpret meaning, narrative coherence, and theological intentionality within a normative religious text rather than to test hypotheses through quantitative means.

Canonical theology functions as the primary interpretive framework because it allows the Pentateuch to be read as an integrated whole, rather than as a compilation of diachronic sources. At the same time, in response to methodological concerns regarding the exclusion of diachronic perspectives, this study adopts a limited and dialogical engagement with historical-critical scholarship. While the research does not pursue source-critical reconstruction as its main method, key historical-critical insights are incorporated where they clarify the socio-historical setting or theological development of major Pentateuchal themes. This dialogical posture strengthens the argument for readers who may not fully align with a purely canonical-narrative approach, while preserving the study's central claim that *missio Dei* emerges most coherently from the final canonical form of the text.

Data collection is conducted through systematic textual analysis of the Pentateuch alongside critical engagement with contemporary Old Testament and missiological scholarship published between 2020 and 2025. The primary data consist of the biblical text itself, analyzed in its narrative sequence to identify recurring theological motifs related to creation, election, covenant, liberation, law, and communal formation. Particular attention is given to passages that explicitly describe Israel's public identity and the response or perception of surrounding nations toward Israel's law and way of life (for example, legal and narrative texts that frame Israel's obedience as visible wisdom or righteousness before the nations). This targeted textual focus addresses the need for more concrete exegetical grounding regarding the theme of Israel's missional "visibility."

Secondary data include peer-reviewed books and journal articles in Old Testament theology, biblical theology of mission, and public theology. The principal research instrument is an

analytical theological framework that integrates narrative criticism, canonical interpretation, and selective historical dialogue. This integrated instrument enables the researcher to trace theological continuity across the Pentateuch without fragmenting the text into isolated pericopes, while also engaging critically with established scholarly interpretations. Such triangulation helps minimize subjective or anachronistic readings and enhances methodological transparency.

Data analysis is carried out through thematic-narrative synthesis. Identified missional motifs are examined in relation to the overall narrative movement of the Torah rather than in isolation. Analytical procedures include: (1) identifying key theological movements within the Pentateuch, (2) examining their interconnections across narrative and legal materials, and (3) evaluating how these movements collectively articulate God's saving purpose for creation and the nations. This approach is justified by the study's objective to demonstrate that the Torah presents a coherent missional structure, not merely scattered missional elements.

3. Results and Discussion

The canonical-narrative analysis of the Torah demonstrates that *missio Dei* is not a marginal or implicit theme but constitutes a structuring theological logic that governs the Pentateuch as a whole. When read in its final canonical form, the Torah consistently portrays God as the initiating subject of mission whose saving purpose unfolds through a coherent sequence of creation, promise, election, liberation, covenantal formation, and renewal. Rather than presenting mission as a series of isolated commands or outward-oriented activities, the Torah embeds mission within God's identity and action in history, thereby framing mission as a theological reality prior to and determinative of Israel's existence.

The analysis of the creation narratives reveals that the universal scope of God's mission is established at the very beginning of the Pentateuch. Creation is portrayed not merely as the origin of the cosmos but as the initial expression of God's purposeful engagement with the world. The goodness of creation and the *imago Dei* mandate together articulate a vision in which humanity is constituted as a representative agent of God's benevolent rule. This finding indicates that mission precedes sin and redemption in a narrow sense; it is rooted instead in God's original intention for relational order, life, and flourishing within creation. Consequently, the fall does not initiate mission but necessitates its redemptive continuation, confirming that *missio Dei* is intrinsic to God's creative will rather than a reactive divine strategy.

The Abrahamic narratives further develop this missional logic by demonstrating how God's universal purpose is advanced through particular election. The analysis shows that Genesis 12:1–3 functions not as an isolated proof text but as a programmatic statement that governs the subsequent patriarchal narratives. Election is consistently portrayed as instrumental, oriented toward blessing beyond Abraham's immediate lineage (Fu, 2020). The Torah thus reframes chosenness as vocation rather than privilege, establishing a pattern in which God's engagement with one family serves the broader restoration of humanity. This finding challenges interpretations that construe election in narrowly ethnic or exclusivist terms and confirms that universality and particularity are mutually constitutive within the Torah's theology of mission.

The exodus narrative emerges in the analysis as the historical enactment of God's missional purpose within the public sphere of human history. Liberation from Egypt is shown to function simultaneously as salvation for Israel and revelation for the nations. God's actions are repeatedly oriented toward making divine identity and sovereignty known beyond Israel, indicating that redemption in the Torah is inherently testimonial. The sequence of redemption followed by covenantal obligation reinforces the theological priority of grace over law, while also demonstrating that ethical formation is integral to mission. The designation of Israel as a "kingdom of priests" further confirms that the Torah envisions the

entire community as bearing a mediatory and representational role within God’s redemptive economy.

Table 1. Missional Structure of the Torah in Canonical Perspective

Narrative Stage	Key Textual Focus	Theological Emphasis	Missional Significance
Creation	Genesis 1–2	God as Creator; Imago Dei	Mission grounded in God’s original purpose for all creation
Fall and Fragmentation	Genesis 3–11	Sin, disorder, and dispersion	Necessity of redemptive mission to restore creation
Abrahamic Promise	Genesis 12; 15; 17	Election and covenant	Particular election serving universal blessing
Exodus	Exodus 1–15	Liberation and divine self-disclosure	Salvation as public witness to God’s power
Sinai and Law	Exodus 19–24; Leviticus	Covenant and holiness	Law as embodied missional ethic
Wilderness Formation	Numbers	Testing, failure, and formation	Mission sustained by divine faithfulness
Covenant Renewal	Deuteronomy	Obedience as wisdom and life	Communal witness before the nations

The table 1 synthesizes the main findings of the study by illustrating how the Torah’s narrative structure functions as a coherent missional framework. Rather than presenting mission as an isolated theme, the Pentateuch integrates *missio Dei* into every major stage of its theological progression. Creation establishes the universal horizon of mission, grounding God’s redemptive purpose in the goodness and vocation of humanity itself. The fall narratives explain why mission becomes redemptive in character, while the Abrahamic promise demonstrates how God advances universal restoration through particular election.

Analysis of the Sinai legislation reveals that the law functions not as an inward-facing legal code but as a missional ethic designed to shape Israel’s communal life as a visible witness to God’s character. The Torah integrates worship, social justice, economic responsibility, and care for the vulnerable into a unified vision of holiness that is relational and public in nature. This finding demonstrates that mission in the Torah is embodied rather than programmatic: Israel’s obedience is intended to manifest an alternative social reality that reflects divine justice and compassion. Holiness, therefore, is not defined by separation from the world but by faithful participation within it, offering a lived testimony to God’s redemptive intent.



Figure 1. Missional themes in the Torah diagram

The wilderness narratives contribute a critical dimension to the Torah's missional theology by highlighting formation, failure, and divine perseverance as essential components of mission. The analysis shows that Israel's repeated disobedience does not negate God's mission but becomes the context in which divine faithfulness is most clearly displayed. Mission is thus sustained by God's commitment to the covenant rather than by Israel's moral consistency. Covenant renewal in Deuteronomy further clarifies this dynamic by rearticulating obedience as wisdom and life, explicitly linking Israel's faithfulness to the recognition of God's justice among the nations. The wilderness experience functions as a formative process through which a missional people is shaped over time, underscoring that mission unfolds through patience, discipline, and renewal rather than through immediate success.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the Torah articulates a coherent and continuous missional structure rather than a fragmented or anticipatory theology. Mission emerges as a narrative reality embedded in God's creative purpose, covenantal initiative, and ongoing engagement with humanity (Snedden, 2023). The Torah thus functions as the foundational framework of Old Testament mission theology, providing the theological logic upon which later biblical developments build. This study's findings confirm that *missio Dei* is fully operative within the Pentateuch itself and that the Torah must be recognized not merely as background to mission (Koshy, 2021), but as a constitutive theological witness to God's saving purpose for creation and the nations.

The findings of this study confirm and extend the growing scholarly consensus that the Old Testament, and particularly the Torah, plays a constitutive role in biblical mission theology. In continuity with earlier studies on *missio Dei*, the present research corroborates the claim that mission originates in the identity and initiative of God rather than in ecclesial mandate alone (Cho, 2024). Scholars such as Christopher J. H. Wright and Michael W. Goheen have persuasively argued that Israel's election must be understood within God's universal redemptive purpose. However, the present findings advance this discussion by demonstrating that the Torah does not merely contain missional themes but is itself structured by a coherent missional logic (Wright, 2025). This distinction is significant, as it moves beyond thematic acknowledgment toward a canonical-theological demonstration of mission as a governing narrative principle.

The study's emphasis on creation as the starting point of *missio Dei* aligns with recent theological developments that stress the cosmic scope of mission. Contemporary missiological literature increasingly highlights creation care, ecological justice, and holistic salvation as central to mission discourse (Mangayi, 2023). The present findings reinforce these trajectories by showing that the Torah already grounds mission in God's creative intent prior to the emergence of Israel or the problem of sin. This explains why mission in the Pentateuch is universal in horizon rather than narrowly ethnocentric. Earlier studies often begin missional analysis with Abraham or Israel's election; by contrast, this research demonstrates that such election is intelligible only within the prior creational vocation of humanity as bearers of the *imago Dei* (Odera, 2025). Theologically, this explains why election functions instrumentally rather than exclusively: it serves the restoration of God's original creational purpose rather than replacing it.

When compared with previous scholarship on Abrahamic election, the findings both converge and diverge in important ways. Numerous studies identify Genesis 12:1–3 as a key missional text, emphasizing the promise of blessing for the nations (Warouw, 2021). This study confirms that interpretation but further explains why election takes this form. The narrative analysis demonstrates that election emerges as God's response to the fragmentation of humanity in Genesis 3–11, making it a missional strategy rooted in divine fidelity to creation rather than a privileging of one ethnic group. This helps explain why the Torah consistently portrays Abraham and his descendants in relational engagement with surrounding peoples (Hanock & Putrawan, 2022). Unlike some earlier approaches that treat universal blessing as a future or secondary outcome, this study shows that universality is

structurally embedded in the Abrahamic promise itself, thereby challenging reductionist readings of chosenness.

The exodus findings resonate strongly with studies that interpret liberation as central to biblical mission, particularly in contexts influenced by liberation theology and public theology. Recent journal research emphasizes that salvation in Scripture is inseparable from social and political dimensions of life (Sihombing, 2024). This study affirms that trajectory but clarifies its theological grounding within the Torah. Liberation from Egypt is shown to function as both redemptive act and revelatory event, explaining why the exodus narrative repeatedly emphasizes God's self-disclosure to the Egyptians as well as to Israel. Earlier studies sometimes isolate liberation as a socio-political motif; the present analysis demonstrates that liberation is missional precisely because it reveals God's character publicly and covenantally (Harwanto & Edgar, 2025). This finding explains why ethical formation and law-giving follow redemption rather than precede it.

The analysis of the law as a missional ethic both aligns with and corrects previous interpretations. Scholars such as Walter Brueggemann and John Goldingay emphasize the Torah's ethical and communal vision but often resist explicit missional categorization due to concerns about anachronism (Hamilton & Kang-Hamilton, 2024). The present findings acknowledge this concern yet demonstrate that mission need not be defined narrowly as geographic expansion or verbal proclamation. By interpreting the law canonically as shaping Israel's public life before the nations, this study shows that embodied obedience functions as witness. This explains why the Torah repeatedly links justice, compassion, and holiness with Israel's visibility among other peoples (Friedman & Gefen, 2025). The implication is that mission in the Old Testament is primarily lived rather than proclaimed, a conclusion that complements rather than contradicts New Testament mission theology.

The wilderness and covenant-renewal narratives provide one of the most distinctive contributions of this study when compared to previous research. While earlier scholarship often treats wilderness traditions primarily as theological reflections on failure and obedience, this study demonstrates that they play a crucial missional role by emphasizing formation over triumphalism. Recent missiological literature critiques success-driven models of mission and highlights vulnerability, patience, and suffering as integral to participation in *missio Dei* (Moroz, 2025). The present findings explain why such themes are already embedded in the Torah: mission advances not through Israel's moral consistency but through God's enduring covenantal faithfulness. This insight reframes mission as a long-term divine commitment rather than a human achievement, offering a theological corrective to pragmatic or results-oriented mission paradigms (Khan, 2025).

In comparison with existing studies, the primary difference lies in methodological integration. Whereas many earlier works either emphasize theological themes without narrative coherence or apply missional categories selectively, this study demonstrates that the Torah's final canonical form itself generates a unified missional theology. The scientific implication of this finding is significant: it suggests that Old Testament mission theology cannot be constructed adequately through isolated texts or motifs alone, but must attend to narrative structure and canonical shape. This contributes to biblical theology by reinforcing the legitimacy of canonical approaches in missiology and challenges future research to extend similar analyses to the Prophets and Wisdom literature.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Torah, when read canonically and narratively, constitutes a coherent and foundational theological articulation of *missio Dei*. In response to the research problem, the findings demonstrate that the Pentateuch does not merely anticipate mission theology later developed in the New Testament, but actively shapes the theological logic of mission through its portrayal of God's creative purpose, covenantal initiative, redemptive action, and formative engagement with a chosen people for the sake of the nations. Mission

in the Torah emerges not as an explicit program of sending, but as a sustained divine movement in which creation, election, liberation, law, and communal formation are integrally related within God's saving purpose for the world. The scientific contribution of this research lies in its demonstration that mission is structurally embedded in the Torah's canonical form, thereby challenging New Testament-centric tendencies in missiology and strengthening the claim that Old Testament theology is constitutive, not supplementary, for a robust biblical theology of mission. By integrating canonical theology and missiology, this study offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding Christian mission as participation in God's redemptive work from creation onward.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that open space for further research. Its focus on the final canonical form of the Pentateuch necessarily limits engagement with diachronic perspectives and with other Old Testament corpora, such as the Prophets and Wisdom literature, which also contribute significantly to the development of *missio Dei*. In addition, the analysis remains primarily theological and textual, without direct engagement with contemporary missional praxis or contextual applications. Future research is therefore encouraged to extend this canonical-missional approach to the Prophets and Writings in order to trace the continuity and transformation of mission theology across the Old Testament canon as a whole. Further studies may also explore how the Torah's missional vision can inform contextual, ecological, and socio-ethical dimensions of mission in contemporary global Christianity. Such research would not only deepen biblical-theological understanding but also strengthen the dialogue between scriptural interpretation and lived missional practice in the present era.

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