A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF DONALD A. MCGAVRAN'S

HARVEST THEOLOGY PRINCIPLE

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

Todd Alan Benkert

October 2008

UMI Number: 3357125

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy
submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and
photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper
alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized
copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.
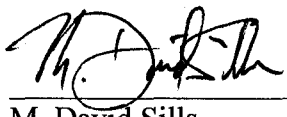
UMI®

APPROVAL SHEET

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF DONALD A. MCGAVRAN'S

HARVEST THEOLOGY PRINCIPLE

Todd Alan Benkert

Read and Approved by:

_____

George H. Martin (Chairperson)

_____

M. David Sills

_____

Thomas R. Schreiner

Date _October 24, 2008_____

To Heidi,

my best friend and partner

in life and ministry

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB Anchor Bible

ABD Anchor Bible Dictionary

AGJU Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums

BECNT Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

BAGD Bauer, W., W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker,. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

BDAG Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

BibSac *Bibliotheca Sacra*

BST The Bible Speaks Today

CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

CGB *Church Growth Bulletin*

CGTC Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary

ChrCent *Christian Century*

CTJ *Calvin Theological Journal*

CTR *Criswell Theological Review*

CurTM *Currents in Theology and Mission*

DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*

DLNT *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*

DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*

EBC	*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*
EDBT	*Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*
EDNT	*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*
EDWM	*Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*
EKK	Evangelische-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EMQ	*Evangelical Missions Quarterly*
EQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
ERT	*Evangelical Review of Theology*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
GOTR	*Greek Orthodox Theological Review*
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HTCNT	Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament
HTKNT	Herders Theologischer Kommantar zum Neuen Testament
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
IBMR	*International Bulletin of Missionary Research*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IRM	*International Review of Mission*
JASCG	*Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JEM	*Journal of Evangelism and Missions*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series

JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NIDNTT	*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OTL	Old Testament Library
PBTM	Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
PSB	*Princeton Seminary Bulletin*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*

RHPR	*Revue D'Historie et de Philosophie Religieuses*
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	*Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SP	Sacra Pagina
STR-B	Strack, H. L., and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash.* 6 vols. Minich, 1922-1962
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SwJT	*Southwestern Journal of Theology*
TD	*Theology Digest*
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TS	*Theological Studies*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
USQR	*Union Seminary Quarterly Review*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WLQ	*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

PREFACE

Much more goes into the preparation and writing of a doctoral dissertation than one man sitting in an office in a library. I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of people who made this journey possible.

I am grateful for Dr. George Martin, who served not only as my doctoral supervisor, but also as teacher, boss, counselor, and friend. Above all, Dr. Martin has given me, as he does all his students, a love for missions. The other members of my doctoral committee, Dr. David Sills and Dr. Thomas Schreiner, have provided both instruction and encouragement throughout my doctoral studies. I appreciate the guidance of Dr. Mark Terry, who instilled in me a passion for church planting and helped me become a better writer. Marsha Omanson has been a gracious and tremendously helpful guide in producing this manuscript.

I am grateful for my dean, Dr. Chuck Lawless, who through his counsel and example has helped me become a better Christian, and my pastors, Chris Bonts and Chris Gustafson, whose friendship and encouragement have helped me press on toward the mark. My church families at Irvington Baptist Church and Eastern Heights Baptist Church have provided encouragement and prayer support throughout the writing stage. My close friend and brother, Tom Bohnert, has been my sharpening iron and partner in the gospel from the first day until now. A special thanks goes to Dr. Bryan Galloway, who has devoted much of the past year to being my cheerleader. He has helped me in more ways than he can know as co-laborer in ministry, mentor, and friend.

I would be remiss if I did not also thank the staff of Boyce Centennial Library, who for the past year have become my second family. I am especially grateful for the

assistance of Barbara Kidd and Paul Roberts, whose help has been invaluable. I would also like to thank the Julie O. Montgomery Scholarship Fund, whose financial contributions helped make my doctoral studies possible.

The greatest thanks belongs to my family. My grandparents and my mother have, throughout my life, been my most faithful supporters. Whatever I have undertaken, they have believed in me and encouraged me to achieve my best. My brother, Chad, and his family have been an encouragement and model of sacrificial ministry. My sister, Sheri, and her husband have also been an encouragement and have supported us throughout the process. I am as proud of her as she is of me. She is a wonderful example of giving one's life in service for others. Our children, Ashley, Max, and Kaitlin have shown me love, patience and support. They are a great joy and blessing from the Lord. Above all, I am thankful for my wife, whose loving support of me defies description. Heidi is truly my best friend, my partner in ministry and the finest Christian I know.

Finally, I would like to thank Donald McGavran. His ideas sparked a movement that has influenced the way believers approach missions and evangelism for more than fifty years. Beyond the church growth movement, McGavran was a champion for the priority of evangelism at a time when much of Christendom was abandoning the call to go forth with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In his writings, McGavran's heart for bringing salvation to the lost masses of the world is evident on nearly every page. Whatever one's final assessment of the church growth movement, McGavran leaves behind a legacy of passion for the mission of Christ. May we all serve the Lord with such zeal for the Lord's work.

Todd Alan Benkert

Louisville, Kentucky

November 2008

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ask most pastors, missionaries, or lay workers and they will tell you they want successful ministries. Few, however, can agree on what constitutes true success. Just what is success? What does God really expect from his people? The answers from prominent evangelicals are conflicting. One claims, "God's call is to be faithful rather than successful."[1] Another argues, "God expects both faithfulness *and* fruitfulness."[2] These differing values are reflected in opinions about numerical church growth. Even among Southern Baptists, attitudes about statistics range from churches who receive awards for their numerical results[3] to churches that, because of conviction, do not report them.[4] Further, varying attitudes exist between those who must report numbers and those to whom they must report them. Common sentiment among missionaries and practitioners is that one must do what one is called to do and leave the results to God. At the same time, agencies set various numerical criteria for things such as pre-commission assessments, field evaluations, and fund distribution. Most evangelicals believe that numerical results are a good thing. A diversity of opinion exists, however, concerning

---

[1]Kent Hughes and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 43.

[2]Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 62.

[3]See for example, Vanessa Rodriguez, Vanessa Rodriguez, "95 Florida Baptist Churches Honored for Evangelism," *Florida Baptist Witness*, 14 October 2004, 5.

[4]Matt Schmucker, "Things I've Seen and Heard – On Numbers," 9 Marks, 2006 [on-line]; accessed 19 December 2006; available from http://www.9marks.org/CC/article/0,,PTID314526%7CC HID598016%7CCIID1552870,00.html; Internet.

whether human agents of the gospel message are responsible for those results, and if so, to what extent.

One significant contribution to the discussion is found in the writings of Donald A. McGavran. McGavran is most remembered as the founder of the Church Growth Movement.[5] Most of what are now called "church growth principles" came about as a result of McGavran's life long pursuit to answer the questions, "What are the *causes* of church growth?" and "What are the *obstacles* of church growth?"[6] McGavran's extensive research concerning why some churches grow and others do not led to such (often controversial) concepts as receptivity, people movements, and the homogeneous unit principle. More than a generation after McGavran published his magnum opus, *Understanding Church Growth,*[7] his principles continue to influence church growth and missions practice.

Undergirding McGavran's drive to develop principles of church growth was his presupposition that God desires and even expects churches to grow. McGavran explained this expectation in his principle of "harvest theology." On the basis that God expects ripe fields to be harvested, McGavran conducted research and promoted principles that influenced both evangelistic and missions strategies of many North American evangelicals. While the church growth movement has evolved into a variety of new movements, a common belief that God desires to see lost people found still prevails.[8] A related question remains: If God indeed desires church growth, does this mean he

---

[5]See Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 33-39.

[6]Donald A. McGavran, "The Discovery of Church Growth," in *Church Growth: Strategies That Work,* by Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 16.

[7]Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970).

[8]For a detailed summary of the post-McGavran evolution of the church growth movement in its various streams, see John Albert Crabtree, Jr., "The Divergence of Donald McGavran's Church Growth Movement in North America, 1955-2000" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

requires those who engage in evangelistic activity actually to produce quantifiable results?

Statement of the Problem

What *does* God expect of Christians and the church in terms of numerical growth? In other words, what is the relationship, biblically, between faithfulness to the command of Christ and fruitfulness in terms of actual countable persons being won to faith in Jesus Christ? Donald McGavran answers this question with his concept of "harvest theology." The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a biblical analysis of McGavran's harvest theology principle as it relates to the relationship between faithfulness in the evangelistic task and actual numerical church growth.

This relationship can be discovered through approaching the biblical text with related questions, which I hope to answer in the course of the study:

1. What role has God given human agents in the evangelistic task?

2. What, if any, strategy or method is employed in the New Testament and for what purpose?

3. What does the New Testament say concerning numerical results?

As will be shown in chapter two, McGavran provides answers to these questions as he describes his understanding of Great Commission faithfulness in what he calls "harvest theology." The ideas behind harvest theology are evident in many of McGavran's writings, especially pre-1970. McGavran describes harvest theology explicitly, as well, most notably in *Understanding Church Growth* in a chapter entitled "God's Will and Church Growth."[9] McGavran is one of the few persons to offer a theological understanding of numerical church growth. Furthermore, McGavran's principle has both directly and indirectly influenced much of evangelical practice and expectation. It seems

---

[9]McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 31-48.

appropriate, therefore, to use McGavran as both a starting point and "sparring partner" in exploring the biblical relationship between faithfulness and numerical growth.

Background

Personal Interest

My interest in the present research question has developed from a variety of interests and concerns in both my personal ministry and academic studies.

An interest in Donald A. McGavran. Throughout my doctoral work, my interest in the teachings of Donald McGavran has grown. In the spring of 2003, while applying for entrance to the Ph.D. program, I sat in on the evangelism and church growth colloquium. In one class period, the colloquium discussed the influential book *The Purpose Driven Church* by Rick Warren. As we were discussing his assertion that healthy churches grow,[10] the professor made a comment that stuck with me. He suggested that there was need for more study on McGavran and the theology of church growth. In the context of the colloquium discussion, he noted a need for a dissertation that would probe the theological presuppositions of the church growth movement. This suggestion began my thinking about questions concerning the theology of church growth in general and McGavran in particular.

After acceptance into the Ph.D. program, I switched my emphasis from evangelism and church growth to missions. Here, I was again introduced to McGavran and his importance not only to the North American church growth movement, but to Christian missions as well. On several occasions in seminars and colloquia he led, one professor noted that McGavran's book *Understanding Church Growth* was the missiological work that has most influenced his philosophy and practice of ministry. Likewise, another professor noted *Understanding Church Growth* as one of the most

---

[10]Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 17.

important and influential books for mission philosophy and methodology. My interest in McGavran has steadily increased throughout my doctoral studies.

A concern for faithfulness to Scripture. A second interest I have developed centers around the importance of the Bible for life and ministry. As a missiologist, my interest in this particular research topic stems from an overriding concern for biblical fidelity in the theory and praxis of missions and evangelism. Because the Bible is the foundation of Christian missions, mission agents must make every effort to conform their thought and practice to the Scriptures. Whether speaking of church planting models, ecclesiology, contextualization, evangelism, or theology, Christians must be faithful to the revelation of God given in his word. The Bible must be the foundation of the practice of ministry.

While evangelicals have made great progress in reaffirming commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture, a need remains for a recommitment to sound biblical exegesis. Too often, biblical theology has been an afterthought to the actual practice of mission. The Bible, in many cases, has become the source of proof texts to validate opinions already formed or courses of action already taken. Rather than allowing the Scripture to direct mission practice, practice often directs the interpretation of Scripture. In the preface to his two-volume work, *Early Christian Mission,* Eckhard Schnabel acknowledges this problem. He states,

> Missiologists, missionaries and representatives of missionary societies seek to promote interest in crosscultural dialogue and witness and to encourage and develop the involvement of Christians, young and old, in active outreach to non-Christians. As laudable as these endeavors are, their proponents have not always sought to provide exegetical explanations or to engage in theological discussion when presenting models for missionary work and paradigms for effective evangelism.[11]

---

[11]Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Leicester, England: Apollos, 2004), 1:xxiii.

Similarly, Andreas J. Köstenberger contends,

> The *descriptive* nature of New Testament theology entails that we set aside for the time being our concern for the contemporary application of the biblical message. At the proper time, this will, of course, be very important . . . But unless we are willing to let the New Testament speak to us on its own terms, we only deceive ourselves. We will merely find in the pages of the Bible what we have already determined to find there on other grounds. If we thus domesticate Scripture, we deprive ourselves of an opportunity to be instructed by, and even transformed by, Scripture, and we rob Scripture of its authority and preeminence.[12]

Scripture is the basis of our Christian faith. It must also, therefore, be the basis of missions practice. Evangelical missiologists agree that current issues in missiology must be solved on the basis of Scripture. Further, application of biblical principles to missions practice must be done using a sound hermeneutic and avoid merely "proof-texting." Such a hermeneutic would include discovery of the original meaning of the text, bridging between the biblical context and the present one, and making application consistent with the intent of Scripture. Rather than going to the Scripture to validate my preconceived ideas, I must allow my ministry and method to be shaped by Scripture itself. Because of this concern that missions practice be faithful to Scripture, I selected New Testament theology as a minor discipline in my doctoral studies, and wish now to do research on the biblical answer to a contemporary missiological question.

A question concerning faithfulness and numerical results. My interest in the relationship between faithfulness and results stems from my lifelong passion for evangelism and missions and my own desire to see lost people come to faith in Christ. Throughout my experience as a Christian layman, minister and missionary, I have held conflicting views concerning what God expects from those who proclaim his message.

Theologically, I believe that God is sovereign in salvation. God is the one who draws, convicts, and saves. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, I am merely a

---

[12]Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Place of Mission in New Testament Theology: An Attempt to Determine the Significance of Mission within the Scope of the New Testament's Message as a Whole," *Missiology* 27 (1999): 349.

messenger. I have thus believed and taught that success in evangelism is "sharing Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results up to God."[13] I have believed that I am responsible for sharing the message of the gospel verbally, but God is ultimately responsible for producing a harvest. In other words, what God requires of me is to be faithful. Periods in which I saw no numerical results were interpreted accordingly.[14]

At the same time, I often assume responsibility for numerical results and measure my effectiveness in ministry by those results. As a Christian, I am not satisfied with merely performing my Christian duty to evangelize. I desire to see real persons come to faith in Christ. As a pastor, I find myself concerned with the number of baptisms performed each year. I set numerical goals for conversion growth. I look for strategies and methods that are effective. Through a variety of forums, I have received training in strategy, methodology and anthropology—all under the assumption that beyond merely being faithful to proclaim the gospel, there is something I can do to see better numerical results. Faithfulness, I conclude, is not enough. I must also be fruitful. When I do not see results, I then examine what I am doing, or not doing, that is hindering the advance of God's kingdom.

Outside of my own personal reflection, I also find I am part of an evangelical culture in which numbers are important. Although a common teaching is that faithfulness is what really matters, the evangelical world tends to measure success numerically. This tendency manifests itself in many ways and a few examples illustrate the point: As a prerequisite to missionary appointment, candidates must demonstrate that they have indeed seen numerical results in their personal ministries. Once appointed, missionaries

---

[13]Darrell W. Robinson, *People Sharing Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 7.

[14]Interestingly enough, though I have at certain points in my spiritual life been more Arminian or more Calvinistic than at other points, this view of human responsibility in evangelism has endured. As an Arminian, I could claim that I am not responsible for results because people have free will and I cannot be held responsible for their free choices. As a Calvinist, I could claim that I am not responsible for results because God is sovereign and nothing I do will change what he has already chosen to do.

must submit reports of their progress in seeing people come to faith and are accountable to their superiors for that progress. Denominational publications regularly publish numerical statistics and honor those churches and pastors whom they deem successful. Among pastors, those who are numerically successful are commonly held up as heroes of the faith and models of effectiveness while those who experience little or no growth are criticized or marginalized. Status, rightly or wrongly, is tied to numerical success. The implication of all this, is that God expects us not only to proclaim the gospel but also, practically, to reap a harvest as well.

There remains a need for biblical clarity on these issues. One may define biblical faithfulness on neither personal feelings nor the current cultural climate. If one seeks to be "approved unto God" in the area of missions and evangelism, it is necessary that one discover the biblical relationship between faithfulness and numerical growth. McGavran's harvest theology principle is one approach to answering this biblical question. Harvest theology, likewise, forms the basis for much of modern thinking about numerical church growth. For these reasons, I have chosen to research and biblically evaluate McGavran's harvest theology principle and, thus, the biblical relationship between faithfulness and numerical growth.

Literature Review

In addition to my interest in the research question, an examination of existing research demonstrates a need for such a study. While numerous dissertations and other works have studied McGavran and several of his church growth principles and methods, a need remains for a thorough biblical analysis of his harvest principle. Likewise, while some have noted the relationship of faithfulness to numerical results and proposed definitions of success in evangelism and missions, a need exists for significant exegetical work on these issues. The following summary of relevant works demonstrates the need for research on the present question.

Dissertations and theses. Robert Glahn, in a well-written Th.M. thesis,

explains and evaluates several principles of church growth related to our study. The

actual biblical analysis, however, is confined to thirty pages, covers six church growth

principles, and leaves room for much further and more in-depth analysis.[15]

Perhaps the most significant critique of harvest theology comes from Charles

Van Engen, in *The Growth of the True Church*. In this work, Van Engen devotes an

entire chapter to harvest theology. The work of Van Engen, however, is not an exegetical

study. Further, Van Engen had a much narrower focus than what I propose. He addresses

that aspect of harvest theology that suggests that "actual, consequential numerical growth

[is] a mark of the true church."[16] In doing so, Van Engen makes a distinction between

intention and consequence—between desire and results. He posits a "yearning" theology

in which the church is measured by its *desire* to see people come to faith in Christ. Van

Engen presents "yearning" theology as an alternative to McGavran's "harvest" theology

in which the church is measured on the basis of actual results.[17]

Young J. Son, in his dissertation, examines the Great Commission from a

missiological perspective. Son devotes fifteen pages to McGavran's Harvest theology

principle, of which eleven are evaluation and critique. The dissertation, however, is

primarily a summary of various criticisms of harvest theology rather than a biblical

analysis.[18]

Morley Mitchell, in the first part of his D.Min. dissertation, seeks a biblical

answer to the question "Does Jesus want His Church to grow numerically?" Mitchell

---

[15]Robert Gale Glahn, "A Biblical Analysis of Donald A. McGavran's Church Growth Principles" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980). Dissertations and theses are presented in chronological order.

[16]Charles Van Engen, *The Growth of the True Church* (Amsterdam: Ropodi, 1981), 463.

[17]Ibid., 467.

[18]Young J. Son, "The Missiological Significance of Matthew 28:16-20 with Special Reference to Donald M. McGavran" (Th.D. diss., Potchefstroom University, 1983).

answers that question in the affirmative and makes the leap to the responsibility of Christian churches to see that growth occurs. Mitchell's study is helpful in that it seeks to answer a question related to this present study. However, he does not demonstrate that the desire of Jesus for church growth translates into an expectation that his followers produce such growth. Further, his study of the biblical texts provides neither the breadth nor depth proposed for the present study.[19]

Raymond Waldock, in his dissertation "Current Theological Issues in Donald A. McGavran's Missiology," attacks McGavran's view of Scripture as a form of "bibliolatry." Waldock takes a more moderate/liberal position, disavowing both the authority and infallibility of Scripture.[20] While he notes McGavran's "theological imperative" concerning harvest theology, Waldock does not engage it exegetically. Rather, he dismisses harvest theology on the ground that Scripture's "proof-texts" are not authoritative revelation.[21]

A dissertation by Sakari Pinola analyzes the theological and methodological positions of McGavran. Rather than a biblical critique, however, the study emphasizes the origins of McGavran's theological and methodological positions in both his denominational background and missions experience. Pinola's treatment of the harvest principle resides in only five pages in which he is descriptive rather than analytical and provides only a paragraph of critique.[22]

---

[19]Morley Charles Mitchell, "Church Growth: What Jesus Had to Say! What We Have to Do!" (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1985), abstract. Mitchell is helpful in identifying several of the key texts in the debate; however, his work is not at all exegetical. He cites no scholarly works and bases his study on the English text of the TEV translation of the New Testament.

[20]Raymond Waldock, "Current Theological Issues in Donald A. McGavran's Missiology" (Ph.D. diss., University de Montreal, 1989), 83.

[21]Ibid., 15.

[22]Sakari Pinola, *Church Growth: Principles and Praxis of Donald A. McGavran's Missiology* (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1995).

Shawn Leroy Buice, in his dissertation, studies how McGavran, as well as C.

Peter Wagner, handles the biblical texts. Buice provides a hermeneutical framework for

analyzing McGavran's concepts as well as a detailed analysis of McGavran's

interpretation of the Great Commission. Buice's study is informative and will prove

helpful to the present study.[23]

Other theses and dissertations by Smith, Good, Burkhalter, Middleton, Mills,

Melancon, Lee, Crabtree, and Bates, while helpful in varying degrees, study various other

concepts of McGavran and do not address the present subject in any significant way.[24]

Other studies. Robert Evans, in an article about the balance between

faithfulness and effectiveness, suggests that God requires faithfulness, not growth, from

---

[23]Shawn Leroy Buice, "A Critical Examination of the Use of Selected New Testament Passages in the Writings of Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner" (Ph.D. diss, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996).

[24]James Clapsaddle Smith, "Without Crossing Barriers: The Homogeneous Unit Concept in the Writings of Donald Anderson McGavran" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1976); N. Sanford Good, "A Biblical Analysis of the Receptive People Principle in the Writings of Donald A. McGavran and the Modern Church Growth Movement" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1981); William Nolan Burkhalter, "A Comparative Analysis of the Missiologies of Roland Allen and Donald Anderson McGavran" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984); Vernon James Middleton, "The Development of a Missiologist: The Life and Thought of Donald Anderson McGavran, 1897-1965" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990); David Charles Mills, "Donald A. McGavran's Theology of Church Growth" (M.Div. thesis, Emmanuel School of Religion, 1990); Patrick Julian Melancon, "An Examination of Selected Theological Topics in the Thought of Donald A. McGavran (Church Growth)" (Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997); Sang-Man Jonah Lee, "A Missiological Assessment of People Movement Theory in Church Growth (Korea)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria, South Africa, 1997); John Albert Crabtree, Jr., "Donald Anderson McGavran's Theology of Evangelism and Church Growth as a Basis for Theological Education" (Th.M. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997); idem, "The Divergence of Donald McGavran's Church Growth Movement in North America, 1955-2000" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003); Matthew David Bates, Jr., "Growing the Church, Resisting the Powers, Reforming the World: A Theological Analysis of Three Options for Ecclesial Faithfulness in North American Protestantism (Donald A. McGavran, John Howard Yoder, Walter Rauschenbusch)" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 2005). Burkhalter is helpful in his description of McGavran's theology and its comparison with the theology of Roland Allen. Middleton provides a well researched biography using primary source material in which he traces the development of McGavran's thought and shows the formative nature of his tenure in India to his missiology. Mills gives a general overview and analysis of McGavran's theology of church growth but does not specifically address the harvest principle. Melancon describes the historical development of McGavran's theology. He specifically focuses on ecclesiology and soteriology and does not address harvest theology. Lee, while addressing McGavran, deals only briefly with his emphasis on numerical growth. Bates provides some description of McGavran's view but, rather than biblical analysis, is a comparative work with positions of Yoder and Rauschenbusch.

the church. Evans finds "no emphasis in the New Testament on a self-conscious strategy for church growth."[25] Rather, the church is to faithfully love God and neighbor. As a disclaimer, Evans states that his position does not necessarily set itself against church growth or its emphasis on seeking effective ways of sharing the gospel. Nevertheless, Evans clearly takes a position that the goal of the church's mission is not growth but faithfulness. In some cases, he states, "faithfulness may actually mean numerical decline."[26] Evans' primary complaint, however, is not against church growth per se, but church growth at the expense of faithfulness in other areas.

More recently, Rodney Zwonitzer, in his *Testing the Claims of Church Growth,* has written an essay entitled "Effective or Faithful?".[27] In his essay, Zwonitzer does not address the question of whether or not the New Testament expects effectiveness. Rather, he speaks against the extremes of the church growth movement and its excessive pragmatism, which he labels "growth at any cost."[28]

A variety of other articles have been written that touch on the subject of numbers. In most cases, these articles are pastoral in nature and vary in their view of results oriented ministry.[29] These articles, while demonstrating a common view of numbers in the evangelical world, do not provide the kind of biblical analysis in which this dissertation seeks to engage.

---

[25]Robert A. Evans, "Recovering the Church's Transforming Middle: Theological Reflections on the Balance between Faithfulness and Effectiveness," in *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978*, ed. Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979), 293.

[26]Ibid., 299; also 296-99.

[27]Rodney E. Zwonitzer, "Effective or Faithful?" in *Testing the Claims of Church Growth* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 65-74.

[28]Ibid., 70.

[29]See, for example, Alan R. Tippett, "Numbering: Right or Wrong?" *CGB* 1, no. 3 (January 1965): 1-2; Browne Barr, "Smaller and Smaller, Better and Better?" *ChrCent* 95 (1978): 828, 830; J. Randall Petersen, "'Church Growth': A Limitation of Numbers?" *Christianity Today*, 27 March 1981, 18-23; Wayne Jacobsen, "The Numbers Game: A Threat to Churches Large and Small," *Leadership* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 49-53; Darrell Holtz, "Numbers: The If and How," *Christianity Today*, 17 June 1983, 65; James F. Engel, "Getting Beyond the Numbers Game," *Christianity Today*, 7 August 2000, 54-58.

Methodology

Research Methods

In the course of this study, I have utilized the following research methods. My first task was to come to an understanding of harvest theology and its primary themes. To do this, I began with McGavran's presentation of harvest theology in his seminal work, *Understanding Church Growth.* I traced the argument of McGavran here, and identified key themes and categories of thought in his presentation of harvest theology. After this initial review, I then examined the writings of McGavran to discover where he explicitly spoke of harvest theology, used the same or similar key words and phrases, or developed themes related to the harvest theology concept. Through an analysis of this data, I was able to come to a fuller understanding of how these themes emerged and were developed in McGavran's thought. I used this understanding to describe each of the major themes and how they contribute to McGavran's understanding of harvest theology.

Second, I examined passages of Scripture relevant to the research question. The method of selecting biblical passages was somewhat complex. I began with McGavran himself. In the process of seeking an understanding of McGavran's position, I looked for the major passages of Scripture McGavran used to support his position biblically. These included such passages as the post-resurrection commissions, the teachings of Jesus concerning the harvest, certain parables of Jesus, and the record of numerical growth in the book of Acts. I then examined authors who have criticized harvest theology directly or its related themes to identify major texts cited. These added texts included such passages as the self-comparison of Paul with the ministry of Apollos, certain parables and teachings of Jesus, and the numerical decline in the ministry of Jesus.

With these texts as a starting point, I then looked for other relevant texts in order to get a clear biblical picture of the related issues. Reading through the New Testament, I gathered and recorded texts that might pertain to the question of the

relationship between faithfulness in the evangelistic task and numerical growth. In looking through these texts, I categorized them into three major themes that inform the research question and would form the basis of the study: the role of human agents of the gospel, the use of strategy and methods in the evangelistic task, and references to numerical results. Finally, I organized texts for each of these categories into sub-groups that formed the outline for each of the exegetical chapters. For two of the themes, I followed the basic structure of Gospels, Acts, and Pauline epistles. For method and strategy, I divided the material between the Twelve and Paul.

Through this process, I understand that I may not have covered every text another researcher might find relevant to the issues at hand. My hope, however, is that through this method of text selection I have provided an adequate biblical representation of the issues. My goal has been not only to examine those texts most commonly cited, but also to provide a full picture of the biblical relationship between faithfulness and numerical church growth.

Upon selecting the biblical passages, I exegeted each of the texts. In doing so I used the grammatico-historical approach.[30] Exegesis of the biblical passages was not in every case an exhaustive probe into the primary meaning of the particular text. Rather, I inquired specifically what, if anything, the particular text contributes to answering the research question.[31] In the process, I have interacted with the biblical claims of McGavran, his supporters, and detractors.

---

[30]For an example of the grammatico-historical approach, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990).

[31]McGavran often stated that the Bible was the source of church growth thinking and that people must learn to read the Bible "through Church Growth eyes." See, for example, Donald A. McGavran and Winfield C. Arn, *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 24-25. This approach is similar to the one I wish to employ here—approaching the relevant passages with the question, "What if anything does this text say about the relationship between faithfulness in missions/evangelism and actual church growth?"

Finally, having examined key biblical texts, I have summarized the results of the exegesis to provide a theological basis for understanding the biblical relationship between faithfulness and church growth. I have then applied that understanding in an analysis of McGavran's harvest theology.

Definitions

The following simple definitions are given to clarify the research problem. By "biblical analysis," I mean an exegetical examination of relevant biblical texts to determine whether or to what extent McGavran's harvest theology is consistent with the teaching of Scripture. By "faithfulness in the evangelistic task," I mean meeting God's expectation of obedience in the spread of the gospel. By "church growth," I mean conversion growth that results in responsible church membership.[32]

Limitations and Delimitations

Several factors narrow the scope of the study. First, because the nature of the present study is a biblical analysis and not a historical study, I have delimited the research on harvest theology itself to the published works of McGavran. Focus has been upon the public presentation of harvest theology and its related concepts. The published works of McGavran include books, essays, and articles in journals and periodicals. While a multitude of archival materials is available for McGavran, unpublished articles and those available only through archival research were not consulted.

Second, specific academic constraints limit the length of the dissertation. For this reason, an examination of every relevant Scripture text was not feasible. Accordingly, this study does not claim to be exhaustive but has focused on a selection of Scriptures deemed most relevant to the research question.[33] Additionally, when

---

[32]This, I believe, is consistent with McGavran's use of the term.

[33]See the methodology section, above, for an explanation concerning the selection of biblical texts for this study.

appropriate, I have handled parallel passages from the synoptic gospels together, taking into consideration any significant textual differences.

Third, I have delimited my study to the human responsibility side of the equation. A presupposition of this dissertation is that God is sovereign in salvation. He alone can save. Only God can do the salvific work of conviction, regeneration, justification and sanctification. Only God can bring harvest. Nevertheless, the Scriptures also testify to human responsibility in the salvation of persons. Thus, we acknowledge and firmly believe that only God can bring in the harvest, and at the same time submit that there remains a human element in terms of reaping the harvest. This dissertation will assume that God is sovereignly at work and that he alone can save. The study will delimit itself to human responsibility in salvation. The reader, thus, should not view the focus on human responsibility as a denial of divine sovereignty in salvation. Rather, we assume the sovereignty of God as a presupposition and focus our study on human responsibility.[34]

McGavran, similarly, would affirm divine activity in bringing persons and peoples to Jesus Christ. The fact that God alone can save certainly informs the thinking of McGavran and thus his harvest theology principle. The focus of this dissertation, however, concerns the role, practice and responsibility of human agents in the evangelistic task. As will be shown in chapter 2, McGavran makes certain claims about God concerning his will and activity in the conversion of people. Those claims will not be analyzed here. Rather, this dissertation will deal only with those claims that pertain to the responsibility of Christians in missions and evangelism.

---

[34]Theologians have continually wrestled with balancing divine sovereignty in election and human responsibility to repent and believe. I submit there is a similar tension between divine sovereignty over salvation and the responsibility of gospel agents to win persons to faith in Christ. This dissertation will focus on the human responsibility side of the equation.

Conclusion

Those who wish to be obedient to the call of God to take the gospel to the nations must know what God requires. Donald McGavran described that responsibility as harvesting ripe fields. In the next chapters, we will examine McGavran's harvest theology, and seek to answer biblical questions concerning the role, methods, and results of human agents of the gospel. My hope, through this research, is to find clarity on the issue of human responsibility in missions, particularly regarding numerical growth. Beyond that, I pray that I and those who read this dissertation might be faithful to fulfill that responsibility as we take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

CHAPTER 2

HARVEST THEOLOGY

Introduction

What is the relationship between faithfulness and success or between

faithfulness and church growth? In the opening chapter of *Understanding Church*

Growth, Donald McGavran pointedly claims, "Church growth is faithfulness."[1]

McGavran later develops this thought by introducing the concept of harvest theology.

Harvest theology may be summarized as follows: The role of gospel

messengers is to harvest ripe fields. Because of this role, while "search" is all that one

can expect in some situations, gospel messengers must not take a neutralist stance to

missions and evangelism that focuses upon mere obedience in proclamation regardless of

results. Rather, one must adopt a stance that aims toward church growth and that

effectively wins persons to faith in Christ and responsible membership in his church.

Mission agents should employ strategies that focus on receptive peoples and methods that

are effective in bringing the maximum number of persons to faith in Christ and

multiplying churches. Numbers are important because they represent real persons who

are in need of the gospel message. In terms of numerical growth, harvest theology

concludes: *When God has ripened his harvest fields, he expects the harvest to be reaped.*

Faithfulness in evangelism can thus be measured, in part, by fruitfulness in terms of

numerical results. Having summarized the principle, we may now observe in more detail

how this thought develops in McGavran's writing.

---

[1]Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 15.

18

The Will and Activity of God:
Themes That Contribute to Harvest Theology

Before examining harvest theology itself, it will prove helpful to examine a few prominent themes in the writings of McGavran that contribute to his understanding of harvest theology. While harvest theology proper deals with human responsibility in evangelism and missions, for McGavran, that responsibility stems from his understanding about the will and activity of God. Because God wills church growth and is working in the world to bring lost people to himself—because God wants his lost children found and enfolded into his church—God has commissioned his followers to share his message.

God Wills Church Growth

One of the dominant recurring themes throughout the writings of McGavran is his conviction that church growth is the will of God. In *Understanding Church Growth*, McGavran describes *missio Dei,* the mission of God, as that which God desires.[2] Among those desires, McGavran claims, is "that persons be found—that is, be reconciled to Himself."[3] The desire of God to see people saved translates, for McGavran, to a belief that "A chief and irreplaceable purpose of mission is church growth."[4] These are no minor points in McGavran's thinking. As Elmer Towns notes, "McGavran's words are not merely passing statements, reflecting one of many emphases. They represent the foundational presupposition of Church Growth."[5] Indeed, the idea that God wills the salvation of people and, therefore, wills church growth permeates McGavran's thought

---

[2] At this point, an understanding of the historical theological climate in which McGavran writes is helpful. McGavran, throughout his career, was heavily involved in the conciliar/evangelical debate concerning the nature and purpose of Christian mission. This debate forms the background for much of what McGavran writes. Contra the conciliar camp, McGavran argues for the priority of evangelism over good works and social justice. Contra fellow evangelicals, McGavran argues for an evangelism that not only proclaims the gospel, but is effective in bringing the lost to salvation.

[3] McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 32.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Elmer Towns et al., *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: Five Views*, ed. Gary L. McIntosh, Counterpoints: Church Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 182.

from his earliest writings and throughout his ministry. A few representative examples illustrate the point:

> We should focus our attention on the Church and its growth as the paramount purpose of the missionary enterprise.[6]

> God wills church growth. He has commanded the preaching of the Gospel, not as an exercise in piety for existing Christians, but that multitudes may believe and live. He leads the Church to seek lost sheep, not as a drill in obedience, but that the lost may be brought into the fold rejoicing. God sent His Son to redeem the world. He created the Church that all men might have the opportunity to accept the Saviour. God wants churches to multiply.[7]

> . . . the actual planting of countable churches is a chief end of mission. It is not the only end and not even the *chief* end; but it is *a chief end and it must always be sought.*[8]

> There were many reasons [for church growth in the New Testament]. A principal one was God's purpose—His ongoing, unshakable, unchanging purpose—for the salvation of men. The growth and expansion of the church throughout the world does not take place in and of itself. It is God's will that this should happen.[9]

> Church growth is directly related to God's will. God wants his church to grow.[10]

> Church Growth begins in and is required by Christian *theology.* God wants the Church to grow.[11]

> Church growth is not a gimmick. It is faithfulness to God. He wants his lost children found and transformed into responsible members of his Body.[12]

---

[6]Donald A. McGavran, "Using the Present Adversity for Advance," *IRM* 32 (1943): 195.

[7]Donald A. McGavran, "The Institute of Church Growth," *IRM* 50 (1961): 430.

[8]Donald A. McGavran, "Essential Evangelism: An Open Letter to Dr. Hoekendijk," in *Eye of the Storm: The Great Debate in Mission,* ed. Donald A. McGavran (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972), 65.

[9]Donald A. McGavran, *How to Grow a Church* (Glendale, CA: Regal, Books Division, G/L Publications, 1973), 19.

[10]Donald A. McGavran and Winfield C. Arn, *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 21.

[11]Donald A. McGavran, *Ethnic Realities and the Church* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 11.

[12]Donald A. McGavran, "The Discovery of Church Growth," in *Church Growth: Strategies That Work,* by Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 26; see also p. 19. For further examples, see McGavran, "1965 Model—Basic Policy in Evangelism (Part II)," *CGB* 1, no. 2 (November 1964): 3; idem, "The Great Debate in Missions," *CTJ* 5 (1970), 163; idem, "Missionary Confession of Faith," *CTJ* 7 (1972): 133; idem, "God Commands Church Growth," in *Effective*

When reading McGavran's works, one continually finds the idea that God wants his church to grow as people hear the gospel, respond in faith, and are enfolded into his church. The desire of God to redeem the lost and see his church grow formed a basis for McGavran's harvest theology. Because the will of God is church growth, church growth must also be the task of his followers. Harvest theology originated as a necessary response to the conviction that God wills church growth. Harvest theology emerged not only from the will of God, however, but also out of the perception of McGavran concerning the activity of God. God not only desires his church to grow, but is also a God who is at work in the world drawing peoples to himself. The idea that God makes peoples receptive forms a second theme in the works of McGavran.

God Has Made Peoples
Receptive to the Gospel

The God who wills church growth is also actively at work in the world. Harvest theology was not important to McGavran because he wanted to answer an academic question about human responsibility in missions. Harvest theology was important to McGavran because he believed God was already at work in the world ripening his harvest and it was imperative that Christians reap it. McGavran believed that the present era of missions provided an unprecedented opportunity for church growth precisely because God had made large numbers of people receptive to the gospel. This fact brought with it both a sense of great optimism as well as great responsibility. Among the peoples of the world, McGavran believed, more people were receptive in his day than ever before.

> We face the most winnable populations which ever existed. More men today want to know about Jesus Christ; more people are being baptized from non-Christian religions; more churches are being built; more congregations are being established;

Evangelism: A Theological Mandate (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988), 22; idem, "Why Some American Churches Are Growing and Some Are Not," in *The Complete Book of Church Growth*, ed. Elmer L. Towns, John N. Vaughan and David J. Seifert (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1981), 285.

and the mind of Christ is being incorporated more into human society than ever before.[13]

We live in a ripening world. This is perhaps the most revolutionary and encouraging fact in missions. More populations today are responsive to the Gospel than ever before.[14]

More winnable people live in the world today than ever before.[15]

Today there is unprecedented receptivity to the message of Christ. Today people are more winnable; the nations, the tribes, and the castes of the world are more responsive to the gospel than they have ever been before.[16]

From his perspective, McGavran saw entire peoples who were now receptive to the gospel. Even among so-called unresponsive groups, McGavran saw opportunities in pockets of people who *were* responsive to the gospel.[17] Thus, harvest theology arose out of the optimism and conviction of McGavran that multitudes of peoples were receptive now. These receptive people must be won to faith in Christ now, while they are open to the gospel.

This change on the world scene, McGavran believed, was no coincidence. On the one hand, the time of harvest was a result of previous times of sowing. As previous generations had sown the seed of the gospel, that seed had grown and was now ready for harvest. Thus, McGavran asserts, "Today we stand at the beginning of an era in which the

---

[13]Donald A. McGavran, "Church Growth Strategy Continued," *IRM* 57 (1968): 342; idem, "Theological Bed Rock in Mission," *Religion in Life* 30 (1961): 608.

[14]Donald A. McGavran, "Have We Lost Our Way in Missions?" *Christian Herald* 81, no. 3 (March 1958): 21; idem, "What is the Nature of the Church?" *Religion in Life* 27 (1958): 334; idem, "Ten Emphases in the Church Growth Movement," in *Unto the Uttermost: Missions in the Christian Churches / Churches of Christ*, ed. Doug Priest Jr. (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1984), 252-53.

[15]McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 58.

[16]McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, 9; see also Donald A. McGavran, "Sown Fields," *World Call* 9, no. 9 (1925): 55; idem, "After the First Flush of Success," *IRM* 48 (1959): 273; idem, "The Dimensions of World Evangelization," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 101-02.

[17]McGavran, "Have We Lost Our Way in Missions?" 60; idem, "Church Growth Strategy Continued," 341-42; idem, "Ten Emphases," 252.

fruit of many decades of missionary effort is rapidly ripening."[18] Similarly he suggests,

"Plantings of the last hundred and fifty years are ripening faster than they are being

reaped."[19] More importantly, however, McGavran saw the growing receptivity to the

gospel as the work of God. The change in receptivity among the peoples of the world was

a divine move of God of which the church must take notice. God had made peoples

receptive, thus, faithfulness to God required winning receptive peoples to the gospel.

> The fact of the matter is that opportunity blazes all around the world.
> This is no accident. The multitudes who can today be discipled consist of millions of individuals whose salvation God desires. That is the reason they are receptive. That is the reason they can be discipled. We can properly sense the call of God in the winnable men and women of the earth.[20]

> Receptivity does not arise by accident. Men become open to the Gospel, not by any blind interplay of brute forces, but by God's sovereign will. Over every welcoming of the Gospel, we can write, "In the fullness of time God called *this* people out."[21]

> Receptivity is a human dimension, but it is also a divine dimension. God has spoken to these multitudes. The Holy Spirit has turned them receptive. They hear the voice of the Great Shepherd and seek to follow him. Christ's church in all six continents must look to her Master and follow his lead in proclaiming the Good News of salvation and incorporating believers in multiplying thousands of Christian cells, churches of Christ, congregations of the redeemed.[22]

> Church growth is obviously the will of God. We face highly winnable populations. The field has not ripened by accident. God has ripened it. God wants it reaped. Christians must dis-associate themselves from anti-harvest people who would snatch defeat out of the hands of victory. This is the day to purify and magnify the church and multiply congregations of the redeemed. This is the day to liberate millions into the glorious liberty of Christ.[23]

In McGavran's view, God was actively at work in the world making peoples receptive to

---

[18]McGavran, "What is the Nature of the Church?" 334.

[19]McGavran, "After the First Flush of Success," 273.

[20]McGavran, "Theological Bed Rock," 609.

[21]Donald A. McGavran, "Why Neglect Gospel-Ready Masses?" *Christianity Today*, 29 April 1966, 18.

[22]McGavran, "Dimensions of World Evangelization," 102.

[23]Donald A. McGavran, foreword to *Why Churches Die*, by Hollis L. Green (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972), 6.

the gospel. This receptivity to the gospel constituted a divine call of God to reap the harvest. Because of this divine initiative, it was now imperative that Christians respond to this harvest call. If God had ripened the harvest field, it is the responsibility of his people to harvest it. From this viewpoint concerning the will and activity of God, McGavran developed the concept he called "harvest theology."

McGavran's Harvest Theology

Based on the understanding that God desires church growth and that he is making peoples receptive to the gospel, McGavran develops his theology of harvest. Harvest theology itself is made up of several components. Harvest theology addresses the role, the means and the result of missions.

The Role of Missions:
Harvest Ripe Fields

A primary component of harvest theology is the role God has given his messengers. Having begun with the will and activity of God, McGavran moves to describe the role of his messengers. Gospel messengers are to harvest what God has ripened. God intentionally reaches out through his messengers to grow his church. Thus, one finds in *Understanding Church Growth* that McGavran moves from relating the broad desire of God for the salvation of people to a narrow description of Christian mission. McGavran defines mission as "an enterprise devoted to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, and to persuading men to become His disciples and dependable members of His Church."[24] This means on the one hand, that the work of evangelism is to

---

[24]Ibid., 34; italicized in the original text. Note that here, though responsible membership will lead to local church participation, the context implies that McGavran capitalizes the word "Church" to refer to the universal rather than local church. McGavran is not consistent in this practice, however, as he may capitalize "Church" not only as a reference to the universal church, but also a particular denomination, the idea of church in general, or the body of Christ in a particular region. Thus, when reading McGavran, context and not necessarily capitalization should be used to discern his meaning. A similar observation can be made concerning the terms "mission" and "missions." While in later years, the terms have taken on different ranges of meaning, McGavran appears to use the terms synonymously. Again, context must determine whether a more narrow understanding of the terms is warranted.

take priority over other mission endeavors whether Christian service, social ministries, or social justice.[25] On the other hand, the definition seeks not only to establish the priority of evangelism, but also emphasizes the primary goal of winning persons to Christ. The reason for this priority, McGavran explains, is that God is a "God who finds."[26] God desires not only that persons hear the message of the gospel, but that they turn to Christ and be saved. This theme is also well represented in the writing of McGavran:

> . . . the first essential of mission/church growth is to realize that God wants his lost children found and enfolded.[27]

> God wants his lost children found, brought into the fold, and fed.[28]

> What Christians, as they carry out mission, must do is to remember that they are sent into the world *to find God's lost sons and daughters.* That is their task. God's greatest rejoicing does not occur when lost sons or daughters hear the gospel with their ears, experience it through social action, or sense it through Christian presence. God most greatly rejoices when lost sons and daughters walk back through the front door of the house saying, 'Father, I have sinned. Make me as one of your hired servants.' He rejoices even more when, redeemed and restored, the saved sons and daughters go back out and . . . start living as Christians and bringing sinners to a saving faith in Christ and membership in His Church.[29]

Because God is a God who finds, McGavran reasons, Christians in the present era of missions must not be satisfied merely to proclaim the gospel, but must see lost persons come to faith Christ. That is, the present era of missions, in which many of the peoples of

---

[25]Ibid., 32-34. Elsewhere, McGavran states, "Think of missions as, specifically, winning men and multiplying churches. Realize that while there are many other good aims, church growth is the central continuing business of *mission*. Mission succeeds only as churches multiply in land after land." Idem, "Have We Lost Our Way in Missions?" 60. Similarly, he states, "These good deeds must, of course, be done, and Christians will do them. I myself was doing them. *But* they must never replace the essential task of mission, discipling the peoples of the earth." Idem, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *IBMR* 10 (1986): 54.

[26]McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 34.

[27]McGavran, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," 57; italicized in the original text.

[28]Donald A. McGavran, "The Dividends We Seek," *Christianity Today*, 19 January 1973, 4; italicized in the original. Idem, *Ethnic Realities*, 11.

[29]Donald A. McGavran, "Presence and Proclamation in Christian Mission," in *Eye of the Storm: The Great Debate in Mission*, ed. Donald A. McGavran (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972), 217.

the world are responsive to the gospel, calls for not only a "theology of search," but a "theology of harvest."[30]

In contrast to this so-called search theology, McGavran introduces his harvest theology principle. In chapter two of *Understanding Church Growth*, McGavran presents search theology as a kind of antithesis to harvest theology. For McGavran, search theology represents the prevailing viewpoint of which harvest theology is an alternative. Functionally, the introduction of search theology is a tool for introducing and contrasting McGavran's own concept. Presenting harvest theology in contrast to search theology is somewhat problematic, however, because McGavran leaves the reader without a clear understanding of just what he means by search theology.[31] This lack of understanding occurs for two reasons.

First, the designation "search theology" is McGavran's own label. While the term may indeed represent a common trend in the missiology of his day, it does not represent an actual, identifiable, theological position of any particular person or group. Rather, "search theology" is a blanket term used to represent any idea that is counter to harvest theology. Search theology is thus a concept McGavran formulates to describe a particular mindset that exists concerning the relation of mission and numerical results. Search theology refers broadly to any position that is indifferent or neutral toward numerical conversion growth.[32] By using the term "search theology," McGavran seeks to counter those who claim "that in Christian mission the essential thing is not the finding,

---

[30]McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 34.

[31]This problem is perhaps why, in his review of *Understanding Church Growth*, Sabbas Kilian called the distinction between search and harvest theology "cloudy and misleading." Sabbas J. Kilian, review of *Understanding Church Growth*, by Donald A. McGavran, *Theological Studies* 33 (1972): 182.

[32]Charles Van Engen, *The Growth of the True Church* (Amsterdam: Ropodi, 1981), 460. Van Engen here notes, "If we pay careful attention to what McGavran is saying, we find that in actual fact he is not really referring to any particular 'theology' at all. . . . the fact of the matter is that 'Search Theology' has no spokesman, no school, nor direct advocate from whom McGavran might have quoted. McGavran himself is attempting to draw some generalizations regarding missional perspectives worldwide. . . . a negative illustration of the 'real' issue at hand – that is, 'Harvest Theology.'"

but going everywhere and preaching the Gospel."[33] McGavran challenges those who emphasize faithfulness in proclamation but do not aim for numerical growth with the claim that *"Mere search is not what God wants. God wants his lost children found."*[34]

A second problem with the search terminology is that McGavran is inconsistent in his use of the term. For much of the chapter, McGavran uses the term to describe an indifference or neutralist stance toward numerical growth and objects to such a position. Elsewhere, he accepts a theology of search "for some men and some populations."[35] While the intention of mission should always be *"a vast and purposeful finding"* and a "searching for the lost *in order to find them,*"[36] McGavran qualifies his remarks by stating that sometimes search is all that one can expect. Where the people are not receptive to the gospel, one might not demand results. In such situations, a theology of search may be appropriate. Even then, however, the search may not be one that is hostile or indifferent to numerical growth. Rather, the gospel must be preached to every creature in order that whosoever will may come. Search always takes place in order to find.[37]

Despite these problems with the terminology McGavran employs, a careful reading of the chapter reveals his line of reasoning. Search, for McGavran, is partial and preliminary. Search must always be done, but it is a search whose purpose is to find. While in some cases search is all that can be done, the norm is to find. Finding is God's desire and must be our purpose. "It is not theologically permissible," McGavran asserts,

---

[33]McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 34.

[34]Ibid., 40.

[35]Ibid., 47.

[36]Ibid., 46.

[37]Ibid., 46-48.

"for the Christian's true intention to be 'only search.'"[38] Note what McGavran states in

How Churches Grow: "Mission in the New Testament was never proclamation for

proclamation's sake . . . it was never simply discharging a duty to witness. It focused not

on what Christians should do, but on saving men. It was witness and proclamation, that

men might believe."[39] Harvest theology is based on the premise that God's purpose is not

merely to seek but to find. The purpose of proclamation is not merely to fulfill a

requirement of obedience, but that people might come to faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, the

role of messengers is not merely proclamation, but persuasion: we are to harvest what

God has ripened.

McGavran objected to search theology, then, not because it was false but

because he believed it to be only a partial truth. When search is all that is possible,

McGavran concedes, faithfulness can be measured by intent. He explains this idea clearly

in *Church Growth and Christian Mission*:

> [I]n some places the Church can expect little or no growth. There are highly
> resistant populations where younger Churches and their assisting missions do well
> merely to hang on. When God sends men to these populations He measures
> devotion not by numerical increase of Christians but by the intent of the missionary.
> In such populations genuine concern for evangelism may be great, while the amount
> of church growth may be very small. *In such populations* expectation of church
> growth may be legitimately small. . . .[40]

Where God has ripened his harvest field, however, God demands a harvest. When God

has prepared hearts to be open to the gospel, his people must not be satisfied with an

evangelism that sees no results. McGavran continues:

---

[38]Ibid., 47-48.

[39]Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: World Dominion Press, 1955), 63.

[40]Donald A. McGavran, "Conclusion," in *Church Growth and Christian Mission*, ed. Donald A. McGavran (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 236-37; idem, "Have We Lost Our Way in Missions?" 22; idem, "After the First Flush of Success," 265.

These unquestioned truths must not, however, be applied to missions in general. Small expectations need not and must not characterize Christian mission. *In receptive populations* concern for evangelism correlates very closely with church growth. . . . Missionaries should not become accustomed to coming empty-handed out of ripe fields. . . . where the Church can grow, it ought to do so.[41]

McGavran is clear. God wants his ripe fields harvested. In responsive populations, God

demands church growth. This idea continues throughout McGavran's writing:

He [God] wants a real finding of countable persons. In responsive populations at least, it is theologically wrong to say that God sends men out to labor fruitlessly. On the contrary, three Gospels strongly suggest that He sends men into ripe fields *to bring in the sheaves.*[42]

In fields white to harvest, evangelism is each bringing his quota of sheaves to the Master's threshing floor.[43]

He wants ripe fields reaped to the last sheaf.[44]

God commands Christians to reap the fields he has ripened.[45]

To be faithful stewards of God's grace, they must—in responsive populations—lead multitudes to serve Jesus as Lord in the fellowship of His church and to follow Him in the vocations of the common life.[46]

When God ripens a harvest, McGavran believed, faithfulness demands that the harvest

be reaped.

The Means of Missions: Right
Strategy and Effective Methods

For McGavran, the application of the harvest principle became part of harvest

theology itself. Because the role of the missionary is to harvest ripe fields, McGavran

---

[41]Ibid., 237; cf. Donald A. McGavran, John Huegel, and Jack Taylor, *Church Growth in Mexico* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), 131.

[42]McGavran, "Conclusion," 244.

[43]McGavran, "Essential Evangelism," 66.

[44]McGavran, "Why Some American Churches Are Growing," 286.

[45]Donald A. McGavran, *Momentous Decisions in Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 51.

[46]Donald A. McGavran, "Crisis of Identity for Some Missionary Societies," in *Crucial Issues in Missions Tomorrow*, ed. Donald A. McGavran (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 201.

reasoned, we must both follow a strategy that focuses activity and resources on those peoples God has made receptive to the gospel and utilize those methods God is blessing to bring people to Christ.

Focus on receptive peoples. An immediate consequence of harvest theology, for McGavran, was the need to focus on what he called "receptive peoples." That is, focus of missions efforts must be on areas that are seeing a response to the gospel message.[47] If God has ripened a harvest and our role is to reap it, focus must be on those places and peoples where the harvest is ripe. The overriding factor for McGavran was that receptive peoples, rather than non-receptive ones, should receive the greater part of personnel and missions funds. As McGavran put it, "Gospel-accepters have a higher priority than Gospel-rejecters."[48] This priority does not mean an outright abandonment of resistant populations in favor of receptive ones. Rather, one should continue to pray for and work in non-responsive areas with hope that they will one day be responsive.[49] Nevertheless, in doing so, one must not neglect the full bringing in of the harvest in receptive areas.

To bring in the harvest, a focus on receptive areas, therefore, is essential. McGavran explains,

---

[47]McGavran also uses synonyms "responsive" and "approachable" to designate the same idea. Perhaps we can understand how McGavran defines receptivity by his definition of an earlier term, "Approachability." McGavran states, "Approachability does not mean merely that the people in question is friendly, can be addressed, or listens to the Gospel; but that some of its sub-groups are actually accepting Jesus as Lord, being baptized and formed into congregations. On the basis of this kind of response, we judge that we have an 'approachable people'." Donald A. McGavran, "The People Movement Point of View," in *Church Growth and Group Conversion*, by Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III, 3rd ed. (Lucknow, U.P., India: Lucknow Publishing House, 1956), 5; idem, *Bridges of God*, 3.

[48]McGavran, "Why Neglect Gospel-Ready Masses?" 18.

[49]McGavran, *How to Grow a Church*, 56; idem, "The Dimensions of World Evangelization," 102. Interestingly, McGavran further suggested that a focus on receptive people might be the key to turning now resistant populations receptive. See McGavran, "Why Neglect Gospel-Ready Masses?" 19; idem, "What is the Nature of the Church?" 334.

The resistant peoples of the world—make no mistake—must also hear the Gospel. The Bible straightly charges us to preach to all the world—and that means resistant as well as receptive. But we should also answer all Macedonian calls and baptize all the responsive, so that none holds out his hands in vain, begging for the Gospel.[50]

McGavran based this priority toward receptive peoples on both pragmatic and theological grounds. From a pragmatic viewpoint, a focus on receptive people simply makes sense. Given a choice, it seems logical that one would focus on the receptive over the non-receptive. McGavran asks, "Will you by-pass those who can now be saved in order to carry on mission work among those who cannot now be saved?"[51] For McGavran, focus on the receptive was a matter of stewardship. Given limited personnel and funds, priority should be given to supporting mission in those areas where people are responding to the gospel.[52]

Another factor also influenced McGavran in giving priority to receptive peoples. McGavran believed that the receptivity of a particular people was time-sensitive. That is, there is no guarantee that peoples who are receptive at one particular time will be so in the future. McGavran explains,

> Opportunity blazes today, but it may be a brief blaze. Certainly conditions which create the opportunity--as far as human wisdom can discern--are transient conditions. We have today. Let us move forward.[53]

> Some way must be found to win to Christ the people that can now be won. . . . Doors now open swing shut.[54]

---

[50]McGavran, "Dimensions of World Evangelization," 102; cf. Robin Hadaway, "Balancing the Biblical Perspectives: A Missiological Analysis," *JEM* 2 (2003): 105. Hadaway remarks, "Since the Gospel is to be preached to all creatures, no Christian will doubt that both the receptive and the resistant should hear it. And since Gospel acceptors have an inherently higher priority than Gospel rejecters, no one would doubt that whenever it comes to a choice between reaping the ripe fields or seeding others, the former is commanded by God."

[51]Donald A. McGavran, "New Methods for a New Age in Missions," *IRM* 44 (1955): 402.

[52]McGavran, "Using the Present Adversity for Advance," 195; idem, "After the First Flush of Success," 275; idem, "A Bigger Bang for Your Buck: Or How to Get More for Your Missionary Dollar," *World Vision*, December 1967: 17.

[53]McGavran, *Bridges of God*, 9.

[54]Donald A. McGavran, *The Church in a Revolutionary Age*, The United Christian Missionary Society, Missionary Education Department (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1955), 16; cf. p. 38,

Because time was such a factor, McGavran often repeated what became a kind of mantra

concerning receptivity: "win the winnable while they are winnable."[55] He likewise

emphasized "seeking of the lost where and when they can be found."[56]

Even more important to McGavran was a theological factor. Not only did

McGavran see the principle of focusing on receptive as the model of the New

Testament,[57] but also as a necessary response to the sovereign purpose of God. Earlier it

was noted how McGavran saw the hand of God in ripening harvest fields. Focusing on

receptive people as the priority in missions was a direct response to this observation.

> When our Lord's pierced hand points out harvest fields, white with multitudes who can be won for Him, what justification can we give if we choose to go somewhere else?[58]

> We have been considering all this from a human point of view. But we should also view it from the divine point of view. Those hundreds of thousands who can now be won each year are those whom God purposes to disciple. If we stubbornly cleave to the *status quo* [continued focus on resistant populations], God's redemptive purpose will be frustrated for hundreds of thousands of souls each year. The new methodology about which we have been talking simply attempts to co-operate with God. . . . God is trying to give His churches great victory. Any methodology which is of Him will lead us into it.[59]

> ...when God has opened the door to growth, we pay particular attention, lest by our existing commitments, our dull eyes, and unbelieving hearts we frustrate the redemptive purposes of God.[60]

---

where as an example of this point, McGavran notes what he sees as a missed opportunity in Japan after WWII.

[55]McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 40-41; McGavran, Huegel, and Taylor, *Church Growth in Mexico*, 134.

[56]McGavran, Huegel, and Taylor, *Church Growth in Mexico*, 134.

[57]McGavran, *Bridges of God*, 63-65; idem, "New Methods," 400.

[58]McGavran, *Bridges of God*, 65-66.

[59]McGavran, "New Methods," 403.

[60]McGavran, Huegel, and Taylor, *Church Growth in Mexico*, 97; see also p. 132; see also John T. Seamands, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Church Growth," in *God, Man and Church Growth: A Festschrift in Honor of Donald Anderson McGavran*, ed. Alan R. Tippett (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 106.

<u>The peoples whom God has prepared have priority.</u> . . . Once receptivity of a population has been established by the rapid growth of the Church, Christian mission should regard this as a <u>God-given priority.</u>[61]

The Christian is commissioned by God as a faithful steward to speak to all, but especially to those in whom he discerns some preparatory grace, from whom he receives a welcome for the gospel . . .[62]

McGavran thus saw the focus upon receptive peoples as a most immediate application of the harvest principle. Accompanying this focus was a second application—the discovery and use of effective methods.

Study and development of effective methods. From early in his ministry, McGavran struggled with the dichotomy between what he knew to be true and what he experienced as a missionary. Well before he presented the concept of harvest theology formally in *Understanding Church Growth*, while working as a missionary, McGavran believed that God desired and expected church growth. At the same time, McGavran observed that in many ministries, including his own, slow growth or even no growth was the norm. This conflict between belief and experience motivated McGavran to search for answers. He explains this conflict in an essay entitled "The Discovery of Church Growth":

I knew perfectly well that church growth is dependent upon the action of the Holy Spirit, but since God works in orderly ways, and, according to Scripture, does not want *any* to perish, I believed that the Holy Spirit wanted more growth than we were getting. I came to believe that non-growth is a disease, but a *curable* disease. I came increasingly to believe that God wanted more growth than we were getting and that if we would but go about Christian mission in an enlightened way, God would grant us more church growth.[63]

McGavran's harvest theology led him to a lifetime of study of the causes of and hindrances to church growth. What were those methods that God was blessing to bring people to faith in Christ? McGavran continues:

---

[61]Donald A. McGavran, "The Church Growth Viewpoint," *CGB* 1, no. 4 (March 1965): 7.

[62]McGavran, *Momentous Decisions*, 48.

[63]McGavran, "Discovery of Church Growth," 16.

> A vast curiosity was born within me. What *does* make churches grow? More importantly, what makes many churches *stop* growing? How is it possible for Christians to come out of ripe harvest fields empty-handed? Answering the questions, What are the *causes* of church growth? and What are the *obstacles* to church growth? became the chief purpose of my life.[64]

Thus the church growth movement was born. McGavran would spend his life studying church growth and those methods of evangelism and missions that were effective.

McGavran's view of harvest theology, combined with the belief that principles of church growth could be discovered, led to a conviction that Christians be engaged in *effective* evangelism—"an evangelism which actually enrolls in the Body of Christ segment after segment of mankind."[65] Faithfulness in evangelism—harvesting ripe fields—required both the removal of obstacles to growth and the faithful discovery and use of effective methods. McGavran saw lack of growth as most often "due to remediable causes"[66] and "a disease which can be cured."[67] While leaving in place the "offense" of the gospel, anything that erects a non-biblical barrier to the gospel must be removed.

> Biblical hurdles to accepting Christ must, of course, be left in place. But non-biblical hurdles should be removed. Men must repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ, for that is a biblical hurdle.[68]

> As men and women confront Christ, they must face and overcome biblical obstacles: the scandal of the cross, the difficulty of penitence, the renunciation of self, the abandonment of idols. But the church must be careful not to place non-biblical obstacles in the way of would-be believers.[69]

In addition to removing obstacles to the gospel, McGavran sought the best ways to present the message of Jesus Christ in a given context. To accomplish the role of

---

[64]Ibid. Cf. McGavran, "New Methods for a New Age in Missions," 403.

[65]McGavran, *Momentous Decisions*, 27; idem, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," 58.

[66]McGavran, "1965 Model," 4; idem, "Ten Emphases," 254.

[67]McGavran, "Church Growth Strategy Continued," 336.

[68]Donald A. McGavran, "Without Crossing Barriers," *CGB* 8 (1971): 135.

[69]Donald A. McGavran, "The Adaptation-Syncretism Axis," in *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* ed. Tetsunao Yamamori and Charles R. Taber (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1975), 243.

harvesting ripe fields required the discovery and development of effective methods.

McGavran continually spoke of doing evangelism in a way that produced the most

results:

> In carrying out this mission, Christians . . . will study other religions with
> scrupulous scientific honesty—to find out the most effective way to present Christ.[70]

> Seeing each nation as it really is *and devising an evangelistic approach which
> will please God in that nation at that stage* is urgently needed. . . . Our methods
> should always be those that will *most directly* lead to the discipling of nations,
> whether we can expect to complete the task in ten years or 200.[71]

> Their [Mission Societies] goal should be to secure a proclamation of the Gospel so
> biblical and so suited to each separate population that it is believed, men are
> baptized, and new churches multiply.[72]

> They [seminaries and missionary training institutions] will understand how to
> *harness* the insights provided by various disciplines—theology, anthropology,
> history, psychology, sociology—to the God-given task of *so* proclaiming Christ that
> living churches do *in fact* multiply.[73]

The study and development of effective methods became a major application of the

harvest theology principle. Because God expected ripe fields to be harvested, the

discovery of effective evangelistic methods was of utmost priority.[74]

McGavran's desire to discover effective methods and remove barriers to

evangelism led him to use knowledge gained from sociology and cultural anthropology to

aid in effective evangelism. It was this study that led McGavran to such often

controversial elements of the church growth movement as evangelism of persons in

groups and the homogeneous unit principle. At the same time, McGavran was highly

---

[70]Donald A. McGavran, "The Passive and Active Role in Mission," *CGB* 3, no. 5 (May 1967): 11.

[71]James H. Montgomery and Donald A. McGavran, *The Discipling of a Nation* (Santa Clara, CA: Global Church Growth Bulletin, 1980), 170.

[72]Donald A. McGavran, "Crisis of Identity for Some Missionary Societies," *Christianity Today*, 8 May 1970, 12.

[73]McGavran, "Institute of Church Growth," 434.

[74]At one point, McGavran exclaims, "Effective evangelism must be the highest priority in every Christian's life." McGavran, *Momentous Decisions*, 28.

critical of mission agencies that clung tenaciously to ineffective methods.[75] Harvest

theology required evangelism and evangelistic methods that would result in the growth of

the church.[76]

The Result of Missions: Numerical Church Growth

Given the role of messengers to harvest ripe fields and the priority given to

strategy and effective methods, harvest theology finds its culmination in its attitude

toward numerical growth. Thus, a final aspect of harvest theology focuses on the result of

missions. From his earliest writings, McGavran saw numerical growth as "essential to the

achievement of total Christianity."[77]

Numerical growth as a goal of missions. McGavran saw the growth in the

number of believers and the number of churches as one of the most important goals of

missions.

Today's supreme task is effective multiplication of churches in the receptive
societies of earth.[78]

---

[75]See, for example, Donald A. McGavran, "Wrong Strategy—The Real Crisis in Mission," in *Eye of the Storm: The Great Debate in Mission*, ed. Donald A. McGavran (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972), 104-05; idem, "Crisis of Identity (*Crucial Issues*)," 194; idem, "Satan and Missions: A Chapter in the High Strategy of Hell," *World Dominion* 33 (1955): 98-104.

[76]McGavran, *Bridges of God*, 16; idem, "Institute of Church Growth," 431; idem, *Church Growth in Jamaica: A Preview of Things to Come in Many Lands* (Lucknow, U.P., India: Lucknow Publishing House, 1962), 122; idem, "Crisis of Identity (*Crucial Issues*)," 201; idem, "Dividends We Seek," 5; idem, "Particular Theologies and Theology of Mission," in *Contemporary Theologies of Missions*, by Arthur F. Glasser and Donald A. McGavran (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 149; idem, *Momentous Decisions*, 28; idem, "How Can an *Ethnos* Be Discipled," in *Missions Now: This Generation*, by Roger S. Greenway, John E. Kyle and Donald A. McGavran (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 68-76.

[77]Donald A. McGavran, *How Churches Grow: The New Frontiers of Mission* (London: World Dominion Press, 1959), 29.

[78]McGavran, *Understanding Church* Growth, 49. For McGavran, evangelism and church planting were inseparable. Evangelism and church planting were connected because McGavran believed that those who came to faith in Christ must be incorporated into New Testament churches. In pioneer areas, winning persons to Christ necessitated forming new congregations of believers. Thus, for McGavran, church planting was "the only effective means of proclamation." Donald A. McGavran, "Imperialism and

> Think of missions as, specifically, winning men and multiplying churches. Realize that while there are many other good aims, church growth is the central continuing business of *mission*. Mission succeeds only as churches multiply in land after land.[79]

> We should focus our attention on the Church and its growth as the paramount purpose of the missionary enterprise.[80]

McGavran often describes this goal in grand numerical terms. The goal of mission is described as "*maximum finding*," "maximum reconciliation of men to God," and "maximum church growth." We should strive for a "fantastic increase in the number of Christians" as well as a "fantastic increase of churches." We must "multiply the number of those who believe." We must "win men [and women] for Jesus Christ and multiply churches."[81] In nearly all of his writing, McGavran aims toward winning as many people as possible to Jesus Christ and planting churches among the peoples of the world.

Numbers and whom they represent. Perhaps the most common criticism of McGavran and the Church Growth Movement generally was his emphasis on numbers. Many thought that McGavran overemphasized numbers and that numerical growth was something about which persons should not be concerned. McGavran rejected these criticisms. He saw the use of statistics for evaluation and goal setting as a natural part of the work of missions.[82] Church growth and its theology of harvest was not about a "secular hunger for numbers." Rather than a mere "numbers game," McGavran viewed

---

Church Multiplication," *Church Growth Bulletin* 3, no. 5 (May 1967): 8.

[79]McGavran, "Have We Lost Our Way in Missions?" 60

[80]Donald A. McGavran, "Using the Present Adversity for Advance," *IRM* 32 (1943): 195; idem, "A Foundation of Fact under the Churches of Africa and Asia," *IRM* 51 (1962): 352-54.

[81]McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 30, 51; idem, "Have We Lost Our Way in Missions?" 53; idem, *How Churches Grow*, 29; idem, *Understanding Church Growth*, 47; idem, "The Hottest Race Issue in the World," *Transformation* 2, no. 2 (1985): 18; idem, "A Bigger Bang for Your Buck: Or How to Get More for Your Missionary Dollar," *World Vision* December 1967: 17.

[82]McGavran, "Dimensions of World Evangelization," 105.

church growth as "an intensely spiritual and biblical way of looking at life . . . Christians

living under the discipline of theologically sound doctrines."[83]

Nor was McGavran interested in numbers for numbers sake. Rather,

McGavran sought lasting conversion growth. Numbers were a tool for accessing long-

term progress not a means of self-glorification:

> It is not adding mere names to the roll or baptizing those who have no intention
> of following Christ. Roll-padding, aside from being dishonest, is useless. The
> numerical increase worth counting is that which endures from decade to decade.
> Roll-padding and dishonest baptizing will never produce lasting growth.[84]

The reality for McGavran was that numbers represented people. His heart bled for the

"two billion who have never heard the name of Christ."[85] Numerical growth was

important because behind those numbers were real persons who remained lost without the

gospel.

> . . . no numbers of redeemed persons are ever 'mere numbers'. Numbers of persons
> brought into living worshipping contacts with the Way, the Truth and the Life are
> never mere digits. They are always persons [,] beloved persons, persons for whom
> Christ died. They are our own brothers and sisters. As such the more who come to
> Christian faith the better.[86]

McGavran used numbers because numbers represent people and he believed God desires

that as many people as possible come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Numerical growth as a measure of faithfulness. Harvest theology maintains

that God desires that persons come to faith in Christ and has given his messengers the

---

[83]McGavran, "1965 Model," 4; idem, "Church Growth in Europe and America," *CGB* 6, no. 6 (January 1970): 74.

[84]McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, 16; idem, *Multiplying Churches in the Philippines*, 8; idem, "God's Royal Power in Zaire: An Evaluation of the State of the Church," *Missiology* 6 (1978): 90; McGavran and Arn, *Ten Steps*, 33. Elsewhere McGavran notes, "Simply counting heads . . . is not sufficient; neither is simply not counting them." McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, 147. For an explanation of how one might quantify regeneration, see also, Donald A. McGavran and Norman Riddle, *Zaire: Midday in Missions* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979), 145; idem, Donald A. McGavran, "Quantifying World Evangelization," *CGB* 3, no. 3 (January 1967): 8.

[85]McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 49.

[86]McGavran, *Bridges of God*, 97.

role of harvesting ripe fields. For these reasons, harvest theology finds its practical

expression in the principle that faithfulness in evangelism, when the harvest is ripe,

results in numerical growth. Numerical results thus become an important measure of

faithfulness in the evangelistic task.[87] In numerous places, McGavran expresses a

correlation between numerical growth and faithfulness in the evangelistic task:

> In lands where the Churches can grow, growth in numbers is a good test as to
> whether Christians really share the mind of Christ.[88]

> Among receptive peoples, growth is a test of the Church's faithfulness.[89]
> To be faithful stewards of God's grace, they must—in responsive populations—lead
> multitudes to serve Jesus as Lord in the fellowship of His church and to follow Him
> in the vocations of the common life.[90]

> A common objection is that since we are not commanded to be successful, but only
> to be faithful, we do not do well to emphasize that right doctrine will produce
> church growth. In reply we grant at once that when the servant is sent to sow a field,
> the Master does not expect the servant to come back the same day bearing sheaves.
> But when the servant is sent into a ripe harvest field, faithfulness means bringing
> out many sheaves.[91]

McGavran states this principle perhaps most clearly in an essay entitled "Ten Emphases

in the Church Growth Movement." McGavran remarks, "In responsive populations, (note

the condition), faithfulness to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ results in

church growth. It is unfaithful to come out of ripe harvest fields empty-handed."[92]

---

[87]For further evidence of this, see Van Engen, *The Growth of the True Church*, 375-78.

[88]McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, 16.

[89]McGavran, "Why Neglect Gospel-Ready Masses?" 18.

[90]McGavran, "Crisis of Identity (*Crucial Issues*)," 201.

[91]Donald A. McGavran, "Making Doctrines Missionarily Effective and Biblically Correct," in *Contemporary Theologies of Missions*, by Arthur F. Glasser and Donald A. McGavran (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 133.

[92]Donald A. McGavran, "Ten Emphases in the Church Growth Movement," in *Unto the Uttermost: Missions in the Christian Churches / Churches of Christ*, ed. Doug Priest Jr. (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1984), 249.

Summary

Harvest theology begins and ends with the will of God. McGavran contends that the will of God is that his church grows. The will of God is that lost persons be found and enfolded into his church. The will of God is that his messengers seek in order to find and focus on not only obedience but also actual church growth. The will of God is to ripen harvest fields. The role of gospel messengers is to harvest those ripe fields—to focus on the receptive and use effective methods to bring in the harvest. Faithfulness to the will of God requires that his servants reap what God has ripened.

In the following chapters, we will examine the biblical record to see if, in fact, harvest theology is biblical. What role has God given human agents in the evangelistic task? What, if any, strategy or method is employed in the New Testament and for what purpose? What does the New Testament say concerning numerical results? To these questions we now turn.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE ASSIGNED TO HUMAN AGENTS
OF THE GOSPEL

From the earliest days of the earthly ministry of Jesus, through the first years

of the Christian church, to the churches in the world today, God has called his people to

go forth with the message of Christ. The New Testament writers record the sending of

human agents with this message. As seen in the previous chapter, one of the aspects of

harvest theology is the role God assigns to human agents of his message. McGavran

defines the role of human messengers in terms of numerical results. In order to do a

biblical analysis of harvest theology, then, the focus of this chapter will be an

examination of various New Testament texts to determine the biblical role assigned to

human agents in the evangelistic task. Further, this chapter will explore the relationship

between the role of the messenger and response to the message.

The Role of Human Agents in the Gospels

A logical starting point for a study of the role of gospel messengers is the

ministry of Jesus as he chooses, trains and sends out his disciples. The gospels record that

in his earthly ministry Jesus called and sent out disciples with his message and authority.

The role of these human agents includes both the proclamation of the gospel message as

well as an expectation that the message will be received. An examination of various texts

in the gospel accounts reveals the role Jesus assigns to these disciples. Jesus calls his

disciples, sends them out during his ministry, gives them teaching concerning a

"harvest," and commissions them prior to his ascension. In each case, one finds a concern

and expectation of results as people hear and accept the message. The role of these

messengers includes both the act and result of proclaiming the message.

41

The Call of the Disciples

Several passages chronicle the initial calling of twelve disciples by Jesus. First, the Synoptics each contain, in summary fashion, a list of these disciples (Mark 3:13-19; Matt 10:1-4; Luke 6:12-16). The summaries contain initial clues concerning the role Jesus assigns to the Twelve. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus names the Twelve as apostles (ἀποστόλους, Luke 6:13), a term which carries with it the implication that the disciples will be sent out as "fully authorized representatives" of Jesus.[1] Mark, in his rendering, records the intent of Jesus to send the Twelve as messengers of the good news. In addition to giving them "authority to cast out the demons" (Mark 3:15), Mark records that Jesus appoints the Twelve "in order that he might send them out to preach (ἵνα ἀποστέλλη αὐτοὺς κηρύσσειν, Mark 3:14). Thus, the Markan reading indicates that the designation "apostle" is an indication of their function as preachers of the good news.[2] Matthew does not record the role of the Twelve as messengers. He does note, however, that Jesus gives the Twelve "authority over unclean spirits, and to heal every kind of sickness" (Matt 10:1).[3] These short summary passages, then, hint at the nature of discipleship. At least for the Twelve, discipleship includes not only learning *from* Jesus but also being messengers *for* him while acting in his name and with his authority.[4]

---

[1] John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, WBC, vol. 35a (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 270. See Jan-Adolf Bühner, "ἀπόστολος" in *EDNT*, vol. 1, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 142-46.

[2] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978).

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are from the NASB.

[4] James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 114; see also Demetrios Trakatellis, "'Ἀκολούθει μοι/Follow me' (Mark 2:14): Discipleship and Priesthood," *GOTR* 30 (1985): 274-75. Beyond their unique role as apostles, Nolland insightfully notes that throughout his gospel, Matthew presents the Twelve as "patterning something which belongs more broadly to Christian identity and role." John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 411; see also Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1:542. Being a "representative messenger" of Christ is a role assigned to the Twelve in these texts and is thus part of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Much of what we learn about the role of the disciples of Jesus as messengers, then, carries over to modern-day believers, as they too are

Perhaps the most commonly referenced accounts of the call of the disciples are the so-called "fishers of men" passages (Mark 1:16-20; Matt 4:18-22; Luke 5:11). The accounts in Mark and Matthew are parallel with only minor differences. Here, Jesus calls Simon and Andrew as disciples. Jesus calls them to "Follow Me" (δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου).[5] The call to follow Jesus, however, implies not merely allowing Jesus to be their teacher, but also following in his example and work.[6] The call, "Follow Me," is thus a call to follow Jesus as an apprentice who will learn and carry out the same work as he does.[7]

In the process of calling these men, Jesus tells them what their work will be. They are to become "fishers of men" (ἁλεῖς ἀνθρώπον). To follow Jesus thus demands changes for the disciples on a number of levels. First, Jesus calls the disciples to a change in authority. The disciples must leave the commercial fishing industry, in which they are accountable to brokers and, perhaps, ultimately Herod,[8] to join an enterprise in which they are accountable to Christ.[9] Second, and more obvious, to follow Jesus means a change in what they will catch. The disciples will now join Christ in his concern for

---

disciples of Jesus and messengers of the good news. Further, it is clear in the Gospels that the ministry of bearing the message extended beyond the Twelve. Luke's gospel records that Jesus send out the Twelve (Luke 9:1-6) followed by sending out seventy-two (Luke 10:1-16). In both cases, the disciples were bearers of the Kingdom message (9:2; 10:9).

[5]The phrase translates literally as "come after me."

[6]Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 76-77; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 1:398; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 147.

[7]R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 96; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 179; Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:398.

[8]K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 106-09.

[9]F. Scott Spencer sees in the calls of Peter and Andrew, as well as Matthew, a political overtone as "essentially saying: 'You're working for me now, not Antipas; you're fishing for the kingdom of God, not the Roman-Galilean empire." F. Scott Spencer, "'Follow Me': The Imperious Call of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels," *Interpretation* 59 (2005): 145.

people. Rather than being commercial fishermen, they now will be "living to reach others."[10] Third, Jesus calls them to a change in task. Rather than casting nets to catch fish, the disciples follow Jesus in his ministry in Galilee (Mark 1:20-21; Matt 4:22). One key aspect of that ministry is "proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt 4:23; cf. Mark 1:38); a ministry that Jesus indeed passes on to his disciples (Mk 3:14; 6:12; 16:15; Luke 9:2; 24:47; Matt 10:7; 28:19). As fishers of people, the disciples will proclaim the message of Christ.

A further implication of this call is in its expectation. One does not engage in commercial fishing indifferent to whether or not there is a catch. Rather, fishing is a task designed to produce a desired result—to catch fish. Success is dependent upon the catch. When fishing for people, then, "the aim will be to gain more disciples."[11] This aim is precisely what we find in Luke's account (Luke 5:1-11), where Jesus describes their role in terms of its result. Jesus states, "you will be catching people" (ἀνθρώπους ἔσῃ ζωγρῶν). This explicit wording by Luke is enhanced by his focus on Peter and his description of a miraculous catch of fish. At the instruction of Jesus, Peter lets down his nets. His action results in "a great quantity of fish" (5:6) which amazes Peter and his companions. Jesus responds to Peter with a promise of his future role: "from now on you will be catching people" (5:10). Peter had been a fisherman. Now, he will fish for *and catch* people. I. Howard Marshall describes this statement by Jesus as a "prophecy which has the effect of a command."[12] Jesus, in effect, both commands Peter to be a fisher of people while at the same time promises a miraculous catch. The fishing miracle foreshadows an abundant catch of persons who will later respond to his gospel ministry.[13]

---

[10]Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, WBC, vol. 34a (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 51.

[11]France, *Gospel of Mark*, 96.

[12]Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 205.

[13]Craig Blomberg demonstrates that many of the nature miracles of Jesus, while historically reliable, actually function as parables of the kingdom of God. Thus, similar to the parables of the sower and

In another set of passages, the Synoptics record a similar call of Jesus to Levi/Matthew (Mark 2:13-17; Matt 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32). In all three synoptic accounts, Jesus extends his call in the form of a command: "follow me" (ἀκολούθει μοι; cf. the call of Phillip in John 1:43).[14] The present imperative form indicates a continuous following and thus the phrase constitutes a call for Matthew to become a disciple of Jesus.[15] Again, this call does not imply merely being with Jesus and learning from him, but also joining in his mission. The call to Matthew is thus a call for him to join Jesus in his redemptive purpose. Unique to the narrative of the call of Matthew, however, is the table fellowship of Jesus with "sinners" (ἁμαρτωλούς, Mark 2:15; Matt 9:10; cf. Luke 5:29). Jesus calls not only Matthew, but also sinners like him to become disciples (Mark 2:15).[16] The call of Matthew thus provides not only a call to his special role as an apostle, but also as a "pattern for wider discipleship."[17] The command to "follow me" and thus to join Jesus in his mission is an expectation for all would-be disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Sending of the Twelve
and Seventy-Two Disciples

Jesus does not wait until the end of his ministry to include his disciples in his mission work. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, while training his disciples, Jesus

---

mustard seed, the fishing miracle depicts "the overabundant harvest of the kingdom of God." Craig L. Blomberg, "The Miracles as Parables," in *The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg, Gospel Perspectives, vol. 6 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 345. See also Craig L. Blomberg, "New Testament Miracles and Higher Criticism: Climbing up the Slippery Slope," *JETS* 27 (1984): 425-38.

[14]The gospel writers use the verb ἀκολουθέω in its various forms almost exclusively of the disciples. See for example, Mark 5:37; 6:1; 8:34; 10:21, 32. Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 81

[15]Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 219.

[16]Repentance is also implicit in this call to follow, which Luke makes clear by adding the phrase εἰς μετάνοιαν (Luke 5:32). See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, AB, vol. 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 589. On the significance of this table fellowship, see Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, NSBT, vol. 19 (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos and InterVarsity Press, 2005), 98-103.

[17]Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 385.

sends out the Twelve (Matt 10:5; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:2) and later seventy-two (Luke 10:1)

disciples on a "home mission trip." Again, the role of these disciples centers on being

messengers of the kingdom.[18] In all three Synoptics, Jesus gives the disciples "authority"

(ἐξουσίαν; Luke adds δύναμιν, "power") over demons and to heal diseases. Thus,

Ferdinand Hahn notes, Jesus "does not merely send his disciples out to spread the news

of what they have seen and heard, but he makes them take part in the same full authority

by which he himself works. They are not merely his messengers; they are his fellow

workers."[19]

With this authority, Jesus sends out the Twelve. Jesus assigns them a preaching

and healing ministry. The disciples are to do what Jesus himself has been doing (cf. Matt

4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:21-39; Luke 4:18, 38-44; 7:22; 8:1). Matthew records the extent of

their healing ministry as the disciples are to "Heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the*

lepers, [and] cast out demons" (Matt 10:8).[20] Both Matthew and Luke identify the content

of the message Jesus gives them. They are to "proclaim the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:2);

"the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 10:7).[21] In their proclamation, the disciples

preach essentially the same message that John the Baptist and Jesus have already been

preaching (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 9:35; Mark 1:4, 15).

Luke alone records the sending of seventy-two. Like the sending of the

Twelve, Jesus sends this group of disciples and assigns them a preaching and healing

---

[18]In each of the gospel accounts of these sendings, Jesus gives detailed instructions on what to do (Matt 10:5-42; Mark 6:8-11; Luke 9:3-5; 10:3-16). It is not our purpose to examine these instructions here. Rather, our focus is on the role of the disciples as Christ's messengers. The teaching of Jesus concerning the harvest will be examined in the next section. On the issue of the number of disciples sent, see Bruce M. Metzger, "Seventy or Seventy-Two Disciples?" *NTS* 51 (1958-59): 299-306.

[19]Ferdinand Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament*, SBT, vol. 47 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1965), 32-33.

[20]Davies and Allison comment, "The good news of the kingdom is spread by believers following the example of the Messiah." Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 2:170.

[21]For the meaning of "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," see Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:389-92.

ministry (Luke 10:9). The message that the seventy-two proclaim is similar to that of the Twelve in the Matthean account: "The kingdom of God has come near" (Luke 10:9, 11).

In these sendings, several factors indicate that Jesus does not send his disciples merely to proclaim a message without regard to results. Emphasis in these passages appears to be on the reception of their message. First, the message itself aims for a response. The proper response to the good news Jesus preaches and that he sends his disciples to proclaim is to "repent and believe" (Mark 1:15). Mark records that the purpose of their preaching is that people will repent (6:12).[22] That the Kingdom of God is near means that the "message must be accepted and acted on by those who received it."[23] Further, specific instructions for the mission emphasize response. Jesus instructs the disciples to stay and minister to those who receive the message (Luke 9:4; 10:7-9; Matt 10:11-13a; Mark 6:10) but move on when the people reject the message (Luke 9:5; 10:10-11; Matt 13:b-15).[24] Finally, the intent for the success of their mission is evident in the accompanying teachings of Jesus concerning "harvest."

Instructions about the Harvest

In the course of his teaching and healing ministry, Jesus instructs his disciples using a metaphor of harvest.[25] In the Synoptics, the teaching of Jesus concerning the

---

[22]Literally, ἵνα μετανοῶσιν "in order that they might repent" (my translation). The ἵνα + subjective construction here indicates a purpose clause.

[23]Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 200.

[24]While the report of the disciples does not include the success of the preaching mission (Mark 6:30; 9:10), the fact that the disciples were able to perform "many" miracles (Mark 6:13; cf. Luke 10:17) suggests at least some of the hearers accepted their message (cf. Mark 6:5; Matt 13:58). Contra Garland who suggests that Mark omits the successful report in order to prepare the reader for "the reality of rejection." David E. Garland, *Mark*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 242. Note: The instruction of Jesus to "shake the dust off your feet" will be discussed in chap. 4.

[25]The so-called "harvest passages" are important to our study, for it is from these passages that harvest theology gets its name, and it is to these passages that McGavran initially appeals as biblical evidence for the role of messengers. Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 40.

harvest occurs only in Matthew and Luke. Matthew links the harvest saying to the sending of the Twelve (Matt 10:1).[26] Luke links the material to the sending of seventy-two (Luke 10:1). John, in his gospel, records a similar harvest teaching connected with the ministry of Jesus in Samaria.

The texts of the harvest sayings in Matthew and Luke are identical, except for a minor variation in word order. Jesus states, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Matt 9:37-38; Luke 10:2). Generally, the harvest imagery in the Old Testament is eschatological in nature. Thus, the use of harvest imagery by Jesus likely refers to eschatological fulfillment. That which was future is now present in his own ministry. Further, in the Old Testament, harvest can have either positive or negative connotations. Often, harvest refers to judgment (Mic 4:11-13; Jer 25:30-31; Isa 63:1-6; Joel 3:13). Elsewhere, the harvest metaphor is used as a positive reference (Isa 27:12; Hos 6:11; cf. Ps 126:6). Here, the reference is positive. The eschatological salvation, which had been promised in the past, is being accomplished in the present and many are now ready to be gathered into the kingdom.[27]

The word θερισμός, translated "harvest," can refer to either the process of harvesting or the crop itself. Here the reference is to the crop, specifically, people.[28] Still, the word includes the idea of activity.[29] Jesus uses the concept of harvest metaphorically

---

[26]While Luke includes two sendings, one of the Twelve in Luke 9 and one of seventy-two in Luke 10, it is likely that Matthew combines the material and records only one sending.

[27]John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, WBC, vol. 35b (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 551; Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 2:149; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:846.

[28]Charette sees harvest in terms of "eschatological blessing" rather than a missionary call, that is, not a harvest *of* people but "for the people." Blaine Charette, "A Harvest for the People? An Interpretation of Matthew 9.37f," *JSNT* 38 (1990): 29-35. See also Eung Chun Park, *The Mission Discourse in Matthew's Interpretation*, WUNT, Reihe 2, vol. 81 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995), 84.

[29]Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 21.

for "people who are ripe for inclusion in the kingdom. In that situation it is necessary that something be done to bring them in."[30] The role of the laborers is *to bring in the harvest.*

Here, Jesus contrasts the abundance of the crop with the scarcity of the workers. The μὲν . . . δὲ construction sets up this contrast and emphasizes the need for more workers. There is urgency in the statement because harvest time demands that workers waste no time lest the crop spoil.[31] The harvest is too great for the present number of workers to reap, therefore, the workers must "beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Matt 9:38).

Certainly, the Twelve will be laborers. Jesus sends them out in Matthew 10:1. As they go out, "Those who petition the Lord of the harvest become the answer to their own prayer."[32] The same is true of the seventy-two in Luke 10:1. Though these disciples become laborers, however, the call to prayer indicates a need for the Lord to send out still others.[33] There is more work to do. The command of Jesus to pray recognizes the sovereignty of God in sending out workers. The role of the worker is to harvest, but the worker is not ultimately responsible for bringing in *all* the crops. Thus, in addition to bringing in the harvest, the role of harvesters includes praying to the Lord of the harvest whose responsibility it is to recruit workers and send them to the field.[34]

The Gospel of John also records a harvest saying of Jesus (John 4:35-38). The occasion for this saying follows a conversation Jesus has with a Samaritan woman (John 4:7-26). Upon the testimony of the woman, many Samaritans from the village begin

---

[30]Morris, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 239; see also France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 373.

[31]Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 551; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 309.

[32]James L. Bailey, "Church as Embodiment of Jesus' Mission (Matthew 9:36-10:39)," *CurTM* 30 (2003): 191; cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 181.

[33]Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 408.

[34]See Gundry, *Matthew*, 181; Morris, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 240.

coming to Jesus (4:30). While the disciples worry about whether Jesus has eaten anything (4:31-33), Jesus says that his "food" is "to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (4:34).

Jesus states the role of the disciples explicitly in this instance. He sent them "to reap" (θερίζειν, 4:38) a harvest. The saying itself has two parts. First, Jesus states, "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest" (4:35). The construction, "Do you not say . . . Behold, I say to you" (οὐχ ὑμεῖς λέγετε . . . ἰδοὺ λέγω ὑμῖν), indicates that Jesus wants to correct the perception the disciples have. In speaking of "four months," Jesus refers to the conventional wisdom that there is a time of waiting between sowing and harvest.[35] Significantly, Jesus challenges the idea that the time of spiritual harvest is in the future. Rather, the harvest is now and is before them. Jesus says, "lift up your eyes" (ἐπάρατε τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς), thus, inviting his disciples to see what they do not see.[36] The fields are "white" unto harvest. White (λευκαί) is not the color normally associated with harvest. Here, Jesus likely refers to the Samaritans in their white garments who were coming to Jesus.[37] When Jesus speaks here of doing the

---

[35]Several scholars have speculated about the origin of the saying, "There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest." For example, based on its "iambic line," Argyle argues that John 4:35 is likely a proverb of Greek origin. A. W. Argyle, "A Note on John 4:35," *ExpTim* 82 (1971): 247-48. See also C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 394-95. Bernard rejects the idea of Greek origin. J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Gospel According to St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 1:156. Others argue for a Semitic background (cf. Lev 26:5; Jer 51:33). See, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966, 1970), 1:182; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 160; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, HTCNT (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:449.

Others have sought the precise duration of the "four months." Some suggest, for example, from the Gezer calendar that the period between the end of planting and the beginning of harvest was four months. F. M. Braun, "L'Arrière-Fond Judaïque du Quatrième Évangile et la Communauté de L'Alliance," *RB* 62 (1955): 26; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: S.P.C.K., 1955), 202; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 278-79.

[36]Rogers and Rogers, *Linguistic and Exegetical Key*, 190.

[37]Morris, *Gospel According to St. John*, 279 n. 85. Also, George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*,

will of the Father, the immediate context is of these Samaritans who were coming to Jesus and who believed in him (4:39).

A second section of this saying speaks of the laborers of the harvest and their relationship to those who have previously sown. The text gives a sense of some urgency in the task by stating that the reaper is already receiving wages.[38] Further, there is eternal significance to the task as the one who reaps is "gathering fruit for life eternal" (4:36). In verse 37, Jesus employs another saying: "One sows and another reaps." This second saying appears in early Semitic sources and is generally a negative reference to the inequality of life (cf. Lev 26:16; Job 31:8; Mic 6:15).[39] Jesus applies this truth in verse thirty-eight. The disciples are not the ones who have sown the seed, yet they are sent to harvest its yield. "Others" have labored and the disciples are enjoying the fruit of their labor.[40] Several have attempted to identify the ἄλλοι to whom Jesus refers.[41] The proposal that seems to fit best with the harvest imagery is that ἄλλοι refers most

---

WBC, vol. 36 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 63; Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to St John*, 449. Note: there is a significant contrast here between the occasion in Matthew versus the occasion here in John. Immediately following the harvest teaching in Matt 9:37-38, Jesus instructs the disciples "do not enter any city of the Samaritans." Here, Jesus describes the Samaritans as the ripe harvest.

[38]Morris, *Gospel According to St. John*, 280.

[39]Beasley-Murray, *John*, 63-64; Köstenberger, *John*, 163.

[40]BDAG, 294. I am in general agreement with Ridderbos, who sees this phrase as indicating "the difference between the time before and after the fulfillment [of prophecy in Jesus], especially for those who with intense longing looked forward to that time of harvest." Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 171.

[41]Alfred Plummer argues that ἄλλοι, though plural in form, refers to Jesus alone. Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St John*, rev. and enl. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 90; See also Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to St John*, 1:453. Okure argues that ἄλλοι refers to Jesus and the Father. Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42*, WUNT, Reihe 2, vol. 31 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988), 163. Robinson argues that the others are primarily John the Baptist and his disciples. John A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962), 510-15; also, Morris, *Gospel According to St. John*, 281. Perhaps the most creative proposal is that of Cullman, who argues that that ἄλλοι refers to the mission of the Hellenists to the Samaritans in Acts 8:34 upon whose work the disciples would later build. Oscar Cullmann, "The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity," *JBL* 74 (1955): 221.

immediately to John the Baptist as "the last in a succession of prophets and of others who sowed the seed. . . . Jesus and his followers arrive at that moment in redemptive history when the eschatological harvest begins."[42] In any case, the point seems to be that the time of harvest has now come and the disciples are to be a part of it. The role of the disciples is to reap what others have planted and God has ripened.

The Commissioning of the Disciples

The call of the first disciples, the sendings of the Twelve and seventy-two, and the harvest teachings, are all precursors to the final commissioning of the disciples by Jesus. Each of the gospels and the book of Acts contain commissioning statements of Jesus to his followers.

John 20:21. In the harvest teaching in the Gospel of John, Jesus had explained to his disciples, "I sent you" (ἐγὼ ἀπέστειλα ὑμᾶς, John 4:38) to reap a harvest. At the end of his gospel, John records a similar commissioning statement of Jesus. Here, Jesus compares his own ministry to that of the disciples. Jesus sends his disciples "just as" (καθὼς) the Father has sent him.[43] In the same manner, Jesus states, "I also send you" (κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμας, John 20:21, cf. 17:18).[44] A transition in tense occurs here from the perfect to the present. The Father "has sent" (ἀπέσταλκεν) Jesus. The perfect tense indicates that the sending of Jesus by the Father has a continued significance in the present. Jesus then shifts to the present tense as he sends his disciples. The combined effect thus suggests that the ministry of the disciples will be a continuation of the ongoing

---

[42]D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 231; cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 180-84.

[43]NASB has "as" rather than "just as" here.

[44]Here, πέμπω carries essentially the same meaning as ἀποστέλλω. Köstenberger, *Missions of Jesus and the Disciples*, 97-106; also Morris, *Gospel According to St. John*, 846 n. 51.

ministry of Jesus.[45] This continuation becomes significant as one views the sending theme in the Gospel of John.

In the Gospel of John, the theme of sending is prominent and most often appears in the sending of Jesus by the Father. In this gospel, the Father sends the Son to speak the words of the Father (7:16; 8:26, 28; 12:49-50; 14:24; 17:8; cf. 3:34), to accomplish his works (5:36; 9:4), to do the Father's will (4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28-29) to follow his commands (10:18; 14:31) and, ultimately, to seek his glory (7:18).[46] Because Jesus sends his disciples just as the Father sent him, his disciples must follow this same pattern.[47] Jesus does not merely send his disciples on a mission. He sends them to carry on *his* mission and that mission concerns the salvation of people.[48] John himself carries out this sending work in the writing of his gospel: "These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

The role of the disciples in the Johannine commission thus centers on bringing people to faith in Christ. The sending of Jesus by the Father is for a specific purpose—the redemption of people. The disciples must follow that purpose in their mission as well.

---

[45]Beasley-Murray, *John*, 379-80. See also Bruce Milne, "'Even So Send I You': An Expository and Theological Reflection on John 20.21," in *Mission To the World: Essays to Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Ordination of George Beasley-Murray to the Christian Ministry*, ed. Paul Beasley-Murray (Didcot, Oxfordshire: Baptist Historical Society, 1991), 48.

[46]For a thorough explanation of the sending theme in John, see Köstenberger, *Missions of Jesus and the Disciples*, 180-97.

[47]Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, NSBT, vol. 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 222. "As Jesus did his Father's will, they have to do *Jesus'* will. As Jesus did his Father's works, they have to do *Jesus'* works. As Jesus spoke the words of the Father, they have to speak *Jesus'* words. Their relationship with the sender, Jesus, is to reflect Jesus' relationship with *his* sender."

[48]Carson comments, "What is central to the Son's mission – that he came as the Father's gift so that those who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life (3:16), experiencing new life as the children of God (1:12-13) and freedom from the slavery of sin because they have been set free by the Son of God (8:34-36) – must never be lost to view as the church defines her mission." Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 649.

When the disciples speak the words of Jesus, like him, they speak words that lead to eternal life (5:24; 6:63; 12:50). When the disciples are sent out by Jesus, they are sent to reap a harvest for eternal life (4:36, 39a; cf. 6:39-40) by one whose will is to save (3:17). As Jesus lays down his life (10:18; 3:16), his disciples are sent out with the message of eternal life. Obedience to Jesus is certainly in mind, but it is an obedience of loving discipleship and an obedience that brings others into that discipleship.[49]

While the role of the disciples leads to the salvation of people, there is a sense in this commission statement of absolute dependence upon God. The emphasis of the Johannine commission is not on those to whom the disciples will minister.[50] Rather, here, the emphasis is on the relationship between the sender and the sent. This relationship finds expression in two ways. First, the relationship the disciples emulate is one of dependence. "Just as Jesus, the Sent One, depends wholly and at every point on the Father, the Sender, so dependence on the Sender, Jesus, is the *modus operandi* of the disciples' mission."[51] The dependence of the disciples on Jesus is further demonstrated by the promised giving of the Spirit in verse 22. Second, the relationship between sender and sent is one of representative authority. The Father sent Jesus as his representative and with his own authority. So now, Jesus likewise sends the disciples as representatives of himself and confers on them his authority (cf. Matt 28:18).[52] Those sent out to bring others to faith go out in the authority of and in utter dependence upon the one who sends.

Luke 24:46-49. The Gospel of Luke also records a commissioning statement of Jesus. In this gospel, Jesus commissions his disciples during his final post-resurrection

---

[49]This idea is further confirmed if fruit bearing (15:8, 16) refers to the fruit of new converts as a result of the disciples' mission. See Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 523.

[50]Cf. 17:18 where Jesus sends the disciples "into the world" (εἰς τὸν κόσμον).

[51]Milne, "Even So Send I You," 49.

[52]Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1:379.

appearance. Here, Luke includes the commissioning verb in a series of aorist infinitives connected to the perfect indicative verb "it is written" (γέγραπται).[53] Fred Craddock notes, "To say that 'it is written' is the equivalent of saying, 'It has been God's plan all along.' . . . the mission to the world was God's plan from the beginning."[54] The first two infinitives describe the plan of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus. What the Scripture previously recorded has present significance in understanding these events. So also, the Scriptures declare what will come next. In the third infinitive, Jesus presents the plan of God that the gospel of repentance and forgiveness "would be proclaimed" (κηρυχθῆναι).[55] Just as the death and resurrection of Jesus is both a fulfillment of OT prophecy and an event that Jesus himself foretold, so the mission of the disciples will fulfill such prophecy as well.[56]

Here, Jesus describes the gospel the disciples will preach in terms of its results. The disciples will preach "repentance" (μετάνοιαν) and "forgiveness" (ἄφεσιν).[57] Repentance and forgiveness are consistent themes in Luke/Acts and often appear

---

[53]While the syntactically the verse does not have an imperatival sense, Legrand views v. 47 as a command noting "the infinitive is governed by the phrase 'it is written', which, in Lukan theology, evokes the dimensions and the imperative character of God's plan." L. Legrand, "The Missionary Command of the Risen Christ," *Indian Theological Studies* 23 (1986): 293 n. 2.

[54]Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 291; cf. Acts 10:43; 26:22-23.

[55]Thomas Moore shows a connection between the Lukan commission and the servant theme in Isaiah. The servant concept has not only Christological but also missiological significance. Jesus' disciples are to take up the mission of the servant and be a "light to the nations." Thomas S. Moore, "The Lucan Great Commission and the Isaianic Servant," *BibSac* 154 (1997): 47-60.

[56]John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*, SNTSMS, vol. 76 (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 139-47.

[57]This is not to say that the gospel message is devoid of content, as the message will be proclaimed in his name (ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ), that is, "on the basis of the name of Christ." Hans Bietenhard, "ὄνομα . . . ," in *TDNT*, ed. Friedrich Gerhard, vol. 5, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1967), 278.

together.[58] Further, Darrell Bock notes, "The goal of the message is that others might respond appropriately to Christ's activity: repent before God . . . For Luke, repentance is the summary term for response to the apostolic message."[59] Primary to the role of the disciples in this passage, then, is proclamation of the gospel leading to repentance and forgiveness of sin. Jesus describes this role in verse forty-eight as he states, "You are witnesses of these things" (ὑμεῖς μάρτυρες τούτον). "These things" refers back to the three infinitives of verses 46-47, as the disciples become both eyewitnesses of the Christ event as well as witnesses of its significance.[60]

The disciples do not have to fulfill their role in their own power, however. Jesus tells the disciples he is sending "the promise of My Father" (τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρός). Surely, Jesus is referring here to the coming Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:4-5).[61] The disciples must wait until they receive "power from on high" (ἐξ ὕψους δύναμιν; cf. Acts 1:8) to fulfill their role. Thus, "The disciples are not to attempt the task of evangelism with their own meager resources, but are to await the coming of the Spirit."[62]

Matthew 28:18-20. Of the commissioning passages, none is more often cited among evangelicals than the so-called "Great Commission" text in Matthew 28:18-20.

---

[58]Repentance: Luke 3:3, 8; 5:32; 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 16:30; 17:3-4; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 13:24; 17:30; 19:4; 20:21; 26:18-20. Forgiveness: Luke 1:77; 3:3; 5:20-26; 7:40-50; 11:4; 12:10; 17:3-4; 23:34; Acts 2:28; 5:31; 8:22; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18. Appearing together: Luke 3:3; 17:3-4; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 8:22; 26:18-20.

[59]Bock, *Luke*, 2:1939. Bock lists the following references: Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 13:24; 17:30; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20.

[60]The concept of "witness" is an important theme in Acts (1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15, 20; 26:16). The meaning of μάρτυς will be examined in the discussion of Acts 1:8 below.

[61]For a detailed study, see John H. Sieber, "The Spirit as 'The Promise of My Father' in Luke 24:49," in *Sin, Salvation and the Spirit: Commemorating the Fiftieth Year of The Liturgical Press*, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979), 271-78.

[62]Morris, *Luke*, 374. Cf. Jack Dean Kingsbury, "Luke 24:44-49," *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 174.

The amount of writing on this passage is immense.[63] Eckhard Schnabel provides an outline of the passage that is helpful in seeing its flow and in discovering the role of those Jesus commissions. Schnabel identifies a threefold structure: the word of authority, the word of commission, and the word of promise.[64]

The word of authority is the statement of Jesus that all authority (πᾶσα ἐξουσία) has been given to him. Many scholars rightly see here an allusion to the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14.[65] W. D. Davies and Dale Allison describe this allusion as "an overwhelming depiction of the Son of Man's triumphant victory and consequent authority (both given to him by God the Father)."[66] The use of οὖν in verse 19 indicates that Jesus gives his commission on the basis of that authority. One significant element of the passage is the four-fold use of πᾶς, of which this is the first. The use of πᾶς here signals a "universal perspective" in which "The exalted Son of Man is Lord over all people and over all things, over heaven and earth and therefore over all nations."[67] Thus, Jesus not only has authority over the disciples, but over the "all nations" (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) to whom they are to go. Further, Jesus does not merely speak of his authority as the basis of his right to commission the disciples. Rather, Jesus sends the disciples out as emissaries of his divine authority.

Having established his authority, Jesus proceeds with a word of commission. As is commonly noted, verse 18 contains only one verb that is imperative in form. The

---

[63]For an extensive bibliography on Matt 28:16-20, see Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 878-80; also, Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1258-60.

[64]Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:353.

[65]See especially, Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3:682-83; also Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:353-54; Köstenberger and O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 102; Keener, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 716; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 298; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 431; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1112.

[66]Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3:688.

[67]Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:354.

remaining verbs are participles. This fact has caused some to interpret the aorist passive participle πορευθέντες in the sense of "as you go" with the implication that the Great Commission is to be carried out wherever you are.[68] Cleon Rogers, however, convincingly argues that πορευθέντες carries imperatival force. First, Rogers notes similar constructions where an aorist participle precedes an imperative. In most cases, the participle becomes part of the command. Further, this construction is quite common in Matthew (cf. Matt 2:8; 5:24; 11:4; 21:2; 17:27; 28:7). Finally, an imperatival interpretation makes the most sense of the passage. Rogers comments, "Without the going, the making disciples is not possible, and especially when 'all nations' is the object." Thus, one should interpret πορευθέντες with imperatival force and thus the command includes that the disciples must go. One aspect of the role of gospel agents, then, is an intentional going.[69]

In the Matthean commission, "make disciples" (μαθητεύσατε) is the only verb that is imperative in form.[70] The verb itself is rather rare in the New Testament, occurring only two other times in Matthew and once in Acts (Matt 13:52; 27:57; Acts 14:21). Here, Jesus essentially tells his disciples "to make more of what they are themselves."[71] That is, as disciples, they are to make more disciples. This new commission by Jesus is a shift from his previous sending out of the disciples to "preach" (κηρύσσετε, Matt 10:7).

---

[68]See for example, Robert Duncan Culver, "What is the Church's Commission? Some Exegetical Issues In Matthew 28:16-20," *BibSac* 125 (1968): 243-53; J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 46.

[69]Cleon L. Rogers, "The Great Commission," *BibSac* 130 (1973): 262; also see 260-62.

[70]David Kuske argues for the translating μαθητεύσατε in Matt 28:19 as "make disciples." He is careful to note, however, the distinction between the human part in making disciples and the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion. David Kuske, "Exegetical Brief: The Meaning of μαθητεύσατε in Matthew 28:19," *WLQ* 94 (1997): 115-21. For a discussion of the meanings of discipleship in the New Testament, see the Hans Kvalbein, "Go Therefore and Make Disciples: The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament," *Themelios* 13 (1988): 48-53. On the concept of discipleship outside the Gospels and Acts, see A. Boyd. Luter, Jr., "Discipleship and the Church," *BibSac* 137 (1980): 267-73.

[71]Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 162.

Bosch notes, "The task of the disciples is no longer merely that of 'preaching', but of enlisting people into their fellowship."[72] The fact that the passage uses the verb "make disciples" rather than "preach the gospel," combined with the following participles, "baptizing" and "teaching," indicates that more than merely preaching the gospel is in mind here. Further, Daniel Ulrich points out that the other occurrences of μαθητεύω indicate both the initial call of persons to discipleship (Matt 27:57; Acts 14:21) and their training as disciples (Matt 13:52).[73] The verb implies not only proclamation, but also the results of that proclamation.

That μαθητεύσατε goes beyond mere proclamation of the gospel is further evidenced by its occurrence in Acts 14:21. In this occurrence, the only other transitive use of the verb, announcing the gospel (εὐαγγελισάμενοί) and making disciples (μαθητεύσαντες) occur as separate acts. Joachim Gnilka rightly concludes, "Confrontation with the word of the Gospel only is not sufficient."[74] The role of human agents of the gospel in the Great Commission is not a proclamation ambivalent toward results, but an evangelism that results in persons becoming disciples of Jesus Christ.

The remaining present active participles, "baptizing" (βαπτίζοντες) and "teaching" (διδάσκοντες), describe how the command to make disciples will be carried out.[75] "Make disciples" includes both baptism and teaching—both initial conversion as well as discipleship of new converts.[76] Ulrich suggests that the reference to baptism

---

[72]David J. Bosch, "The Scope of Mission," *IRM* 73 (1984): 24.

[73]Daniel W. Ulrich, "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew," *CBQ* 69 (2007): 71.

[74]Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 2nd ed., HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1986, 1988), 2:509, translation mine.

[75]Rogers, "Great Commission," 262. For a historical survey of the interpretation of "teaching them to obey all things," see John Jefferson Davis, "'Teaching Them to Observe All That I Have Commanded You': The History of the Interpretation of the 'Great Commission' and Implications for Marketplace Ministries," *ERT* 25 (2001): 65-80.

[76]It is precisely at this point that we must differ with McGavran. In *Bridges of God*, McGavran views μαθητεύσατε and διδάσκοντες as separate commands making up successive "stages" of

presupposes the success of the mission.[77] It is likewise clear from the addition of these participles that "make disciples" goes beyond mere proclamation and includes a response to the results of that proclamation as well. The role of the disciples is not merely preaching, but a preaching that results in new disciples who are then baptized into the church and are trained in the teachings of the Word of God. The combination of this aorist command followed by present participles implies both that the command is "definite and urgent"[78] and yet is an ongoing process in which more and more people are made disciples of Jesus Christ.

A final section of the Matthean commission provides a word of promise: "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This final phrase of Matthew's gospel is emphatic, including both an introductory clause, "and behold!" (καὶ ἰδού), and the use of the personal pronoun ἐγώ. Jesus promises to be with his disciples "even to the end of the age" (ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). Thus, Jesus promises his presence with the disciples as they do their work. Davies and Allison note that the sense of the phrase may imply not only the presence of Christ but assistance from him.[79] In any case, whether Jesus promises his presence or divine assistance, it is clear that Jesus does not send out the disciples to complete this mission on their own. "He will be in their midst,

---

Christianization. He thus coins the terms "discipling" and "perfecting" as separate stages of bringing peoples to faith in Christ and *then* working to bring about ethical change through relationship to God. McGavran maintains this terminology throughout his writing. While there may be some sociological truth to the process McGavran describes, his classification is exegetically flawed. Making disciples and teaching are not separate acts. Rather, teaching is part of the process of making disciples. See Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: World Dominion Press, 1955), 13-16. For various critiques of McGavran's view, see Charles Van Engen, *The Growth of the True Church* (Amsterdam: Ropodi, 1981), 515-17; Bosch, "Scope of Mission," 17-32; Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way* (New York: Friendship Press, 1987), 35-36.

[77]Ulrich, "Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew," 71.

[78]Rogers, "Great Commission," 262.

[79]Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3:687.

though unseen, and will empower them to fulfill the commission he has given them."[80]
Jesus commissions the disciples, giving them the role of making disciples. At the same
time, it is clear that the disciples are to go under Christ's authority and complete the work
with his divine presence.

Summary

Thus far, we have examined the role of messengers in the Gospels. When Jesus
initially calls his disciples, he calls them in order to send them out. Their role is to be
proclaimers of his kingdom message. The disciples are to be followers of Christ, joining
him in his redemptive purpose. As followers, they not only take Jesus as their teacher, but
accept his mission as their own. To become a disciple is to be an apprentice who would
carry on the same work of the master. That work is to become fishers of people. The
disciples will not merely go out with a message, but they will catch persons in an
abundant harvest. Success is both promised and expected.

During their apprenticeship, Jesus sends out the Twelve as well as a larger
group of seventy-two. Jesus sends them with his power and authority. Even more, Jesus
sends them with a divine message of repentance. This message is the same message he
himself has been preaching; a message that his hearers are to receive. The disciples are
not to preach haphazardly, but aim for a response. Where people reject the message, the
disciples are to go to those who would receive it.

During these sendings, Matthew and Luke record that Jesus also gives
instructions concerning a harvest. Likewise, John records a similar teaching in response
to his ministry in Samaria. The disciples are to pray for more laborers whose role is to
bring in the harvest. The task is urgent because of the abundance of the crop and the
scarcity of workers. The harvest belongs to God, and only he can send workers to harvest

---

[80]Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 889.

the ripe fields. The role assigned to those he sends is to reap the harvest. God has ripened the fields; it is the responsibility of sent laborers to reap it.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus commissions his disciples. John records that just as the Father had sent out Jesus, now Jesus sends his disciples. Again, Jesus sends them out with his authority and with his mission—the salvation of people. The disciples are to go out in complete dependence upon God and, in his authority, bring persons to faith. In the account in Luke, Jesus sends them with a message of repentance and forgiveness of sin. They are to proclaim this message not in their own strength, however, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Matthean commission, the role of the disciples is most clear. Jesus sends them out to minister on the basis of his own authority. That authority extends to all the nations to whom he sent his disciples. The disciples are emissaries of that authority. Jesus commands his disciples to go and fulfill the role he has given them. That role is to "make disciples." They are not merely to proclaim a message, but to fulfill a mission of enlisting others as followers of Christ. They do not fulfill their role in their own authority or their own power. Nevertheless, their role is not mere proclamation, but a proclamation that results in new disciples who are then baptized and enfolded into his church.

In the gospels, then, Jesus has a role for his disciples to fulfill. This role is evident in the initial call of the disciples, in their instruction and training, and in their eventual commissioning. The role of disciples in the Gospels is to go out with the authority and in the power of God, and through proclamation of his message, to make disciples of those in whom God is working. The role of disciples is to reap God's harvest.

The Role of Human Agents in the Book of Acts

The book of Acts records the early years of the church and the ministry of the first messengers of the gospel. In this account by Luke, the role of messengers is largely bound up in the concept of "witness." The theme first appears in a commission statement

by Christ in Acts 1:8 and continues throughout the narrative. An examination of this commission as well as the descriptions and self-understandings of these early messengers provides insight into the role of these messengers as witnesses of the gospel. This role includes an attestation to the facts of the Christ event, the theological significance of those events, and the intended reception of the witness by the hearer. Further, this witness is to occur through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Commission of the Disciples in Acts

The first chapter of Acts begins with a second Lukan commission statement of Jesus in the final post-resurrection appearance of Christ. The commission passage (Acts 1:4-8) shares some similarities to the one in the Gospel of Luke. The similarities reflect a unity between Luke and Acts and identify the "promise" and "power" in Luke 24:49 as the Holy Spirit.[81] Jesus commissions his disciples in verse eight. The context of this commission is the response of Jesus to a question by his disciples concerning the time of the coming kingdom. Jesus refocuses their attention from end events to their missionary role.

Jesus begins by stating, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Jesus has already promised the Holy Spirit (1:5), and now adds that with the promised Spirit they will receive "power" (δύναμιν). Power, here, refers to spiritual enabling for witness. This power includes divine enabling in proclamation (2:14ff.; 4:31, 33; 14:3; cf. 6:10; Rom 1:16-17).[82] At the same time, power in Acts also

---

[81]The phrase "you are to stay in the city" (Luke 24:49) is similar to "He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem" (Acts 1:4). Likewise, "I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you" (Luke 24:49) resembles "wait for what the Father had promised" (Acts 1:4) and is identified here as the "Holy Spirit" (1:5). Finally, "clothed with power from on high" is parallel to "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). See also John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 85.

[82]Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 63; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introductionand Commentary*, AB, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 205.

sometimes refers to the power to perform signs and wonders as an additional "witness" to the truth of the gospel message (Acts 3:12; 4:7; 6:8; 10:38; 19:11). In any case, Jesus makes it clear that the disciples must wait for the power of the Spirit in order to fulfill their role in mission.[83] As the book of Acts unfolds, one observes this promise of the Spirit fulfilled, and his enabling power for not only the eleven, but other believers as well.[84]

The phrase "you shall be My witnesses" (ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες) indicates the role the disciples will play in the Lord's plan. The concept of "witness" is prevalent in Acts.[85] Throughout Acts, μάρτυρες refers to "witnesses who bear a divine message."[86] The most obvious aspect of the role of the apostles as μάρτυρες is that of being eyewitnesses of the resurrection as well as the ministry of Jesus. Luke, in fact, uses μάρτυς and its derivatives in this way in several places (1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 10:39; 13:30-31). Thus, in one sense, the ministry of the apostles is unique as they are not only eyewitnesses of Jesus, but divinely chosen by him as official representatives of that witness. In that sense, the role of the Twelve includes "a once-for-all unrepeatable

---

[83]It is worth noting that Bosch argues that the role of witness, because it is empowered and dependent upon the Spirit, indicates that "in a sense, they are not really called to accomplish anything, only to give testimony to what they have seen and heard and touched." David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 116. It does not naturally follow, however, that dependence upon the Spirit negates personal responsibility of the witness. In a related example, dependence upon the Holy Spirit to draw a person to Christ does not negate the responsibility of that person to repent and believe. Likewise, dependence upon the Spirit in sanctification does not negate the responsibility of the believer to grow in Christ-likeness. Similarly, the role of the Holy Spirit in witness does not necessarily negate the responsibility (if indeed that responsibility exists) of the witness to reap a harvest.

[84]Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:392-93. Schnabel notes the following texts here: Acts 6:3, 5; 9:31; 11:24, 28; 13:52; 15:28; 21:4, 11.

[85]Of the 35 occurrences of μάρτυς in the New Testament, 13 are in Acts. Occurrences of μαρτ- family words in Acts include: Μάρτυς (13 times) 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 6:13; 7:58; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15; 22:20; 26:16. Μαρτυρέω (11 times) 6:3; 10:22; 10:43; 13:22; 14:3; 15:8; 16:2; 22:5, 12; 23:11; 26:5. Διαμαρτύρομαι (9 times) 2:40; 8:25; 10:42; 18:5; 20:21, 23, 24; 23:11; 28:23. Μαρτύριον (2 times) 4:33; 7:44. Μαρτύρομαι (2 times) 20:26; 26:22. Μαρτυρία (1 time) 22:18.

[86]BDAG, 619; BAGD, 494.

witness."[87] However, it is also clear that the Twelve are not the only witnesses of Christ. Luke uses the noun μάρτυς also of Stephen (22:20) and Paul (22:15; 26:16).[88] Additionally, the Old Testament prophets (10:43; cf. 26:22) the Holy Spirit (5:32) and God himself (14:3; 15:8; cf. 14:17) all "bear witness" (μαρτυρέω) of Christ. While at times Luke employs the word μάρτυς to signify the special role of the Twelve, Luke does not limit the concept of witness to these men.

Similarly, the concept of bearing witness is not limited to that of "eye-witness." In various places, Luke may employ witness terminology to refer the facts of the Christ event, the significance of the event, or both. Thus, in some places, the word family refers both to the facts of the event and its meaning (2:40; 5:32; 8:25; 10:38-43; 22:15, 18; 26:16-18) and still others to only the significance of the message (18:5; 20:21, 24, cf. verse 27; 23:11; 26:22; 28:23).

This witness theme can be further understood in its relation to the servant of the Old Testament. Dennis Johnson shows that Luke ties witness to the servant theme in Isaiah. Just as the Spirit enables the people in the time of Isaiah to be witnesses to the redemptive plan of God, so in Acts, the Holy Spirit empowers believers to be witnesses of the saving purpose of God through Jesus Christ. On the one hand, the Apostles themselves give eyewitness testimony. "On the other hand, this does not mean that those who are not apostolic eyewitnesses must be silent concerning these great events. As the

---

[87]Andrew C. Clark, *Parallel Lives: The Relation of Paul to the Apostles in the Lucan Perspective*, PBTM, vol. 4 (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2001), 45.

[88]Michael Green argues that the term witness is reserved in Acts for those who had personal encounters with the risen Jesus. Stephen and Paul are thus included not because they were disciples during earthly ministry of Jesus, but because they had seen the risen Lord; Paul at his conversion, Stephen at his death. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 72. See also Robert P. Casey, "Μάρτυς," in *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, vol. 5 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1933), 32. See also Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 86-88. Maddox argues persuasively that witness is not a technical term in Acts. He goes too far, however, in his suggestion that Paul is part of a second generation of believers. Ibid.,75; cf. Clark, *Parallel Lives*, 24-25. For a discussion of how μάρτυς came to be used for "martyr," see Casey, "Μάρτυς," 30-37.

Lord in Isaiah summoned his people to be his witnesses, so now all believers, empowered

by the Spirit, can speak the word of God boldly (Acts 4:31)."[89] The closest parallel to

Acts 1:8 is Isaiah 43:10, 12 where the "people of God become witnesses to the salvation

of God when the new age arrives."[90] Thus, the role Jesus assigns his disciples in Acts 1:8

is to be witnesses both of the facts of his ministry, death and resurrection but also their

significance for salvation.[91]

The role of witness also carries with it a concern for results. That is, the

concept of witness includes a concern and aim that the hearers accept the presented

message. In its use outside the New Testament, with its background as law-court

terminology, the μαρτ- word group includes the idea of attesting to certain facts about the

gospel as well as "views or truths of which the speaker is convinced."[92] When applied to

the gospel, especially in its use by Luke, μάρτυς includes an appeal that these truths be

recognized by the hearer. Hermann Strathmann notes,

> [W]itness cannot be borne to these facts unless their significance is also indicated
> and an emphatic appeal is made for their recognition in faith. This, too, is from
> God's standpoint a fact. But it is a fact on a different level from that of the facts in
> the story of Jesus. It cannot be confirmed by witnesses; it can only be believed and
> then attested by proclamation. The distinctiveness of the object referred to in this
> witness implies also that the declaration of specific facts and the believing,
> confessing, evangelizing confession of their significance are *indissolubly united in*

---

[89]Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 45; also 34-45. Johnson argues that Acts 1:8 continues a pattern in which Luke follows the Servant theme of Isaiah. Johnson notes parallels in Acts 1:8 with the LXX including "Spirit comes upon you" (Isa 32:15), "you shall be my witnesses" (Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8), and "to the ends of the earth" (Isa 45:22; 49:6). Johnson, *Message of Acts*, 35-36. For more on the Isaianic background of Acts 1:8, see also I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 528; David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, WUNT, Reihe 2, vol. 130 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2000), 91-93; Moore, "Lucan Great Commission," 47-60.

[90]Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, 93; cf. Marshall, "Acts," 528.

[91]David J. Graham, "Witness," in *DLNT*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1204. ; Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 133, 142, 144.

[92]Hermann Strathmann, "Μάρτυς . . . ," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. 4, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1967), 478.

the concept of witness. The witness to facts and the witness to truth are one and the same – the unavoidable result of the fact that the Gospel presents a historical revelation.[93]

Witness in the book of Acts is not merely a recollection of events, with no regard to whether or not people believe the message. Rather, the messengers witness of something they believe and seek to convince others to believe as well. They witness of something so significant that they cannot stop speaking about what they have seen and heard (4:20). Allison Trites notes, "witnesses are passionately involved in the case they seek to represent. They have been apprehended by it, and so they have an inner compulsion to plead its merits with others."[94] Mere obedience to a command is not the primary motivation of gospel witnesses. Rather, witnesses desire to persuade others to accept the truth and significance of their message. Thus, in Acts, to be a witness is not a dispassionate testimony of facts, "but a testimony to lead the Jews, and later the Gentiles, to faith in Christ."[95] The descriptions of the apostles and Paul in the book of Acts demonstrate this kind of witness.

Descriptions of Witnessing
Activity in Acts

Luke describes the activity of the disciples and others as they act as witnesses of the gospel. While Luke does not provide a description of the role of these mission agents, he does provide historical descriptions of evangelistic activity. A quick survey of some of the materials provides useful insight into our research question. Throughout the narrative, the concept of witness works itself out in a number of ways.

---

[93]Ibid., 492; emphasis mine.

[94]Lothar Coenen and Allison A. Trites, "Witness, Testimony," in *NIDNTT*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1986), 1049.

[95]Trites, *New Testament Concept of Witness*, 144; cf. 122. See also Allison A. Trites, "The Importance of Legal Scenes and Language in the Book of Acts," *NovT* 16 (1974): 278-84.

Witness as proclamation. One of the primary ways that the apostles and others witness is through proclamation of the gospel. Luke provides one such example of this sort of witness in Acts 2:40. In this passage, after recording the sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost, Luke offers a summary statement of his preaching activity. Luke states, "with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them." The words "He solemnly testified" (διαμαρτύρατο) and "kept on exhorting" (παρακάλει) are similar and should not be distinguished too sharply.[96] Nevertheless, here, the word παρακάλει helps to show that Peter's witness includes persuasion. Peter not only witnesses by proclaiming the facts of the resurrection, he exhorts them to respond. Bock further suggests that the change in tense from the aorist διαμαρτύρατο to the imperfect παρακάλει means that "the speech as a whole is a testimony that includes exhortation throughout." Thus, he concludes, testimony includes both the facts of the gospel and an appeal to respond.[97]

Witness as empowered testimony. Another aspect of witness is its dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit. An example of witness as empowered testimony appears in Acts 4:33. In another of his summary statements, Luke states, "And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." The precise meaning of the phrase "with great power" (δυνάμει μεγάλη) is difficult to determine. It could refer to "mighty works," "the power of a new life in the believing community" (cf. v. 32), or "God's presence and the proof of divine enablement."[98] The latter view would indicate that the witness of the disciples is not merely a human presentation of the facts of the resurrection, but is empowered by the

---

[96]Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:156.

[97]Bock, *Luke*, 145.

[98]F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 160; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in vol. 9 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 311; Bock, *Acts*, 214. I favor the latter view here.

Spirit of God. Whatever the source of the power, however, it is evident by its connection with the disciples' "giving testimony" (ἀπεδίδουν τὸ μαρτύριον) that this power affected the witness of the apostles.[99] In their role as witnesses, their testimony is not mere presentation of facts but "powerful, convincing speech."[100] Further, Luke notes the favor of God in their witness: "abundant grace was upon them all."[101]

Witness as persuasion. A third aspect of witness in Acts is the element of persuasion. While this concept will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, we will examine here in its relationship to witness. Persuasion is most typically associated with Pauline witness. An example appears in Acts 18:4-5 (cf. 17:2-4, 17-18; 18:19; 19:8). In this case, Luke records that Paul "was reasoning" (διελέγετο) and "trying to persuade" (ἔπειθέν)[102] Jews and Greeks in the local synagogue. Paul had been conducting this ministry each Sabbath. When Silas and Timothy arrive, Paul is able to devote himself more fully to word of the gospel. Luke describes his activity as "solemnly testifying" (διαμαρτυρόμενος) that Jesus is the Christ. The action, both before and after the arrival of his colleagues, is the same. After their arrival, however, Paul is able to devote himself more fully to the task. The juxtaposition of the verbs διαμαρτύρομαι with διελέγομαι and πείθω shows the relationship, at least for Paul, between witnessing and persuading. Acts 28:23 provides a similar example. As many persons flock to him to hear his message, Luke records that Paul was both "solemnly testifying" (διαμαρτυρόμενος) and

---

[99]Marshall argues, "The point is that they spoke in such a way under the guidance of the Spirit that their words were effective in leading other people to faith in Jesus." Marshall, *Acts of the Apostles*, 108.

[100]Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:254.

[101]While it is possible that χαρίς here could mean favor of people in the sense that their preaching well received, it more likely refers to the favor of God upon their mission (cf. Luke 2:40). Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:254; also, Marshall, *Acts of the Apostles*, 109; Bock, *Luke*, 214.

[102]The verb may be conative here, as Bock suggests; also in 28:23. Bock, *Acts*, 578, 754. There is nothing in the form itself, however, to suggest a conative sense. Thus, HCSB translates, "He persuaded them."

"trying to persuade" (πείθων) them. The role of Paul as witness includes the persuasion of those who heard the message.

Witness as disciple-making. Finally, Luke describes witness in terms of the making of disciples. Acts 14:21 contains a transitional summary statement. Luke records that, in their preaching ministry, Paul and Barnabas "had made many disciples" (μαθητεύσαντες ἱκανοὺς). The verb μαθητεύω is a *hapax legomenon* for Luke and occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only three times in Matthew; most notably in Matthew 28:19. Detwiler thus speculates that Luke is both aware of the Matthean commission and intentionally uses the word here.[103] Whether or not the commission is in view, Luke speaks of the success of their ministry. Luke employs a word that shows the role of Paul and Barnabas in not only preaching but in the result of that preaching, the making of disciples. The following two verses then show that nurturing believers and establishing churches is a part of their role as well (cf. Matt 28:19-20).[104] Making disciples includes not only initial conversion, but also the growth of believers.

The Self-Understanding of the Apostles
Concerning Their Roles

The book of Acts also contains statements of the apostles and Paul that are helpful for discovering how they understand their role as agents of the gospel message. In the first half of the book, Luke focuses on the Twelve and, especially, Peter. Of course, besides the Twelve, there were many witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22; cf. 1 Cor 15:6-8). Even those who were not eyewitnesses do in fact witness based on the testimony of these first disciples and their own experience of Christ. For Luke, however,

---

[103]David F. Detwiler, "Paul's Approach to the Great Commission in Acts 14:21-23," *BibSac* 152 (1995): 35.

[104]Ibid., 35-41; cf. Luter, "Discipleship and the Church."

the Twelve have a special role among the eyewitnesses of the resurrection. Often, Luke's

use of μαρτύς signifies this special role. Robert Maddox explains,

> The Twelve Apostles had the special, unrepeatable function of bearing witness to
> their own experience of the transition from the Lord's earthly life through his cross,
> resurrection, and ascension to his heavenly enthronement. After them the whole
> church, represented by the great preachers and missionaries, like Stephen and
> especially Paul, had to carry the same testimony on throughout the world.[105]

This special role is seen clearly in Acts 1:21-22 (cf. 2:32). Many of the post-resurrection

followers had been with Christ from the beginning and had experienced first-hand his

teaching, ministry, death and resurrection. Among these, to replace Judas, "one of these

must become a witness with us of His resurrection." To be a witness, in the way that

Peter describes here, surely means more than merely being an eyewitness. Those of

whom Peter speaks were already eyewitnesses, but would now take on a special role.[106]

A larger group were witnesses (cf. Luke 24:48), but among them the Twelve had an

particular apostolic role.[107] While the charge Jesus gives in Acts 1:8 is "a charge which

remains valid for all readers of Luke's work,"[108] the disciples understood their position as

unique.

---

[105]Maddox, *Purpose of Luke-Acts*, 75.

[106]C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2nd ed.,
ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, 1998), 1:102. Note the understanding of Paul concerning the unique
role of the Twelve in Acts 13:31-32. Here, at least, the concept of witness distinguishes Paul from the
Twelve. Paul is a preacher of the gospel but not one of the witnesses of the Christ event. See Maddox,
Purpose of Luke-Acts, 75. Though Paul elsewhere identifies himself as a witness of the resurrection (1 Cor
9:1; 15:8), in this passage he includes witness of the life and ministry of Jesus as well. See Polhill, *Acts*,
303.

[107]Joseph Plevnik, "'The Eleven and Those with Them' According to Luke," *CBQ* 40 (1978):
209-11. Elsewhere, Plevnik argues that this "witness" had to be chosen from among those who had been
with Jesus before and after the resurrection and had heard directly from Jesus his explanation from the
Scriptures. Joseph Plevnik, "The Eyewitnesses of the Risen Jesus in Luke 24," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 100-01.
For further discussion of the unique role of the Twelve as apostles, see Colin G. Kruse, "Apostle," in *DJG*,
ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992),
27-33.

[108]John T. Squires, "The Plan of God in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel:
The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans,
1998), 38.

A similar recognition of the special role of the Twelve occurs in chapter six. Here, the apostles instruct the church to choose men of good report to manage the distribution of support for the widows. The reasoning given is so that the apostles do not have to give up preaching (6:2) and can thus devote themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (6:4). There would be other preachers and other witnesses. Indeed, both Stephen and Philip, two of the seven, preach the gospel. Luke later identifies Stephen as a witness (μαρτύς, Acts 22:20).[109] Still, the selection of these seven shows that one of the primary roles of the apostles is witness and evangelism.[110]

As has been previously noted, the idea of "witness" carries with it not only attestation to the facts concerning the ministry of Jesus and his death and resurrection, but the significance of those events for salvation. Witness as a substantiation of facts is clearly the understanding of the apostles in Acts 10:39-43. In his address to Cornelius and those who had gathered in his house, Peter states "We are witnesses [μάρτυρες] of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem." Peter and the other apostles (ἡμεῖς) are in view here as among those who witnessed "all the things he did." These "things" include the healing ministry of Jesus (10:38) and his teaching in Galilee and Jerusalem, as well as his death and resurrection (10:39-40).[111] Later, Peter affirms their credentials as witnesses: they were "chosen beforehand by God" and are those "who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (10:41). Thus, this passage

---

[109]Capper suggests that the role of the seven in Acts 6:1-6 was as leaders for the newly emerging group of Hellenistic Christians and included both teaching and care of this new community. Brian J. Capper, "The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods," in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans), 34.

[110]I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 126; Polhill, *Acts*, 181.

[111]The phrase "land of the Jews" (τῇ χώρᾳ τῶν Ἰουδαίων) is a reference to Galilee and Judea. See Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 465.

demonstrates the specific role of the Twelve as they are actual "witnesses" of the events.[112]

Another sense of witness is present here as well, however. The preaching of the events is good news precisely because of the significance of those events for salvation. For that reason, Peter states, they are to "preach to the people" (κηρύξαι τῷ λαῷ) and "solemnly to testify" (διαμαρτύρασθαι) about Jesus (10:42). The preaching and testimony of the apostles includes not only the event but also its significance. The ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus demonstrate that he is "the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead" (10:42). The apostles are witnesses not only of the events that occurred, but of the person and role of Jesus himself.[113] These events had significance and the apostles were witnesses of that significance. Their role as witnesses, then, is not only the special role of eyewitness, but as proclaimers and witnesses of the significance of the gospel.

A third sense of witness, a concern for results, is also present in this passage. The purpose of the witnessing act of Peter is for the salvation of those who hear the message. In this case, Peter also presents another set of witnesses as "all the prophets bear witness" (πάντες οἱ προφῆται μαρτυροῦσιν) of the salvation message: "that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (v. 43).[114] The phrase "everyone who believes" (πάντα τὸν πιστεύοντα) is an indication that through this combined witness God offers salvation and that offer now extends to the

---

[112]Clark notes that one of the things that makes the witness of the Apostles different from witnesses that came after them was that they were in the position "to be able to confirm that the resurrected Jesus was the same man who had preached and healed." Clark, *Parallel Lives*, 121 n. 28.

[113]On the role of Jesus as judge, see Mark A. Seifrid, "Judgment," in *DLNT*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 623-24.

[114]Walls offers an interesting suggestion and sees here a link to the story of Jonah. Luke, he suggests, has the Jonah narrative in mind when he retells the Cornelius story. Thus, Jonah is one of "the prophets" who bear witness to the gospel and the bringing of salvation to the Gentiles. Robert W. Wall, "Peter, 'Son' of Jonah: The Conversion of Cornelius in the Context of Canon," *JSNT* 29 (1987): 79-90.

Gentiles as well.[115] Cornelius had sent for Peter to hear this message from him (v. 22). In sending for Peter, Cornelius expected him to bring a message by which he and his household would be saved (11:14). Further, at the Jerusalem council, Peter recounts that God had ordained "that by [his] mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe" (Acts 15:7). It seems evident that Peter expected that his preaching would result in the salvation of these Gentiles.[116] Peter witnesses with both an intention for Cornelius to accept his message and an expectation that he would do so. The role of Peter as a witness is not merely to recall events and explain their meaning, but to bring salvation through his witness.

The Self-Understanding of Paul
Concerning His Role

Just as Peter understood his role as a witness of Christ, in several passages in Acts Paul gives insight to his own understanding of his missionary role. One such passage is Acts 13:46-48. The background of this passage is as follows: In what would become his custom, Paul, along with Barnabas, begins his preaching ministry in the Jewish synagogue (13:5). Initially, he is well received and many desire to hear the word of the Lord (13:42-44). After continued proclamation of the message, the Jews reject the message (13:45). Paul, in response, turns to the Gentiles (13:46-48).

Paul, in verse 47, describes the role God has given him in a prophetic word of Scripture. Quoting Isaiah (Isa 49:6), Paul describes the command of God: "I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth." Elsewhere, Luke uses the designation "light for the Gentiles" of Jesus (Luke 2:32; Acts 26:23) as Jesus takes on the mission of Isaianic servant. Now, Paul and Barnabas take on

---

[115]Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 393.

[116]This is, perhaps, one of the reasons God came to Peter in a vision. Not only was he to associate with Gentiles, he was to bring them salvation (11:18; 15:7).

that mission as well. As Paul and Barnabas assume the mission of the servant, their role is thus to continue the work of Christ in their proclamation of the gospel.[117] In adopting this prophetic command for themselves, Paul and Barnabas believe they have "a significant role to play in salvation-history."[118]

Jesus did not die to make salvation possible but to actually save (Luke 19:10; cf. 1 Tim 1:15). Likewise, the mission of Paul and Barnabas, in continuing the servant ministry of Jesus, is not to bring the possibility of salvation but to "bring salvation" (Acts 13:47).[119] This, in turn, is why Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles when the Jews reject the gospel. The gospel is not something they are merely to proclaim. Their hearers must accept the message. The role of Paul and Barnabas is not to proclaim the gospel without regard to its acceptance. Rather, their role is to bring salvation to those who will receive it (Acts 13:48).[120]

Acts 20:17-27 provides another example of the witnessing role of Paul. In his farewell address to the elders at Miletus, Paul offers a description of his ministry. In doing so, he employs the language of witness. Paul describes his work in verse 21 as "solemnly testifying" (διαμαρτυρόμενος, also v. 24). This witnessing action had included both proclamation and teaching (20:20). His testifying ministry took place both "publicly and from house to house," indicating Paul's practice of proclamation in public gatherings as well as private teaching in the homes of Christians.[121] Further, Paul had

---

[117]David A. deSilva, "Paul's Sermon in Antioch of Pisidia," *BibSac* 151 (1994): 48; cf. Marshall, "Acts," 588. Schnabel notes that the phrase "light for the Gentiles" refers to not only the ministry of Paul and Barnabas but to all gospel messengers. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1107.

[118]Andrew C. Clark, "The Plan of God in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 184.

[119]See Köstenberger and O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 149.

[120]We will address the issue of receptivity in the next chapter.

[121]Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:968.

testified "to both Jews and Greeks" (Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἕλλησιν). That is, he preached the gospel without distinction.[122]

As Paul describes his witnessing activity in this passage, it is interesting to note that although the death and resurrection of Christ is certainly implied, Paul does not describe his gospel in terms of the event itself. Rather, he describes his testimony in terms of the significance of those events and the response of the hearer.[123] Thus, his testimony is one of "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (20:21), "the grace of God" (20:24), "the kingdom" (20:25), and "the whole purpose of God" (20:27). Having thus testified, Paul claims he is "innocent of the blood of all men" (20:26) because he has declared "the whole purpose of God" (πᾶσαν τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θεοῦ). That is, in preaching the gospel to all without distinction, Paul has demonstrated to the Ephesians "the saving purpose of God for the human race."[124] The role of Paul is to preach the gospel to all people and in all its fullness for the salvation of his hearers. His role as witness is to testify to the salvific purpose of God in the death and resurrection of Christ. The purpose of God in the death and resurrection of Christ is to save. The purpose of witnessing of these events is also to save. Paul has fulfilled his role as a witness because he has faithfully proclaimed the whole gospel to all who would receive it.

A final example illustrates the witnessing role of Paul in terms of results. In Acts 26:13-18, Paul recalls his conversion and call to ministry. Here, Jesus states his purpose to appoint Paul "a minister and a witness" (ὑπηρέτην καὶ μάρτυρα). The word

---

[122]Tannehill demonstrates the inclusive nature of Paul's gospel to both Jews and Gentiles throughout the Miletus speech. See Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986, 1990), 2:252-61.

[123]See Clark, "Plan of God in the Acts of the Apostles," 189. Buckwalter also notes, "For Paul to present evidence that Jesus was the Messiah was at the same time intended to produce a believing response from his Jewish listeners." H. Douglas Buckwalter, "Testimony," in *EDBT*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 768.

[124]Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:973; cf. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:257.

ὑπηρέτης signifies that the role of Paul as witness is as an assistant or helper to Christ.[125] Paul thus participates in Christ's work of salvation. In the following verses, Jesus describes the role of Paul as witness in terms of a positive response to the gospel. The role of Paul is not merely to proclaim the gospel, or even testify to its significance, but to save his hearers. That is, Paul is "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." This role is described in three infinitives in verse 18: to open (ἀνοῖξαι), to turn (ἐπιστρέψαι), and to receive (λαβεῖν). All three are infinitives of purpose, with the latter two in subordination to the first.[126] The purpose for which Christ sends Paul is to save. Thus, the role of Paul as witness includes the result of that witness. As a witness, Paul is an agent of salvation leading to conversion, forgiveness, and acceptance by God. Through the witness of Paul, Jesus will save persons.

Summary

In the book of Acts, Luke presents the role of gospel messengers primarily in terms of witness. In the commission of the disciples in Acts 1:8, Jesus expresses that they will be "witnesses" beginning in Jerusalem and extending to the far reaches of the world. While the Twelve have a unique role as chosen eyewitnesses of the Christ event, the disciples and others witness to the significance of those events and seek a positive response to their witness. In the commission, Jesus sends out his disciples, instructing them to wait for power from the Holy Spirit. With this empowering, gospel messengers in Acts serve as witnesses to the facts of the gospel and their significance. Further,

---

[125]See BDAG, 1035. The significance of Paul's role as ὑπηρέτης is discussed in the section on 1 Cor 4:1-5 below.

[126]Rogers and Rogers, *Linguistic and Exegetical Key*, 304; Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:1161-62.

witnesses seek to persuade others to accept their message and respond in repentance and faith.

Throughout the book of Acts, Luke describes the role of witness in a variety of ways. Witness is, in one sense, proclamation. Gospel messengers proclaim the truths of the gospel and exhort hearers to respond to its claims in repentant faith. Further, witness is testimony empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes the disciples bold in their witness and makes that witness effective in bringing persons to faith. Witness includes persuasion. This is especially evident in the ministry of Paul. Paul does not merely present the facts of Christ, but persuades many of his hearers to accept the message. Proclamation and persuasion, for Paul, are inseparably linked. Finally, witness is disciple-making. The role of the disciples as witnesses is not just to bring a message, but also to enlist more disciples, nurture new believers, and, together, to establish churches.

These elements appear in the narratives as one observes the self-understanding of the gospel messengers concerning their role. The apostles understand their role, on the one hand, as chosen eyewitnesses of the Christ event. In this sense, the Twelve have a unique roll. On the other hand, the Twelve are the first among many who witness to the significance of the Christ event and who appeal to their hearers to accept the gospel message. The disciples are witnesses of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ and testify of the significance of the salvific act of Christ. Through this witness, the disciples understand their role to bring salvation to their hearers.

Similarly, Paul understands his role in the eternal plan of God. Paul, with Barnabas, continues the mission of Christ as they proclaim the message of Christ. Their role is not merely to proclaim a message, however, but to "bring salvation" through that proclamation. Paul is accountable to proclaim the gospel fully to his hearers and without distinction. In doing so, Paul claims, he is "innocent of the blood of all men." Yet, Paul does not see his role in terms of mere obedience in proclamation without regard for

results. Rather, his purpose is the saving of his hearers. Paul sees his role as an agent of salvation—a witness through whom God will save those who accept the message.

The Role of Human Agents in the Pauline Epistles

Beyond what Luke records in the book of Acts, Paul speaks of his ministry in several places throughout his letters. Through a survey of some of these key passages, one can see the understanding Paul has about his role as a messenger of the gospel.

Paul and the "Obedience of Faith"

In the introduction to his epistle to the Romans, Paul gives significant clues to his understanding of his role. Paul describes the goal of his ministry and his desire for a harvest. In Romans 1:1, Paul identifies himself as both a servant and an apostle who has been "set apart for the gospel of God."[127] Paul goes on in the following verses to explain the significance of that gospel. In verse 5, Paul describes the purpose of his apostolic ministry. He states that he has received grace and apostleship "to bring about *the* obedience of faith" (εἰς ὑπακοήν πίστεως). Here, εἰς is used to indicate aim or purpose. Thus, C. E. B. Cranfield translates εἰς, "for the purpose of bringing about."[128] God has set apart Paul for the gospel for this purpose: the "obedience of faith."

It is not merely purpose, however, that Paul relays here. Eugene Nida shows the semantic relationship of the various phrases. The Gentiles are themselves the agents of obedience and faith, while it is the activity of Paul that is "for His name's sake" (1:5). Nida contends, "An examination of the semantic structure shows clearly that between Paul's activity as an apostle and the people's believing and obeying there is a causative

---

[127]For a discussion of this phrase, see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 42-43.

[128]C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975, 1979), 1:66. See also BAGD, 229; BDAG, 290.

relationship. Paul is thus the causative agent . . . ."[129] L. Ann Jervis likewise notes,

"Paul's commission is to bring about faith in the gospel."[130] The phrase "obedience of

faith" appears again in 16:26 and serves as a kind of bracket for the epistle. One must

seek to understand, then, the relation of obedience to faith in this phrase.

Much of the discussion concerning Romans 1:5 focuses on the precise meaning

of the genitive πίστεως in relation to ὑπακοήν. While a variety of options for the

meaning exist, commentators have generally focused on two.[131] The first option sees

πίστεως as a genitive of apposition or epexegetical genitive. The phrase thus would

mean an "obedience which consists in faith."[132] With this understanding Cranfield

asserts, "Paul's preaching is aimed at obtaining from his hearers true obedience to God,

the essence of which is a responding to His message of good news with faith."[133] The

primary argument for this view is that Paul treats obedience and faith as virtually

equivalent terms in Romans and elsewhere.[134] If the genitive is indeed appositional, then

Paul expresses here the purpose of his apostleship in terms of the results of his ministry in

initial conversion—the Gentiles not only hear the message but also turn to faith in Christ.

---

[129]Eugene A. Nida, "Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship," *JBL* 91 (1972): 82.

[130]L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation*, JSNTSup, vol. 55 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 77.

[131]Most commentators have ruled out the objective genitive here. For a more complete evaluation of the various grammatical options, see Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 1:66; Don B. Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul's Letter to the Romans*, WUNT, vol. 79 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994), 13-15.

[132]See, for example, John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 1:13; Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 1:66; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 14; Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 6 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 46.

[133]Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 1:66; emphasis mine.

[134]Ibid. Cranfield notes the following comparisions: 1:8 with 16:19; 10:16a with 10:16b; 11:23 with 11:30-31; 1:5 with 15:18. See also Käsemann, *Romans*, 14. Byrne basis his view on the context of the passage "where the focus lies upon initial response rather than continuing pattern of life." He finds the view that obedience and faith are interchangeable "unhelpful." Byrne, *Romans*, 46.

Glenn Davies rightly raises problems with the genitive of apposition view. First, the initial context includes the Roman believers to whom he is writing. If this is the case, more than merely initial conversion must be in view. Second, while obedience and faith are interrelated, they are by no means identical concepts.[135] Thus, Davies suggests a second option: to see πίστεως as a genitive of origin (also identified as adjectival or subjective genitive).[136] The phrase ὑπακοήν πίστεως would then mean "obedience which stems from faith." Taken this way, the goal of Paul would be to help believers reach maturity in Christ. It is hard to imagine that Paul's goal as an agent of the gospel, however, would focus on the obedience *resulting* from faith to the exclusion of the faith response itself. Such a view, Douglas Moo observes, "illegitimately downplays the priority of evangelism in Paul's apostleship."[137]

Don Garlington presents a third, more comprehensive view. Garlington notes the strengths of the two positions but their failure to exhaust the meaning Paul intends. He rejects these two options as "too restrictive."[138] Rather, he asserts, Paul was intentionally ambiguous and intends both meanings. The genitive is an adjectival genitive in the sense of "believing obedience." Thus, ὑπακοήν πίστεως refers to the "total response to the gospel."[139] Given the emphasis in Romans on both obedience and faith,

---

[135]Glenn N. Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study in Romans 1-4*, JSNTSup, vol. 39 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 27-29.

[136]Ibid., 25-30; cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 70; Matthew Black, *Romans*, 2nd ed., NCBC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 24.

[137]Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 52.

[138]Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 30. This view is strengthened by concessions of advocates of the other views. For example, Cranfield notes, "Faith by its very nature includes in itself the sincere desire and will to obey God in all things." Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 1:67; likewise Davies affirms that his view "does not displace [faith] from the significant role that it plays in justification and in the epistle as a whole." Davies, *Faith and Obedience*, 29. There is no faith without obedience, nor obedience without faith.

[139]Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 15-31; See also Don B. Garlington, *'The Obedience of Faith': A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context*, WUNT, Reihe 2, vol. 38 (Tübingen: J.C.B.

and the context which includes both believing and unbelieving Gentiles, it seems more plausible, and thus in favor of the proposal of Garlington, to see Paul speaking of the entire conversion process. This process begins at an initial point of conversion and matures to a life of obedience. If this view is correct, this is significant in that Paul sees his role, given by God, as seeing people come to faith in Jesus Christ and grow into an obedient maturity in Him. Paul is not content merely to proclaim the gospel, but to see its fruit in the lives of real people in terms of both initial conversion and continued growth.

The view that Paul intends both conversion and growth is strengthened by an understanding of what Paul means by his desire "to preach the gospel" (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) in Rome (1:15). Here, the idea that Paul refers only to the initial preaching of the gospel to win new converts is highly unlikely because Paul is speaking to Christians and desires to preach the gospel "to you also who are in Rome." Of course, this phrase does not exclude the preaching to unbelievers, but it certainly *includes* the believers to whom he writes. One should understand, as Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O' Brien point out, that "Paul employs the *euangelion* word-group to cover the whole range of evangelistic and teaching ministry—from the initial proclamation of the gospel to the building up of believers and grounding them firmly in the faith."[140] Preaching the gospel, for Paul, is an inclusive idea that includes the initial proclamation of the gospel, the strengthening of new believers, and the establishment of churches.[141]

Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991), 1-2 n. 4, 252; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:974-75; Köstenberger and O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 182; cf. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 52; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 20.

[140]Köstenberger and O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 183.

[141]Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme*, NovTSup, vol. 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 189; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 53; Paul Bowers, "Fulfilling the Gospel: The Scope of the Pauline Mission," *JETS* 30 (1987): 198; Köstenberger and O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 184.

The role of Paul is to achieve an intended result, but that result includes much more than initial acceptance of the Christian message.

Paul as a "Minister of Christ"

Another self-description of Paul concerning his ministry occurs in Romans 15:14-21. While portions of this text will be discussed in the following chapters, verses 16-18 reveal clues about Paul's understanding of his role. In verse 16, Paul refers to himself as "minister of Christ Jesus" (λειτουργόν Χριτοῦ 'Ιησοῦ). The word "minister" (λειτουργόν) commonly refers to the role of priest. Here, Paul speaks metaphorically in priestly terms. Note the further use of terms commonly associated with priestly functions: ἱερουργοῦντα (performing priestly service); προσφορὰ (offering); εὐπρόσδεκτος (pleasing/acceptable); and ἡγιασμένη (having been set apart/sanctified).[142] Of course, this priestly ministry describes more than just his ministry to the Romans. His letter and desired visit to the Romans is part of the broader ministry to which God has called him—as "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles." What is significant is that Paul speaks of his priestly offering to God in terms of the results of his ministry. Paul offers God not his service of proclamation, but literally an "offering of the Gentiles" themselves.[143] The priestly offering of Paul is not the ministry itself but the fruit of that ministry.

As in previous passages we have examined, the result of his ministry refers to more than merely initial conversion. In his ministry to unconverted Gentiles, Paul includes a ministry to the Roman believers as well. This ministry shows, then, that Paul is not concerned with the initial faith response to Christ alone. He is also concerned with

---

[142]See Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 889-91. Paul employs another kind of "offering" imagery in Phil 2:17.

[143]Note that "of the Gentiles" (τῶν ἐθνῶν) is an appositional genitive, meaning "the offering which is the Gentiles." Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 511; cf. Käsemann, *Romans*, 393; Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:756; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 890; Black, *Romans*, 202-03.

those who have already believed. To the Roman believers, he has "written very boldly" (15:15) so that they might come to maturity in Christ. Further, the image of being "sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (ἡγιασμένη, 15:16) suggests that the role of Paul includes not only original preaching toward conversion, but the ongoing ministry of establishing believers in the faith.[144] Paul describes the result of his ministry in verse 18 as the "obedience of the Gentiles" (ὑπακοὴν ἐθνῶν). Similar to its use in Romans 1:5, "obedience" again suggests both initial conversion and growth, "denoting comprehensively the believers' response to the Lord Jesus Christ, including, but not limited to, faith."[145] The result of his mission, presented to God as an offering and having been accepted and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, is the conversion and bringing to maturity of the Gentiles.

Although Paul offers to God the results of his ministry, he acknowledges that he cannot take credit for those results. The "obedience of the Gentiles" has been accomplished only by the work of God. While the conversion and growth of the Gentile Christians is both the goal and result of his work, Paul is merely the conduit of what Christ has accomplished. The gospel is the power of salvation (1:16). Paul is merely its messenger (10:14). Thus, Paul can only boast in Christ Jesus the "things pertaining to God" (τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν). This phrase refers to what Paul has described in the preceding verses so that "the entire work of his ministry is intended." [146] Paul goes on to explain that he will only dare speak of what "Christ has accomplished through me" (κατειργάσατο Χριστός δι' ἐμου). The verb κατεργάζομαι means "to bring about a

---

[144]Cf. Byrne, *Romans*, 436.

[145]Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 892.

[146]Schreiner, *Romans*, 767; cf. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 891. Contra Jervis who argues that the οὖν (v. 17) is emphatic rather than inferential, so that "things pertaining to God" refers to the signs and wonders of v. 19. Jervis, *Purpose of Romans*, 122-23. For the concept of boasting, cf. 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17.

result."[147] The sense then becomes "I will not dare to speak of any results that Christ did not bring about through me." Paul glories in the results of his ministry, but only as Christ works through him to bring about those results.

In this passage, then, the role of Paul is as a minister of the gospel. In that priestly ministry he offers to God not his work, but the results of that work—the conversion and spiritual growth of the Gentiles. The results are reason for glorying, but only because through Paul, Christ has brought about those results. His role, then, is to bring results to God that Christ has accomplished through him.

Paul and Apollos as "Servants" in God's Harvest

In 1 Corinthians 3, we come to a passage that is important for our discussion because of its popular application to personal evangelism and its statement about the role of the agents of the gospel. In its position within the epistle, this passage falls into the broader context of Paul addressing factions within the Corinthian church. In verse 5, as part of his argument, Paul asks, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul?" As Anthony Thiselton has noted, in essence Paul asks, "What is their role?"[148] This is precisely the question we are asking in our present study.

Paul answers his own question in the text. He notes that he and Apollos are "servants" (διάκονοι) through whom the Corinthians believed. The word διάκονος, here, denotes servants who are under the authority of another and are given tasks to complete.[149] Paul and Apollos each serve under and have been given a task by God. The phrase, "through whom you believed" (δι' ὧν ἐπιστεύσατε), indicates the completion of

---

[147]BDAG, 531.

[148]Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 299.

[149]Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:947; Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6*, AGJU, vol. 18 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 119-20; BDAG, 230.

these tasks. The result is that the Corinthians, whether through the ministry of Apollos or

Paul, believed.[150] Though the ministries of Paul and Apollos were different, each of them

evangelized and won converts. Barrett notes, "Their carrying out of the tasks assigned to

them led to the creation of a company of believers in Corinth. Of this they were not the

cause but the instruments: God himself evoked faith in the Corinthian believers, by

means of his servants."[151]

Paul goes on to describe the differing tasks in an agricultural metaphor. He and

Apollos each had a task. In verse 6 he states, "I planted, Apollos watered" (ἐγὼ

ἐφύτευσα, ᾿Απολλῶς ἐπότισεν). Contrary to the popular application given to this

passage, the description of different tasks is not a reference to personal evangelism, but of

the establishment of the church.[152] Thus, the colloquial interpretation of this verse, that

one shares the gospel without seeing a response while another comes along and leads

persons to faith in Christ, is not in view here.[153] Rather, this verse should be understood

---

[150]The aorist active indicative here indicates the "inception of the event." Thus, one can understand ἐπιστεύσατε literally as "came to faith." Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 300; Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 57. Collins identifies this as "an ingressive aorist, indicating that the Corinthian's embrace of the kerygma is the decisive event." Raymond J. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 7 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 145; cf. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 291.

[151]C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 84.

[152]Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 131-32. Hays astutely observes that this "may be especially hard for some Protestant congregations to keep in focus, because the tradition of an individualistic reading is so entrenched. But if this point is not grasped firmly, Paul's whole meaning will be missed." Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 51-52.

[153]This interpretation fails for a number of reasons. First, to interpret "planting the seed" as initial proclamation of the gospel that must be "watered" by another before it leads to conversion, does not match with the experience of Paul with the Corinthians. Paul is the one pictured as the seed planter here, yet Paul saw many converts in Corinth (Acts 18:8). Likewise, the view that one leads to Christ while another disciples (or in McGavran's terms, one "disciples" another "perfects") also does not match the historical record as Paul taught the new church for a year and six months (Acts 18:11). Further, many came to faith in Christ through the ministry of Apollos as well.

as referring not to the results of personal evangelism but to the growth of the Corinthian church.[154]

As the church grew, the role of each minister included both initial evangelism and establishing in the faith. In each of their roles, they were instruments through whom the Corinthians came to faith and through whose continued ministry the Corinthian believers grew in Christ. One should understand planting and watering, then, in terms of sequence. For Paul to have planted the church means that he founded the church and established the Corinthians in the faith. That Apollos "watered," means that he followed Paul and continued the ministry of both evangelism and discipleship. The most important role, however, is not that of Apollos or Paul, but that of God.

Despite their roles, God "was causing the growth" (ηὔζανεν). The key role belongs to God.[155] Each agent of the gospel has the role of bringing persons to faith in Christ and growing them in their faith. It is God, however, who is the prime mover and who is ultimately responsible for the success of the eschatological harvest. This relationship between the roles of Paul and Apollos and of God becomes even more clear by the shift in tense from aorist to imperfect. The roles of Paul and Apollos, in the aorist tense, indicate their specific tasks in the grand salvation plan. The role of God, in the imperfect tense, "indicates what was going on *throughout*; God was all along causing the increase."[156] It is difficult to improve on the agricultural metaphor here. Paul and Apollos have a definite role in the growth of the church and the salvation of individual believers, yet God actually *causes* the growth. God is a God of salvation. The role of Paul and

---

[154]Understanding this verse in terms of the growth of the church fits well with the following metaphors in v. 9, as "field" and "building" represent the church and not individuals. Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 306-07. Further, Paul speaks of his role as the founder of the church as a "skilled master builder." For further discussion of the "master builder" concept, see Jay Shanor, "Paul as Master Builder: Construction Terms in 1 Cor," *NTS* 34 (1988): 461-71; J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Paul as Master-builder," *EQ* 69 (1997): 129-37.

[155]Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 119.

[156]Plummer, *First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 57.

Apollos is to be agents of that salvation. In literal farming, there is much human labor and responsibility for growing a crop. Yet, God actually causes the growing. Applying the metaphor to the role of these messengers, Paul and Apollos are the *instruments* through which church growth occurs. Their role, then, is not merely to obediently perform duties that God may or may not choose to bless. Rather, they have key tasks to perform as part of the work of God in accomplishing the growing.

In comparison to God, neither Paul nor Apollos are anything (3:7). God receives all the glory. In comparison to each other, Paul describes their roles as "one" (ἕν, 3:8). That is, their roles, though different in time and task, are essentially the same. Each has the aim of reaching others with the gospel and each is dependent upon God for the growth. Moreover, their work is complementary in that they both work toward the same desired end.[157] Thus, Paul states, "For we are God's fellow workers" (θεοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, 3:9). The γάρ in this verse links back to and explains the phrase "he who plants and he who waters are one." The word συνεργός is a common designation of Paul (e.g., Rom 16:3; 2 Cor 1:24; 8:23; Phil 2:25; 4:3; Col 4:11; Phlm 1:24) and carries the sense of "missionary colleague."[158] In this passage, however, God is the focus. The genitive here is a possessive genitive and the phrase thus carries the meaning "co-workers who are God's"[159] or "fellow workers in God's service."[160] Further, Paul has placed θεοῦ in the emphatic position. Thus, Paul indicates that he and Apollos are one in the sense

---

[157]Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 85; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 52; Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 73.

[158]Wolf-Henning Ollrog, "συνεργός, συνεργέω," in *EDNT*, vol. 3, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 304.

[159]Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 306; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 53; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 147.

[160]Victor Paul Furnish, "Fellow Workers in God's Service," *JBL* 80 (1961): 364-67. Garland notes, "Paul's point is that he and Apollos work under God as jointly commissioned by God." David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 113.

that they work toward the same purpose, under the same power, in service to the same Lord. The harvest belongs to the Lord, and they are fellow workers in it.

In the following chapter, Paul adds other descriptors to his role. First, he and Apollos are "servants of Christ" (ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ). The word ὑπηρέτης describes one who functions as a helper or assistant, frequently in a subordinate role to a master or superior.[161] The phrase may be interpreted "assistants of Christ." As such, Paul completes his task under the authority and discretion of the master. David Garland notes, "The terminology underlines the fact that ministers work under the orders of their master and have no significance except in relation to their master."[162]

Paul expands his thought by adding that they are "stewards" (οἰκονόμους), "emphasizing both their trusted position and their accountability to God."[163] There is not enough in the context here to determine exactly what Paul must do to be deemed faithful. Faithfulness might mean faithfulness to the content of the message, to its proclamation, or to the results of that proclamation. In context, the most that can be said is that a steward is accountable to the one who has entrusted him with the stewardship. If we are correct in our overall analysis of how Paul understands his role, then it is likely that his stewardship included winning persons to faith. Thus, William Paul Bowers correctly notes,

> Beyond the act of proclamation, Paul was demonstrably very much concerned with the results of that proclamation. He might well take service itself, without reference to its outcome, as meaningful; simple faithfulness is praiseworthy in God's sight . . . But beyond the act of service he was very much devoted to a successful outcome.[164]

---

[161]BDAG, 1035, BAGD, 842. Cf. Acts 26:16.

[162]Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 125.

[163]Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 159; see also Horst Kuhli, "οἰκονόμος," in *EDNT*, vol. 2, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 499.

[164]William Paul Bowers, "Studies in Paul's Understanding of His Mission" (Ph. D. diss., Clare College, University of Cambridge, 1976), 84.

Regardless of the meanging of faithfulness, Paul argues that God is the proper judge of

his ministry, not himself or anyone else. He is judged by and accountable to God alone.

Paul and His Purpose
"to Win" and "to Save"

Later in the letter, in chapter nine, Paul explains his mission practice and the

purpose behind it. Most commentators place 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 in the context of

Paul's discussion of idol meat in 8:1-11:1.[165] While a detailed analysis of this larger

context is beyond our scope here, the thrust of the passage is in response to a question on

meat associated with idols.[166] In the process, Paul describes his ministry practice.[167] In

verse 19, Paul explains the reason for his practice in the first of six ἵνα clauses. Paul

performs his ministry in such a way that he "may win" (κερδήσω) others. Much debate

centers on the meaning of κερδαίνω. The most common understanding is that κερδαίνω

is a missionary term[168]—that is, that Paul seeks to convert his listeners to the Christian

---

[165]Exceptions to this general agreement include Weiss, who suggests that redactors have combined parts of two different letters throughout and that 1 Cor 9 is part of a different letter than 8 and 10: Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 9th ed., KEK (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), xi-xliii. Scholars that see this passage as an editorial misplacement of Paul include W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 92-96; and J. Héring, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1962), xii-iv, 75.

[166]Many commentators argue that chapter 9 serves as a digression, which is used to support Paul's larger argument. Wuellner argues convincingly that 1 Cor 9 is a digression in good Greek rhetorical form: Wilhelm Wuellner, "Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant*, ed. William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken (Paris: Beauchense, 1979), 177-88. He argues that the reason for the digression is to serve as an averment and prepare the Corinthians to be favorable when they "judge for themselves" (in 1 Cor 10:15), and to serve as a model to assure that salvation reaches not just some but all—a commitment that calls for sacrifice of the sort presented in 9:19-23 (p. 187). See also John C. Brunt, "Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility: The Contribution of 1 Cor. 8-10 to an Understanding of Paul's Ethical Thinking," in *SBL 1981 Seminar Papers*, (Chicago: Society of Biblical Literature, 1981), 19-21; Wendell Willis, "An Apostolic Apologia?: The Form and Function of 1 Corinthians 9," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 24 (1985): 39;

[167]Paul's mission practice described in this passage will be discussed in chap. 4.

[168]In a much cited study, Daube contends first that Paul's principle of accommodation in 9:19-23 is a missionary maxim adopted from Judaism. Here Daube suggests that Paul adopts the idea of making himself a servant from traditional Jewish teaching (Daube cites Hillel: *Bab. Shab.* 31a, *Ab. de-R.N.* 15) and his willingness to accept converts who did not accept the whole Law in order to later convert them. Daube suggests therefore that the purpose of Paul's accommodation was the conversion of those whom he served.

faith. This view is strengthened when, in the sixth ἵνα clause (v. 22), Paul changes the verb to σώσω ("I may save"). Thus, a number of scholars see κερδαίνω as a Christian missionary term linked with the idea of initial conversion.[169] The difficulty with understanding κερδαίνω in terms of conversion comes with the discussion of the "weak" in verse 22. If, as many scholars argue, to win "the weak" (τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς) means to win those who already are Christians, then κερδαίνω cannot be interpreted in the sense of initial conversion to the Christian faith because the weak have already been converted. Most scholars, however, retain the missionary use of the word for verses 19-21. An unresolved issue remains, however, concerning how one should interpret κερδαίνω in light of the "weak" in verse 22.

A wealth of discussion exists on the identity of "the weak" in this passage. For our purposes, the question is whether or not τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς refers to persons who have already come to initial faith in Christ. The exegesis is difficult here because of the recurrent ἵνα clause. Just as Paul seeks to win those under the Law and to win those without the Law, Paul becomes weak to the weak "in order to win the weak" (ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω). Because κερδήσω in the first four instances likely refers to conversion, some interpreters reason that the weak must be non-Christians. C. H. Dodd, for example, maintains that the weak are "non-Christians, presumably of Jewish

---

Daube, *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 336-51. Daube goes on to suggest that the Christian use of κερδαίνω reflects the rabbinic vocabulary linked to Jewish missionary praxis. Ibid., 352-61. More recent studies by Schnabel, and by Köstenberger and O' Brien demonstrate the likelihood that no Jewish mission existed, which seriously weakens Daube's argument. See Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:92-172; 2:954, 958-59; Köstenberger and O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 55-71. That κερδαίνω cannot be traced to a Jewish mission does not, however, negate the fact that the word had a significant usage in early Christian mission.

[169]Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: Clark, 1914), 193; John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, SNTSMS, vol. 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 51-52; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 425-31; Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 701.

origin."[170] Similarly, David Black identifies the weak as "non-Christians, whether Jew or Gentile."[171]

While interpreting τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς as being non-Christians solves the problem of the meaning of κερδήσω in the text, there are at least four reasons why it is better to understand the weak as Christians. The first reason emerges when comparing the categories of this passage with those in 1 Corinthians 10:32-33. This passage is in some ways parallel to 9:19-23. There, however, Paul refers to "Jews . . . Greeks . . . [and] the church of God." Because of its closeness to our present passage, it is natural to see "the church of God" (τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, 10:32) as corresponding to τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς. If this is the case, then the "weak" is a reference to believers. Second, Kenneth Neller argues that in addition to 10:32-33, Paul elsewhere mentions the Jews and Gentiles together with a third group which can be identified as the church (1:22-23a; 1:23b-24; and 12:13). Neller explains, "It would seem, therefore, that if every time Jews and Greeks were mentioned together there is always a third group, and that Paul identifies himself with that group (the church) each of the three times, then the fourth time (9:20-22) he could also be referring to the Jews, Greeks, and the church, though in different terminology."[172] Third, in the larger context of chapters 8-10, and particularly in 8:7-13, the weak refer to weak Christians. It seems most natural then to see the weak in 9:19-23 as Christians also.[173] Finally, Paul's use of "weak" elsewhere in the letter (1 Cor 1:27; 4:10; cf. 2:3, 12:22) is a referent to Christians. Many scholars thus agree that the "weak"

---

[170]C. H. Dodd, "ΕΝΝΟΜΟΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," in *Studia Paulina: In Honorem Johannis de Zwaan Septuagenarii*, ed. J. N. Sevenster and W. C. van Unnik (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn N. V., 1953), 96.

[171] David Alan Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness: Astheneia and its Cognates in the Pauline Literature*, American University Studies, series 7, Theology and Religion, vol. 3 (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 118.

[172] Kenneth V. Neller, "1 Corinthians 9:19-23: A Model for Those Who Seek to Win Souls," *ResQ* 29 (1987), 137.

[173]Cf. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 161.

in 9:19-23 does indeed refer to Christians.[174] The evidence seems to indicate that τοὺς

ἀσθενεῖς does at least *include* Christians. If this conclusion is correct, however, the

meaning of κερδήσω remains unresolved.

Because of the conclusion that "weak" is a referent to Christians, some have

offered alternate interpretations of κερδαίνω, at least in reference to the "weak" of verse

22. C. K. Barrett suggests that κερδαίνω may best be understood as "*keep* them for

the church, instead of driving them out by wounding their consciences."[175] Similarly,

Bruce offers the interpretation "win them to a better appreciation of Christian liberty."[176]

Neller suggests, "bringing anyone, believer or non-believer, closer to the way of Christ

than he was before."[177] Craig Blomberg speaks of winning to a more mature form of the

Christian faith.[178] Leon Morris suggests "to win them for inner strength or perhaps simply

to keep them from slipping."[179] Those who see the weak as non-Christians, on the other

hand, retain the meaning of κερδήσω as a referent to conversion.[180]

Perhaps both κερδήσω and σώσω should be interpreted in a more full sense.

That is, the words speak not only of initial conversion but of the entire process of

salvation. This fuller sense is evident in the interpretation of Köstenberger and O' Brien.

They note that "save" and its cognates usually have a future connotation in Paul's

---

[174]See, for example, Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 136; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 88; Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 215; Neller, "1 Corinthians 9:19-23," 37; Carson, "Pauline Inconsistency," 14; O' Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 102; Richardson, "Pauline Inconsistency," 347; Willis, "An Apostolic Apologia?" 37; Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 184.

[175]Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 215.

[176]Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 88.

[177]Neller, "1 Corinthians 9:19-23," 142.

[178]Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 184.

[179]Morris, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 136.

[180]See, for example, Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 433-34.

letters—that is, to save from the coming wrath on the final day. Winning Gentiles means

to bring to perfection in Christ on the final day. Likewise, winning weak Christians (as

well as non-Christians) has to do with full maturity and blamelessness at the second

coming. They explain,

> Paul's goal of winning Jews, Gentiles, and weak Christians has to do with their full maturity in Christ and thus signifies *winning them completely*. . . . 'Win' or 'save' then speaks not only of the initial activity whereby a person comes to faith, but also of the whole process by which a Jew, Gentile, or weak Christian is converted and brought to glory. . . .([cf.] 2 Cor 1:14; Gal 2:2; Phil. 2:16; 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19).[181]

To understand both "win" and "save" in this expanded sense helps clarify the problems

otherwise inherent in the text and is faithful to Paul's understanding of salvation. The role

of Paul in this passage is to win/save his hearers. That winning includes not only initial

conversion, but also a bringing to full Christian maturity.

Paul further explains his role in 1 Corinthians 10:33. He states here that the

purpose behind his actions is "that they may be saved" (ἵνα σωθῶσιν; cf. 1 Thess

2:16).[182] The purpose of Paul's ethical conduct, as well as his mission activity, is the

furtherance of the gospel. Winning persons is his driving principle.[183] As Marion Soards

notes, the phrase "summarizes Paul's self-understanding and purpose in life. He lived so

that God might work through him for the salvific benefit of others, because he understood

that God acted through his (Christlike) selflessness and saved others in the operation."[184]

It is this overarching concern that he modeled for the Corinthian believers (11:1).[185]

---

[181]Köstenberger and O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 181; cf. O' Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 95-96.

[182]The phrase "please all men," to which the ἵνα clause refers, will be discussed in chap. 4 (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23; 2 Cor 2:17 1 Thess 2:4; Gal 1:10).

[183]Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 203, 502.

[184]Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 218.

[185]On the significance of 1 Cor 11:1 for evangelism by the church, see Robert L. Plummer, *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* PBM (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2006), 85-92.

**Paul and His Band as
"Ambassadors" of Christ**

Another self-description of the ministry of Paul occurs in 2 Corinthians 5:18-
6:1. We have, in this text, what Barrett rightly observes as "one of the most pregnant,
difficult and important [passages] in the whole of Pauline literature."[186] Thankfully, for
our purposes, we may bypass the deep theological questions surrounding the nature of
salvation and narrow the discussion to the role of the gospel agent. Paul states in verse
eighteen that God has given him "the ministry of reconciliation" (τὴν διακονίαν τῆς
καταλλαγῆς). Elsewhere, Paul has referred to himself by the related term διάκονος.[187]
Here, he speaks of a ministry (διακονία) God has given him. The use of the term here
refers to a service or ministry "functioning in the interest of a larger public."[188] Hermann
Beyer notes that the early church used the term to denote any kind of significant ministry
or service to the community. The service of the gospel preacher, the ministry of
reconciliation, is for the benefit of the community and with a view to their salvation.[189]

To perform this ministry certainly required proclamation of the gospel. Paul
makes this clear in verse nineteen as he describes this ministry as "the word" (τὸν
λόγον) of reconciliation. That he speaks first of a διακονία, however, denotes that more
than mere proclamation is in view. The word of reconciliation includes the implications
of what Christ has done (vv. 19, 21) as well as an urgent appeal to respond (v. 20).
Garland notes that this ministry "involves more than simply explaining to others what

---

[186]C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York:
Harper & Row, 1973), 163.

[187]See the discussion on 1 Cor 3:5-9 above.

[188]BDAG, 230.

[189]Hermann W. Beyer, "διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol.
2, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), 87.

God has done in Christ. It requires that one become an *active reconciler* oneself."[190] The

role God gives them involves becoming part of the process of reconciliation. God is the

one who is "reconciling the world to Himself" but he assigns to human agents the

ministry, the word, of reconciliation. God does the reconciling, *in* Christ, *through* those to

whom he has given this ministry. Thus, the ministry of Paul and other mission agents is a

real part of what God is doing to reconcile the world to himself.[191]

Paul further describes the role of gospel agents in verse 20. He explains,

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ" ('Υπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύμεν). In

Greco-Roman culture, an ambassador functioned as a representative of the one who sent

him.[192] A legate of Caesar, for example, was often called a πρεσβευτής.[193] Further,

realms conquered by Rome often sent ambassadors as representatives to appeal to Caesar

on their behalf. The role of such an ambassador is to appeal (δεόμεθα, v. 20) on behalf of

the one who sends him.[194] Paul, as an ambassador of Christ, though only a representative

---

[190]David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 291; emphasis mine.

[191]Cf. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 294; Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 182. On the meaning of reconciliation, see George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 492-98; Stanley E. Porter, "Peace, Reconciliation," in *DPL*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 695-99; I. Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of 'Reconciliation'," in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd*, ed. Robert A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 117-32; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Reconciliation in Pauline Theology," in *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 162-85; Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981). Martin has produced a helpful study of reconciliation, but goes too far in his assessment that reconciliation is central to and should take a higher place than justification in Pauline theology. See also Ralph P. Martin, "Center of Paul's Theology," in *DPL*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 92-95.

[192]Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 445-46; for further discussion of the role of ambassador, see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:967-70.

[193]Günther Bornkamm, "πρεσβεύω," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 6, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 681-83.

[194]Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 296-98; cf. Colin G. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 128;

and of no significance apart from the work of God, is nevertheless part of the reconciling

action. Barrett explains,

> On the one hand, Paul has no importance, and indeed no message, of his own. He
> does not act on his own behalf, but Christ's. . . . On the other hand, where Paul is at
> work, Christ, whom he represents, is at work; where Paul speaks, God speaks. The
> same act that effected reconciliation, committed to Paul the word and ministry of
> reconciliation. . . . in other words, the preaching itself belongs to the event of
> salvation.[195]

God sends his ambassadors to represent him in his appeal: "be reconciled to God"

(καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ).[196] Those who are ambassadors have a reconciling role as

representatives of God.

    Because of what God accomplished through Christ (vv. 19, 21), the role of his

ambassadors is to be ministers of reconciliation, that is, to be used by God to bring about

the salvation of his hearers. Paul could thus describe himself and other gospel agents as

fellow-workers of God, "working together" (συνεργοῦντες, 6:1) with Him. Paul and his

companions, through the ministry of reconciliation given to them by God, become co-

workers *with* God. [197] Thus, the role of gospel agents in this passage is not merely to

fulfill the obligation of proclaiming the gospel, but to be ministers of the gospel and thus

participants in the reconciling work of God.

Glenn T. Miller, "2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13," *Interpretation* 54 (2000): 187.

[195]Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 178-79.

[196]Harris argues effectively that Paul's appeal here is to "any evangelistic audience." Harris,
Second Epistle to the Corinthians, 447-49; cf. Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary
on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 1:438. It is possible,
however, that Paul appeals to Corinthian believers generally. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 298-300; Ralph P.
Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 149-51; Martin, *Reconciliation*,
109-10. In either case, Paul speaks of his mission activity.

[197]Alfred Plummer, *Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 189; Harris, *Second Epistle to
the Corinthians*, 456-57; Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:451; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 303;
Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 183; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*,
trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), 147.

Paul and His "Stewardship from God"

In Colossians 1:25-29, we again find a passage in which commentators debate nearly every phrase. As with previous passages, however, we will confine our study to the understanding Paul has concerning his role as an agent of the gospel. Paul speaks of having been "made a minister" (ἐγενόμην ἐγω διάκονος, 1:25; cf. v. 23) of the church. The role of Paul as διάκονος indicates both his responsibility to God and the benefits to those he serves. Paul has been given this ministry "according to the stewardship from God, bestowed on me for your benefit" (κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς). While the stacking of phrases is difficult, Paul indicates that his ministry is both part of his assignment from God and of his divine plan for the Colossians.[198]

The purpose of this stewardship is "to fulfill the word of God" (πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ).[199] On the one hand, Paul fulfills the word of God when he carries out the commission given by God (cf. 4:17; Rom 15:19).[200] On the other hand, Paul fulfills the ministry of the gospel not when he proclaims it, but when that proclamation achieves its desired effect. Thus, O' Brien notes,

> The Word of God is 'fulfilled' not simply when it is preached in the world . . . but when it is dynamically and effectively proclaimed in the power of the Spirit . . .

---

[198]Peter T. O' Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 81; R. McL. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*, ICC (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 173; Ernest D. Martin, *Colossians, Philemon*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 91. Martin offers the dynamic translation, "I became a minister according to God's plan, the execution of which has been assigned to me for your benefit."

[199]Translation mine. Most English Bibles do not give a literal rendering here and interpret the passage in the translation: "so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of* the word of God" (NASB); "to present . . . the word of God in its fullness" (NIV); "by proclaiming his entire message" (NLT); "to make the word of God fully known" (ESV); "to preach his complete message" (CEV); "to tell fully the message of God" (NCV); "to make God's message fully known" (HCSB). The NKJV is an exception. Thus, most Bible translations interpret the phrase in terms of the fullness of the message preached. That is, one fulfills the word by preaching it completely. Yet, this interpretation misses the sense of the passage.

[200]O' Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 82; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 118-19.

throughout the world, and accepted by men in faith. . . . Like God's Word of old (Isa 55:11) it is dynamic, achieving the very purpose for which it was sent forth.[201]

In this way then, Paul can speak of his missionary role as both service to the gospel and to the church. The role of Paul is to fulfill the word of God. He is to faithfully fulfill his commission to proclaim the gospel, and in doing so, win persons for Christ. Of course, we again see that initial conversion is not isolated from discipleship. The stewardship of Paul is to present the gospel so the he may "present every man complete in Christ." Thus, the goal is not reached at initial conversion, but when those who believe reach full maturity in Christ (cf. 1:22; Eph 4:13).

To that end, Paul is constantly at work. He states, "I labor" (κοπιῶ) to present each person complete in Christ. The word κοπιῶ here "conveys the sense of strenuous effort, of toil amid trouble and difficulty."[202] Paul adds that he is "striving" (ἀγωνιζόμενος), thus employing an athletic metaphor to illustrate the strenuous effort and exertion in his outworking of ministry.[203] In all his human effort, however, Paul is completely dependent on God for success. Paul works "according to His power, which mightily works within me" (κατὰ ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐν δυνάμει). Note the repetition of the verb ἐνεργέω here. Literally, the passage reads, "according to his effectual working, which works effectually in me in power." Both Paul and God are at work. Paul labors and strives, while God effectually works (cf. 1 Cor 15:10). N. T. Wright explains the balance here:

> Paul does not go about his work half-heartedly, hoping vaguely that grace will fill in the gaps which he is too lazy to work at himself. Nor however, does he imagine that

---

[201]O' Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 83; cf. Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, in *Hermeneia*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. William R. Poehlmann and Robert K. Karris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 73; N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986), 91.

[202]Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 182; see also BADG, 443.

[203]Rogers and Rogers, *Linguistic and Exegetical Key*, 463; Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 182; BADG, 15.

it is 'all up to him', so that unless he burns himself out with restless, anxious toil nothing will be achieved. He knows that God's desire is to bring Christians to maturity, *and* that God has called him to have a share in that work.[204]

Paul's mission is to see persons saved and brought to maturity in Christ. To fulfill this mission, Paul works in all his human effort and in full dependence upon the work of God in and through him. Thus, "the balance between human effort and divine enabling is clearly struck."[205]

Summary

In his letters, Paul makes several statements about his ministry in which he describes his role. In each of these descriptions, Paul speaks of his ministry in a different way. Examination of the various passages reveals the understanding of Paul concerning the role of human agents of the gospel.

In Romans, Paul speaks of the purpose of his ministry as the "obedience of faith." Two aspects of this phrase emerge. First, Paul describes his role as bringing about this obedience among his Gentile hearers. Paul aims toward a result and acts as a "causative agent" to bring about that result. Second, obedience of faith involves more than initial conversion but also includes the winning of converts, the strengthening of new believers, and the establishment of churches.

Later in the letter, Paul refers to himself as a "minister of Christ Jesus." Here, Paul functions as a priest who presents an offering to God. His offering is the Gentiles themselves. Paul presents to God not his work, but the results of that work. Again, more than initial conversion is in view as Paul speaks once more of obedience. Paul is the instrument through which God works. His role is to bring about results, but only those results that Christ accomplishes *through* him.

---

[204]Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 93.

[205]Dunn, *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 127.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes the role that he, Apollos, and other gospel agents share as "servants" and "co-workers" who belong to God. Paul utilizes an agricultural metaphor in which his role is as an instrument through which God works. He and Apollos are both servants through whom the Corinthians came to faith in Christ and were established in that faith. Their purpose is to produce a harvest, but God is the one who actually causes the growth. They are instruments of God. As such, they are co-workers who belong to God and through whom God works. They are also "stewards" who are accountable to God for their work and result.

Later in the letter, Paul describes his purpose in terms of results. As Paul describes his mission practice, he states that he does what he does so that he "may win" others. Later, he says that his purpose is that he "might save" some. As we have seen, these phrases both point to the role of Paul in terms of the result of his ministry. Again, that result includes more than merely initial conversion; it also includes bringing his hearers to Christian maturity. Nevertheless, Paul aims for results. His role is not merely to proclaim a message. His role, through his ministry and message, and as God works through him, is to save his hearers.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes himself as an "ambassador" of Christ. As such, Paul has received from God the "ministry of reconciliation." As an ambassador of Christ, Paul becomes a part of the process of reconciliation. Though Paul has no significance apart from the work of God, he nevertheless becomes part of the reconciling action. In this sense, he becomes a co-worker with God. As Paul spreads the message, he takes part in the reconciling action of God.

Finally, in his letter to the Colossians, Paul explains the stewardship which God has entrusted to him. Paul is to "fulfill the word of God" by winning persons to faith in Christ and presenting them "complete" as mature believers. Paul does not merely fulfill a minimum requirement, but labors and strives, working toward that goal. While

Paul works to see results, God is also at work. Paul is to put in his best effort, while God ultimately brings about the result.

Preliminary Conclusions

Having examined the role of both the apostles and Paul, we are ready to make some preliminary conclusions. First, the role of gospel agents includes results. Human agents are to follow Christ in his redemptive purpose. They will "catch people" and are to "reap" a harvest. Gospel messengers are sent by Jesus, just as Jesus was sent by the Father. Their ministry is an extension of Christ's ministry. They are sent with his purpose—the redemption of people. Gospel agents preach repentance and forgiveness. They "make disciples."

Gospel agents are witnesses, bearing the divine message. As witnesses, they proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ and its significance for salvation. They believe the message and strive to convince others to accept it as well. As Christ died and rose again to save, so his witnesses bring salvation to those who receive their message. Witnesses open the eyes of those in darkness so that they may turn from darkness to light and receive forgiveness. Their message leads to conversion, forgiveness, and acceptance by God of those who will receive it.

Human agents of the gospel bring about the "obedience of faith" as their hearers accept the message. They are "ministers of Christ" offering to God the results of their ministry. Gospel messengers are servants in God's harvest and coworkers who belong to him. They are instruments through which God works. They are stewards who are accountable to God. Their purpose is "to win" and "to save." They are representatives of Christ as his "ambassadors." They are co-workers "working together" with God as participants in his reconciling work.

The role of human agents of the gospel is not only to proclaim the gospel, but through that proclamation to see persons come to faith in Christ. Proclamation of the gospel is neither indifferent to results nor is it merely desirous of numerical results.

Messengers of the gospel desire, strive for, and expect results. The role is to proclaim, but not merely to proclaim. Their role is to bring salvation to the hearer through that proclamation. Gospel messengers are vessels through which God saves.

Second, the results gospel messengers produce include not only initial conversion but also the nurturing of believers to maturity in Christ. The commission to "make disciples" as well as the subsequent demands to baptize and teach indicate a role of gospel messengers that goes beyond the initial conversion of the hearers. Human agents seek for an "obedience of faith," which includes the entire conversion process from initial faith to growth in Christian maturity. The work of human agents involves the "planting" and "watering" of the church as God brings the growth. The purpose of human agents "to win" and "to save" apply both to unbelievers who need to come to faith in Christ as well as "weak" believers who must grow in maturity in him. Gospel agents seek to "present every man complete in Christ." The role of messengers of the gospel includes the initial proclamation of the gospel as well as the strengthening of new believers in New Testament churches.

Finally, though the role of messengers certainly includes results, messengers are unable to fulfill their role apart from God. There must be an intentional "going." Yet, in everything, God is the prime agent. God sends gospel messengers in his name and with his authority. Human agents are dependent upon his power. They rely on his promise. The harvest they are to reap is God's. The relationship of sent ones to the Sender is one of absolute dependence.

Gospel messengers are promised God's Holy Spirit to empower their mission and witness. They are promised his presence as they fulfill their role. They can accomplish nothing of themselves but can only fulfill their role by what God accomplishes through them. They are the conduit through which God saves. Messengers are servants in God's harvest, yet God is the one who ultimately causes the growth. The role of human messengers is to bring salvation. God is the one who actually saves.

Messengers, though having a role to play in the reconciling work of God, have no significance apart from him. Human messengers "labor" and "strive" to fulfill their role, yet God is the one who "effectually works" in his messengers. Messengers are completely dependent upon God for success.

The role of human agents includes results. At the same time, those results are completely dependent upon God. Given this balance, what is the place of human ingenuity in terms of strategy and methods? Does the role of human agents mean that one should develop strategies and use effective methods for fulfilling that role? In the next chapter, we will examine the use of strategies and methods in the evangelistic task.

CHAPTER 4

THE STRATEGY AND METHODS OF GOSPEL
AGENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the last chapter, we examined the biblical role of those sent with the gospel

message. This chapter will focus on a second aspect of harvest theology: the discovery

and use of effective methods and strategy. To analyze this aspect of harvest theology, this

chapter will examine the activities and writings of the apostles and Paul to see what, if

any, strategies or methods are employed in the New Testament and for what purpose.

At the outset, we must acknowledge the limitations of the study that makes up

the content of this chapter. One of the dangers of doing a "biblical analysis" of the

strategy and methods of New Testament gospel agents is the lack of material actually

available to analyze. In the gospels, the evangelistic mission had not yet begun. There is,

thus, little if any information about a mission strategy. In the remainder of the New

Testament, after the commissioning by Jesus, there is still little data. Apart from the few

places where Paul actually speaks about his method, usually as part of some other

argument, there is little material in the New Testament about evangelistic strategy and

methodology at all. This lack of material is evident even in the narrative accounts of

Acts. In the course of the research, I share the same frustration as others who have

examined the book of Acts for its missiological principles: Luke did not write a

missiological textbook.[1] Thus, we must approach our analysis with an admission that the

Bible, while providing useful information from which to form and evaluate mission

---

[1]In his own study of Acts, Harold Dollar comments, "It gradually became apparent to me that Luke had little interest, per se, in missiological or sociological categories. Luke was not a missiologist." Harold E. Dollar, *A Biblical-Missiological Exploration of the Cross-Cultural Dimensions in Luke-Acts* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993), 3.

strategy, is not a manual of church growth. Nonetheless, there are some hints of evangelistic strategy and methods in the New Testament as well as explicit statements of the Apostle Paul concerning his method.

The Strategy and Method of
the Twelve in the Gospels

We begin with the mission strategy of the Twelve. When seeking to examine the ministry of the Twelve, however, one is struck by the rather small amount of information available. In the Gospels, the disciples spend most of their time along side Jesus in his earthly ministry. Seemingly, the sole passages we may examine in terms of actual "mission" work during the earthly ministry of Jesus are the sending of the Twelve recorded in the Synoptics and the sending of seventy-two in Luke. Even then, one must take care in applying whatever strategy and method may be discerned here to the post-resurrection ministry of the apostles.

In the last chapter, we examined the sending of the Twelve and, later, seventy-two disciples by Jesus in terms of the role he assigned them. Here, we will reexamine the passages in terms of strategy. As Jesus sends out these messengers, he gives them specific instructions. The synoptic writers present varying amounts of this instructive material.[2] Many of the instructions are specific to this unique sending during the ministry of Jesus.[3] The details of where to go and what to bring are applicable only to this

---

[2]The account in Mark is rather short while Luke's account is longer and divided between two sendings. Matthew's account is longest and includes what appears to be instructions for a future mission. Detailed examinations of the entire discourses are beyond the scope of this paper and would not prove profitable for our current purposes.

[3]Lane comments, "There is in the context no thought of the creation at this time of a permanent office, but rather the fulfillment of a specific commission. This is an important consideration; it signifies that the instructions which Jesus gave to the disciples do not have a general and permanent vitality." William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 207. Caird overstates the point when he suggests, "Not only the Mission Charge but all the sayings of Jesus were addressed to Jews in the particular circumstances of their own time, and it is wrong to think that any of them can be turned onto propositions universally valid for all time." George B. Caird, "Uncomfortable Words: II. Shake the Dust from Your Feet (Mk 6 11)," *ExpTim* 81 (1969): 41.

particular event.[4] Likewise, the scope of the assignment is particularly narrow, especially when compared to the post-resurrection commission statements.[5] Further, the extended discussion in Matthew, while likely referring to the future mission of the disciples, does not help us determine what strategy or methods the disciples employed.

At the same time, D. A. Carson suggests that this "commission of the Twelve [is] both an explicit short-term itinerary and a paradigm of the larger mission stretching into the years ahead."[6] If Carson is correct, certain elements of this sending may constitute patterns to follow in future missions. Our role is to examine the passage for hints of mission strategy and methodology as it relates to the spread of the evangel itself.[7]

The Scope of the Mission

One aspect of these sendings during the training of the disciples is their scope. In the account in Matthew, Jesus sets boundaries for this specific mission. Jesus limits their mission to the local Jewish region. In Matthew 10:5, Jesus instructs his disciples not to go "in *the* way of *the* Gentiles" (ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν). The "way" of which Jesus speaks may refer to a particular road leading to a Gentile city or, more generally, "in the direction of" the Gentile territory.[8] The disciples are to restrict their mission geographically to the

---

[4]Compare 1 Cor 9:3-6 where Paul notes a difference in practices of him and the other apostles concerning provisions, etc.

[5]Here, the disciples are not to go in "*the* way of *the* Gentiles" (ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν, Matt 10:5), whereas, later Jesus commissions them to go to "all the nations" (πάντα τὰ εθνη, Matt 28:19). Cf. also the "Samaritans" in Matt 10:5 with Acts 1:8.

[6]D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 242. Schnabel notes, "The reference to a witness before rulers and kings and the announcement of persecution indicate that the commissioning of the Twelve was no just an 'incident' but rather training for the proclamation of the kingdom of God and exemplary preparation for future missionary activity." Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1:294.

[7]These texts have a particular relevance for the present study because of their use by McGavran to support his doctrine of receptivity.

[8]For the former view, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 2:165. For

Jewish region. Similarly, Jesus instructs them to avoid any "city of the Samaritans." Their mission was limited within their region to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6). Later, Jesus would indeed send his disciples to "all the nations" (Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47) and to "the remotest part of the earth," including the Samaritans (Acts 1:8). For this mission, however, they are to limit themselves both regionally and culturally to the Jews.

In the accounts in Luke, the disciples will cover this territory by going to the cities (9:4-5) and villages (9:6) of the region. No place is to be excluded. The disciples take the message "everywhere" (πανταχοῦ, 9:9). In the following chapter, Luke notes that Jesus sends the disciples ahead to "every city and place" (πᾶσαν πόλιν καὶ τόπον, 10:1) that he will go to in the future. The message of the kingdom is to spread widely to all in the communities of the area.[9] Thus, within the territory assigned to them, Jesus sends them with a mission designed to bring the message to the entire region.

The Response to Rejection

While the disciples are to proclaim the message broadly throughout the region, they are not to do so without regard to response. Jesus gives both the Twelve and the seventy-two specific instructions concerning those who reject the message. As Jesus sends out the Twelve he gives instructions in case any "does not receive you" (μὴ δέξηται ὑμᾶς) or "listen to you" (μηδὲ ἀκούσωσιν ὑμῶν).[10]

---

the latter, see Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 270; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 415; cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 381-82.

[9]Marshall argues that it is inconceivable that Jesus could preach in all these cities. For this reason, he sees an allusion here to a future mission in which messengers take the place of Jesus. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 416; cf. John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, WBC, vol. 35b (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 550. However, Schnabel has shown through a creative scenario that the pairs of disciples could have preached in each of the known cities, villages and settlements in a relatively short period. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:305-11.

[10]Mark 6:11. Luke 9:5 changes δέξηται to δέχωνται and omits μηδὲ ἀκούσωσιν ὑμῶν. Matthew 10:14 changes ἀκούσωσιν to ἀκούσῃ τοὺς λόγους ὑμῶν, "heed your words." Hagner notes

First, they are to leave that place (ἐκπορευόμενοι, Mark 6:11; ἐξερχόμενοι, Luke 9:6/Matt 10:14). They are not to tarry in the homes or villages that will not receive their message. Their message is that people should repent. If the people will not, the disciples are to move on to another place. Joachim Gnilka notes that the disciples are to make no repeated attempts to win those who reject the message. Time is precious and one must move to those who will receive it.[11]

Second, for those who reject the message, the disciples are to leave with a sign of rejection of them. Jesus instructs them, "shake the dust off your feet" (ἐκτινάξατε τὸν κονιορτὸν τῶν ποδῶν ὑμῶν, Matt 10:14[12]). The same symbol appears in the sending of the seventy-two, this time with a word of explanation (Luke 10:11).[13] The symbol here is one of judgment. The act serves as a warning for, and ultimately a judgment against, those who continually reject the message.[14]

---

that the addition of "your words" by Matthew indicates that their primary task was proclamation. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 273.

[11]Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 2nd ed., HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1986, 1988), 1:369.

[12]Also, with slight modification, Luke 9:6; Mark 6:11; cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6.

[13]There is some disagreement among the commentators concerning the meaning of the symbol, and it may be impossible to determine a precise meaning. Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, WBC, vol. 34a (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 322-23. In rabbinic literature, Jews shake the dust from their shoes when returning to Israel from Gentile lands (*m. Ohol.* 2:3, 18:6; *m. Tohar* 4:5; *b. Sanh* 12a; see Str-B 1:571). This practice has caused some commentators to suggest that the gesture in Jesus' instructions is "tantamount to calling a *Jewish* village *heathen*." James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 181; see also Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 354. This meaning is unlikely here, however, because in these rabbinic passages the act is one of self-purification and not a response to those who reject God. Henry J. Cadbury, "Dust and Garments," in *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, vol. 5 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1933), 269-77; cf. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 420. The symbol could also be a sign, similar to the washing of hands (cf. Matt 27:24), that the messenger is no longer responsible for the fate of the hearer. Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 2:178. A third option is that the act is a symbol of judgment. This option is most likely given the explanation of Jesus that the act is a "testimony" (μαρτύριον, Luke 9:5) against them. Bock, *Luke*, 1:817; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 420.

[14]James A. Brooks, *Mark*, NAC, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 102; David E. Garland, *Mark*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 241-42; Bock, *Luke*, 1:817; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 420. Bock notes, "The declaration is not decisive, but it indicates where the town is headed. The danger of refusal now is that there will be refusal later." Bock, *Luke*, 2:1002 n. 31. This warning would

Summary

Thus far, we have examined the strategy of the disciples when they are sent by Jesus during his earthly ministry. While many of the instructions to the Twelve and seventy-two are specific to this particular mission, certain elements may serve as paradigm for their post-resurrection mission. A few points are of particular interest. First, within the limited scope of this particular mission, the disciples are to saturate the area with the message of the kingdom. By taking the kingdom message to every city and village, the disciples cover the entire region. Second, the disciples respond positively to those who receive them but are to move on when the message is rejected.

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the book of Acts records some of the evangelistic activity of the Twelve. Consistent with the instructions given by Jesus during their earlier sending, the Twelve appear to evangelize the entire region of Judea in the early years of the church. On the issue of receptivity, there is no indication of the Apostles responding to rejection of the gospel in Acts by "shaking the dust from their feet." As we shall see, we do find, in at least one case, the Apostles responding to the positive reception of the gospel by affirming and multiplying a gospel witness. Later, the apostle Paul does in fact respond to the rejection of the gospel by turning to those who are receptive (Acts 13:51; cf. 18:6).

<div align="center">

**The Strategy and Method
of the Twelve in Acts**

</div>

As in the Gospels, when one turns to the book of Acts one finds no explicit information about the strategy of the Twelve and little data from which to discern one. One reason for this absence is that Luke writes for his own theological purposes rather

---

serve as a witness against them in the day of judgment. Hermann Strathmann, "Μάρτυς, κτλ.," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1967), 503; cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 250.

than to provide an exhaustive treatment of the ministry of the disciples. Among other objectives, Luke wishes to show the advance of the gospel as it spreads from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and from the Jewish people to the Gentiles. Rather than a full accounting of the mission activities of the Twelve, much less an explanation of a specific strategy, Luke only follows Peter and John with most of the focus on Peter. Despite this small amount of biblical data, however, there is enough evidence to suggest that the Twelve were obedient to the Great Commission and likely had a strategy by which to fulfill it. An examination of the texts is thereby warranted.

After his resurrection, Jesus commissions his disciples to go out in his authority and with his message to make disciples of the nations. In the early chapters of Acts, following the empowering by the Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples begin their preaching ministry. Primarily focusing on Peter, Luke portrays the disciples boldly proclaiming the gospel in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church grows quickly as the gospel spreads. As discussed in chapter 3, the primary role of the disciples in Acts is that of witness to the Christ event and its significance, calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus. One can rightly say that the primary "method" of the apostles is proclamation.[15]

Beyond the initial proclamation of the gospel and establishing of the church in Jerusalem, however, Luke provides little information. A few stories of Peter remain that take place outside Jerusalem, but there is no narrative record in Acts of a broad evangelistic campaign *by the Twelve* outside the holy city. This absence has caused some to suggest that, outside a ministry to the Jews in Jerusalem, the disciples are largely disobedient to the Great Commission. Don Richardson suggests, "Just as the four Gospels deliberately expose many of their human failings . . . so the book of Acts reveals another

---

[15]Verbs used of the preaching and teaching ministry of the apostles in Acts include διαμαρτύρομαι (2:40; 8:25; 10:42), διδάσκω (4:2; 4:18; 5:25, 21, 28, 42), εὐαγγελίζω (5:42; 8:25, 35, 40), καταγγέλλω (4:2), κηρύσσω (10:42), λαλέω (4:20, 29, 31; 5:20; 8:25), παρακαλέω (2:40); etc. For a discussion of the primary terminology for Christian proclamation in the New Testament, see Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 48-77.

error just as serious—their reticence to take Christ's last command seriously, at least during the early years following Pentecost."[16] Likewise, J. Herbert Kane retorts, "It was with great reluctance that the church leaders, Paul included, finally agreed to include the Gentiles in their plans."[17] Thus, some suppose that the Gentile mission, when it did finally begin, happened by accident and certainly not because of any intended strategy of the apostles.[18]

Were the Twelve Obedient to the Great Commission?

There are several indications, however, that the disciples were, in fact, obedient to the Great Commission. First, one must understand that there is very little available information about the early apostolic mission. The book of Acts is the primary source of this knowledge and Luke, for his part, is very selective in his use of materials as he writes for his own unique purposes. Thus, our knowledge of the early activity of the apostles is limited.[19] Hans Conzelmann notes that missionary activity in the early church "was more varied than is shown by our sources, focused as they are one-sidedly upon Paul."[20] Thus, arguments against the view that the apostles were obedient to the Great Commission are largely arguments from silence. Further, the few narrative

---

[16]Don Richardson, "The Hidden Message of 'Acts'," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph Winter and Steven H. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981), 94; cf. C. Gordon Olson, *What in the World is God Doing?* 5th ed. (Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers, 2003), 51; David J. Bosch, "Church Growth Missiology," *Missionalia* 16 (1988): 20-21; Carl R. Holladay, "Church Growth in the New Testament: Some Historical Considerations and Theological Prespectives," *ResQ* 26 (1983): 97-98.

[17]J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 66.

[18]Scott McKnight, "Gentiles, Gentile Mission," in *DLNT*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 390.

[19]Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Mission, Early Non-Pauline," in *DLNT*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 755.

[20]Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 153 n. 17.

accounts that Luke does include cast the disciples in a positive light. This positive

presentation of the ministry of the disciples is striking given the prominence and central

roll of the commission in Acts 1:8 for the book of Acts as a whole. Throughout the

narrative, Luke emphasizes the positive effects of the Twelve's ministry and not their

supposed failure.[21] Luke shows the disciples as bold proclaimers of the gospel who fill

Jerusalem with the teaching about Jesus and win many to faith in him.

Second, it is natural that the disciples would spend a substantial amount of

time establishing the church in Jerusalem. The disciples begin with a centralized mission

and work outward. Michael Green explains,

> They seem consistently to have *worked outwards from a warm centre*. . . . They
> gave attention to their own unity and prayerfulness, obedience and expectancy. And
> they were able to move out from that hot centre on to the streets with enormous
> effect on the day of Pentecost and in the months that followed. In obedience to Jesus
> they began to be his witnesses in Jerusalem first, then Judaea, then Samaria, and
> then to the uttermost ends of the earth. It was an effective strategy. . . . God added
> daily to the church those who were being saved.[22]

Not only was Jerusalem a starting place for mission, at least for Luke, Jerusalem was the

theological center of the Christian mission. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus commissions the

disciples to a gospel mission "beginning in Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Likewise, in Acts,

the disciples are to be witnesses first in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). Luke seems to focus on

Jerusalem as the center from which the gospel will go forth and the Twelve as the leaders

of an Israel that God has restored. Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O' Brien explain:

> Although we might have expected to be given an account of the missionary travels
> of the twelve apostles, generally this does not appear in Acts . . . Instead, Luke sees
> them as closely linked with the city of Jerusalem, a connection that persists
> throughout the narrative. As the nucleus of the restored Israel, they are preeminently
> witnesses to Israel 'in Jerusalem', from which centre the word of the Lord will

---

[21]Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:522-23.

[22]Michael Green, *Thirty Years That Changed the World: The Book of Acts for Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 47-48.

sound forth, as the Old Testament prophecies had anticipated (*e.g.* Is. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-5).[23]

Luke thus focuses on the beginnings of the mission in Jerusalem. Further, with the tremendous success in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7), a significant amount of time would naturally be spent there, both in evangelism and in the establishing of the church.[24] If the role of the disciples was to reap a harvest, they were busy fulfilling that role.

Third, there is evidence within the book of Acts of early mission work by the disciples that extended to the surrounding area and that included concern for non-Jews. Gentiles were among early Christian converts from the beginning. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preaches the gospel to the Jews of the Diaspora, which includes Gentile "proselytes" (προσήλυτος, 2:11).[25] In his second sermon, Peter cites the Abrahamic covenant (3:25; cf. Gen 12:3), a passage with a definite promise for the Gentiles. That Peter does not ignore the Gentile implication of the passage is evidenced by the phrase "for you first" (ὑμῖν πρῶτον, 3:26).[26] In Acts 6, when leaders are chosen among the Hellenist believers, one of them is a proselyte (6:5) and becomes the first church leader who is not of Jewish decent. Later, Peter and John confirm the mission of Philip to the Samaritans (8:14-17) and, in the process, undertake a preaching tour of Samaritan

---

[23] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, NSBT, vol. 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 139; cf. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 524.

[24] Green comments, "How this programme was to be carried out did not immediately concern the first disciples. They had their hands full preaching Jesus and the resurrection to the Jews of the capital." Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 112.

[25] See BAGD, 717; BDAG, 880. A proselyte is a Gentile who has fully converted to Judaism. Thus, a proselyte, having submitted to Jewish law including circumcision, is properly called a Jew, albeit of non-Jewish anscestry. Nevertheless, Luke makes a point of mentioning proselytes (also 6:5).

[26] Contra John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 137. See C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2nd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, 1998), 1:213; cf. I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 550.

villages (8:25). After the conversion of Paul, because of peace in the region and rest from

persecution, Peter begins a traveling evangelistic ministry (9:31-32a).[27] The fact that he

preaches in Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea is evidence that his mission activity extended

well beyond Jerusalem.[28] In Caesarea, Peter leads the Gentile Cornelius and his family to

faith in Christ (10:34-48).[29] Returning to Jerusalem, Peter explains what has happened

and how repentance and new life has come to the Gentiles (11:1-18). After persecution

breaks out in Jerusalem, James, the brother of John is martyred, and Herod has Peter

arrested (12:1-3). Upon his miraculous release (12:4-17), Peter "departed and went to a

different place" (12:17).[30]

---

[27]This fact is contrary to the popular conception that the disciples began their traveling ministry only as a result of the persecution and only after martyrdom of James in Acts 12. The "all" (πάντων) of 9:32 refers back to "Judea, Galilee, and Samaria" in 9:31.

[28]Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (New York: Living Age Books, 1958), 36.

[29]The climax of the narrative of Peter comes with the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius and the accompanying vision (Acts 10). Some have reasoned that God had to prod Peter to take the gospel to Gentiles and thus, "purge Peter of his anti-Gentile biases." Richardson, "The Hidden Message of 'Acts'," 92. This interpretation reads much into the text. A more preferable reading is that Peter's "reluctance" had to do with his being unwilling to break the Jewish law (10:28). The vision released Peter from that restriction. Further, the barrier for Peter had not been his unwillingness to take the gospel to the Gentiles, but the ability for Gentiles to become Christians without first becoming Jews. The Holy Spirit, through his vision and subsequent request by Cornelius, led Peter to the discovery that God would accept Gentiles apart from the law. A. T. Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Simon Peter* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 226. That this view should be preferred, is evidenced by the testimony of Peter at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:7-11). Here, Peter defends the right of Gentile Christians to remain uncircumcised because God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles without them first becoming Jews (15:8-9; cf. 10:44-45). Thus, the Holy Spirit had to instruct Peter, not that he must take the gospel to the Gentiles, but that the gospel was available to the Gentiles apart from the Jewish law.

[30]This persecution in chap. 12 is the event that some mark as the point at which God forces Peter out of Jerusalem after twelve years of disobedience. We have seen, however, that Peter is involved in missionary activity during his ministry as a leader in Jerusalem. Given the evidence, Donfried suggests as one possible scenario that Peter handed over leadership in Jerusalem well before the persecution in Acts 12. While he does not specifically argue for the position, Donfried suggests one plausible interpretation of the data: "Peter and the other members of the Twelve were involved with a Christian missionary strategy far more extensive than just Jerusalem. Peter was not a local church leader, and once the Jerusalem church grew to the point of requiring consistent administrative leadership this role was assumed by James, the brother of the Lord. Karl P. Donfried, "Peter," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:253.

Finally, there is evidence in other parts of the New Testament that indicates a ministry of the disciples outside Judea, which included Gentiles. In the longer ending of Mark, having received their commission from Jesus, the disciples "went out and preached everywhere" (ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ, Mark 16:20).[31] In Corinthians, as Paul defends his rights as an apostle, he notes the practice of Peter and the other apostles "to take along" (περιάγειν, 1 Cor 9:5) their believing spouses. The context refers to the accompanying of their wives as they traveled on mission.[32] The first epistle of Peter also gives evidence of concern for Gentiles. Peter addresses the letter to cities in Asia Minor and writes to Gentiles.[33] Further, Peter writes this letter from Gentile territory (1 Pet 5:13).[34] Thus, Peter, the "minister of the Jews," writes from Gentile land to Gentiles.

---

[31]While I do not recognize the ending of Mark to be authentic to the gospel, the phrase here does reflect the viewpoint of the early church of the activity of the apostles. On this text Peters comments, "The exact locations and geographical areas we are unable to establish with certainty. From the course of history of Christianity in apostolic times, we are justified to conclude that all of them were effective evangelists and missionaries. According to tradition, most of them laid down their lives as martyrs in the mission fields of the world. The rapid and far-flung spread of Christianity within a few decades is our best commentary on the zeal and labors of the apostles." George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 134.

[32]Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 153; Ferdinand Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament*, SBT, vol. 47 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1965), 49 n. 2; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 203-04.

[33]Specifically, "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet 1:1). These are all Gentile cities. While Peter refers to them as διασπορᾶς, a term which normally refers to Jews, the context of the letter demonstrates that this title is now used of the Gentile church. Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 46; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 2003), 51. Peter refers to their former pagan, rather than Jewish, life before conversion (1:14, 18). Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 67; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC, vol. 49 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 6, 57, 64. Also, using themes from Hosea, Peter identifies Gentiles as a people now accepted by God as his own (2:10). Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, trans. John E. Alsup, ed. Ferdinand Hahn (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 151; Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 93; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 112-13. See also Hos 1:6, 9-10; 2:23.

[34]In the close of the letter, Peter writes, "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and *so does* my son, Mark." Babylon, here, is a symbolic name for Rome. Goppelt, *Commentary on I Peter*, 373-75; Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 202; John H. Elliot, *1 Peter*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 882-87. Further, tradition places Mark and Peter in Rome (see Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 2.15.1; 3.39.15). Some commentators thus argue that the letter was written in Rome. See, for example, Goppelt, *Commentary on I Peter*, 373-77. Theide argues, however, that Rome here is symbolically connected to diaspora so that no particular place is in view. C. P. Theide, "Babylon, der andere Ort: Anmerkungen zu 1 Petr 5,13 und Apg 12,17," *Biblica* 67 (1986): 532-38; cf. Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*,

The Universal Strategy of the Twelve

The New Testament thus gives ample, if fragmented, evidence that the disciples were in fact obedient to the Great Commission. The question remains: Did the Twelve have any discernable strategy. Piecing together a "strategy of the Twelve" from the accounts in Acts is somewhat tenuous. Those who seek to discern the particulars of such a strategy will be frustrated by a lack of biblical material from which to do so. Nevertheless, given the limited material, one can surmise that in terms of method, the disciples preached the gospel liberally and responded to receptive people. In terms of strategy, the apostles sought to saturate Jerusalem and Judea with the gospel and establish the church there before moving on to other areas.

If our analysis is correct, then the book of Acts records the beginning of a universal strategy of the Twelve. Jesus had commissioned them to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8). In terms of geography, the gospel is indeed preached "beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Jerusalem is the location of the first gospel sermon of Peter (Acts 2:14-40), the establishment of the church (Acts 2:41-47; cf. 4:32-35), the preaching of Peter after healing a lame man (Acts 3:11:26), the defense of the gospel by Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-12), and the continued preaching of the gospel in the early days of the church (Acts 5:20-21). People from the surrounding areas come to Jerusalem because of the work of the apostles there (Acts 5:16). Up until the martyrdom of Stephen and the persecution by Saul, Luke records, "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem" (Acts 6:7). Jerusalem becomes the center from which the surrounding areas are reached with the gospel.

BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 322-23. Whether the letter was written in the city of Rome or in another place in the scattered regions of the Roman empire, it seems clear that the letter was written from Gentile territory.

We have seen above that the ministry of Peter extended to the region of Judea and Samaria. Further, Eckhard Schnabel argues persuasively for at least the general authenticity of later traditions that the apostles, after twelve years in Jerusalem, engaged in a planned mission to the regions of the known world.[35] Schnabel also argues, from circumstantial evidence in the New Testament, that the apostles were engaged in missionary activity beyond Jerusalem. He suggests that Paul's reference to the apostles taking along their wives (1 Cor 9:5), Paul's unwillingness to build on another's foundation (Rom 15:20), and his insistence that he worked harder than the other apostles (1 Cor 15:10), implies that the Twelve were engaged in missionary activity.

A Local Strategy

Not enough evidence exists to say with confidence that the apostles had a strategy for fulfilling the Great Commission to the "uttermost part of the earth." The New Testament does provide at least enough evidence to show that such a strategy was possible if not probable.[36] Ample evidence exists, however, to discern the practice of the Twelve, at least as it pertained to their mission to Jerusalem and Judea.

Preach the gospel abundantly. If their primary method was the clear proclamation of the gospel, their primary local strategy was to preach at every opportunity. In Acts, the apostles make a continual practice of teaching and preaching the good news (Acts 2:42, 46; 5:42). Further, the disciples take advantage of every opportunity they have to spread the gospel message. Luke records that Peter preaches when a crowd gathered after the miracle at Pentecost (Acts 2:6, 14) and the healing of a lame man (Acts 3:11-26). He uses opportunities when brought before the Sanhedrin to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish leaders (Acts 4:8-12; 5:29-32; cf. Stephen before the

---

[35]Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission,* 1:527-32.

[36]For a detailed analyses of the possibility of an extensive apostolic strategy and mission, see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission,* 1:436-551.

Synagogue leaders in Acts 7:1-53). The apostles use the occasion of the trip to validate

the Samaritan mission to preach to the surrounding villages (8:25). They preach in the

temple (Acts 2:46; 3:11; 5:20-21, 42; cf. 5:12), in homes (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 10:27), and

before the Jewish council (5:27-32); both in Jerusalem and in the surrounding villages

and cities of Judea, Galilee and Samaria (8:25; 9:31-32).[37]

The result of this abundant sowing of the gospel is that the area becomes

saturated with the gospel message. The number of Christian disciples continues to grow

(Acts 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31, 35, 42). The Jewish leaders, in opposition to the gospel,

recognize that the apostles have "filled Jerusalem" with the teaching of the resurrection

of Christ (Acts 5:28).[38] The persecution in Acts 8:1-4 is further evidence that the gospel

had spread in Jerusalem and was effectively taking hold. Ironically, the purpose of the

persecution is to stop the message of the gospel, but by scattering many of the church

leaders, the persecution ends up multiplying the influence of the Jerusalem church and

thus contributes to the continuing spread of the gospel to the surrounding region.[39]

---

[37]In Acts 9:32, Luke records that Peter traveled "through all" (διὰ πάντων). The NASB adds "*those* regions" because the phrase likely refers to the church in the regions of Judea and Galilee and Samaria mentioned in 9:31. Marshall notes, "Peter is represented as traveling among the churches outside Jerusalem in order to give them apostolic teaching (2:42); his activity, however, is not confined to teaching the Christians, but also includes evangelism." I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 178. For further discussion of the phrase διὰ πάντων, see Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:479.

[38]Bock notes that the verb "have filled" (πεπληρώκατε) is in the perfect tense with extensive or copulative force. Thus, the meaning is "like a cup filled to the full with their teaching." Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 246. The perfect also emphasizes the continuing result of their teaching. Fitzmyer identifies πεπληρώκατε as "Lucan hyperbole [that] serves to underline the success of apostolic preaching. Not only news about the miraculous cure, but even the teaching of the apostles, has spread thoroughly abroad in the city." Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 336.

[39]Bock, *Acts*, 320. The persecution was not God's way of getting them to obey the Great Commission. Rather, the disciples were so effective that persecution came. Those who were scattered made the most of the opportunity. The Twelve stayed in Jerusalem continuing the work there. Schnabel further notes, "The comment in Acts 8:3 that Saul entered 'house after house' in order to drag off both men and women whom he arrested and committed to prison may plausibly be taken as an indication of house churches that actively proclaimed the gospel and attracted new converts." Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:420. Additionally, Luke's recording of the seventy-two who were trained by Jesus in mission work is an indication that gospel proclaimers likely included more than the Twelve from the first days of

Further evidence of the liberal preaching of the gospel and its subsequent success is the establishment of the church in the region. By chapter nine of Acts, Luke refers to "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria." Later, Paul would refer in his letters to "the churches of Judea" (Gal 1:22)[40] and "the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea" (1 Thess 2:14). The continued teaching ministry in the church (Acts 2:42-47; 5:42; cf. 9:31-32) is evidence that the apostles are committed to the discipleship of these new believers and the establishment of the church.

Respond to the receptive. While there is no incident recorded in Acts in which the disciples reject a people based on their rejection of the gospel, there are hints that they do respond positively to those who are receptive to it. At least on one occasion, the disciples recognize the work of God in making peoples receptive to the gospel. While the apostles continue in Jerusalem, those who are dispersed because of persecution begin to evangelize other areas (Acts 8:4). When the Samaritans are receptive to the preaching of Philip, the apostles send (ἀπέστειλαν, 8:14) Peter and John to them.[41] The reason for their going is not specified in the text.[42] Whatever the purpose of their mission, the disciples respond to the receptivity of the Samaritans. During their mission, they engage in a preaching and teaching ministry among them (8:25). The text does not reveal how long this ministry takes place. However, Peter and John speak not only to the Samaritans

---

the church. If so, the fact that those scattered proclaimed the gospel wherever they went would be expected rather than coming as a surprise.

[40]Interestingly, J. Gresham Machen suggests that the reason Paul was unknown to the apostles other than Peter and James in Gal 1:19-22, is that "the others were out of the city, engaged in missionary work in Judea." J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1947), 76.

[41]The term ἀπέστειλαν implies an official mission. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 405.

[42]Barrett gives several possibilities: to convey a gift Philip could not (15); to perform a religious rite (the laying on of hands) which only the apostles could do (17); to inspect the work there; or "to share in what had already been recognized as a desirable step forward." Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:410; cf Bock, *Acts*, 330.

in that particular location, but also to "many villages" (πολλὰς κώμας, 8:25) of the Samaritans.[43] The response in Samaria is significant enough that Luke later describes the church as extending "throughout all . . . Samaria" (9:31).

Summary

While there is no explicit strategy of the Twelve in Acts, a few observations have been made. First, there is sufficient evidence to reject the claim that the Twelve were disobedient to the Great Commission. Luke portrays the disciples in a positive light as men who boldly proclaim the gospel, despite opposition, and establish the church in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. While the church begins among the Jews, the gospel spreads to Gentile proselytes, God-fearers, Samaritans, and eventually uncircumcised Gentiles. Later, the disciples leave Jerusalem and take the gospel to Gentile territory.

Second, we have observed at least some general contours of the method and strategy of the apostles. It is likely that the Twelve conceived of a way to proclaim the gospel beginning in Jerusalem and eventually reaching the ends of the earth. Whether or not the disciples indeed had such a strategy, Luke shows the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem outwards. While we cannot know the disciples' plans for a worldwide evangelistic campaign, we can observe the actions recorded by Luke in the early chapters of Acts. Here we find that the disciples preach the gospel at every opportunity, saturate Judea and Jerusalem with the gospel message, and firmly establish the church in the entire region.

In the case of the Samaritans, the Twelve are not the initial carriers of the gospel message. Nevertheless, they affirm and expand the evangelistic ministry to the Samaritans and respond to this receptivity by multiplying the spread of the gospel

---

[43]Barrett notes that the phrase πολλὰς κώμας indicates "an extensive evangelistic tour among Samaritan villages." Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:418; Polhill further notes, "The reference to the apostles evangelizing the Samaritan villages is significant. Not only did they endorse the Samaritan mission, but they also enthusiastically participated in it." Polhill, *Acts*, 221.

message among them. While the evidence in Acts is minimal, Schnabel summarizes the missionary tactics of the disciples this way: "Proclamation of the good news of God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ to as many people as possible, to Jews and to Gentiles, in all regions and among all peoples, at every opportunity."[44]

Mission Strategy of Paul

Among missiologists, a significant amount of attention has been given to the concept of strategy. The search for a Pauline strategy has been at the forefront of missiological studies. This section will explore the mission strategies and methods of the apostle Paul.

The Question of a Pauline Strategy

The question of whether or not Paul had an evangelistic strategy is not as self-evident as it may appear. A variety of opinions abound. Part of the dilemma concerns what exactly one means by "strategy." To some, strategy refers to a highly detailed organizational plan. To others, it means a loosely tied set of principles from which we act and measure our actions. The confusion over terms contributes to the varied opinions one finds.

A variety of opinions. If defined in the former sense, many object to the idea that Paul had a strategy. Roger Hedlund, for example, rejects the idea of a rigid strategy. He states, "Paul did not have a static method. His plans were flexible, his program open, so that he was able to move as the Spirit led and according to response and need."[45] Others suggest that to think of Paul's activity in terms of strategy is the wrong approach

---

[44]Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:512.

[45]Roger E. Hedlund, *The Mission of the Church in the World: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 217.

because such it sees mission as "primarily a program for accomplishing the task."[46]

Michael Green also rejects the idea that the early Christians, including Paul, had a

detailed strategy, rather "the Gospel spread out in an apparently haphazard way as men

obeyed the leading of the Spirit, and went through doors he opened."[47] Others are more

optimistic and find in the biblical record the inference that Paul did indeed have a

strategy. Edward Dayton and David Fraser see strategy in the words "as was his custom"

in Acts 17:2.[48] Similarly, McGavran notes Paul's practice of beginning at the synagogue

as evidence that "Paul had a deliberate plan."[49] David Hesselgrave sees a Pauline strategy

in Acts 16:6-10 where he observes, "If Paul had no plan, the Holy Spirit could not have

changed it!"[50]

Roland Allen had trouble with the concept of a Pauline strategy as well. In one

place, Allen seems to indicate that Paul did not have a strategy: "It is quite impossible to

maintain that St. Paul deliberately planned his journeys beforehand, selected strategic

points at which to establish his Churches and then actually carried out the designs."[51] At

the same time, Allen suggests that Paul did have some framework for his activity: "I find

it equally difficult to believe he was not guided by some very definite principles in his

---

[46] John Driver, "Paul and Mission," in *Mission Focus: Current Issues*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 47.

[47] Michael Green, "Evangelism in the Early Church," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice.*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 175. Bosch describes a missionary strategy for Paul, but only "for lack of a better term." David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 129.

[48] Edward R. and David A. Fraser Dayton, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 13.

[49] Donald A. McGavran, *How to Grow a Church* (Glendale, CA: Regal, Books Division, G/L Publications, 1973), 31.

[50] David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 43.

[51] Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours: A Study of the Church in the Four Provinces* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913), 15.

selection of his mission stations."[52] Ultimately, Allen concludes that Paul did have a

strategy: "He seized strategic points because he had a strategy."[53]

Given the various answers to the question of a Pauline strategy, it seems clear

that the issue is not easily resolved. Missiologist J. Herbert Kane offers the following

guideline in determining whether, in fact, Paul had a strategy:

> If by strategy is meant a deliberate, well formulated, duly executed plan of action
> based on human observation and experience, then Paul had little or no strategy; but
> if we take the word to mean a flexible *modus operandi* developed under the
> guidance of the Holy Spirit and subject to His direction and control, then Paul did
> have a strategy.[54]

Thus, the answer to the question depends in some part on how we define and qualify the

term "strategy." Kane seems to have presented a false dichotomy here, however. The

ideas of deliberateness and flexibility are not mutually exclusive. If having a strategy

means that the apostle had a rigid unalterable agenda with no room for adjustment, much

less the Holy Spirit, then one can by no means say that Paul had a strategy. It is possible,

however, to define strategy as both "deliberate" and "well formulated" as well as

"flexible" and "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

Strategy in the words of Paul. The question remains, did Paul have a specific

goal and a deliberate plan for reaching it? The answer, of course, must not originate from

the speculations of missiologists but from the biblical text itself. On the question of

whether Paul had a specific goal, it appears that he did. In various places, Paul speaks

generally about his preaching ministry and his mission to the Gentiles. In Romans 15:14-

33, Paul speaks specifically about his specific geographic goals. Already we have seen

---

[52]Ibid., 17.

[53]Ibid., 27.

[54]Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 73. Hesselgrave is in basic agreement with Kane on this point, but observes that while modern missionaries have two thousand years of history on which to look back, Paul had no such opportunity for a strategy based on "opportunity and experience." Additionally, any good strategy will be flexible and any *Christian* strategy must be guided by the Holy Spirit. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, 44.

that in this passage Paul presents the Gentiles as an offering to God. The aim of Paul in the evangelistic task is both the initial conversion and spiritual growth of these believers. God accomplishes results through the priestly ministry of Paul. Thus, in verses 14-18, Paul speaks in terms of the result of his ministry, that is, the conversion and growth of the Gentiles. In verse 19 and following, Paul continues to speak of the results of his ministry, but now he speaks in geographic terms. As a result (ὥστε) of the power of God working through him, Paul states that he has "fulfilled" (πεπληρωκέναι, cf. Col 1:25) the gospel "from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum" (15:19). The statement that he has "fulfilled the gospel" refers neither to his manner of preaching, nor to the idea that every person in the region has heard the gospel. Rather, Paul has completed the pioneering task assigned to him.[55] Paul has strategically planted churches throughout the area on which he has focused.[56] Paul has done so in the region extending from "Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum." This designation covers the general territory between the two points where the first three missionary journeys of Paul took place.[57] The phrase "around to"

---

[55]C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975, 1979), 2:762.

[56]Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 770; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 896; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 2:214; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 514. Dunn notes that Paul may have included the work of his emissaries whom he had sent out from the strategic centers. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC, vol. 38a (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 864.

[57]Schreiner, *Romans*, 769; James M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians*, WUNT, vol. 84 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995), 136-37. There is considerable debate here concerning the two places. Many argue that Jerusalem and Illyricum describe the outer limits of the region within which Paul ministered, so that neither city is itself included. Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:760; Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:213-14; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 394. Byrne argues that Jerusalem is a starting point theologically as the center from which the gospel eminates. Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, SP, vol. 6 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 438; cf. Köstenberger and O' Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 171; Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, 138; Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:761. Moo points to the fact that Paul did in fact minister in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30; 26:20) and could have ministered in Illyircum during his third missionary journey. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 894.

(κύκλῳ μέχρι) designates the route as a circuitous one, extending in different directions and covering the broad area between the points (cf. Mark 6:6).[58]

Paul goes on to indicate the reason for the area that he chose. He aimed to minister where Christ was not "named" (ὠνομάσθη, 15:20). That the word was not named is not a refernce to the absence of gospel proclamation, though this would most certainly be the case. Rather, Christ was not "acknowledged and confessed" by the people.[59] That is, no churches had yet been established. Paul did not want to build on another's "foundation" (θεμέλιον, cf. 1 Cor 3:10). His work was pioneer, church planting work.[60] Others would later build on his ministry (1 Cor 3:5-10). His call as a pioneer missionary had kept him up to this point from coming to Rome (Rom 15:22). Paul had busied himself with completing the work he had already begun.[61] As Paul writes this epistle, he has now fulfilled that work (15:19) so that there is "no further place" for him in the region (15:23). Paul has completed the missionary task he had undertaken. Churches have been established which could now carry on the work.[62] Paul looks forward

---

[58]Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:761; cf. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 895; Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:214. There are, however, other possible interpretations of the phrase. The phrase may refer to the centrality of Jerusalem. Schreiner, *Romans*, 769; Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, 138. Dunn suggests that κύκλῳ μέχρι refers his path as an arc. He suggests the possibility that Paul has taken the top half of a circle with Jeruslaem at the center. Others have carried the gospel to the bottom southern part. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 864; cf. John Knox, "Romans 15:14-33 and Paul's Conception of His Apostolic Mission," *JBL* 83 (1964): 11.

[59]Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:215; cf. Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 515; Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:764.

[60]Schreiner, *Romans*, 770; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 896; Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 515.

[61]Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 899; Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:216.

[62]Marshall notes, "It is preferable to take Romans 15 as a strategic endeavor to found churches as centres of continuing Christian work." I. Howard Marshall, "Luke's Portrait of the Pauline Mission," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 104; cf. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 899; Schreiner, *Romans*, 774; Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2:766. For evidence that Paul expected his churches to evangelize, see Robert L. Plummer, *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006).

to a new mission enterprise as he plans a future pioneer ministry in Spain, for which he will enlist the support of the Roman church (15:24). Thus, Paul speaks here of both a mission which has been accomplished and a mission he hopes to engage in the future.

If one takes from this text only that Paul understood his missionary task to be described at least partially in terms geography (v. 19),[63] or that Paul purposely did not go to areas that were already evangelized but chose instead to preach where Christ had not yet been named, we have enough to say that Paul had some sense of planned purpose and direction and, thus, a strategy. Further, we can say that his strategy was tied to results in that he not only sought to preach the gospel, but through that preaching, to plant churches and establish a Christian presence in the regions in which he ministered. Paul, in stating that there was "no further place for me in these regions," was looking back at a finished work.[64] That work was not that he had preached the gospel to every inhabitant of these regions, but that he had planted the church there.

Elements of Paul's Overall Strategy

When reading the biblical record from a missiological point of view, a pattern emerges as Paul embarks on his missionary journeys. Paul follows the same or nearly the same pattern throughout his itinerant ministry.[65]

Paul proceeds from a home base. Paul saw his mission as part of the overarching plan of God. To fulfill his role in that mission, Paul needed a strong "home

---

[63]W. Paul Bowers, "Paul and Mission," in *EDWM*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 732.

[64]Marshall, "Luke's Portrait of the Pauline Mission," 103.

[65]Others have offered various outlines and descriptions of a Pauline Strategy. See, for example, Allen, *Missionary Methods*, vii; Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 74-85; Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, 47-48; Dean Gilliland, *Pauline Theology & Mission Practice* (Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria: Albishir Bookshops, 1983), 284-91; Paul Bowers, "Fulfilling the Gospel: The Scope of the Pauline Mission," *JETS* 30 (1987): 185-88; Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 46-47.

base."[66] As one examines the text, in different respects, both Antioch and Jerusalem serve as a home base for his itinerant ministry. Both remain important to Paul as he goes out as a missionary to the surrounding areas and the world. Antioch was the sending church, having separated Paul and others and sent them as missionaries (Acts 13:1-3). After his first missionary journey, Paul returns to Antioch and remains there for a time (15:30-33). After his second missionary journey, Paul returns to Antioch again and spends time there before leaving a third time (Acts18:22-23). Thus, each of his three missionary journeys begins at Antioch (13:3-4; 15:35-36; 18:22-23).

Paul had a home connection with the Jerusalem church as well. Kane suggests that Jerusalem was the "mother" church, being the starting place for the new faith and the original home of the Twelve. Paul later returns to Jerusalem to counsel with the leaders there, especially concerning the Gentiles (Acts 15:2).[67] Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller suggest that, theologically, Paul kept continued ties to Jerusalem, rather than Antioch, as the basis for his mission. "He was always aware that his starting point to the Gentiles remained 'from Jerusalem' (Rom 15:19)."[68] Paul saw himself as sent physically by Antioch, and theologically by Jerusalem. The significance of a home base for Paul is demonstrated both practically and theologically in the final stage of his rhetorical progression in Romans 10:15, "How will they preach unless they are sent?"

Paul seeks to reach provinces. In the Acts narrative, one finds that from these home bases, Paul commences his mission tours. In examining his mission travels, one can see a clear pattern in the location of his evangelistic activity. Paul narrows his focus to work in a smaller area than the entire world. In Romans 15, Paul describes the broad area

---

[66]Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 75.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 184.

from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Later he desires to go to Spain. Part of the reason for his

success is that Paul does not see the ultimate mission of whole-world evangelization to be

his alone. Instead, he concentrates his efforts on a confined area. Kane has observed from

the biblical texts that Paul worked primarily in four provinces: Galatia, Asia, Macedonia,

and Achaia.[69] Kane attributes the success of Paul to his focus on planting churches in

these provinces: "His aim was not simply to cover territory but to plant churches. To

accomplish this it was necessary not only to sow the seed but also to reap a harvest. This

could best be done by confining his efforts to a fairly restricted area."[70] Allen further

explains this focus on provinces. He argues,

> The object that he [Paul] set before himself was the establishment of the Church in
> the province rather than in the city or town or village in which he preached. . . . both
> St. Paul and St. Luke constantly speak of the provinces . . . This principle is worthy
> of notice not only because it witnesses to the largeness of his vision and of his faith,
> but because . . . it greatly influenced him both in his choice of cities in which he
> would preach, and in his method of preaching the gospel.[71]

The focus of Paul on the province, then, was narrow enough to be a manageable and

reachable goal but large enough to be one worthy of his God. Paul's ministry to the

provinces served in advancing him toward his larger missiological goal.

What then were the criteria Paul used in selecting the provinces on which he

would focus his efforts? McGavran suggests that Paul looked for responsive areas.[72] No

evidence from the Scriptures, however, suggests that Paul chooses provinces according to

---

[69]Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 75. For evidence of Kane's assertion, see Acts 16:6-7, 9-12; 18:5, 23, 27; 19:10, 21, 22, 26, 29; 20:18; 1 Cor 16: 1, 5, 15, 19; 2 Cor 1:1, 8, 16; 2:13; 7:5; 8:1; 9:2; 11:10; Gal 1:2; Rom 15:26; Phil 4:15; 1 Thess 1:7-8; 4:10; 1 Tim 1:3; 2 Tim 1:15.

[70]Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 75.

[71]Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 17-18. Note the subtitle of his book *A Study of the Church in the Four Provinces*.

[72]Here McGavran is caught by his own definitions. By his designation, a responsive people is one in which persons are coming to Christ. Yet, Paul sought pioneer areas where no church had yet been established. For Paul to have used the receptivity principle as McGavran defines it, he would have to have sought areas where the gospel had to some degree been proclaimed, people were coming to faith in Christ, but in which no church had yet been established. There is no evidence of that scenario.

the receptivity principle. Rather, as we have already seen, Paul looks for those provinces in which Christ has not been named and the church has not yet been established (Rom 15:20).

Paul focuses on cities and urban centers. To reach the provinces, Paul narrows his focus even further. He chooses particular cities that will help him reach his goal of spreading the gospel quickly to the world.[73] In fulfilling his call to Macedonia (Acts 16:10), Paul focuses on Philippi, "a leading city of the district" (Acts 16:12), and Thessalonica, "where there was a synagogue of the Jews" (Acts 17:1). Similarly, Paul focuses on Ephesus for Asia, and Corinth for Achaia. It also appears that Paul did have some criteria by which he selected the cities on which he would focus his ministry. These criteria would explain why he did not spend time in every city and hurried through some in favor of others.

Here, again, we are faced with the question of how Paul chose the cities in which he would minister. In other words, what was his strategy? More specifically, did Paul choose cities within the unreached provinces in which he thought the people were or might be more receptive or upon some other criteria? On this question, Paul does not speak. We must attempt to discern his strategy from his practice. As we shall see in the next section, Paul does respond at times to the receptivity or rejection of the gospel. There seems to be no evidence in Acts, however, that Paul observes a city or group within a city to be receptive *before* he takes the gospel there.[74]

In the writings of Paul, one might be tempted to see receptivity in Paul's concept of the "open door." Even in these passages, however, we do not see a kind of

---

[73]Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 77.

[74]Sanford Good persuasively argues this point. Receptivity does not seem to be part of Paul's selection of cities, and Paul leaves a city only when led by the Holy Spirit to do so or is forced to do so because of persecution. N. Sanford Good, "A Biblical Analysis of the Receptive People Principle in the Writings of Donald A. McGavran and the Modern Church Growth Movement" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1981), 134-39.

strategy based on receptivity. In three places, Paul speaks of a ministry opportunity as an open "door" (θύρα, 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12; Col 4:3).[75] The first passage is most favorable to the receptivity view. In 1 Corinthians 16:9, Paul states that he will be delayed in his visit to the Corinthian church because in "a wide door for effective *service*" had opened in Ephesus where he currently was. While the description "effective" (ἐνεργής) may refer to a favorable response to the gospel,[76] it more likely refers to "the possibility of open and plain proclamation."[77] Even if the "door" is a reference to receptivity, there is no indication that Paul *chose* Ephesus because he thought the gospel would be better received there. He was responding to a situation that presented itself after he arrived. Similarly, in Colossians 4:3, Paul asks for prayer that a door would open "for the word" (τοῦ λόγου). Paul does not ask for prayer that his hearers will receive the message, however, but that he will be able to abundantly preach the message and "may make it clear" (φανερώσω, Col 4:4).[78] Martin notes that Paul asks for prayer "that God may open a door of access for the word being spoken by human channels. Paul does not see prayer [in this passage] as asking God to save lost people, but to facilitate witness."[79] Finally, in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, despite an open door, Paul's concern for the wellbeing of the Corinthian church causes him to move on to Macedonia to find Titus. This text, then, reveals at least one occasion on which Paul's concern for the church in

---

[75]In these cases, the "door" is symbolic of a ministry god makes "possible or feasible." BAGD, 366; BDAG, 462.

[76]Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 126.

[77]Henning Paulsen, "ἐνεργέω," in *EDNT*, vol. 1, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 454.

[78]For φανερώσω, I prefer the translation, "may reveal it" as in HCSB. Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 264.

[79]Ernest D. Martin, *Colossians, Philemon*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 198.

one location takes precedence over an open opportunity for evangelism in another. The open door in Troas is not as important as the growth and success of the already established Corinthian church. [80]

What then was the reason Paul chose the cities he did? Roland Allen notes four characteristics of the cities Paul chose. (1) They were centers of Roman administration. (2) They were centers of Greek civilization. (3) They were centers of Jewish influence. (4) They were centers of trade.[81] Dean Gilliland makes similar observations, adding that Paul went to cities because the masses of people were there. Because of the Roman highway system, these cities were places where the diversity of the empire could be found. They were centers of travel and commerce.[82] I. Howard Marshall sees the selection of cities by Paul as evidence of his strategic choice. He notes that of the five major cites in the Roman Empire in his day, Paul visited four of them, stopping also in other major towns. This fact suggests to Marshall that Paul saw in the cities their importance for achieving his goals.[83] In order to reach the region, he must first reach these strategic cities.

What about the other cities? How would they be reached? During his time of ministry, Paul would send his companions and other ministers to evangelize the surrounding areas (see, e.g., Col 1:6-8; Acts 19:10; 2 Cor 1:1).[84] The thrust of Paul's strategy to reach key cities, however, was that from these centers, the surrounding areas

---

[80]See Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 133-37; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 40-42.

[81]Allen, *Missionary Methods*, xii, 19-27.

[82]Gilliland, *Pauline Theology*, 287; cf. Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 76-77; Senior and Stuhlmueller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 184; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 131.

[83]Marshall, "Luke's Portrait of the Pauline Mission," 103.

[84]Schreiner, *Romans*, 770; Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 864.

would receive the good news. These strategic cities served as a springboard for the message of the gospel.[85] Kane explains.

> It was never Paul's intention to preach in *every* city. That was neither possible nor desirable. He established missionary churches in the major centers of population and they in turn engaged in "saturation evangelism" in their own areas.[86]

Paul left the work of reaching these surrounding areas to those who he had reached, or perhaps to other missionaries.[87] David Bosch summarizes Paul's strategy in this way:

> He chooses cities that have a representative character. In each of these he lays the foundations for a Christian community, clearly in the hope that, from these strategic centers, the gospel will be carried into the surrounding countryside and towns.[88]

The hope Paul had for reaching specific regions was in his reaching of these strategic centers. By planting churches in these strategic centers, as each church was established, the surrounding areas would be reached as well.[89]

Elements of Paul's Local Strategy

In addition to what we can observe about Paul's overall strategy for reaching unreached regions, an examination of the materials in Acts also shows a pattern of activity that Paul followed in each location where he ministered. The following are elements of Paul's local strategy.

Open forums. While there is little doubt that Paul engaged in personal (Acts 16:14, 31) and "house to house" (Acts 20:20) evangelism, his primary strategy for evangelism was in finding an open forum in which to preach. Apart from the

---

[85]Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 76; Gilliland, *Pauline Theology*, 233.

[86]Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 82.

[87]Senior and Stuhlmueller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 184.

[88]Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 130.

[89]Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 60-61.

proclamation of the gospel, there was no other means of salvation.[90] Therefore, Paul

looked for every opportunity and forum for preaching. We see one example of this

practice in his preaching at the Areopagus (Acts 17:18-34). Here, Paul uses the

opportunity offered by the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers to proclaim and defend the

faith in a public presentation. Elsewhere, we see Paul using his arrests and trials as

forums to proclaim the gospel. As Peter (Acts 4) and Stephen (Acts 7) had done

previously, Paul boldly uses the opportunity of his trials to preach Christ (Acts 24:10-21;

25:26:1-23). Paul even attempts—unsuccessfully at Ephesus but successfully at

Jerusalem—to use the occasion of mass riots, as opportunities for preaching to the people

(Acts 19:30-31; 21:39-40). His most common forum—that which was most readily

available and from which Paul most always began—was the synagogue. Robert Garrett

comments,

> We have already noted that one of the characteristics of the cities Paul chose was
> that they were of Jewish influence. In each of these cities, Paul began at the
> synagogue (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1-3; 18:4, 19). Paul had theological reasons for
> starting at the synagogue (Rom 11:13), but a strategic one as well. Paul saw in the
> synagogue, a ready preaching point; one that was open to him because of his
> rabbinic background and status in the synagogue.[91]

The synagogue gave Paul an open forum from which to preach to Jews, proselytes, and

God-fearing Gentiles.[92] Many of them responded to the gospel (Acts 13:42-43; 14:1;

17:4; 18:4).

Receptive people. At least one reason Paul started in the synagogue was that it

provided an audience for his message. Another reason may be that the synagogue

---

[90]Joseph A. Grassi, *A World to Win: The Missionary Methods of Paul the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Maryknoll Publications, 1965), 53-62.

[91]Robert Garrett, "The Gospels and Acts: Jesus the Missionary and His Missionary Followers," in *Missiology*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 81; Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 78-79.

[92]Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), 95-96; Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 78.

attendees would be most likely to be responsive to the gospel. The added benefit to this forum was that the groups present at the synagogue had a prior awareness of the one true God, were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, and were awaiting a Messiah. The synagogue provided a "unique opportunity" and the greatest chance for Paul to spread the Gospel in his context. He had a ready audience among the Jews; and when they rejected his message, the proselytes and god-fearers were responsive.[93] Thus, while it does not appear that Paul chose his locations based on receptivity, it is possible that within a locality, Paul sought out and responded to those he thought would be receptive people.

On several occasions, when the Jews oppose his gospel, Paul turns to the Gentiles (Acts 13:45-48; 18:6-7; 19:9; 28:23-29). That is, Paul responds to the unreceptive by turning to those who *are* receptive. Paul makes it clear that he will not continue to preach to a people who reject his message. Kane describes Paul's reasoning.

> He believed that every ethnic group has the right to hear the gospel and he would gladly preach it to them; but if they adamantly and consistently refused the message, no further purpose could be served by continuing to preach to them. Better far to move on to another group who would respond.[94]

Paul expected a response on the part of his hearers; and when one group rejected the gospel, he turned to another.[95]

Churches established. For Paul, however, his mission of evangelism was not complete until churches were established. Paul called people not merely to a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ," but to a relationship with his body, the church. Gilliland defines this kind of evangelism as "the presenting of Christ in a way that will lead people

---

[93] Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 78-79; cf. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology*, 286-87.

[94] Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, 80.

[95] One should note that this rejection of the Jews was never a final rejection. Paul would begin in the synagogue whenever he entered a new city and maintined his theological priority of "for the Jew first." Nevertheless, Paul turned to the Gentiles in each location where the Jews rejected the gospel. In this sense, then, we may agree with McGavran that Paul focused on the receptive.

to make decisions to accept him as Lord and to seek the nurture of the new faith within the company of believers."[96] Paul did not think his task of preaching the gospel was finished until there was an established church.[97] Consider Paul Bowers' comments: "Paul saw his mission as more than gospel proclamation and conversion of individuals; through and beyond these endeavors he understood his missionary role to concern the establishment of settled, believing communities."[98] Bowers sees Paul's definition of "proclaiming the gospel" as not only preaching, but also including the "full sequence of activities resulting in settled churches."[99] The appointment of leaders for the new church completed the process.[100]

At this point, the churches were no longer dependent on Paul. Paul left the churches to govern and support themselves. He entrusted them to the Holy Spirit.[101] Paul continued his ministry to these churches through a nurturing ministry. Paul saw this continued ministry as necessary in his overall evangelistic strategy of making disciples.[102] His primary nurturing method was his letters. Thomas Schreiner explains the importance of the epistles in this regard: "Paul did not conceive of his mission as successful if his converts initially believed the gospel and then lapsed. His work was in vain unless his converts persisted in the faith (1 Thess 3:1-10). Thus, his letters were part of his missionary work, written to encourage believers in their new found faith."[103] In addition

---

[96]Gilliland, *Pauline Theology*, 289-90.

[97]Schreiner, *Paul*, 67.

[98]Bowers, "Paul and Mission," 732

[99]Bowers, "Fulfilling the Gospel," 198.

[100]Gilliland, *Pauline Theology*, 290.

[101]Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 198.

[102]David F. Detwiler, "Paul's Approach to the Great Commission in Acts 14:21-23," *BibSac* 152 (1995): 36.

[103]Schreiner, *Paul*, 39.

to his letters, Paul nurtured his churches by returning to visit them when possible, and by sending others to minister to them.[104] Paul was concerned not merely with the initial conversion of believers or of merely planting a church. Paul wanted to be sure his converts grew to maturity in Christ and that his churches remained successful.

Elements of Paul's Evangelistic Method

We have thus far observed the strategy of Paul in his selection of regions and cities and his practice within each location. Paul also speaks of his evangelistic method. Again, we are interested in Paul's objective in employing method. When speaking of the evangelistic method of Paul, it seems quite natural to think of his preaching ministry. In examining how Luke describes the ministry of Paul and how Paul himself describes his method in the Corinthian correspondence, it seems evident that Paul's method extends beyond mere proclamation. Paul seeks to persuade his hearers of the truth of the gospel. In doing so, Paul employs rhetoric, but is not dependent upon rhetorical devices for success. Rather, Paul seeks clearly to present the gospel. The gospel itself saves. Further, in attempting to present the gospel clearly, and thus persuade his hearers to accept the message of Christ, Paul seeks to remove all barriers of the gospel, save the gospel itself, so that persons come to faith in Christ.

Paul's use of persuasion. One of the ways the New Testament describes Paul's evangelistic activity is to refer to it as persuasion. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, Paul makes the statement that he and his band "persuade men" (ἀνθρώπους πείθομεν). In the context of his argument, Paul uses the verb πείθω as a reference to his practice of evangelism.[105] While this text is the only place where Paul himself uses πείθω in this

---

[104]Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 131.

[105]Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 280 n. 8; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1971), 206; David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 271. This interpretation is contrary to the view that Paul needs to persuade those who question his motives. For this latter view, see Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*

way, Luke uses the term to describe the evangelism of Paul several places (Acts 18:4; 19:8, 26; 28:23-34). Paul's evangelism included persuasion. On this note, Colin Kruse comments on the persuasive practices of Paul recorded in the New Testament: Paul "sought to remove intellectual barriers, to overcome prejudice and ignorance, to convince by argument and testimony, and by the straightforward proclamation of the gospel."[106] Ben Witherington also ties Paul's use of πείθω here closely to his manner of preaching: "Paul freely admits that his *modus operandi* is to persuade, not simply to command, and this would normally be understood to mean the use of the art of persuasion, that is, rhetoric."[107]

Indeed, even a cursory examination of the preaching of Paul in the book of Acts demonstrates that Paul used elements of rhetoric and tailored his message to the particular situation and audience.[108] "His letters, which at times have all the character of speech, are in fact powerful examples of rhetoric and persuasion."[109] Among the several studies on Paul's speeches in Acts, Dean Flemming has demonstrated that Paul contextualized his method throughout his ministry. Having demonstrated the contextual differences among the three sermons in Acts (13:13-52; 14:8-20; 17:16-34), Flemming comments:

---

on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 168-69; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), 147. Martin argues that Paul intends both meanings here. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 121; cf. Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 1:402-03; Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 413.

[106]Colin G. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 119.

[107]Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community at Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 392.

[108]D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 34-35.

[109]Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 94 n. 27.

> At the same time, basic commonalities run through all three sermons. Each of the speeches is structured in order to be rhetorically persuasive . . . All of them herald the saving content of the "good news" (Acts 13:32; 14:15; 17:18), even if that message is communicated with distinct emphases and in different ways. . . . Each address engages and confronts the cherished beliefs and the competing stories of the audience. It calls them to repent of their sins and embrace an entirely new vision of the world. The aim of Paul's targeted preaching is not simply intellectual assent, but salvation and changed lives.[110]

There is no need to duplicate Flemming's study here. We have seen that Paul intends to win his hearers. Likewise, it seems equally evident that Paul adapts his message to his audience and employs some level of rhetorical method. The question that pertains to our present study is whether Paul uses contextual/rhetorical methodology in his preaching *in order to* persuade his hearers. That is, on what does Paul depend to see results—method, message, or both? In what way and for what purpose does Paul use method in preaching? For the answer, we will examine the self-assessment of Paul concerning his use of rhetoric in preaching ministry.

Paul's Attitude toward Rhetoric

In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Paul gives arguments concerning the nature and manner of his preaching. For our purposes, we may focus our attention on the few verses that help to show the understanding of Paul on the use of rhetoric in persuading his hearers. On the surface, this passage seems to give a negative view of the use of rhetoric. Does Paul in fact argue against the use of rhetorical method in persuading his hearers? The thrust of the argument centers on three key phrases in the argument of Paul. Paul denies that his preaching ministry was based on "cleverness of speech" (σοφίᾳ λόγου, 1 Cor 1:17), "brilliance of speech or wisdom" (ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας, 1 Cor 2:1), or "persuasive words of wisdom" (πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις, 1 Cor 2:4). In other words, Paul downplays the importance of rhetoric in his gospel ministry.[111]

---

[110]Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 85; see also 56-88.

[111]Stephen Pogoloff has shown that σοφίᾳ λόγου (1 Cor 1:17) is a reference to rhetoric. Both the words σοφίᾳ and λόγος have a wide semantic range. It is possible that one could understand the terms

Paul's objection to rhetoric has many facets. In one sense, when Paul speaks of σοφίᾳ λόγου, he focuses on the content of the message itself. This focus appears especially in 1:18-25 and 2:2. Paul cannot persuade his hearers by altering the message to make it more palatable. The wisdom Paul offers is thus not σοφίᾳ λόγου, but the "wisdom of God" (θεοῦ σοφίαν, 1:24). That is, his message is not worldly wisdom, but the God-given message of the cross (1:18; 2:2). Part of the reason that Paul cannot call his proclamation σοφίᾳ λόγου is because the message of the cross, by its very nature, is "foolishness" (μωρία, 1:18) to those who reject it. Paul's use of rhetoric cannot remove the offense of the cross because it is the very message of the cross that is the "power of God" (δύναμις θεοῦ, 1:18). Paul rejects any method of evangelism that so changes the message that it is accepted by the hearer but loses its central content. Further, Stephen Pogoloff argues that lofty content was an important element in rhetoric and was contrary to the cross preaching of Paul. Concerning Paul's persuasion, he states,

> What persuades is speech about what is ordinarily unfit for contemplation: not a life which is cultured, wise, powerful, but one marked by the worst shame and the lowest possible status. Paul's rhetoric of the cross thus opposes the cultural values surrounding eloquence.
> This explains how Paul can at once attack rhetoric and yet employ it in that very attack.[112]

---

as philosophical so that the meaning of the phrase refers to philosophical speech or a type of mystical reasoning. Given the context in which Paul speaks of the manner of his preaching ministry, Pogoloff suggests the phrase should be understood as "sophisticated speech" or rhetoric. Thus, the meaning of σοφίᾳ here refers not to wisdom in a philosophical sense, but rather a practical one. Similarly, Paul uses λόγος here not as a philosophical term, but of speech in general. Paul's restatement in 1 Cor 2:4 makes it clear that Paul speaks of rhetoric. The phrase is a clear reference to rhetorical speech. "Πείθω, to persuade, was the central aim of rhetoric." Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation in 1 Corinthians*, SBLDS, vol. 134 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 109-11, 137; cf. Richard A. Horsley, "Wisdom of Word and Words of Wisdom in Corinth," *CBQ* 39 (1977): 224-39; Timothy H. Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom, But in the Demonstration of the Spirit and Power," *NovT* 29 (1987): 146.

[112]Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 120. Winter notes, "While rhetors sought topics from their audience on which to declaim in order to demonstrate their prowess in oratory, Paul was concerned only to proclaim Jesus, the crucified Messiah." Bruce W. Winter, "Rhetoric," in *DPL*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 821; cf. A. Duane Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric*, SNTSMS, vol. 79 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 190-91.

Similarly, Gordon Fee notes, "There is a *logos* (speech) that belongs to wisdom and there is a *logos* (message) whose content is the cross; but they are mutually exclusive.[113] Paul presents a gospel that is not a cleverly crafted human message (cf. 2 Pet 1:16), but a message from God—a message that is cross-centered.[114] If the use of rhetorical method results in the change of the message, then one must not use the method. Any results from such a use of method would be void (1:17) because the power to save is dependent on the content of the message.

In another sense, Paul rejects a σοφία λόγου in which the form of the message confers status on the speaker and thus the persuasive element is the speaker himself. In this sense, "Paul rejects not rhetoric, but the cultural values wedded to it."[115] Specifically, Craig Blomberg notes that Paul rejects the worldview that is "enshrining the beautiful and powerful people of that day in a position of social power."[116] Paul downplays the significance of status for the Christian faith (1:25-31). Not many of those who had accepted the gospel were wise (σοφοί, 1:26) by human standards. In his own presentation, therefore, Paul refuses to speak in a way that merely achieves status for himself.[117] Further, Paul did not come with "superiority of speech" (ὑπεροχὴ λόγου, 2:1). The phrase refers not only to Paul's manner of rhetoric, but that he did not employ the kind of speech that places the focus on the messenger rather than on the message.[118] The gospel message itself, not the person delivering it, must be that which persuades.

---

[113]Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 68.

[114]Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 46.

[115]Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 121. On the relationship between rhetoric and status, see also 129-72.

[116]Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 45.

[117]Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 117-19.

[118]David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 82. Garland comments, "The gospel always points beyond humans to God and Christ and becomes garbled whenever humans exploit it instead to headline themselves as stars."

Similarly, Paul rejects a kind of gospel presentation that would put form over content. The phrase "not in persuasive words of wisdom" means "the setting aside of the art of persuasive speech."[119] The success of Paul's message was not dependent on rhetoric.[120] Thus, Lim suggests that Paul rejects "that specific, studied art of persuasive speech as was practiced by orators and rhetoricians of the Graeco-Roman world and by at least some of the Corinthian Preachers."[121] Many commentators see here a rejection of a specific kind of rhetoric made popular by the Sophists. Witherington comments, "Paul does not use the approach the Sophist would, where there was such an emphasis on form that *Sophia* became virtually identical with eloquence rather than content."[122] For Paul, the content of the gospel was what counted, not the eloquence of the message. He must communicate the message clearly, and not overshadow it with flowery speech. C. K. Barrett explains,

> Paul presents himself as a preacher, not as an orator. Preaching is the proclamation of the cross; it is the cross that is the source of its power. The convincing power of the cross could not be fully manifest if preaching shared too evidently in the devices of human rhetoric; if men are persuaded by eloquence they are not persuaded by Christ crucified."[123]

Again, Paul does not reject persuasion in his method of preaching. The attitude Paul conveys about rhetoric is one that "is willing to employ human eloquence, for this is

---

[119]Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom," 146-47.

[120]Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 65.

[121]Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom," 146. Cf. Gal 1:10 where Paul argues against using the kind of deception inherent in some kinds of rhetoric. See esp. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 54-56.

[122]Witherington, *Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 103; Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom," 149.

[123]Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 49; cf. Raymond J. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SP, vol. 7 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 85; C. Clare Oke, "Paul's Method not a Demonstration but an Exhibition of the Spirit," *ExpTim* 67 (1955): 35.

intrinsically neutral, as long as it remains subservient to the message of the Gospel and the divine work of the Spirit."[124]

Ultimately, Paul's objection to rhetoric is an objection to dependence upon rhetoric for results rather than on the power of God. Paul states, "My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4-5). Paul understands that any true results of his work must ultimately be dependent upon God rather than any method he might employ. Duane Litfin explains,

> He [Paul] is insisting that it would have been inappropriate for him to have depended upon such a dynamic [of Greco-Roman rhetoric] because in this way the results would have been rooted in his own facility as an orator, his own ability to adept malleably to the rhetorical demands, his own capacity to manipulate the persuasive possibilities of the rhetorical situation so as to engender belief (πίστις ποιεῖν) in his audience. Instead, Paul envisioned a wholly different dynamic, a dynamic which is inherent in the Gospel itself. Paul considered the Gospel of Christ crucified to be the δύναμις Θεοῦ (1.18, 24; Rom. 1.16), and as such to have a persuasive dynamic all its own.[125]

Thus, Paul's attitude toward rhetoric is neither a wholesale rejection of persuasion nor a man-centered dependence on method. Rather, Paul employs a method that is persuasive precisely because it presents the message of the cross clearly to those who hear it. Paul employs rhetoric, but "it is not human rhetoric that leads to faith, but the power of God."[126]

---

[124]Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom," 149. Cf. Witherington, who states, "[Paul] must avoid using pure declamation or overly ornamental rhetoric, which caused the listener to focus on the form or on mere eloquence to the neglect of content. In short, he believes that a Christian preacher or teacher might use rhetoric but not take a Sophistic approach to rhetoric." Witherington, *Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 392.

[125]Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 192.

[126]Collins, *First Corinthians*, 120. D. A. Carson notes two extremes that must be avoided. The first is that notion that Paul here advocates ignoring the use of good communication skills. Rather, "What Paul avoided was artificial communication that won plaudits for the speaker but distracted from the message. . . . [These verses] warn against any method that leads people to say, 'What a marvelous preacher!' rather than, 'What a marvelous Savior!' Second, Paul is not here advocating the ignoring of 'flexibility and cultural sensitivity.' Rather, Paul is unwilling to flex in such a way that the message of the

Paul's Removal of Barriers to the Gospel

Later in the letter to the Corinthians, Paul returns to his method of evangelistic ministry. There is perhaps no other Scripture to which missional practitioners have appealed more than 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. In this passage, as we have already seen, Paul explains his purpose to save. Paul does not write primarily to offer a method for doing evangelistic work. Rather, Paul seeks to illustrate the practice of giving up ones rights, in love, for the sake of others. Nevertheless, Paul sets forth his evangelistic practice as an example of this larger principle. We can thus discern a Pauline methodology from this text.

Paul summarizes his methodological principle in 1 Corinthians 9:22: "I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some." Here Paul summarizes his activity and the reason behind it. As has been previously considered, the shift in the verbs Paul uses, from κερδήσω to σώσω, clarifies what Paul has meant by "winning" others. His goal is "not merely to win this or that class to his side, but, by every method that was admissible, to save their souls."[127] Again, this salvation is not merely initial conversion, but bringing persons to full Christian maturity.

Becoming "all things to all men" certainly does not mean that Paul has placed no limitations on his accommodation principle. He has already stated that he is in Christ's law and not without the law of God. In a much-cited statement, Witherington explains, "He does not say that he became an idolater to idolaters or an adulterer to adulterers. But in matters that he did not see as ethically or theologically essential, or implied by the gospel, Paul believed in flexibility."[128] Paul does not change the central message of the gospel in order to win adherents. Nor does he capitulate to the hearers in their demands.

---

cross is jeopardized." Carson, *Cross and Christian Ministry*, 35.

[127]Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 193.

[128]Witherington, *Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 213.

While Paul becomes all things to all people, he does not give to the Jews the miraculous signs they requested nor the Greeks the wisdom for which they seek (1:22). Rather, he preaches the gospel of a crucified messiah. While his message seems weak and foolish, God reveals the genuine power and wisdom of the cross (1:23-24). Paul's accommodation is not in the message itself, but in the way that message is communicated and in his personal behavior so that the only barrier to the gospel is the gospel itself. Paul is essentially saying that he is willing to "go all out" in his effort to save others—being willing to be a servant of others, to give up his liberty as a Christian, to be flexible in his behavior and communication in order to remove all unnecessary barriers to the communication and reception of the gospel.[129]

The idea of removing all barriers to the gospel is evident in the preceding examples Paul gives. Beginning in verse twenty, Paul provides examples of how he has become "all things to all men." For his first example, Paul states that to the Jews he became "as a Jew" (ὡς Ἰουδαῖος) to win the Jews[130] and as one "under the Law" (ὑπὸ

---

[129]One should note that this willingness to become a "slave of all" (9:19) or "all things to all men" (9:22) extends beyond a missionary application but to the heart of Christian practice itself. Paul intentionally contrasts the attitude of the Corinthians in their right to exercise their freedom with his own example of giving up those rights for the sake of others. Where the Corinthians champion their liberty and their right freely to exercise it, Paul speaks of becoming a slave of all for the sake of Christ. Paul later states, "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own *good,* but that of his neighbor (1 Cor 10:23-24; cf. 6:12-20)." It seems that Paul, in his missionary example, seeks to demonstrate the larger principle. Neller notes, "this self-depreciation and self-accommodation is not just so the gospel may be spread; it is at the core of Christianity. To be Christian is to be all things to all men." Kenneth V. Neller, "1 Corinthians 9:19-23: A Model for Those Who Seek to Win Souls," *ResQ* 29 (1987): 141. Thus, the larger principle is that Christians are not to be preoccupied with their liberty, but are to be concerned with God's agenda. They are not to focus on their rights but be willing to give up those rights for the sake of others.

[130]An initial question that arises is how Paul, already a Jew, can become *like* a Jew. This dilemma is easily resolved by the latter part of the verse in which Paul explains that he is himself is not ὑπὸ νόμον. While nationally Paul is a Jew, Paul no longer submits to Jewish law. Paul's separation from the Mosaic law is large enough that he no longer considers himself a Jew but becomes *as* a Jew. He behaves then as one who is under the law of Moses. D. A. Carson, "Pauline Inconsistency: Reflections on 1 Cor 9:19-23 and Gal 2:11-14," *Churchman* 100 (1986): 12; C. H. Dodd, "ΕΝΝΟΜΟΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," in *Studia Paulina: In Honorem Johannis de Zwaan Septuagenarii,* ed. J. N. Sevenster and W. C. van Unnik (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn N. V., 1953), 97.

νόμον) to those under the Law.[131] Of course, Paul is a Jew, but not one who submits to the law of Moses. He behaves then as if he was under the law of Moses. A reader confused by the first statement of Paul will now understand his intent. Likewise, the reader will recognize that Paul includes all (including non-Jews) who consider themselves "under the Law." Paul becomes like a Jew, and like one under the Law, by keeping the very Law from which he himself has been freed. Because of his standing in Christ, Paul no longer considers himself under the Law. At the same time, Paul is neither against the keeping of the Mosaic law by Jewish brethren nor, when the gospel can receive a hearing, accommodating to Jews by keeping these "particularly Jewish" aspects of the Law himself.[132]

In what way, then, do we see Paul becoming a Jew to Jews and under the Law to those under the Law? Missiologists will point to the contextualization of the gospel message.[133] A cursory examination of Acts 13:13-43 (cf. Acts 28:23), for example, reveals Paul preaching a "Jewish" message to his Jewish audience.[134] For Paul, to become as a Jew in his preaching does not mean that he changes the message of the gospel. Neither does it mean that he communicates the kind of message the Jewish

---

[131]When Paul says that he became "as under the Law," it may be that Paul was merely clearing up the confusion that would have arisen from his previous statement that he became "as a Jew." See, for example, Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 160-61; Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 212. Others argue that Paul uses the second phrase to widen those in view to include not only Jews, but also God-fearers and anyone else that was not Jewish but kept the Jewish law. See, for example, Plummer, *First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 191; Neller, "1 Corinthians 9:19-23," 134. In effect, the phrase τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον accomplishes both.

[132]Grosheide notes, "Paul is free from the ceremonial law through the work of Christ but he does not consider it a sin to observe the law, provided this was not done to acquire righteousness." Frederick Wihelm Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthains*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1953), 212.

[133]David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 177.

[134]For a more detailed analysis, see Donald Robert Sunukjian, "Patterns for Preaching: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Sermons of Paul in Acts 13, 17, and 20" (Ph. D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972).

hearers want to hear. Earlier in his letter to the Corinthians Paul remarks, "For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1:22-24). Paul is willing to clothe the gospel in Jewish language and imagery, and present the message as the fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy, but he will not remove the "stumbling block" of its central message (cf. Acts 13:28-31, 45-46, 18:5-6; 28:23-28). Whether he preaches to Jews or Gentiles, Paul preaches the cross.

While Paul is unwilling to remove the offense of the gospel by changing his message, he *is* willing to remove barriers to its hearing by changing his behavior (cf. 10:32-33).[135] The book of Acts records key examples of Paul's accommodation to Jewish law. Paul, though not bound by the Law, is willing to keep the Law to gain a hearing among the Jews. Though in his liberty as a Christian he is not obligated to keep the Law, Paul gives up his right so as to remove any offense that may hinder the cause of Christ. Commentators point to Paul taking a vow in Acts 18:18-19 as an example of Paul's accommodation. Similarly, Paul pays the expenses of four men taking a vow in Acts 21:20-26.The most vivid example occurs in Acts 16:3 where Paul circumcises Timothy. The most reasonable explanation for this action of Paul was so that Timothy could accompany him in the synagogue where it was his custom to preach first.[136] The irony in Acts 16:3 is that when Paul circumcised Timothy, they were delivering a message from the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:22-23) that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised.

---

[135]Black states, "Where Judaism was in direct and open conflict with Christianity Paul was unmovable (cf. Gal 2:4,5); but in situations where his conduct would unnecessarily alienate Jews he did not hesitate to defer to others." David Alan Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness: Astheneia and its Cognates in the Pauline Literature*, American University Studies, series 7, Theology and Religion, vol. 3 (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 116.

[136]For a review of the discussion concerning Paul's action, see Thomas R. Schreiner, "Circumcision," in *DPL*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 139.

This act is a vivid demonstration of how, though being free, which the Jerusalem council

affirmed by the decree, he "became a slave to all" and had Timothy circumcised.

Certainly, the circumcision of Timothy might send a mixed message.[137] Yet, for the sake

of the Jews, Paul becomes *like* a Jew physically and culturally while not *actually* a Jew

theologically. In this action, Paul demonstrates not only the principle of removing

barriers to the gospel but also the reality that circumcision is nothing (1 Cor 7:19; Gal

6:15). Paul adamantly insists that a Gentile does not have to become a Jew to be saved

while at the same time is willing to accommodate to Jewish ways so as not to hinder the

true gospel. He thus removes the offence to make the gospel itself the sole offender.[138]

---

[137]For Paul there was a clear distinction between the practice of keeping the Law, and a dependence upon keeping the Law for right standing with God. This distinction is precisely why Paul refused to circumcise Titus prior to the Jerusalem council but willingly circumcised Timothy afterward (Gal 2:3; Acts 16:3). The demand to circumcise Titus was a theological one. Paul refused, because in circumcising Titus he would have communicated that keeping the Law was necessary for salvation. In the case of Timothy, however, the decision of Paul to circumcise him is a cultural accommodation to remove an unnecessary barrier to the gospel.

[138]There remain a few objections and explanations that are worthy of note but which I will consign to the footnote here. First, Sanders objects to the idea that 1 Cor 9:19-23 refers to any actual practice of Paul. Sanders notes the unlikelihood that Paul could be a Jew to Jews and a Gentile to Gentiles in the same church. Sanders therefore sees 9:19-23 as "hyperbolic." Paul was primarily a missionary to the Gentiles and likely had no concern for Diaspora Jews. Sanders also argues that the picture of Paul preaching first to the Jews in Acts is inaccurate. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 185-90. Sanders does a good job in outlining the difficulty of understanding how Paul could be all things to all men in the same context. His arguments for his position, however, are questionable. O' Brien shows that although Paul was a missionary to the Gentiles, it is wholly consistent with his theology and practice to reach Jews as well. There is no reason to question the historicity of the Acts accounts. Peter T. O' Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 99.

Another discussion occurs over whether Paul was consistent in his application of the accommodation principle and correct in his criticism of Peter in Gal 2. Richardson views Peter in Gal 2:11-14 as merely applying the accommodation principle differently than Paul. By withdrawing from table fellowship, Peter is merely becoming weak to the weak and applying his principle as missionary to the Jews. Further, accommodation was a principle linked to apostleship and not binding on all believers. In the New Testament, Paul and Peter both accommodate to others: "They differ only in their views of the circumstances in which one should adopt such an ethic." Peter Richardson, "Pauline Inconsistency: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and Galatians 2:11-14," *NTS* 26 (1980): 348. This view is worthy of consideration; however, the distinction here is that Peter is not accommodating in order to win, but in order to save face. Carson effectively rebuts this view: Carson, "Pauline Inconsistency," 4-45; as does Schnabel: Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:956-57.

Finally, Harvey suggests that to become as one under the law meant he must endure punishments for his table fellowship with Gentiles (39 lashes) in order to maintain his Jewish connections and keep ministry doors open. A. E. Harvey, "Forty Strokes Save One: Social Aspects of Judaizing and Apostasy," in *Alternative Approaches to New Testament Study*, ed. A. E. Harvey (London: SPCK, 1985),

In the next verse, Paul states his accommodation to a second category: those

"without Law" (τοῖς ἀνόμοις). The phrase is in parallel contrast to the previous class,

those "under the Law."[139] The most natural way to understand this phrase is that it refers

to Gentiles. Both the relation to the previous verse and its parallel to 10:32 make this

clear.[140] In its fullest sense, as a designation for Gentiles, the designation ἄνομος is quite

appropriate. Paul rightly describes the Gentiles as those who do not possess the Law.[141]

David Garland notes the ethnic connotation as those "without heritage, without the merit

of the fathers, without works of law to set [them] apart from others or to justify [their]

salvation."[142]

In what way, then, do we see Paul becoming as one without the Law to win

those without the Law? Paul can speak of becoming "as without law" in that he is willing

to associate with Gentiles, willing not to observe the Jewish law when ministering to

Gentiles, and willing to conform to certain cultural practices. Likewise, Paul does not

compel his Gentile converts to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:19; Gal 2:3).[143] Surely

---

93. Garland follows Harvey here. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 430; cf. Barton, "All Things to All People," 285. I find Harvey's argument to be unconvincing. Cf. Colin G. Kruse, "Afflictions, Trials, Hardships," in *DPL*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 19; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 927.

[139]Paul could have used Ἕλλησιν (parallel to Ἰουδαίοις in 9:20) as he does elsewhere in the letter (1:23; 10:32).

[140]Frank Thielman, "The Coherence of Paul's View of the Law: The Evidence of First Corinthians," *NTS* 38 (1992): 246.

[141]There is nearly unanimous agreement among commentators on this point.

[142]Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 432.

[143]Parallel to verse twenty, when Paul states that he becomes as one without the Law, he again provides an explanatory clause to explain his actual position: μὴ ὢν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ᾽ ἔννομος Χριστοῦ. Paul adds the phrase to clear any possible misunderstanding from his principle of becoming like one without the Law. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul is vitally concerned with orthodoxy and righteous living. Paul does not mean that in becoming like one without the Law that he abandons right doctrine or righteous living. Carson clarifies, "As flexible as Paul may be . . . he is not infinitely elastic, and that he sees no necessary antithesis between the role of accommodating apologist and defender of orthodoxy." Carson, "Pauline Inconsistency," 10-11. The effect of his disclaimer, then, is that in becoming as one without law he is abandoning neither the moral teachings of Scripture, nor the commands of Christ.

one case is table fellowship. Paul is willing to abandon the Jewish purity laws that forbid eating with Gentiles (Gal 2:11-14; Acts 16:34; cf. Acts 10:28; 11:3) or entering their homes (Acts 16:15, 34, 40). Further, he at times willingly gives up dietary requirements as well (1 Cor 10:27). At the same time, Paul is unwilling to do anything that will take a light view of sin or be seen as endorsing ungodliness. For example, Paul willingly eats with Gentiles and the lost, but refuses table fellowship to anyone who calls himself a believer while living a willfully sinful life (1 Cor 5:9-11). Likewise, Paul says to eat "anything that is set before you," but gives an exception if an association with idols is announced (1 Cor 10:27-30). Paul does all that he can to meet people where they are while maintaining the integrity of his Christian witness (cf. 2 Cor 6:3).

Paul does more than merely accommodate his behavior. He contextualizes his message. In the same way that Paul adapts his message to his Jewish audiences, one can see a contextualization of the gospel in his preaching to Gentiles as well. Paul's preaching at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17) and to the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31) give evidence of his adjusting the message to his Gentile hearers. Flemming shows how Paul adjusted his rhetorical style, chose a cultural point of contact, and used cultural resources to lead to the message of Christ.[144] This adaptation in speaking does not mean that Paul is willing to compromise the message, however. Paul is willing neither to capitulate to the desires of his Gentile hearers nor to mask the "foolishness" of the cross (1 Cor 1:22-24). Rather, Paul models for us "a magnificent balance between, on the one hand, an *identificational* approach that proclaims the gospel in ways the audience can understand and, on the other, a *transformational* approach that resists compromising the gospel's integrity in a

---

Rather he again is removing barriers to the hearing and understanding of the gospel by becoming like the people he is trying to reach. Krause explains, "There is a rigid limit to his flexibility as he seeks to win the lost from different cultural and religious groups; he must not do anything that is forbidden to the Christian, and he must do everything mandated for the Christian. He is not free from God's laws; he is in Christ's law. Richard A. Krause, "'All Things to All men': Where is the Limit? An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23," *WLQ* 93 (1996): 86.

[144]Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 56-88.

pluralistic world."[145] Paul's gospel is a gospel of the cross and a gospel of repentance. Paul began where the Gentiles were, spoke in language they could understand, and then confronted their worldview with the truth claims of the Christian gospel.[146]

Later, in 1 Corinthians 10:32-33, Paul states, "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the *profit* of the many, so that they may be saved." Here, Paul seems to be saying that the gospel, removed from external hindrances, will result in the salvation of people. Though Paul in this section has been addressing how the Corinthian believers should make decisions about ethical questions, specifically concerning the eating of meat, Paul relegates this decision to a more important one. Every decision on non-essential matters must be made to the "glory of God" and with a view of how that decision will affect others. The phrase "give no offense" (ἀπόσκοποι . . . γίνεσθε, 10:32) refers to behavior on the part of the believer that might serve "to prevent someone else from hearing the gospel, or to alienate someone who is already a brother or sister. . . . everything is for God's glory and for the sake of the gospel."[147] Paul desires the salvation of his hearers and views his conduct as having an impact on their salvation. The phrase "that they may be saved" (ἵνα σωθῶσιν, 10:33) is probably not cause-effect, but "with a view to their salvation."[148] That is, Paul's method does not *cause* salvation, but removes unnecessary barriers to it. Blomberg remarks,

---

[145]Ibid., 86.

[146]Schnabel explains, "To polytheists, Paul first needed to speak about the God of Israel as the only true God before he could speak about Jesus the Lord and Savior. In Athens, Paul preached both in the agora and in the synagogue 'the good news about Jesus and the resurrection' (Acts 17:18). This clearly shows that Paul, when he preached to pagans, did not dispense with explaining the person, ministry, and salvational significance of Jesus Christ." Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1386.

[147]Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 489.

[148]Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 795.

Above all else, Paul wants as many men and women as possible to come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus (v.33b). There are stumbling-blocks in the gospel message that dare not be removed, most centrally the cross of Christ (1:18-2:5). But the path must be cleared of all unnecessary obstacles . . ."[149]

Paul desires to remove any offense of the messenger to leave only the offense of the message itself.[150]

The phrase "just as I also please all men" (10:33) draws the reader back to his practice described in 9:20-22. If Paul is consistent, he does not mean here that he attempts to persuade others to the gospel through a pleasing message (1 Cor 2:4-5; cf. 1 Thess 2:4; Gal 1:10). Rather, he is concerned "that his conduct be such that he not stand in the way of their being saved."[151] The Corinthian believers should do the same and follow his example (11:1).

Summary

In examining the biblical text, we have observed that Paul indeed had a strategy in which he chose particular locations to evangelize and plant churches. In his overall strategy, Paul proceeds from Antioch as his commissioning church and from Jerusalem as the theological center of the Christian faith. As Paul takes the gospel to unreached areas, he focuses on provinces where the church has not yet been established. To reach the provinces, Paul focuses on cities and urban centers that can then reach the surrounding areas. Paul chooses cities strategically, not by his perception of their receptivity, but because of their suitability for being centers from which to reach the whole region. In each location, Paul employs a strategy that seeks and takes advantage of every opportunity to proclaim the gospel message. Paul's pattern is to go first to the

---

[149]Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 204.

[150]Barrett comments, "Paul knows that the Christian message is necessarily and intrinsically offensive (e.g. i. 23); it is more important that Christianity should offend for the right and not for the wrong reason, because it is a placarding of Christ crucified, and not because Christians are inconsiderate of the scruples and convictions of their fellows." Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 245.

[151]Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 490; cf. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 101.

synagogue where he finds receptivity among the God-fearers, Gentiles, and some Jews. When persons reject the message, Paul turns to others who are receptive. Paul focuses his attention on those who are receptive to the message, teaching them biblical truth and establishing new believers into churches.

The statements of Paul concerning his method reveal several insights as well. In one sense, Paul attempts to persuade his hearers. In doing so, Paul often employs rhetorical method. His attitude toward rhetoric, however, is that it serves as as a tool rather than a means of persuasion. Paul rejects any kind of rhetoric that changes the content of the gospel and so removes the offense of the cross. Similarly, he rejects any rhetorical device that focuses on the messenger rather than the message itself or emphasizes the form of the message over its content. Rhetoric, when used, is to be a tool of preaching that focuses on the cross and is empowered by the Spirit. The goal of rhetoric is clearly to proclaim the cross and bring it to bear upon the hearer. Paul also seeks to remove all unnecessary barriers to the gospel. This removal of barriers includes both a contextualization of the gospel message and an accommodation to neutral cultural practices. Paul is unwilling to remove theological barriers, but is perfectly willing to accommodate the hearer in terms of neutral social and cultural norms. In doing so, Paul seeks to remove any offense of the messenger to leave only the offense of the message itself. The goal of this practice is the salvation of the hearer.

Preliminary Conclusions

Having examined the use of strategy and methods of both the Twelve and Paul, we are ready to make some preliminary conclusions. While there is little data in the New Testament to construct a "strategy of the Twelve," there is enough evidence to draw some inferences. During his ministry, Jesus sends his disciples on a local mission. In that mission, they undertake a kind of evangelism that saturates the region with the message of the kingdom, going everywhere with the message. The disciples focus on those who receive the message and move on after warning those who rejected it. After the ascension

of Jesus, the Twelve launche an evangelistic campaign beginning in Jerusalem. Luke portrays the ministry of the Twelve positively. In the early period of the church, the apostles spread the gospel prolifically and successfully evangelize Jerusalem and Judea. Other evidence in the New Testament and in extra-biblical materials suggests that the Twelve continue to be obedient to the Great Commission beyond what the book of Acts records. The disciples evangelize at every opportunity and saturate the Judean region with the gospel, establishing the church there. While the Twelve are not the only witnesses, they do respond to receptive people by both confirming and expanding the evangelistic work among the Samaritans.

Paul, for his part, embarks on a strategy to evangelize unreached regions. He focuses on provinces, selecting key cities and urban centers to plant churches from which the gospel could spread to the entire region. Within each city, Paul preaches first in the synagogue and, ultimately, wherever he can find an open forum. Paul focuses on those who are receptive or remain open to his message. When the Jews reject the gospel, he turns to the Gentiles. In his preaching, Paul seeks to persuade his hearers. He employs rhetoric, but does so in a way that keeps the message of the cross central and is dependent upon the Spirit. As Paul evangelizes, he seeks to preach the message of the cross clearly while removing all unnecessary barriers to its reception save the offense of the cross.

We find that the gospel agents in the New Testament in fact did use strategy and methods. Their strategies, however, were not to seek out areas that were receptive but to take the gospel everywhere. Within an area, they focused on those who received the message and established churches among them. We find also that the gospel agents used methods with the intent of reaching the lost with the gospel. Their use of method focused on the abundant, clear, persuasive presentation of the message of Jesus Christ crucified. They both used methods and sought results, but their results were not dependent on the methods themselves but on the power of the gospel to save as the Holy Spirit worked through them.

CHAPTER 5

THE BIBLICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD
NUMERICAL RESULTS

Thus far, we have examined the role of gospel agents in evangelism and missions as well as the use of strategy and methods used in evangelistic efforts. A final element of harvest theology remains. Harvest theology, in part, relates to the numerical results of evangelistic activity. This chapter will focus upon the actual results of evangelistic activity in the New Testament as well as what, if anything, the New Testament writers say about numerical results. This chapter will examine the existence and attitude toward numerical results in the Gospels, Acts, and the Pauline epistles to see what the New Testament says concerning numerical results.

Results in the Gospels

It is fitting that we begin with the ministry of Jesus himself. Jesus, during his earthly ministry was widely popular, drawing huge crowds and many disciples. Further, Jesus in his teaching had much to say about the growth and size of the kingdom.

Results of the Ministry of Jesus

In examining numerical results in the Gospels, a good place to start is the results of the ministry of Jesus himself. The gospel writers record the mixed "success" of Jesus' ministry. There is no question that Jesus was able to gather a crowd. From the beginning of his ministry, the gospels record that Jesus made a name for himself and drew large numbers of people. In the Gospel accounts, as Jesus begins his public ministry, word of him quickly spreads and his fame grows (e.g., Matt 4:24; Mark 1:28, 33, 45; 2:1-2; 3:8; Luke 4:14, 37; 5:15, 17; 6:17-18). Many times, Jesus finds himself

surrounded by great multitudes of people to whom he ministers and teaches (e.g., Matt 4:25; 5:1; 8:1; 12:15; 15:30; 19:2; Mark 3:7-8; Luke 6:17,19). These multitudes, however, do not constitute what we are calling numerical results. Though "large crowds" (ὄχλοι πολλοὶ, Matt 4:25) follow Jesus, they are not all actual disciples.[1] Rather, the multitudes are those attracted to his ministry, among whom, many *become* disciples.[2] Jesus sees the crowds as those who need his message and from which a harvest will be gathered (Matt 9:36; cf. John 4:35).

Certainly, not all those initially attracted to Jesus become true disciples. Leon Morris notes, "Jesus was not looking for amazement and admiration, but for repentance."[3] These crowds may follow him in the beginning, but many never respond to his message. Jesus later denounces those areas which do not repent (Matt 11:21-24; Luke 10:13-15).[4] At the end of Jesus' ministry, these "crowds" become complicit in his crucifixion (Matt 27:20, 24; Mark 15:11; cf. Matt 26:47, 55; Luke 22:47). Indeed, "popularity does not always translate into deep commitment in the end."[5]

---

[1]Matthew likes this phrase, lit. "many crowds," to indicate the large number of people who gathered to see and hear him. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 184. Note, in Matt 4:25 (cf. 12:15) the verb ἠκολούθησαν, "followed," does not denote discipleship. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 1:419, 2:323; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 152.

[2]The crowds are open and receptive to his message, but are distinguished in Matthew from both the disciples (5:1; 13:36; 14:22-23) and those who reject the message (9:33-34; 15:1-11; 23:1-2). Davies and Allison summarize of the crowds in Matthew's gospel: "They are presented in a more or less positive light. To be sure, the ὄχλοι are not true followers of Jesus; yet they are also not in the same league as Jesus' opponents, the chief priests, the elders, the Pharisees. The crowds fall somewhere in between." Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:419; cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 90.

[3]Morris, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 287.

[4]Keener notes that, unlike the religious leaders, the crowds were not particularly hostile to Jesus. They just did not receive the message. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 343. Also note, the "woe" in Luke was part of the sending of his disciples and functions to warn his disciples that they will face rejection. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 2:1004.

[5]Keener, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 159.

The gospel of John records a mixed response. In many places, John uses the verb "believe" (πιστεύω) as the proper response to his message and to indicate those who were truly his followers.[6] Throughout the narrative, John notes that many people believed in him (John 2:23; 4:39, 41; 8:30; 11:45; 12:42). In the gospel of John, however, not all faith is true faith. In John 2:23-25, although many "believed in His name" (ἐπίστευσαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, 2:23), Jesus knows their faith is not genuine and does not entrust himself to them (cf. 10:14). In John 8:30, many "came to believe in Him." Among those who believe (8:31), however, are some who seek to kill Jesus and in whom his words have no place (8:37), who are children of the devil (8:44), who do not believe in him (8:45-46), who are not of God (8:47), and who are liars (8:55).[7] Jesus offers here a test of true faith: "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine" (8:31). True disciples will endure.

Elsewhere, John records that when Jesus' teaching becomes too difficult, some disciples stop following him (6:66). This does not mean that Jesus was unsuccessful, however, but that Jesus desires true success. Jesus "is never interested in multiplying numbers of converts if they are not genuine believers."[8] John thus shows a mixed reception to the teaching of Jesus, noting both true and false believers. Jesus does in fact see results, as we have defined them, in the book of John. Many who believe were true believers. The actual number, however, is uncertain.

Luke provides further indication of numerical results in the ministry of Jesus. Again, among the crowds that follow him, there are true disciples. As in the other Gospels, Luke records the calling of the Twelve disciples (6:12-16). Yet, Luke notes

---

[6]John uses the verb πιστεύω 98 times in his gospel. See also, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 296-98.

[7]For evidence that in 8:31-59 Jesus is actually addressing those who believed, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 346-48.

[8]Ibid., 348.

other disciples besides the Twelve (6:13). Luke uses the term "disciple" (μαθητής) to indicate those who are "convinced believers in Jesus" and indicates that a large number become true followers (Luke 6:13, 17; 19:37, 39).[9] On the occasion described in Luke 6:17, Luke refers to those present as the Twelve, a "large crowd of His disciples" (ὄκλος πολὺς μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ) and "great throng of people" (πλῆθος πολὺ τοῦ λαοῦ). Here, the "disciples" are distinguished from the crowd. Darrell Bock notes, "Jesus is drawing a wide variety of people, whose level of regard for him differs."[10]

In Luke 10:1, seventy-two disciples are sufficiently prepared to be sent out to do mission work. After the resurrection of Jesus, Luke notes a gathering of 120 brethren who make a decision to replace Judas as an apostle (Acts 1:15).[11] An unspecified number of disciples are qualified to serve as a replacement for Judas, having been with Jesus from his baptism through his resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). The implication here is that numerous true disciples exist, but who do not meet the strict qualifications Peter has set forth.

Thus, in the ministry of Jesus, we see a mixed response. Some reject his message outright, oppose his ministry, and eventually are responsible for putting him to death at the hands of the Romans. Others are attracted to Jesus and for them Jesus is a popular figure. Jesus' fame attracts this larger group for a season. Still others, however, genuinely respond in repentance and faith to Jesus. This last group are whom we may call the "numerical results" of the ministry of Jesus. From these believers, the early church will be established. Jesus is not successful if by "successful" we mean that all who heard the message believe. Jesus does see, however, a number of persons become true disciples.

---

[9]Michael J. Wilkins, "Discipleship," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 185. Unlike Luke, Matthew and Mark do not have reference to this larger group of disciples.

[10]Bock, *Luke*, 1:564.

[11]Paul later describes more than 500 who have seen the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor 15:5-8).

Results in the Parables of Jesus

The teachings of Jesus provide further insight concerning numerical growth. In his teaching ministry, Jesus tells several "kingdom" parables, and uses these to explore some aspect of the kingdom of God.[12] Many of these parables speak of or imply numerical results.

The parable of the sower. The parable of the sower and its interpretation by Jesus (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:2-9; Luke 8:5-8) is one of the more relevant teachings of Jesus for our present study because its main focus is the response of the hearer. In the parable, the sower sows seed indiscriminately on four types of soil, only one of which produces fruit. That "good soil" produces fruit thirty, sixty, and one hundred fold. Jesus provides an interpretation of the parable, which appears in each of the synoptic accounts (Matt 13:18-23; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15).

The fact that Jesus titles the teaching as the "parable of the sower" (παραβολὴν τοῦ σπείραντος, Matt 13:18) does not help in the interpretation. The title is not a reference to the theme, but an allusion to its first words—a typical way passages were identified in the era.[13] The title describes the scene, but not the content of the parable.[14] In his explanation of the parable, Jesus does not emphasize the sower himself, but only notes that the sower sows the word (i.e., the message of the kingdom).[15] Further,

---

[12]These parables are included to show the general principles and attitude toward numerical growth. The kingdom and the church are not the same and, thus, we do not equate the growth of the kingdom with church growth. Nevertheless, kingdom and church are intricately related and the principles of growth found in the kingdom parables have some application to the growth of the church. On the relationship between church and kingdom, see George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 103-17.

[13]Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 379; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), 32.

[14]France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 503, 519.

[15]Some in the church growth school view this parable as instructions on how best to sow the seed of the gospel. See, for example, C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective*

debate on how the seed was scattered is superfluous since in the interpretation, Jesus does not refer to the method of sowing.[16] The emphasis is, rather, on the different types of soils and their fruit. Each of the soils represents a different response to the message, with only the climactic "good soil" actually producing a spiritual harvest.

While the meaning of the parable is singular, its application is at least two-fold. To the initial audience of the parable, the crowd, the parable is an appeal to the hearer.[17] To those in the crowd, the parable focuses on the need for a proper reception of Jesus' message and makes the emphasis a call for decision.[18] "The parable is designed to confront the reader and force analysis of how one responds to God's message."[19]

For his disciples—those who will follow Jesus as sowers of the word—there is further application. The parable is a "parable of contrast."[20] The ministry of Jesus, as we have seen, receives a mixed response. The parable of the sower explains this varied

---

Evangelism and Mission (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987), 60-62. Wagner thus applies the parable to effective methodology. The sower of the gospel should "determine ahead of time which individuals or groups of individuals have hearts prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the Word." Ibid., 62; cf. Alan R. Tippett, *Church Growth and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 14-15; idem, "The Biblical Imagery of Growth," *Church Growth Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (March 1965): 5. Nothing in the parable permits this interpretation, however. Nolland notes that the approach of the sower in the parable is a "carefree sowing" rather than careful discrimination of soils. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 529. Davies and Allison conclude that this indiscriminate method of sowing is a "purposeful procedure, for 'the word' is quite intentionally proclaimed to all." Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 2:383.

[16]A substantial debate has taken place concerning whether or not the sower sowed before or after plowing. Jeremias introduced the idea that that in ancient Palestine, sowing preceded plowing. In this way, then, the sower of the parable intentionally sowed on land he would later plow. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 9-10. K. D. White subsequently rebutted Jeremias' interpretation. K. D. White, "The Parable of the Sower," *JTS* 15 (1964): 300-07. Jeremias answered with a rebuttal. Joachim Jeremias, "Palästinakundliches zum Gleichnis vom Säemann," *NTS* 13 (1967): 48-53. However, as Payne notes, neither interpretation can be affirmed with confidence and, "in terms of the realism of the parable, it makes little difference whether or not the field was ploughed before sowing." P. B. Payne, "The Order of Sowing and Ploughing in the Parable of the Sower," *NTS* 25 (1979): 123-29.

[17]Mark L. Bailey, "The Parable of the Sower and the Soils," *BibSac* 155 (1998): 186-88.

[18]Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 113.

[19]Bock, *Luke*, 739.

[20]Kingsbury, *Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*, 35.

receptivity. On the one hand, the parable explains the ineffectiveness of Jesus' ministry among the Jews, signified by the three soils that produce no fruit.[21] On the other hand, the parable emphasizes the success of the word among those who are "good soil." While the detail of the parable shows the various reasons why some do not respond positively to the gospel, the good soil emphasizes the ultimate success of the word. The yield brought forth from the good soil is "some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty" (Matt 13:23). Of this yield John Nolland remarks,

> What is, I think, of central importance is that we have yield figures for the seed in the good soil which are so high that they cause the heavy losses documented for the three cases of failure to pale into insignificance.[22]

Thus, in terms of numerical results, the good soil represents "final, certain success."[23] Simon Kistemaker explains, "The parable assures gospel preachers and teachers of growing success in spite of the fact that some of their hearers reject the message of salvation."[24] Those who go out with the word should expect a mixed response, but the end result is that the word will bring forth fruit and the kingdom will grow.

The parable of the mustard seed. Another parable that deals with the growth of the kingdom is the parable of the mustard seed (Matt 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19). Here is another parable of contrast. This time, however, the contrast is not between positive and negative response to the gospel, but between the humble beginnings

---

[21]Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 403; Kingsbury, *Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*, 35.

[22]Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 529.

[23]Madeline I. Boucher, *The Parables*, New Testament Message, vol. 7 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1981), 80; cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, AB, vol. 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 702.

[24]Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 37. He later remarks, "The faithful proclamation of the gospel will never fail to bring forth fruit." Ibid., 40.

of the kingdom and its ultimate end.[25] Despite what appears to be failure of the message, the kingdom will grow. Given this contrast, however, commentators are divided on whether or not the parable refers to growth itself. Robert Stein argues that the point of the parable is exclusively on the contrast between the beginning and the end. Donald Hagner concedes the parable is primarily about contrast, yet does not rule out the idea that Jesus alludes to growth. W. D. Davies and Dale Allison argue that the parable is about not only contrast, but also growth— including growth in the number of followers. Mark Bailey sees the parable as *primarily* about the growth of the kingdom. Perhaps Peter Jones sums up the dilemma best when he comments, "Growth is both a blatant implication of the contrast, on the one hand, and only mildly mentioned on the other."[26]

Numerical growth, while not the point of the parable, can certainly be inferred.[27] Despite what appears to be failure of the message, the kingdom *will* grow. The parable communicates that the kingdom of God will not fail but will succeed and do so in a grand and unexpected way. It is interesting to note, however, that whatever growth occurs, this parable does not speak of human influence on that growth. While Matthew and Luke mention a man who plants the seed, the seed itself is the focus and not human effort. The emphasis of the parable is thus on the nature of the kingdom itself and not on the messengers of the kingdom. The success of the kingdom is part of its essence.

---

[25]Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 387; Stein, *Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*, 94-95; Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 90-91; Peter Rhea Jones, *Studying the Parables of Jesus* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1999), 85; Boucher, *Parables*, 74-75; Bock, *Luke*, 1225, 1228.

[26]Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 376; cf. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 561; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 387; Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 2:419; Mark L. Bailey, "The Parable of the Mustard Seed," *BibSac* 155 (1998): 458;Jones, *Studying the Parables of Jesus*, 89.

[27]Bock notes that the distinction between kingdom and church remains unclear but maintains that the church era should be seen as a period of growth. Bock, *Luke*, 1226.

Another element of the passage is its allusion to Daniel 4:20-21 and Ezekiel 17:22-24.[28] In both Old Testament texts, the imagery depicts a kingdom of great influence. In the Ezekiel passage, the element of humble beginnings is also present. The relationship of the parable with this OT imagery suggests that the parable is more concerned with the ultimate significance of the kingdom rather than the growth itself. The changes from the image of a mighty cedar (Ezek 17) to the mustard tree may signify that the kingdom is, nevertheless, not what one might expect. In any case, the contrast is clear enough. The emphasis seems to be that despite present appearances, the kingdom will succeed and be universally significant. What seems small, unsuccessful and insignificant now will ultimately be great.

The parable of the yeast. Matthew and Luke include Jesus' parable of the yeast. The kingdom of God/heaven "is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened" (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:21). Coupled with the parable of the mustard seed, this parable also seems to present a contrast. Something seemingly insignificant ends up having a significant impact.[29] As in the mustard seed parable, the process of growth is not described, only "the guaranteed link between the beginning and the end."[30] There is a growth implied here, but again, the growth is inherent in the effect of the yeast and not on human action.[31] The point of the parable, then, is that the kingdom of God will have a significant impact. "The outcome may take

---

[28]R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 216-17. For a discussion of the significance of Ezek 17:23 in the parable of the mustard seed, see Rikk E. Watts, "Mark," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 155-58.

[29]Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 389.

[30]Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 554; cf. Bock, *Luke*, 1228.

[31]Claus Westermann, *The Parables of Jesus in the Light of the Old Testament*, ed. and trans. Friedemann W. Golka and Alistair H. B. Logan (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 186.

time, but it is certain, for both the growth of the seed and the effect of the leaven are regular natural processes which, once begun, will surely bring about the desired result."[32] Numerical results, though not ruled out, are not the point of this parable, however. The certainty of success of the kingdom is.

Parable of the talents. Two parables, the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) and of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27), share much in common.[33] Most commentators, however, see the Matthean and Lukan versions as two similar but different parables.[34] The parable in Matthew is part of a grouping of teaching concerning the end of the age (Matt 24:3-25:46), and is one of four parables included in that teaching. The parable begins with a γάρ, which links it with the previous parable and particularly with verse 13.[35] The parable is thus a kingdom parable (25:1) and one concerned with readiness for the return of Christ.[36] The symbolism of the elements in the parable seems clear enough. The "man *about* to go on a journey" (ἄντηωπος ἀποδημῶν, 24:15) represents Jesus, his

---

[32]France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 526; cf. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 552.

[33]Fitzmyer argues that the parables are two versions of the same tradition and suggests a parallelism of both content and vocabulary. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1230.

[34]See, especially, Bock, *Luke*, 2:1527-29; cf. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, 5th ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), 437; Morris, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 626; cf. Keener, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 599 n. 216. For purposes of space, and because the parable in Matthew focuses on the activity of the servants where the Lukan parable concentrates on the varied reactions to the man receiving a kingdom, we will examine only the parable of the talents here. Similar conclusions might be made from the Lukan parable.

[35]"Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."

[36]France remarks, "The theme of 'being ready', which dominated the last section, is still at the centre of this parable, which again portrays a 'coming' and its consequences for those who should have been preparing for it. But this parable takes up the question which that of the bridesmaids left unanswered: what *is* 'readiness'? It is not a matter of passively 'waiting', but of responsible activity, producing results which the coming 'master' can see and approve. For the period of waiting was not intended to be an empty meaningless 'delay', but a period of opportunity to put to good use the 'talents' entrusted to his 'slaves'." R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 352.

"slaves" (τοὺς δούλους) the church, and the period of time is that time before the final judgment, the church age.[37]

In the parable, the master gives each of three servants "talents" (τάλαντα) they are to invest while the master is away. The number of talents given to each servant is according to his ability. When the master returns and judges their performance, he rewards two servants for their work, while he condemns the third. Hagner correctly identifies the main point of the parable: "before the Son of Man comes and until that time whenever it may be, disciples are called to faithful and steady service for the kingdom."[38] The parable has direct implications for Great Commission work.

> This parable illustrates that the "delay" (24:48; 25:5, 19) is not a meaningless interval. It presents a window of opportunity for servants who love their Master to put to good use the resources given them for gain. In the situation of the Christian community, the resources that have been given apply to the task of mission in the world (10:1; 24:14; 28:19).[39]

One may make specific application from the elements of the parable itself. The word "talents" (τάλαντα) in the parable is a large sum of money.[40] Commonly, however, interpreters apply the modern use of the English word "talent" as the primary application

---

[37]Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3:402.

[38]Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 737. Harrington's suggestion that the parable is a polemic against "the movement within Judaism after A.D. 70 that sought to preserve the Jewish patrimony by building a 'hedge' or 'fence' around the Torah" is unconvincing. Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 354; Daniel J. Harrington, "Polemical Parables in Matthew 24-25," *USQR* 44 (2005): 287-98. Likewise, N. T. Wright's suggestion that the parable and the entire discourse are not a reference to Jesus' parousia. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 632-39

[39]David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 242.

[40]There is some debate about the actual amount of money signified. Of primary importance is the fact that a talent was a substantial amount of money and five talents even more so. Nolland notes, "A serious engagement in business would be possible with any of the three amounts." Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1014; cf. Morris, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 627; Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 352, n.15. The large sum signifies the trust by the master in the stewardship of his slaves. Dipboye suggests, "the size of the sums placed in the hands of the servants underscores the immensity of God's gift of grace and rises to the highest level of priority the church's responsibility for the treasure of that grace entrusted to her keeping." Carolyn Dipboye, "Matthew 25:14-30—To Survive or to Serve?" *RevExp* 92 (1995): 510.

of τάλαντα in the parable. While it may certainly be one application, this interpretation unnecessarily restrains the passage. The meaning is more generally "the specific privileges and opportunities of the kingdom of heaven and the responsibilities they entail."[41] The hearers of the parable are to be stewards of all God has given them for kingdom purposes.

Chenoweth, however, has offered a compelling case that τάλαντα in this parable has a specific referent. He argues that the brief introduction, identifying the teaching as a kingdom parable, connects the parable to other kingdom parables, specifically those in Matthew 13. Chenoweth sees an intentional link between verse 29 and Matthew 13:12. He makes the case that both parables apply the same general principle. Namely, "Jesus has entrusted the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to his disciples."[42] If Chenoweth is correct, then the parable has direct implications for evangelistic work. Jesus has entrusted the message of the kingdom to his servants. Those servants are to be stewards of that kingdom message until he returns.

The parable also concerns the results of the servants' stewardship. When the master settles accounts, the first slave has doubled his amount turning five talents into ten. The master praises him, "Well done, good and faithful slave." Likewise, the second slave has doubled his amount from two talents to four. He, too, the master praises. Why are the servants seen as good and faithful? Significantly, the parable speaks little of the *work* of the first servant, and nothing of the second. The emphasis is on the profit gained. When the third servant is examined, because of his "timidity and lack of enterprise,"[43] he

---

[41]France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 951. Carpenter suggests the money is "an example of everything with which we have been endowed by God." John B. Carpenter, "The Parable of the Talents in Missionary Perspective: A Call for an Economic Spirituality," *Missiology* 25 (1997): 168.

[42]Ben Chenoweth, "Identifying the Talents: Contextual Clues for the Interpretation of the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)," *TynBul* 56 (2005): 70.

[43]France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 956. The word translated "lazy" (ὀκνηρός, 25:26) literally means "hesitates or holds back." The servant is thus lazy in the sense that he was "too timid to take a risk with his master's money." Ibid., 934 n. 21; cf. Keener, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 601 n. 224.

has only the initial investment to return to his master. The master condemns this servant

for his lack of industry because even a minimal effort would have at least yielded *some*

result.[44]

For our purposes, the parable seems to emphasize not the *effort* of the faithful

and wicked servants but the results of those efforts. While it would be improper to

allegorize this parable to speak specifically of numerical results in evangelistic work,

C. Peter Wagner has made a point worth considering here:

> I have heard some say, 'God, I thank you that you do not require me to be
> successful, only faithful.' But the central passage on stewardship, the parable of the
> talents in Matthew 25:14-30, makes no distinction between the two. It tells us that
> the stewards who did their master's will and turned two talents and five talents into
> four and ten respectively were regarded as good and faithful servants. Here success
> and faithfulness go hand in hand. The steward who buried the talent and made no
> money, not even bank interest, from it was considered unfaithful.[45]

Those who are faithful to the master will be about his business. The scenario that one

might be faithful and unsuccessful is not included in this parable. Here, results are a

product of faithfulness. At least in this parable, those who are faithful stewards see

results. Only the unfaithful servant sees none. Thus, "'Being ready' consists not only in

keeping your slate clean, but in active, responsible, faithful service which produces

results."[46] In this parable, results are the evidence of work. There is no thought that one

will be both faithful *and* unsuccessful.

---

[44]Though I think there is an application here for numerical results in ministry, it is important to note that the wicked servant is not condemned for trying and failing. Rather, he was condemned as "a professed disciple who failed to invest all his resources in the work of the kingdom." Keener, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 602. "His performance had not matched his profession." France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 957.

[45]C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 534. Similarly, Citing the parable of the talents, Alan Tippett states, "I object to this offsetting of fruitful and faithful. Scripturally faithful has several meanings, but one of them is fruitful -- faithful in achieving expected results." Alan R. Tippett, "Functional Roles and Ingathering," *CGB* 2, no. 1 (September 1965): 3-4.

[46]France, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 354.

Parable of the great supper. The parable of the great supper (Luke 14:16-24), in its primary meaning, has little to add to our inquiry about numerical results.[47] While it is tempting to allegorize the parable to speak of the mission of the church to reach out to all who will receive the gospel, this is not the point of the parable. Stein rightly identifies the main thrust of the parable: "The point is that the kingdom of God has come and that those who would have been expected to receive it (the religious elite) did not do so, whereas the ones least likely to receive it (the publicans, poor, harlots, etc.) have."[48] The occasion for this parable was Jesus dining in the house of a Pharisee and conversing with the religious leaders there. The parable, in a sense, explains: "Since these opponents have rejected God's invitation, it has gone out to sinners and to Gentiles."[49]

The parable focuses on the presentness of the kingdom and one's response to it. One possible point of the parable, however, is that the inviting of guests remains a task the disciples of Jesus will continue.[50] While this continued task is certainly not the main point of the parable, nor one to be pressed too far in application, two general observations may be made. First, the parable illustrates that the message of the kingdom will face a mixed response. Not all those invited to the great supper accept the invitation. The parable mentions persons who, though invited to the banquet, ultimately refuse to come.[51] "These uninterested responses paralleled some of the responses that Jesus was encountering, and continued to find parallels in the response to the ongoing preaching of

---

[47]The parable is included here, primarily, because McGavran appeals to the parable. See, for example, Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 41.

[48]Stein, *Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*, 89; cf. Bock, *Luke*, 2:1278; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1053.

[49]Boucher, *Parables*, 104.

[50]Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 590.

[51]None of the excuses in vv. 18-20 is seen as legitimate. Ultimately, the excuses serve as a rejection of the invitation. Bock, *Luke*, 2:1273-75.

the Christian gospel."[52] Throughout the New Testament, the gospel receives a mixed response.

A second point is also significant. That is, initial rejection of the message does not negate the mission. In the parable, the banquet is to go on despite the initial refusal by the invited guests. If they will not come, others must be invited until the banquet hall is full (vv. 21-23).[53] The advance of the kingdom will not be thwarted. "The ministry of Jesus and his disciples may well face resistance. But resistance does not impede it."[54] The supper will take place and the hall will be filled.

Teachings of Jesus about the Number of the Redeemed

If the Bible does promise great growth of God's kingdom, what about those passages that suggest the number of the saved will be few? What do these passages tell us about numerical growth and the will of God concerning growth?

Luke 13:23-23. The question concerning whether the number of the redeemed will be few or many did not originate with debate over the church growth movement. While the reasons for asking differ, the question is asked at least as early as the New Testament era. The Bible records that someone asked the very question of Jesus. In Luke 13:23, an unnamed person asks Jesus whether the ones being saved are few (ὀλίγοι). In his response, Jesus speaks of a door that is narrow and will soon be shut. The result is that

---

[52]John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, WBC, vol. 35b (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 758.

[53]Likely, the second sending refers to the inclusion of the Gentiles. Stein, *Luke*, 394; Bock, *Luke*, 2:1277; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1053. Nolland rejects the idea that this is a reference to the Gentile mission. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 757. It is probably a stretch to see McGavran's concept of receptivity as being *mandated* in this parable, however, the symbolism is certainly there.

[54]Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 340; cf. Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 257; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1054.

many (πολλοί) "will seek to enter and will not be able." Our concern here is not the meaning of the metaphor, but whether and how Jesus answers the petitioner's question.

Some commentators interpret Jesus' response as implying, in answer to the question, that the number of the redeemed would in fact be small[55] or at least fewer than expected.[56] This implication, however, is far from clear. First, significantly, Jesus does not answer the question directly but uses the opportunity to make his own point. Jesus shifts the focus from the number of the redeemed to a warning for his hearers.[57] Notably, in the writings of Luke, similar shifts occur in which Jesus does not answer a question but redirects to his own teaching point (Luke 10:29; 12:41; Acts 1:6; cf. John 21:21).

Second, one should note that while the questioner asks whether the saved will be "few" (ὀλίγοι), Jesus does not use the word in his response. Rather, he refers to "many" (πολλοί, 13:24). The many to which Jesus refers, however, is not many who will be saved but many who will not be. When he speaks positively in verse 29, although not using πολλοί, the context implies that the number who enjoy table fellowship in the kingdom will be many rather than few.[58] The many who do enter the kingdom, however, may not be the same "many" that his hearers might expect. Again, Jesus offers a warning rather than answering the petitioner's question and commenting on the size of the kingdom. As Alfred Plummer notes, "The practical answer to the question in ver. 23 remains, 'Whatever be the number of those who are in the way of salvation, that which concerns you is, that you should without delay secure a place among them.'"[59]

---

[55]Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 734, 736; Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 565; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 288.

[56]Bock, *Luke*, 2:1234.

[57]Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 530; Bock, *Luke*, 2:1241; Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 736; François Bovon, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas*, EKK (Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 2:431.

[58]Plummer, *Gospel According to Saint Luke*, 348. The parallel text, Matt 8:11, adds πολλοί.

[59]Ibid.

Matthew 7:13-14. In Matthew's rendering (Matt 7:13-14), the teaching takes place not in answer to a question, but near the end of the Sermon on the Mount.[60] In the Lukan passage, Jesus does not speak directly of the number of those being saved. In this passage, however, Jesus explicitly states that those who choose the narrow gate and the path that leads to life are ὀλίγοι, while those who choose the broad gate/path to destruction are πολλοί. A primary question relevant to our study here is whether Christ means to make a statement about the number of the redeemed or is speaking rhetorically to make a different point.

Here, there is no real agreement. Davies and Allison suggest the possibility that the "few" and "many" of Matthew 7:13-14 are hyperbole so that a possible meaning is "act *as if* very few will enter through the gates of paradise." The text then would not be giving an "objective numerical estimate."[61] Hagner sees πολλοί as "clearly hyperbolic."[62] R. T. France sees the emphasis not on individual responsibility for the choice of two paths, but on the "total numbers" of the two groups.[63]

The view that this statement is hyperbolic is reasonable. Jesus may mean strongly to lead his listeners to choose the narrow path of radical discipleship he has been describing. First, in the context of the final section of the sermon (7:13-27), the emphasis of Jesus seems to be on the correct response to his teaching rather than a concern for a precise rendering of the number of the redeemed. Second, the text places emphasis on the imperative, εἰσέλθατε, so that the emphasis is not on the number of people entering the gate but on making sure one is among them. Clearly, Jesus mentions the πολλοί and ὀλίγοι to emphasize the importance of heeding the command. Finally, Jesus uses

---

[60]Again, our focus here is not on the precise meaning of gates and paths in the metaphor, but on what Jesus says about the number of the redeemed.

[61]Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:701.

[62]Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 179.

[63]France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 288 note 16.

hyperbole elsewhere in the sermon (5:29-30; 7:3-5) to emphasize personal responsibility. It seems reasonable that he would do the same here.

Admittedly, the issue may not be resolved with certainty. However, even if one takes the stricter interpretation, that Jesus is making a statement about the number of the redeemed, one still cannot make a definitive statement about that number. In context, the number of redeemed is relative to those who are ultimately not redeemed. That is, πολλοί and ὀλίγοι are terms whose meanings are not quantifiable. As a numerical marker, their meaning is relative to the context. This relativity explains why the number of people in the kingdom can be described in some places as πολλοί (Matt 8:11; 20:28; cf. πολύς, 10:37; πολλῶν, 26:28) while in others as ὀλίγοι (7:14; 22:14). Here, Jesus uses the words in comparison so that even if the passage is not hyperbole, the most that can be said is that the number of the redeemed is a significant minority. To use this text to say that the number of the redeemed will ultimately be small or as a negation of the idea of church growth would thus be inappropriate.

Matthew 22:14. A third place where Christ speaks of the number of redeemed being few is Matthew 22:14.[64] Here, Jesus concludes a pair of parables with the statement, "For many are called, but few are chosen." The context reveals that "chosen" (ἐκλεκτοί) refers to the redeemed. The number of the "chosen" are ὀλίγοι. The question, then, concerns what Jesus means by few.

Past commentators have sought to remove the force of the statement by limiting its scope to the first part of the parable and thus suggest the statement only applies to the Jews.[65] The arguments for this position are unconvincing. Ben Meyer suggests another possibility and offers a significantly stronger case. Meyer argues

---

[64]Also possibly in 20:16, but is likely a later addition.

[65]Herbert Musurillo, "Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen," *TS* 7 (1946): 583-89. Musurillo lists several commentators of his day that likewise held this view.

persuasively for a Semitic background in the use of πολλοί and ὀλίγοι. The terms, he contends, are comparative and refer not to number, but "all" and "not all."[66] A number of recent commentators follow Meyer here, concluding that ὀλίγοι is not a numerical reference.[67] Thus, the text may be understood: "For all are called, but not all are chosen."[68] This translation seems to be correct.

Even if Meyer is wrong, however, we are left with the same situation as in Matthew 7:13-14. That is, πολλοί and ὀλίγοι remain relative terms. The content of the parable demonstrates this, since in the first half, *many* do not respond to the invitation, yet after the servants have followed their master's orders, the banquet hall was filled (ἐπλήσθη). In the second, only one person is removed. If the many and few refer to both parts of the parable, then Meyer's interpretation seems to make the most sense. Even a strict interpretation, however, would not tell us much about the actual number of the redeemed. At most, the passage indicates the number of redeemed is in the minority.[69] If the text does speak to numbers, it speaks only to the proportionately fewer number of the saved to the lost. However one interprets the passage, this text does not negate other strong biblical evidence that the number of the redeemed, if in fact it is fewer than the lost, will grow and be large in number.

Warnings of Jesus Concerning Rejection

Finally, we can briefly note indications in Jesus' teaching that the response to the gospel will be mixed. As Jesus sends his disciples out during his ministry, he appears

---

[66]Ben F. Meyer, "Many (= All) Are Called, But Few (= Not All) Are Chosen," *NTS* 36 (1990): 89-97; cf. Edmond Boissard, "Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen," *TD* 3 (1955): 46-50.

[67]See, for example, Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3:307, Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 332; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 891.

[68]Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 626, 632.

[69]France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 828.

to expect that those who hear the message will receive it. At the same time, Jesus indicates that both in their immediate and later missions, the disciples would face some who reject the message. Jesus speaks of "whoever does not receive you" (Matt 10:14; cf. Luke 9:5; 10:10; Mark 6:11), indicating that not all would respond favorably to the kingdom message. Elsewhere, Jesus looks to the future and warns the disciples of persecution they would face for the sake of the gospel (Matt 10:16-26; Luke 12:4-12; Mark 13:9-13). The world will hate them (Matt 24:9; Luke 6:12, cf. Matt 5:11-12; Luke 21:7; John 15:18-19, cf. 1 John 3:13). Not all will receive the message.

In the post-resurrection commissions, as we have seen, the role of the disciples is to preach the gospel message and so bring persons to faith in Christ. The Matthean commission is to "make disciples" and upon doing so to baptize and teach. The fulfillment of this commission, of course, is not possible if there is no response to the message. The Markan commission, however, includes a statement that indicates some will receive the message and some will not (Mark 16:16; cf. John 3:18; 8:24; 12:48). Jesus nowhere claims that those who hear his gospel will universally accept it. Jesus experienced and expected some rejection of the gospel. Yet, some would believe. The gospel receives a mixed response.

Summary

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus draws multitudes of people to himself. In the early part of his ministry, Jesus grows large crowds of people attracted to his ministry. Jesus is not interested in mere numbers, however. He desires genuine, repentant, enduring believers. Among these crowds, many do in fact become true disciples. Yet, many of those initially attracted to Jesus do not become his disciples. Throughout his ministry, Jesus sees a mixed response to his kingdom message of repentance. Some oppose Jesus, others are temporary followers, while others become true disciples. In terms of numerical results, Jesus does in fact see a number of persons become true disciples.

In his teaching ministry, several of Jesus' parables give us insight into the nature of kingdom growth. In the parable of the sower, Jesus teaches both the reality of a mixed response as well as the ultimate success of the word. As the word goes forth, it will produce a harvest. Likewise, in the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, Jesus teaches the certain success of the kingdom. In the parable of the talents, Jesus illustrates the necessity of faithful service by his disciples until his return. In the parable, the fruit of that service is evidence of the work. The parable of the great supper highlights both the mixed response to the kingdom message and the fact that the mission will not be thwarted by such a response.

Elsewhere, Jesus teaches concerning the number of the redeemed. In this teaching, Jesus avoids the question of the actual number of the redeemed, few or many, and focuses instead on the mixed response to the message. In one sense, the teaching indicates that while all are to be recipients of the message, not all will respond to that message with repentant faith. To the hearer, Jesus' teaching also highlights the urgency of responding appropriately to the message. That is, if few are indeed saved, be sure you are one of the few. Finally, Jesus prepares his disciples for a mixed response to the gospel. Those who are gospel agents will face both rejection and opposition to the message. The message will be both gladly received and harshly opposed. As we turn to the book of Acts, Jesus' teachings on both the mixed response to the kingdom message and its sure success are realized.

Results in the Book of Acts

Any casual reader of the book of Acts will observe the substantial references to growth in the early church. Unquestionably, Luke speaks of the growth, even numerical growth, of the church. A question remains, however, concerning the significance of these numerical and growth references. A variety of opinions exists on the significance of the numerical growth in Acts:

Luke did not scorn numbers. He rejoiced in the large numbers becoming Christian and carefully recorded them.[70]

Somehow, while evangelism is never slighted, church growth does not seem to be primarily a numerical thing in Scripture, even in the few verses early in Acts.[71]

Reviewing, then, the teaching of the New Testament, one would have to say that, on the one hand, there is joy in the rapid growth of the church in its earliest days, but that, on the other, there is no evidence that the numerical growth of the church is a matter of primary concern.[72]

Luke gives us enough statistics to show that when the Spirit acts the Church grows numerically, but not enough to allow us to seize on numerical growth as the essence of the Church or as the only measure of a church's life and effectiveness.[73]

A solely quantifiable approach to faithful community is not supported biblically. Growth--numerical growth--is not a dominant biblical theme. . . . It is true that when Peter preaches at Pentecost, three thousand are baptized: thanks be to God! Yet it is also true that, when Stephen preaches, he is stoned to death: thanks be to God! Proclaiming the gospel, no matter what the response is, is common to both stories. . . . The primary task of the church involves proclaiming God's Word, not focusing on the results.[74]

His [Luke's] documentation of the 'numerical growth of the early church' is one of the purposes of Acts itself."[75]

What, then, is the significance of the growth passages in the book of Acts? Is there any theological purpose for their inclusion in the book? Further, what is the nature of the growth of the early church?

---

[70]Donald A. McGavran, *How Churches Grow: The New Frontiers of Mission* (London: World Dominion Press, 1959), 25.

[71]J. Randall Petersen, "'Church Growth': A Limitation of Numbers?" *Christianity Today*, 27 March 1981, 19.

[72]Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 140.

[73]Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), 118.

[74]Mark A. Olsen, *Moving Beyond Church Growth: An Alternative Vision for Congregations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 44.

[75]John Mark Hicks, "Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts: The Role of Pragmatism, Reason and Rhetoric," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 8 (Spring 1997): 17; contra Carl R. Holladay, "Church Growth in the New Testament: Some Historical Considerations and Theological Perspectives," *ResQ* 26 (1983): 96-98.

Response to the Gospel in Acts

Before examining the nature and theological significance of the growth in Acts, it will be helpful to examine briefly the ways in which Luke describes that growth. At times, Luke records specific numbers of believers (1:15; 2:41; 4:4; cf. 21:20). Further, Luke includes general statements about the response of faith for those who hear the message and the increase in the number of disciples (e.g., 2:47; 5:14; 6:1; 9:42; 11:24; 14:1; 17:4, 12). Finally, at key places in the text, Luke provides summary statements that record the progress of the gospel (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; cf. 28:31).

Statistical references. The places where Luke records actual statistics concerning the number of believers are relatively few. The first record of the number of believers is in Acts 1:15. Here, Luke records that before Pentecost, 120 persons were together to make a decision regarding the replacement of Judas.[76] After Peter's sermon at Pentecost, 3000 were added to the church (2:41). Later, the number came to be about 5000 (4:4).[77] While in each case Luke gives a specific number, the figures are approximate as indicated by the qualifying term "about" (ὡσεί, 1:15; 2:41 / ὡς, 4:4). These are the only places Luke uses actual figures to indicate the growth of the church.

General references to growth. In addition to the two statistical references to growth, Luke notes a positive response to the gospel and subsequent growth of the church in a number of places:

> And the Lord was adding (προσετίθει) to their number day by day those who were being saved (2:47).

> . . . multitudes (πλήθη) of men and women, were constantly added (προσετίθεντο) to *their number* (5:14).

> . . . the disciples were increasing (πληθυνόντων) *in number* (6:1).

---

[76]For a discussion of whether the number 120 has any symbolic significance, see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 80-81.

[77]NASB has "of the men" (τῶν ἀνδρῶν), but it is unclear whether the number includes women. Ibid., 188.

It became known all over Joppa, and many (πολλοὶ) believed in the Lord (9:42).

And considerable numbers (ἱκανῆς ὄκλος) were brought (lit. "added," προσετέθη) to the Lord (11:24).

a large number of people (πολὺ πλῆθος) believed (14:1)

[Paul and Barnabas] had made many disciples (ἱκανοὺς μαθητεύσαντες, 14:21)

And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number (πολὺ πλῆθος) of the God-fearing Greeks and a number (lit "not a few" οὐκ ὀλίγαι) of the leading women (17:4).

Therefore many (πολλοὶ) of them believed, along with a number (lit "not a few" οὐκ ὀλίγαι) of prominent Greek women and men (17:12).

Luke includes these references to indicate the positive response that the gospel receives as the gospel advances both ethnically and geographically throughout the known world.

Not all the references were solely positive, however. While Luke portrays an effective gospel and a body of believers that continues to grow numerically, the message of the gospel receives a decidedly mixed response.[78] Acts depicts neither a triumphalistic growth nor a universal acceptance of the message. Opposition consistently attends progress.[79] While the number of disciples increases, rejection and even opposition to the gospel are present as well.

The apostles, while seeing a continued response to the gospel message, also meet with resistance. After early success in Jerusalem, the apostles face opposition from the Jewish leaders. Luke couples the growth of the church (4:4) with the arrest of Peter and John (4:3). Again, a report of growth of the church (5:14) is followed by the arrest of the apostles by the high priest and Sadducees (5:17). Luke follows another report of the increase of the disciples (6:7) by the arrest and martyrdom of Stephen (6:8-7:60).

---

[78]This is not to suggest that the Scripture, as Holladay supposes, "provides concrete cases in which genuine expressions of the gospel resulted not in church growth, but in church decline, and thus suggest that the correlation between the two need not always be direct." Holladay, "Church Growth in the New Testament," 94-95. While the gospel does indeed meet with a mixed response, the number of believers continues to grow, not decline. There is no place in Scripture where the preaching of the gospel actually results in church decline.

[79]Brian S. Rosner, "The Progress of the Word," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 215.

Likewise, Paul meets with both opposition and with a mixed response to his message. As Paul preaches at Psidian Antioch, many Gentiles believe and the gospel spreads (13:48-49), but opposition also arises that drives them out of the region (13:50). In Iconium, a "large number of people" believe (14:1) but some disbelieve (14:2) so that the city is divided (14:4). Opposition from the Jews (17:5) accompanies success in Thessalonica (17:4). The same thing happens at Berea (17:12-13). The sermon at the Areopagus results in some who reject Paul's message, others who are open to hearing more, and still others who believe (17:33-34). In Corinth, the Jews reject the message (18:6) but the leader of the synagogue and many Gentiles believe (18:7-8). More mixed response occurs at Ephesus (19:8-10). Finally, in Rome, while under house arrest, when Paul preaches the gospel, Luke records, "Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe" (28:24).

Another aspect of the growth statements in Acts is that the growth is ongoing. Luke includes these growth statements throughout the narrative. While some of these statements indicate a specific response to a particular evangelistic event, other statements indicate a continuous growing. These latter statements use verb forms that indicate the growth was progressive (e.g., 2:47; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20). Some also include additional descriptors— "day by day" (καθ᾽ ἡμέραν, 2:47; 16:5); "constantly" (μᾶλλον, 5:14, lit. "even more"[80])—to indicate the continuous nature of the growth.

Summary statements. Among the growth references in Acts, Luke includes six summary statements (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5: 19:20; 28:31).[81] The six statements are as follows:

---

[80]BAGD, 489; BDAG, 613.

[81]F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 123; Bock, *Acts*, 265.

The word of God kept on spreading (ηὔξανεν); and the number of the disciples continued to increase (ἐπληθύνετο) greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient (ὑπήκουον) to the faith (6:7).[82]

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase (ἐπληθύνετο) (9·31).[83]

But the word of the Lord continued to grow (ηὔξανεν) and to be multiplied (ἐπληθύνετο) (12:24).[84]

So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing (ἐπερίσσευον) in number daily (16:5).[85]

So the word of the Lord was growing (ηὔξανεν) mightily and prevailing (ἴσχυεν) (19:20).

[Paul was] preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered (ἀκωλύτως) (28:31).[86]

What Acts 1:8 anticipates, Luke confirms in his summaries.[87] Each of these summary statements, with the exception of 28:31, is a statement of results and serves to emphasize the progress of the gospel up to that point before moving to the next part of the story.[88]

---

[82]This first summary is a description of the gospels reception among the Jews. Of particular note is that many of the priestly class were now coming to faith as well. Likewise, both the proclamation of the word and the number of those who accepted it increased. Hicks sees this as a "metaphor for the increase of believers through the acceptance of God's word." Hicks, "Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts," 19; cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2nd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, 1998), 1:316; I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 127. Stott notes the correlation that when proclamation increases, response increases as well. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, & the World*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 123.

[83]Bock notes that the passive verb points to God doing the growing. Bock, *Acts*, 373. The church continues to grow despite opposition.

[84]Again, the growth occurs despite persecution. See Marshall, *Acts of the Apostles*, 213.

[85]Hicks notes the similarity in language with Acts 2:47, which illustrates that the Gentile mission succeeded in the same way the Jerusalem mission did. Hicks, "Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts," 19.

[86]Here, the "deliberately open-ended ending of Acts that functions to portray the ongoing progress of the word, and perhaps even to include the readers in the continuing task of spreading the word." Rosner, "Progress of the Word," 232; cf. John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 63.

[87]See, Rosner, "Progress of the Word," 217-23.

[88]Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:595; Rosner, "Progress of the Word," 222.

Additionally, with the exception of 16:5, the summary statements each document the increase in the preaching of the gospel message. In three of the summaries (6:7; 12:24; 19:20), Luke employs nearly identical wording: "the word of God/the Lord grew."[89] The summaries reveal a twin emphasis, stating how, despite opposition, the gospel moves from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth and the church continues to grow.

Theological Significance

Without question, the book of Acts records the growth of the early church. A question remains, however, concerning the theological significance of that growth. What, if anything, does Luke want to convey in his presentation of that growth? Several significant points emerge from a study of the growth passages in Acts.

Models the Old Testament pattern and promise of growth. One probable purpose of the growth statements in Acts is to show that the growth of the church is a natural extension of God's blessing to his creation and to his covenant people.[90] A key to understanding this purpose of Luke is in the words he employs. Two terms Luke prefers as indicators of growth are αὐξάνω (6:7; 7:17; 12:24; 19:20) and πληθύνω (6:1, 7; 7:17; 9:31; 12:24). The words appear together in two of the summary statements (6:7; 12:24). Luke includes these words in general references to growth, but especially in the summary statements. These words appear together in the LXX in God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7). The words also appear in connection with the Abrahamic covenant to indicate the numerical growth of Abraham's descendants (17:20;

---

[89]My translation. The English translations fail to show the intentional repetition here. Both 6:7 and 12:24 have ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ηὔξανεν. Nearly identical is 19:20: τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος ηὔξανεν.

[90]On this point and the following observations, I am indebted to Hicks. Hicks, "Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts," 19-22; see also, Jerome Kodell, "'The Word of God Grew': The Ecclesial Tendency of Λόγος in Acts 6,7; 12,24; 19,20," *Biblica* 55 (1974): 509-12; Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, Church Dogmatics, vol. 4, no. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 646.

28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4; Exod 1:7; Lev 26:9).[91] Finally, Jeremiah employs the phrase in reference to the messianic community (Jer 3:16) and of the restored Israel who, as God's remnant, return to the promised land where they "will be fruitful and multiply" (Jer 23:3). John Mark Hicks is correct when, having examined this pattern, he remarks, "Luke's emphasis on numerical growth in Acts is best seen against this intense theological background."[92] Thus, Hicks suggests the purpose of Luke's record of growth: "The church is the messianic community which is expected to be fruitful and multiply. It belongs to the messianic community not only as a command, but also as a promise and blessing."[93]

Demonstrates the success of the gospel. On a perhaps less profound but no less significant point, the growth statements in the book of Acts show that the proclamation of the gospel was successful. The gospel, wherever it went, was not merely proclaimed, but resulted in new believers who were incorporated into the church. This fact is evident in each of the types of growth statements in Acts. The particular statistical references show that the growth that did occur was numerically significant. Not a few

---

[91]Note also the uses of the two terms, separately, in reference to the covenant promises. Αὐξάνω: Gen 17:6; 26:22; 41:52; Exod 23:30; Num 24:7; 1 Chr 17:10; Ps 104 (105):24. Πληθύνω: Gen 16:10; 17:2; 26:4, 24; 48:16; Exod 1:20; Deut 1:10; 6:3; 7:13; 8:13; 13:17; 28:63; Josh 24:3; Neh 9:23; Ps 106 (107):38; Isa 51:2.

[92]Hicks, "Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts," 21.

[93]Ibid., 22. Pao, however, has suggested an even more precise significance of the growth summaries that speak of the "word." As noted above, three of the summaries (6:7; 12:24; 19:20) state "the word of God/the Lord grew." While the first two employ the "be fruitful and multiply" verbiage, ηὔξανεν and ἐπληθύνετο, in Acts 19:20, Luke replaces ἐπληθύνετο with ἴσχυεν. This change, Pao suggests, is significant and ties the passage to Exod 1 and Isa 40-55. The tie to Exod 1 is further confirmed by the use of ηὔξανεν and ἐπληθύνετο in Acts 7:17. Luke thus presents the church as the covenant community of the Isaianic new exodus. The church grows despite opposition just as Israel did in Egypt. Thus, Pao concludes, the three growth summaries demonstrate the church to be the people of God as evidenced by their growth. The church grows because it is the rightful recipient of the new inheritance promised to new covenant community. David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, WUNT, Reihe 2, vol. 130 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2000), 167-76.

persons responded to the message—many did.[94] The general growth statements, likewise, show that the gospel routinely resulted in the salvation of its hearers. While the gospel met with opposition in places and saw a mixed reception, the gospel was successful. Many did receive it. Finally, the growth summaries intentionally demonstrate the success of the gospel. Luke strategically places the summaries throughout the narrative to show that the gospel is successful despite obstacles and opposition.[95] Further, "the summaries confirm not only that progress is taking place, but that the expansion is impressive and far reaching."[96]

Luke describes numerical growth that is expansive and extensive. The success of the gospel, however, is tied to the success of the word. Thus, as the word increases, the number of believers increases as well (Acts 6:7). The gospel continues to grow and, with it, the church does as well. The gospel, throughout the book of Acts, successfully fulfills its purpose—to save all who will believe and establish Christ's church.

Summary

In Acts, Luke records the response to the gospel as it goes forth and the corresponding numerical growth of the church. Luke describes the growth of the church through early statistical accounts, general statements about the response to the gospel, and six summary statements that record the gospel's progress. Throughout the Acts narrative, in spite of opposition and mixed response, the church continues to grow. As the gospel advances from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth, the church consistently grows larger as the number of disciples increases.

---

[94]Copeland suggests that the specific statistical references in the early chapter of Acts are included because "Luke wants to demonstrate that the Jerusalem community of faith is qualified to be the restored Israel of Messianic expectation." E. Luther Copeland, "Church Growth in Acts," *Missiology* 4 (1976): 17.

[95]Cf. Allison A. Trites, "Church Growth in the Book of Acts," *BibSac* 145 (1988): 163; Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, 172-74.

[96]Rosner, "Progress of the Word," 222.

For Luke, this numerical growth has theological significance. First, the growth of the church and its corresponding increase in numbers models after the pattern of growth promised to God's covenant community in the Old Testament. The growth of the church is a natural extension of God's blessing to the messianic community. Second, the numerical growth in Acts demonstrates the success of the gospel as it is proclaimed and received and links the progress of the word with the growth of the church. Luke utilizes these growth statements to highlight this success.

Results in the Pauline Epistles

We have seen that Luke highlights numerical results as a theme of Acts. In this section, we will examine what, if anything, Paul has to say about numerical growth. Some have argued that Paul has little to say about results. Lesslie Newbigin suggests, for example, "When one has given due weight to this obvious delight in the numerical growth of the church [in the book of Acts], one must also observe that the rest of the New Testament furnishes little evidence of interest in numerical growth."[97] This is perhaps an overstatement. While none of the Pauline epistles shares the same purpose of Luke in demonstrating the numerical growth of the church, Paul does have something to say about results. In addition to what we have observed in the previous chapters concerning Paul's view of his role and the use of methods, Paul gives some insight concerning his expectations about numerical growth and the relationship of such growth to the success of his apostolic mission.

Paul's Attitude toward Numerical Growth

We have already examined the passages that show that Paul viewed his role in terms of winning persons to faith in Christ and that he desired to see numerical results.

---

[97]Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 139.

Here, we will observe several additional passages that expand our understanding of Paul's attitude toward numerical growth.

Paul prays for growth. In several locations, Paul asks for prayer on his behalf and for his mission. In at least two places, Paul requests prayer for the proclamation of the message itself. In Ephesians 6:19-20, Paul requests that prayers be made that he be able to speak the gospel with boldness. Elsewhere, in Colossians 4:3-4, Paul requests prayer for an opportunity to proclaim the gospel and to do so with clarity.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:1, however, Paul requests prayer in terms of both proclamation and the results of that proclamation. Paul requests, "pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you." Both verbs refer to the "word of the Lord" (ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυριοῦ) and convey a continuous action . . . The first part of his request is for the message itself.[98] Paul desires the continued "rapid and unhindered progress" of the gospel.[99] He desires that the gospel message would continue to spread. The second part of his request is that the word "be glorified" (δοξάζηται). Here, Paul desires not only that the message be proclaimed, but that it be successful as well. Just as the word was glorified in its reception by the Thessalonians (cf. 1:6), Paul asks for prayer that the word will continue to be glorified as others received it. For the word to be glorified, as it "runs" forth unhindered, it must also be received by the hearer.[100] "The gospel is 'honored' . . . when it is not merely

---

[98]The word translated "spread rapidly" (τρέχῃ) literally means "run."

[99]D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, NAC, vol. 33 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 262; cf. F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, WBC, vol. 45 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 198; Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 274; Michael W. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 256.

[100]Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 246; Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 334-35; cf. Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 263.

proclaimed, but accepted or acknowledged."[101] Thus, Paul does not pray merely that the gospel be proclaimed, but that it be received as well.

Paul expects numerical growth. There exists at least circumstantial evidence that Paul expected growth as a result of his ministry. We have already examined Paul's role as a "planter" in 1 Corinthians 3. An additional general observation can be made at this point. While Paul describes himself here as one who plants, he expects that as a result of that planting, God will bring the increase. Paul rightly expects an eschatological harvest. As Paul speaks of the varying roles in participation in God's harvest, and as he conveys the requirement that a steward was required to be found faithful (1 Cor 4:2), there is no sense in which Paul expects or would find acceptable a planting and watering that resulted in a failed harvest. Even though he speaks of faithfulness, that faithfulness yields results. Indeed, God is the one who causes the growth (1 Cor 3:7), but the expectation is that growth will indeed occur.[102]

Elsewhere, Paul notes his purpose in ministry in terms of numerical results. In 2 Corinthians 4:15, Paul states, "All things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God."[103] The thrust of the passage is that the purpose of Paul's ministry, and the suffering that accompanies it, is for God's grace to abound as the number of disciples

---

[101]Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 256; cf. Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 274.

[102]Significantly, in v. 6, the verbs of which Paul and Apollos are the subjects are in the aorist tense, while the verb in which God is the subject is in the imperfect tense. Thus while Paul and Apollos performed their particular ministries, God was continually giving the increase. The continuous action is present in verse seven as well. Here all the verbs are in the present tense. Thus, while God's servants continually fulfill their role, God continually gives the increase.

[103]The Greek here presents what Furnish calls a "syntactical thicket" Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 259. For the various interpretive options of the verse as a whole, see David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 237 n. 607; Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 355-56.

increases.[104] This in turn results in the glory of God. The phrase "more and more people" (τῶν πλειόνων) is a reference to the ever growing number of persons who are converted to the gospel—numerical growth.[105] The ultimate goal, God's glory, is attained as the number of believers increases.

Paul expects a mixed response. Though his goal and expectation was for continued increase in the number of believers, Paul was aware that not every person who heard the gospel would receive it. While Paul expected that many would believe in Christ, he knew that others would not. Several passages in the Corinthian correspondence indicate this two-fold response to the gospel:

> For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor 1:18).

> For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life (2 Cor 2:15-16a).

> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, [4] in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor 4:3-4).

In these passages, Paul categorizes the world into two basic groups—those who reject the gospel and those who accept it.[106] The preaching of the true gospel will have both

---

[104]Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 357.

[105]Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 260; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 91; Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 1:345; Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 356. Barrett's rejection of the concept of numerical growth here based on the use of "majority" (οἱ πλείονες) in 2 Cor 2:6 is unconvincing. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 144-45.

[106]Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 68; Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 52; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 63.

positive and negative results.[107] Further, Paul is not willing to make the gospel more palatable so that the number of "converts" increases (2 Cor 2:17). Paul desires a positive response to the true gospel, and recognizes that not all will accept it.

Paul's Success and Numerical Growth

Paul expected a response to the gospel. Beyond this expectation, the New Testament contains additional evidence that Paul viewed his ministry success at least partially in terms of results.

The potential that Paul's ministry would be "in vain." One indication that Paul viewed success partly in terms of numerical success is his repeated claims that a lack of positive enduring response to the gospel would mean that his ministry was in vain. In Galatians 4:11, as Paul warns the Galatian believers, he states his fear "that perhaps I have labored over you in vain." Here, Paul uses the word εἰκῇ meaning "in vain" or "to no avail".[108] Ronald Fung shows that Paul speaks here of the salvation (justification) of the Galatians.[109] Paul claims that his labor would prove to have been εἰκῇ were the Galatian Christians to apostatize. Further, one observes here that Paul is speaking of his evangelistic ministry. In doing so, his focus is on the *result* of that ministry. Using the perfect tense κεκοπίακα ("I have labored"), Paul refers to his past evangelistic actions and their continuing result. If the Galatian believers do not continue in their faith, there is no enduring result of his ministry and, thus, his labor will prove to

---

[107]Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 252.

[108]BAGD, 222; BDAG, 281. Paul uses εἰκῇ elsewhere in Rom 13:4; 1 Cor 15:2; Gal 3:4; and Col 2:18. The only place Paul uses εἰκῇ in reference to his ministry is Gal 4:11.

[109]Cf. 3:4 where εἰκῇ is reference is to justification; cf. also 2:21 and 5:2, 4 where the context is justification. Paul's concern is their salvation. Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 194.

have been "in vain."[110] He fears that "his work and the salvation of the Galatians will come to nothing."[111]

Paul speaks again of his work being in vain in 1 Thessalonians 3:5. Here, Paul is concerned about the faith of the Thessalonian believers. If their faith proves not to be genuine, Paul's labor will be "in vain." Here, "labor" (κόπος) is a reference to Paul's evangelism and the toil associated with it.[112] Paul does not want his work to prove wasted and for nothing.[113] Paul speaks similarly of his ministry among the Thessalonians in 2:1: "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain." In this passage, "in vain" means "not a failure." That is, Paul's statement that his ministry was "not in vain" means that his apostolic mission was successful in bringing persons to faith.[114] Bruce comments, "The Thessalonians' positive response to the gospel and subsequent energy in spreading it abroad bore sufficient testimony both to the quality of the preaching and to the power that accompanied it."[115] Paul says he did not labor in vain because the Thessalonians responded to the gospel message.

---

[110]See Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 194; Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), 255; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 183; Donald Guthrie, *Romans*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 118.

[111]Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, in *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 219; cf. Canon R. A. Cole, *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 165; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, vol. 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 412.

[112]Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 165; Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 104.

[113]Morris, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 99; Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 132.

[114]Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 114-15. Cf. Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 70. It is possible that οὐ κενὴ here could mean either "without purpose" or "without results" but likely refers to results (cf. 1:9-10; 3:5). This meaning reflects the usual sense of the term in Paul's letters (cf. 1 Cor 15:10, 58; 2 Cor 6:1; Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16). In addition, the idea of results fits better with perfect form γέγονεν so that Paul speaks of the continuing result of his mission work. Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 92; cf. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 61. Frame, however, argues that οὐ κενὴ refers not to results but means, rather, "without divine inspiration and power." James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 92.

[115]Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 24.

In Philippians 2:16, Paul admonishes the Philippians to continue in their faith so that "in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain." Here, Paul looks ahead to the "day of Christ" (ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ)—that day when he will stand before the Lord and give account of his life.[116] Paul desires that the Philippians will be a reason for his being able to glory in that day. The verb "run" (τρέχω) combined with "in vain" (εἰς κένον) pictures a runner who may or may not succeed in reaching his goal. In the metaphor, "run" is a reference to the whole of Paul's missionary work so that his personal success is tied to the success of the gospel in the lives of the Philippians.[117] Similarly, the verb "toil" (κοπιάω) refers to the missionary labors of the apostle. Paul desires fruit from his labor so that his work is not in vain.[118]

Paul's "boasting" and numerical results. In addition to his desire for his ministry not to be in vain, Paul also speaks of being able to "boast" about his success.[119]

---

[116]Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, rev. and exp. Ralph P. Martin (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 147.

[117]Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 299-300.

[118]O'Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 300; cf. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 147; Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 140. Cf. Isa 49:4; 65:23. In Isa 49:4, the prophet laments that his labor has been in vain. Later, in 65:23, there is the future promise that the people of God would not labor in vain. Paul perhaps has Isa 65:23 in view since the context seems to indicate that the success with the Philippian believers in doubt, but that Paul is affirming that the Philippians would be evidence that his apostolic ministry had not been in vain. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 249; cf. Thielman, *Philippians*, 141. Of these passages about Paul's ministry, Oepke remarks, "All these passages express a strong sense of responsibility in face of the greatness of the divine gift and of the task thereby imposed, yet also a confidence in the gracious power of God which normally guarantees success." Albrecht Oepke, "κενός, κτλ," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. 3, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), 660.

[119]The Greek word καύχημα and its cognates is distinctively Pauline occurring 50 times in his letters and only four times in rest of New Testament. George B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, The New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: University Press, 1976), 126; see also C. K. Barrett, "Boasting (καυχᾶσθαι, κτλ.) in the Pauline Epistles," in *L'Apôtre Paul* (Leuven: University Press, 1986), 363-68; Rudolf Bultmann, "καυχάομαι, κτλ," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. 3, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), 645-54.

Looking again at Philippians 2:16, Paul speaks of a "reason to glory" (εἰς καύχημα ἐμοί) in the day of Christ. Paul's καύχημα (lit. "boast") is in direct relation to his ministry not being εἰς κενόν. That is, the Philippians will either prove Paul's ministry to be a success and thus become his boast in the day of Christ, or will prove him to have failed in his evangelistic purpose and thus his labor will be in vain. Here, success is assumed and Paul's boast is "a deep exultation or proper pride that only the Philippians can provide Paul by their obedience to God's commands."[120]

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, Paul again speaks of his boasting in the results of his ministry. "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." The Thessalonians are the object of his joy as he rejoices in the work of God in their lives.[121] Paul also refers to the Thessalonian believers, however, as his "crown of exultation" (lit. "crown of boasting"). The crown pictured here is likely the victor's wreath worn by athletes.[122] The picture is of triumph as the Thessalonians represent the victorious success of his evangelistic mission and work.[123] The Thessalonians represent the fruit of his mission. As such, they are his reason for boasting.

In Paul's boasting, we catch a glimpse of the delicate balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in evangelistic ministry. While Paul speaks of his boasting in ministry success, elsewhere he states, "'HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE

---

[120]Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 147. Müller notes, "If their faith was genuine and pure and without blemish, and the light of grace was seen in them, he would not stand ashamed but would find in it a reason to be proud in the day of Christ." Jac J. Müller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1955), 95.

[121]Morris, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 90.

[122]Frame, *Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, 122; Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 124; Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 56; Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 99.

[123]See Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 124. Holmes notes Paul's "evident interest in the Thessalonians as an indicator of his own success or failure." Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 96. Bruce likens Paul's boasting to a parent who has pride in the success of his child. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 56.

LORD.' For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends" (2 Cor 10:17-18; cf. 1 Cor 1:31). This balance is seen clearly in Romans 15. As we have previously noted, Paul finds reason to boast in the results of his ministry as his preaching of the gospel has brought about the "obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed" (Rom 15:18). This boasting, however, consists in the "things pertaining to God" (v. 17) as Christ works in and through him (v. 18). Paul boasts in the success of his ministry as a result of his faithfulness, but God is responsible for, gets credit for, and receives all the glory from that success.

Thus, while Paul boasts in the result of his mission, he does not boast of his own accomplishments. Paul's success is tied to the work of God through him. His faithfulness brings success, but God receives the glory for that success. Moisés Silva explains,

> His life and work were so identified with Christ, and his ministry—particularly his distinctive Gentile ministry—was such a crucial factor in the work of Christ's kingdom that he could speak of his own boasting and of God's glory in the same breath. Moreover, we should note once again in this regard the tension between God's work of grace and Paul's sense of his own responsibility.[124]

At the same time, even though it is God who saves and to whom glory is due, Paul recognizes his own responsibility. George Caird explains,

> When he [Paul] became a Christian, he resigned all claim to that sort of boasting. Salvation depended on God's free grace alone, not on achievement or merit, and all pride was excluded (Rom 3^{27}). But he did not therefore relax his determination to excel or to have something to show for himself *in the day of Christ*. The Christian must appear before the tribunal of Christ (2 Cor. 5^{10}), not indeed to determine his eternal destiny, but to render account of his stewardship to his Lord (1 Cor 4^{1}). There is no condemnation in store for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8^{1}), and, if a man's life work is proved worthless, he does not thereby lose his chance of eternal life; but he does lose something (1 Cor. 3$^{12-15}$; cp. 5^{5}). Thus the doctrine of justification by faith goes hand in hand with the profound sense of responsibility from which self-concern has been expelled. The one thing that matters is the approval of Christ.[125]

---

[124]Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 128.

[125]Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, 127.

The balance is difficult, but must be maintained. Paul can boast in his success, but he boasts in the success that Christ has brought about *through* him. Paul is only required to be faithful, but that faithfulness is evidenced as persons come to faith in Christ and persevere in that faith. Paul is responsible for success, but he is dependent upon God for that success. Numerical growth is the goal, but the glory of God is the ultimate goal (2 Cor 4:15).

Summary

From the teaching in Paul's letters, we learn much about how Paul views the growth of the church as persons respond to the gospel message. Paul's aim is to win persons to faith in Jesus Christ. Paul prays for growth and expects it. While he knows there will be a mixed response, he is also confident that the gospel will triumph and the church will be established to the glory of God. Paul, in part, views his own successful stewardship of that gospel in terms of numerical growth. He does not want his evangelistic efforts to be to no avail. If his evangelism fails to win persons to faith who grow and endure, his efforts will be in vain. Paul's work, however, does produce results. Paul successfully establishes churches throughout the provinces in which he works. This growth, for Paul, is a reason for boasting. Paul can glory in the fruit of his evangelistic effort. Paul does not boast, however, in his own accomplishments. While the growth of the church is the fruit of his labor, God brings about that growth. Only as God works in and through him can Paul be "successful." The numerical results of his ministry are dependent upon God. Therefore, Paul boasts in the Lord. To God belongs all the glory.

Preliminary Conclusions

Examining the record of numerical growth of the believing community in the New Testament, we see a consistent pattern. In the ministries of Jesus, the Twelve, and Paul, the message of the gospel receives a mixed response. At the same time, in each of their ministries, the number of disciples grows. From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus

attracts followers. Among those initial followers, some become true disciples while many do not. Throughout his ministry, Jesus receives a mixed response to his kingdom message. Yet, in terms of numerical results, Jesus does in fact see a number of persons become true disciples.

From Jesus' teaching, we may draw several principles. First, Jesus' teachings reveal that the gospel, as it goes forth, will receive a mixed response. While many will receive the gospel and become committed, enduring disciples, others will exercise a false faith, openly reject the message, or aggressively oppose the gospel. Those sent with the message of the gospel can expect that not all will be saved. Second, Jesus' teachings lead us to expect that despite this mixed response, some will indeed be saved. The gospel will be victorious. God's kingdom will grow. Those who go out with "seed" of the word can expect that some will fall on "good soil." The gospel will bear fruit. Third, Christians are responsible to be good stewards of the gospel and invest all that God has given them in service to the kingdom. Numerical results normatively mark faithfulness in this stewardship.

In Acts, after Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the number of believers begins to increase significantly. Throughout the book of Acts, despite opposition and mixed response, the church continually grows. As the gospel progresses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, the number of disciples continues to multiply and the church experiences consistent numerical growth. The growth in the book of Acts highlights the pattern of growth promised to God's covenant people in the Old Testament and the link between the progress of the word and the growth of the church.

In the letters of Paul, we find a positive assessment of numerical growth. Paul desires to see persons saved and seeks to win them. While he too expects a mixed response, Paul prays for growth both in the proclamation of the word and its response. Paul expects that the word proclaimed will bring forth fruit. As a worker in God's harvest, Paul fully expects a harvest. The penultimate goal of an increased number of

worshippers enhances the ultimate goal of bringing glory to God. Paul sees numerical results as the goal of his ministry such that if no results exist, his ministry will be "in vain." Paul boasts in numerical results as God works through him. That boasting is in God and the glory belongs to him.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF MCGAVRAN'S
HARVEST THEOLOGY

At the beginning of our study, we identified three questions to ask of the

biblical text that would assist in evaluating harvest theology and clarify the relationship

between faithfulness in numerical growth. Having examined these questions in the

preceding chapters, we may now apply what we have discovered to McGavran's position

and begin to formulate a biblical theology of numerical results.

Biblical Analysis of Harvest Theology

Harvest Theology and
the Role of Mission Agents

The first aspect of harvest theology we examined is the role of mission agents.

Harvest theology claims that the role of the gospel messengers is to harvest ripe fields.

This role is based on the premise that God's purpose is not only to seek but also to find.

The purpose for proclamation is not merely that one may fulfill his or her requirement of

Christian obedience. Rather, the purpose of proclamation is that people might come to

faith in Jesus Christ. The *role* of messengers, then, is not merely proclamation but,

through that proclamation, actually to see persons come to faith in Christ. Thus, when

God ripens a harvest, McGavran believed, faithfulness demands that the harvest be

reaped. We are to harvest what God has ripened.

To evaluate the role of mission agents in harvest theology, the following

question was asked of the biblical text: What role has God given believers in the task of

evangelism/missions? In chapter 2, we examined the role of human agents in the New

Testament. Upon examining the various texts, we drew three conclusions. First, the role

of gospel agents includes results. As gospel messengers follow Christ in his redemptive purpose, their ministry is an extension of his ministry. Jesus sends gospel agents with his purpose of salvation. They are to "make disciples" and bring about the "obedience of faith" as they bear the divine message. They are "stewards" and "ambassadors" of God. As co-workers of God, they are participants in his reconciling work. Their purpose is "to win" and "to save." Thus, we concluded, the role of human agents of the gospel is not only to proclaim the gospel, but through that proclamation to see persons come to faith in Christ. The role of gospel agents is to proclaim, but also to bring salvation to the hearer through that proclamation. Gospel messengers are vessels through which God saves.

Thus, the suggestion of harvest theology that the role of gospel agents is to reap God's harvest is consistent with the role of human agents in the New Testament. No place in the New Testament do we see gospel agents whose sole duty is to proclaim the message irrespective of results. Rather, the Apostles and Paul consistently see themselves as agents not only of the gospel but also of the salvation the gospel brings. From the perspective of harvest theology, mission agents today should see their role not merely in terms of proclamation, but in terms of winning to Christ those whom God is drawing to himself.

A second observation from the biblical analysis is that the results gospel messengers produce include not only initial conversion but also the nurturing of believers to maturity in Christ. Throughout the New Testament, gospel messengers do not separate initial conversion from growth in Christian maturity. The role of the gospel agent does not end when the hearer makes an initial faith response. Rather, the role of messengers of the gospel includes the entire scope of salvation including the initial proclamation of the gospel, the strengthening of new believers, and the establishment of churches.

Here, McGavran's emphases have led to error. In his application of harvest theology, McGavran consistently separates the initial conversion of a people from growth in Christian maturity. As McGavran applied harvest theology to his own context, he was

concerned that mission agencies were emphasizing the perfecting of those in existing churches rather than the discipling of new ones. McGavran's remedy maintained a distinction between discipling and perfecting.[1] This distinction, however, is inconsistent not only with the text of the Great Commission, from which McGavran developed his discipling/perfecting schema, but also with the practice in the New Testament as a whole. In both pioneer work and church growth work, the emphasis of New Testament workers is on *both* discipling and perfecting—on conversion growth and spiritual growth. On the one hand, McGavran desires to correct the practice of emphasizing discipleship of reached groups over the evangelization of new ones and the practice of trying to bring about social change before winning a people to the Christian faith. On the other hand, however, McGavran seems to see the biblical concepts of "salvation" and "harvest" solely in terms of conversion and justification. Further, from his understanding that the role of gospel agents is to harvest ripe fields, McGavran often appears wrongly to emphasize "discipling" over "perfecting." In doing so, some have thus given discipling a higher priority than perfecting.

While McGavran is right to emphasize the evangelization of unreached peoples, he inadvertently separates what the New Testament sees as one act. In the majority of texts we have examined, the New Testament writers see discipling and perfecting as one mission. To his credit, McGavran acknowledged the importance of not neglecting the perfecting of those peoples who had been discipled. One must be careful to maintain, however, that while discipling may precede perfecting in terms of chronology, it cannot in terms of priority.

Finally, we have seen that though the role of messengers indeed includes results, gospel agents are completely dependent upon God to fulfill that role. This dependence is also consistent with harvest theology. While McGavran does not

---

[1]See, for example, Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: World Dominion Press, 1955), 13-16.

emphasize the role of God in conversion, he certainly affirms it. Part of this seeming imbalance in McGavran's presentation can be explained by the fact that McGavran saw himself as correcting an error in contemporary missiology. In his writing, McGavran does not de-emphasize God's role in conversion. Rather, he emphasizes the responsibility of human agents.

In the final analysis, McGavran's description of the role of mission agents may be flawed, not because of its content, but because of the misperception implied by the harvest concept. The dichotomy McGavran raises between search and harvest fails to connect with many evangelicals. Few evangelicals, if any, fall into the "search" category as McGavran defines it. Likewise, few evangelicals, if any, promote "mere proclamation" or pure neutrality toward numerical results. At the same time, many evangelicals misunderstand McGavran to be putting human agents in the place of God as responsible for conversion itself. Most evangelicals would fall in between these two extreme positions. The true poles among evangelicals may be closer together. On the one hand are those who, while viewing results positively and even desiring results, see the role of human agents in terms of the act of proclamation. Human responsibility is to actively proclaim the gospel and leave the results to God. On the other hand, McGavran recognizes God, indeed, is the one who converts—after all, it is *his* harvest—but that our role in his salvation plan is to harvest what he has ripened. The distinction is small, but significant. If the biblical analysis is correct, then our role is indeed to harvest God's field. Faithful evangelism cannot be defined by the act of evangelism alone, nor even the *desire* for results. Rather, faithful evangelism brings in the harvest.

**Harvest Theology and
the Means of Mission Agents**

A second aspect of harvest theology is the use of right strategy and effective methods. Because the role of the gospel agents is to harvest ripe fields, harvest theology promotes a strategy that focuses activity and resources on receptive peoples and a

methodology that is effective in winning the lost. Harvest theology focuses on harvesting those fields that are "ripe." In McGavran's view, right strategy means identifying and focusing efforts on those areas that will be most receptive to the gospel. The use of effective methods includes both the removal of obstacles to growth and the faithful discovery and use of those methods that actually resulted in persons coming to faith in Christ.

To evaluate the means of mission agents in harvest theology, the following question was asked of the biblical text: What, if any, strategy or method is employed in the New Testament and for what purpose? In the analysis, we found that the Twelve employ a strategy that proclaims the gospel at every opportunity, saturates Jerusalem and Judea with the gospel, and establishes the church. Paul employs a strategy that focuses on unreached regions. Paul appears to focus on provinces where the church has not been established, selecting cities that are strategic in providing a base from which the region can be evangelized. His evangelistic method includes the use of rhetorical skills, but in complete dependence upon the Spirit. Paul preaches the cross in a clear and compelling way while removing all unnecessary barriers to its reception. The gospel agents in the New Testament do in fact use strategy and methods. Their strategies, however, do not seek out those areas that are most receptive but, rather, take the gospel everywhere. With those who are open to the gospel, they focus on those who receive the message and establish churches among them. We find also that they go with the intent of bringing the lost to salvation through a prolific, clear, persuasive presentation of gospel. They both use methods and seek results, but their results are not dependent on the methods themselves but on the power of the gospel to save as the Holy Spirit works through them. We may now evaluate McGavran's position.[2]

---

[2]One should be reminded at this point that any record of method and strategy found in the narrative of Acts should be seen as *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. That is, whatever strategy we discern in the practice of the apostles and Paul provides for the modern church a model but not a mandate. The general principles should be observed and followed, yet the details will differ according to our time

The focus of harvest theology on receptive peoples. McGavran sees in the Scripture a mandate to focus on receptive peoples. Our exegesis of the various texts, however, does not fully support this focus. Because missions personnel and resources are limited, McGavran promotes a strategy that concentrates efforts and resources on those areas that are receptive to the gospel. Receptive areas take priority over non-receptive ones. The practice McGavran suggests, however, is not born out in the New Testament record. In Acts, the Twelve begin in Jerusalem. Receptivity, however, is not a factor in the choice of this location. From Jerusalem, they ultimately saturate all Judea with the gospel taking it everywhere. Even if one argues that the case of the Samaritan response to the gospel and the subsequent follow-up by Peter and John is an example of a "strategy of receptivity," we find a different strategy at work in Paul's ministry. While Paul focuses on receptive people wherever he goes, we find no indication that Paul chooses his *locations* based on a knowledge or speculation of receptivity. Rather, he appears to choose locations that are strategic in their ability to disseminate the gospel to the surrounding areas once the church is established.

While, as we have seen, the Twelve and Paul do not base their selection of regions and cities on receptivity, that does not mean that McGavran is incorrect in doing so. McGavran bases his receptivity strategy on both theological *and* pragmatic grounds. Further, McGavran does not advocate the total abandonment of sterile areas. Rather, he promotes a strategy that requires limited resources and personnel be prioritized to areas where growth is occurring. This principle seems consistent with the biblical practice even if not mandated by it. Also, while receptivity does not play a part in the choice of location by gospel messengers in the New Testament, we do find evidence that those messengers responded to receptivity *within* each location. This practice is consistent with

---

and context. This is easily demonstrated. For example, missionaries today should not choose their location looking for cities of Jewish influence nor when they arrive in pioneer territory look for the nearest synagogue in which to preach.

McGavran's contention that in so called "sterile areas," missionaries should expect and look for the receptive within the culture.

The focus of harvest theology on effective methods. Whether or not we deem harvest theology's method as biblical depends upon what McGavran means by effective methods. Much of the argument against church growth methodology on the one hand, and what McGavran calls "mere search" on the other, stems from a caricaturization of the two views. Few churches are guilty of the kinds of excesses that completely rely on method to the total disregard of the content of the gospel. At the same time, virtually no gospel presentation is so pure that it is completely devoid of contextualization. The problem occurs because that McGavran addresses one error while his detractors address another.

An additional reason McGavran is in disfavor among many evangelicals today is that McGavran and his understanding of harvest theology are blamed for the excesses of some in the modern version of the church growth movement. When McGavran speaks of using the right methods, however, he is not speaking of a kind of contextualization of the gospel that removes biblical language, downplays the reality of sin and hell, removes the offense of the gospel, or presents the kind of mealy-mouthed ear-tickling sermonizing we hear in many American pulpits. In many cases, McGavran is not speaking of the content of the gospel message at all. Rather, he is critical of those missionizing methods that erect barriers to the gospel and the reaching of large segments of an otherwise receptive population.

Applied to his own time, McGavran was critical of conservatives, on the one hand, who held on to an ineffective mission-station approach that reached people one at a time and removed them from both their culture and relational "bridges." On the other hand, regarding conciliar Christians, he argued against a social gospel that did everything but preach the gospel and bring in the harvest. When the movement shifted to American church growth, McGavran argued against elements of church practice that were part of

one's own church culture but were extra-biblical barriers to the growth of the church.

While McGavran may not have been correct in some of the particulars, he *was* correct in

his overall assessment. Gospel messengers must use effective methods—methods that

faithfully proclaim the gospel and remove extra-biblical barriers to it.

Further, methods were not about trumping God or doing what only God can

do. For McGavran, methods are effective when all human stumbling blocks are removed

to allow God to do his work. Methods do not win persons to Christ—God does. Of this,

McGavran was keenly aware. He states,

> Conversions do take place by the will of God. Mass Movements are brought about
> by the Spirit of God. Revival is not man-made. No man can mix up the right
> ingredients and turn out a Mass Movement.[3]

McGavran had no grandiose ideas that his church growth principles could actually save

anyone. That was God's job. On the other hand, McGavran was not content with a lack of

growth in so-called "sterile areas." McGavran continues,

> But it is utterly false to assume that God is not working for the salvation of the souls
> of the people in sterile areas. On the contrary God is constantly calling men and
> women to repentance and the new birth.[4]

In answer to the question of why sterile areas exist in missions, McGavran challenges a

common answer:

> At the outset is the common answer—a rationalization of defeat—that great
> ingathering is a matter of time. "Where the work has been carried on for a longer
> time there one may naturally expect greater growth," say many, excusing the slight
> growth in their mission field where work has been carried on for only fifty or a
> hundred years![5]

McGavran was concerned that mission agents often erected man-made barriers to the

gospel through their choice of methods. He was concerned that the gospel be abundantly

---

[3]Donald A. McGavran, "Revival in Sterile Areas," *The United Church Review* (September 1936): 256.

[4]Ibid.

[5]McGavran, "Revival in Sterile Areas," 255.

proclaimed. On these bases, we may affirm that McGavran's focus on effective methods was biblically sound.

**Harvest Theology and
the Results of Mission Efforts**

The third aspect of harvest theology we examined is its view of results in evangelism. Numerical growth is a key focus of the church growth movement and harvest theology emphasizes the importance of numerical growth. In McGavran's harvest theology, numerical church growth is a chief goal of missions. Numbers represent people and thus numbers are important. For harvest theology, numerical growth becomes an important measure of faithfulness. A key qualifier for McGavran, however, is that numerical growth is an indicator of faithfulness in "ripe" fields. When the harvest is ripe, faithfulness requires that the harvest be reaped.

To evaluate the attitude of harvest theology toward numerical growth, the following question was asked of the biblical text: What is the Bible's attitude concerning numerical results? In the analysis of numerical results in the New Testament, several observations were made. First, each of the ministries of Jesus, the Twelve, and Paul experience numerical growth. The book of Acts shows the progress of the gospel to the ends of the earth and the corresponding increasing growth of the church. The ministries see mixed results, including opposition, yet the church continues to grow as the word of God increases. In the teachings of Jesus, we discovered that the gospel, when proclaimed, receives a mixed response. Some receive the message while others reject or even oppose it. At the same time, one can expect that the kingdom will grow and that the gospel will be victorious. Those who go forth with the message can expect that some will receive it. Gospel agents are stewards who are responsible to use what they have been given and bear fruit. In Paul's epistles, we find that Paul prays for and expects numerical growth. His success, in part, is tied to the positive enduring response to the gospel of his hearers. If no lasting fruit remains from his evangelistic efforts, his ministry will be in vain. His

ministry does see results, however, and Paul can boast in those results. Nevertheless, his boasting is in God who works through him, so that God receives all the glory.

Goal of missions. In terms of the goal of missions, we find that harvest theology is correct in its assessment. This analysis, in reality, comes from the answers to all three questions. The biblical role of the mission agent leads to the conclusion that numerical growth indeed ought to be a goal of missions. If our role is to reap God's harvest, then it naturally follows that our goal will include numerical growth. As the Apostles and Paul utilize strategy and methods to proclaim the gospel far and wide and in a way that removes hindrances to the gospel, clearly they desire the gospel to be received. Paul states as much in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and 10:33. They aim for results, though they ultimately depend upon God for those results. Further, though they know there will be a mixed response, they expect that the church will grow as the proclamation of the gospel increases. By the continual clear proclamation of the gospel, removing all unnecessary barriers, the agents in the New Testament aim for and expect results. Harvest theology's goal and expectation of numerical growth is thus consistent with that of the New Testament witnesses.

Faithfulness and results. The link between faithfulness and results is a bit more difficult to evaluate and is, in reality, where this dissertation has been headed all along. McGavran claims that when God has ripened his harvest fields, he expects the harvest to be reaped. On the surface, it appears that we can affirm this, too, as a biblical position. In the New Testament, growth is the natural and expected outcome of a gospel clearly and faithfully presented and free from unnecessary barriers. Though one can expect a mixed result, part of that mix will include an increasing number of persons who respond in obedient faith to Christ. Therefore, it follows that numerical results, normatively are a mark of faithfulness in proclamation.

A number of questions surface, however, as soon as one makes that claim: How does one know when a field is ripe? How do we know if we have truly reaped it? At what numerical marker can we say that we have reaped all that God has ripened? What does God expect when a field is not ripe? And, perhaps most significantly, if the criterion is not merely proclamation but results and we have no objective criterion for evaluating our numbers, how can a person ever know if he has truly been faithful? Thus, while we affirm the *principle* of harvest, the idea of faithfulness still seems elusive. Perhaps a better approach is to attempt to construct a preliminary theology of faithfulness and results.

Toward a Biblical Theology of Faithfulness and Results

At this point, I proceed with caution, recognizing the existence of a number of pitfalls in suggesting an answer to our underlying questions. Among those pitfalls is the possibility of incorrectly handling the biblical text. Carl Holladay offers a critique of attempts at church growth theology similar to the attempt in this dissertation. He states,

> Most commonly the biblical rationale for church growth consists in assembling the various biblical references to witness, mission, assorted parables of the kingdom, Jesus in his role as fisherman, teacher, and preacher of the kingdom to mention only a few. That picture usually succeeds in equating, without qualification, church and kingdom, growth and mission, gospel and Word of God, success and growth. All biblical references are more or less thrown into the same hopper.[6]

The biblical analysis I have undertaken in many ways resembles the kind that Holladay warns against here. We have sought in the text answers to questions the writers may not have intended to answer. Certainly, whenever we come to a passage of Scripture, our primary hermeneutical task is to determine what the text means in terms of its original intent. At the same time, while each text may have a primary point in its context, there

---

[6]Carl R. Holladay, "Church Growth in the New Testament: Some Historical Considerations and Theological Perspectives," *ResQ* 26 (1983): 88-89.

are sub-points, equally valid, that if properly discerned can inform our mission theology and practice. For this reason I apply what Christopher Wright calls a "missional hermeneutic."

> In short, a missional hermeneutic proceeds from the assumption that the whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of God's purpose for the whole of God's creation. Mission is not just one of a list of things that the Bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in that much-abused phrase, 'what it's all about.'[7]

In applying this approach, I proceed carefully, knowing that my analysis is subject to critique and that I have not necessarily proved a connection from what is observed in Scripture and what is required of gospel agents today. Nevertheless, I have attempted to draw general principles from what I believe is the consistent pattern of the self-understanding of role, the use of strategies and methods, and the resulting numerical growth of gospel agents in the New Testament. I have also suggested principles from the teachings of the New Testament concerning these matters. Thus, from these principles, I offer the following suggestions regarding the relationship between faithfulness and numerical growth.

Divine Sovereignty and Results

First, let us be clear that, ultimately, God is responsible for numerical results. God is the one who ripens the harvest. God is the one who draws sinners to himself. God is the one who saves. God is the author and finisher of our faith. Thus, in an ultimate sense, we rightly affirm that God is sovereign and alone receives glory for any numerical results in ministry. Regarding such God-centeredness, Packer has stated,

> It is necessary, therefore, to take the thought of human responsibility, as it affects both the preacher and the hearer of the gospel, very seriously indeed. But we must not let it drive the thought of divine sovereignty out of our minds. While we must always remember that it is our responsibility to proclaim salvation, we must

---

[7]Christopher J. H. Wright, "Truth with a Mission: Reading All Scripture Missiologically," in *Text and Task: Scripture and Mission*, ed. Michael Parsons (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 143.

never forget that it is God who saves. It is God who brings men and women under the sound of the gospel, and it is God who brings them to faith in Christ. Our evangelistic work is the instrument that He uses for this purpose, but the power that saves is not in the instrument: it is in the hand of the One who uses the instrument. We must not at any stage forget that. For if we forget that it is God's prerogative to give results when the gospel is preached, we shall start to think that it is our responsibility to secure them. And if we forget that only God can give faith, we shall start to think that the making of converts depends, in the last analysis, not on God, but on us, and that the decisive factor is the way in which we evangelize.[8]

That God is responsible for numerical results in our ministry, however, does not negate human responsibility for results. Packer's classic statement affirms God's sovereignty but does not go far enough in affirming human responsibility. While God is ultimately the "decisive factor," God does indeed hold us accountable for "the way in which we evangelize." Just as a biblical soteriology affirms both the sovereignty of God in election and the human responsibility to respond to the gospel in repentance and faith, a similar relationship exists in biblical missiology. I submit that God is sovereign in numerical growth and that, in some ways, humans are responsible for numerical growth.

Human Responsibility for Results

In what way, then, are human agents of the gospel responsible for results? First, human agents are responsible to see that the gospel is abundantly proclaimed. To see numerical results there must be proclamation. As McGavran himself noted, "Multiplication of evangelism is the only way to obtain great conversion growth."[9] If no evangelism is occurring, then one can certainly hold the messenger responsible for the lack of results. Meyer comments on this issue,

'We are called to be faithful, not called to grow.' I've heard that statement often in criticism of the [church growth] movement. 'Being faithful' means also being faithful to the Great Commission.

---

[8]J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 27

[9]Donald A. McGavran, *Multiplying Churches in the Philippines* (Manila: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1958[?]), 85.

Too often when we avoid seeking numbers we also avoid seeking people. 'Seeking people' needs to be given a high priority, and, if done well, growth usually occurs.[10]

Too often, what passes for faithfulness in evangelism is, in reality, a lack of evangelistic fervor. While the agents in the New Testament witness at every opportunity, our witnessing encounters often remain few. If we do no evangelism and thus see no results, we are responsible for that lack. If on the other hand, we faithfully proclaim the gospel and do indeed see results, we can, like Paul, glory in God's accomplishment and what he has done though us.

Second, we are required to communicate the gospel clearly. The gospel preaching in the New Testament presents Jesus Christ crucified and calls for a response of repentance and faith. The preaching is clear, contextual, and preaches for a verdict. Of course, we should not conduct our evangelism in any way that the hard message of the cross is softened, or the response is dependent on the form of the message. Neither should the message lift up the speaker rather than the cross. Nevertheless, the message should be clear and in the language of the receiver. Further, the gospel must not be merely the passing along of information, but a gospel that demands a verdict. A message devoid of the true gospel produces no true results and the messenger is responsible for the lack. C. René Padilla comments,

> Faithfulness to the gospel should never be sacrificed for the sake of quantity. . . . As the seed, so the tree, and as the tree, so its fruit. It follows that the real question with regard to the growth of the church is not successful numerical expansion—a success patterned after worldly standards—but faithfulness to the Gospel, which will surely lead us to pray and work for more people to become Christians. I am for quantity, but for quantity in regards to faithfulness to the Gospel. I am for numbers, but for numbers of people who have heard a presentation of the Gospel in which the issues

---

[10]Matthew M. Meyer, "Church Growth: A Response," *Brethren Life and Thought* 25 (1980): 240. Hicks similarly comments, "Genuine church growth is not the result of sociological manipulation but neither is it received by passive idleness. Rather, it is a byproduct of faithfulness to the mission God has given us. We receive God's gift as we minister in the world as his instruments." John Mark Hicks, "Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts: The Role of Pragmatism, Reason and Rhetoric," *JASCG* 8 (Spring 1997): 23.

of faith and unbelief have been made clear and the choice between grace and judgment has been a free choice.[11]

At the same time, when a messenger preaches a "correct" gospel, but that gospel is preached in a way that is unclear, not in the language of the hearer, non-contextual, or speaker-oriented rather than receiver-oriented, and there are no results, the messenger remains responsible for the lack despite preaching a technically correct gospel.

Third, we are required to remove all barriers to the gospel. The church growth movement has spent decades studying the "growth barriers" that hinder the numerical growth of the church. Just as Paul became "all things to all men," we too must remove all non-biblical, cultural, social, and functional barriers to the gospel save the message of the gospel itself. When a messenger preaches a gospel but erects or fails to remove barriers to the gospel and sees no growth, the messenger is responsible for the lack of results.

The biblical pattern is for the proclamation of the gospel to increase and the number of disciples to grow with it. Growth is normative for the church. The New Testament records no occurrence where the word of God consistently went forth and also consistently saw no growth. The New Testament records no occurrence in which a gospel agent did not desire, expect and experience numerical results over the long term. Church growth is normative. I contend that whenever the gospel is proclaimed faithfully, clearly and free from barriers that church growth must and always does occur. Thus, human agents are responsible for numerical growth. Before rejecting this proposal, I will offer a number of qualifiers.

First, among the qualifiers, is the matter of focus. Here, I reaffirm what I stated at the beginning: ultimately, only God can do the work of salvation. Like McGavran, I acknowledge God's sovereignty in conversion. For purposes of this research, however, I

---

[11]C. René Padilla, "Evangelism and the World," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas, International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 138.

have deliberately and necessarily focused on the human responsibility side of the equation. To conclude that human agents are responsible for numerical growth in no way negates or undermines the sovereignty of God in election. Rather, both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the gospel messenger must be affirmed.

Second, I do not suggest that each and every individual gospel encounter will or must result in the salvation of the hearer. Neither do I claim that gospel messengers must always see results in the short term. The level of receptivity varies. Time may be needed for the harvest to ripen. Further, every evangelist will see mixed responses to the proclamation of the gospel. I submit, however, that gospel messengers, in the course of their evangelistic ministry, will see numerical results and that, over the long term, one can measure faithfulness by such results.

Third, I recognize that the actual statistical evaluation of results is context sensitive. That is, the method of quantifying conversion growth may necessarily differ from one context to the next. Because one cannot actually measure spiritual rebirth, statisticians must find suitable external indicators of conversion that can be measured. Baptism numbers, for example, may be a more accurate indicator of conversion in one context than they are in another. Because such external indicators are not universally valid, numerical statistics are relatively useless for comparison of ministries both in the grand scheme and between differing contexts. The further the physical and/or contextual distance, the more irrelevant numerical comparisons become. Even when such comparisons are valid, great care should be taken before judging another's ministry, if at all. Numerical statistics are valuable, however, for self-evaluation and the measuring of progress over the long term.

Fourth, when speaking of numerical growth, we must be careful to clarify what we mean. We are talking about numerical *conversion* growth that results in responsible church membership. Problems exist here for Baptists in the way that we count. To track conversions, we typically count baptisms. While a rather easy figure to quantify, in many

contexts, baptisms do not necessarily equate to numerical church growth.[12] Baptists also tend to track attendance. Again, while this is another easy statistic to compile, attendance does not necessarily measure conversion growth. Baptist churches who wish to track true conversion growth must develop more accurate methods of measuring such growth.

Finally, while we have observed the pattern of growth in the New Testament, we have not presented enough biblical evidence to prove that it is the nature of the church only and always to grow. Most of the gospel messengers we examined had a special role of apostolic office. Some might argue, therefore, that what is required of apostles is not required of individuals or the church today. Further, I hold open the possibility, in theory, that God could, for his sovereign purposes, withhold numerical results from his faithful gospel agent.[13]

Implications for Ministry

In light of the present study, two questions emerge that suggest implications of the research on current mission practice.

Should sending agencies focus on the unreached or the receptive? If we are commanded to proclaim the gospel to every creature and, at the same time, to reap God's harvest, where should sending agencies focus their limited personnel and financial resources? In recent times, several mission agencies have shifted their focus from an emphasis on receptive peoples to an emphasis on unreached peoples. I submit that sending agencies should reassess this focus on both theological and practical grounds.

---

[12]Baptisms can be a valuable statistic for self-evaluation but lose their value in comparisons because they do not account for the variety among the churches in the requirements for baptism or the quality of the gospel presentation.

[13]While I allow for this possibility in theory, I personally do not believe that it occurs in actual practice. That is, I have not seen that a mission agent who faithfully proclaims the gospel over the lifetime of his ministry will be completely barren in terms of seeing persons come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Theologically, while we must be sure to preach the gospel to every creature, a focus on the receptive seems to be a logical implication of our responsibility to harvest ripe fields. While God does indeed call individual missionaries to places that are less receptive, sending agencies should consider focusing their resources on harvesting ripe fields. In the process, we must make sure that we are providing a path to bring such peoples to full maturity in Christ and not merely initial conversion. We must continue to go to the unreached peoples of the world, but the emphasis of our resources should be on those unreached peoples where God is at work and people are responding to the gospel. As Robin Hadaway remarked on the implications of harvest theology,

> Since the Gospel is to be preached to all creatures, no Christian will doubt that both the receptive and the resistant should hear it. And since Gospel acceptors have an inherently higher priority than Gospel rejecters, no one would doubt that whenever it comes to a choice between reaping the ripe fields or seeding others, the former is commanded by God.[14]

If our role is to harvest what God has ripened, emphasis must be given to those areas where God is at work. Even as we seek to reach the unreached peoples of the world, priority should be given to those unreached peoples who are responding to the gospel.

Such an emphasis has a practical aspect as well. Mission agencies should well consider McGavran's suggestion that a focus on receptive peoples might be the key to turning now resistant populations receptive.[15] As peoples come to faith in Christ, they might well be the means by which the bridges of God are crossed and the unreached peoples of the world respond in faith to the gospel.

How do we measure faithfulness when there are no results? A second question emerges as well. How then do human agents determine whether they have

---

[14]Robin Hadaway, "Balancing the Biblical Perspectives: A Missiological Analysis," *JEM* 2 (2003): 105

[15]Donald A. McGavran, "Why Neglect Gospel-Ready Masses?" *Christianity Today*, 29 April 1966, 19; idem, "What is the Nature of the Church?" *Religion in Life* 27 (1958): 334" 334.

indeed been faithful in the presence of no results? Admittedly, many do not even ask the question. Numerous books and articles have been written to ease the guilty consciences of those ministers and churches who struggle in ministry. Should gospel agents truly measure their success by numerical growth or should they, rather, be permissive of their lack of results with the self-assurance that they have been faithful? Are numerical results an accurate mark of faithfulness? Yes and no.

Because the actual numbering of results is subject to such a variety of contextual factors, how should one interpret a lack of results; especially in what McGavran has called "sterile" areas? Facing a lack of numerical results, and certainly before deeming oneself faithful in evangelism, individuals, churches, and mission agencies should ask a variety of questions:

1. Has there been a faithfulness in the amount of evangelization that has taken place? Is the lack of results because of a lack of evangelism?

2. Is the gospel being presented clearly? Is there something in the way the gospel is being presented, apart from the gospel itself, that serves as a barrier to communication. Is there something about the receiver of the message that he/she is hearing something other than what the messenger intends to communicate?

3. Are there any cultural barriers that are unnecessarily impeding the progress of the gospel? Is the gospel message so communicated in the language and forms of the culture of the messenger that it is fails to communicate to the hearer? Are there any cultural behaviors that are erecting barriers before the gospel can even be presented?

4. Do any social/personality barriers exist? Is there anything in the practice of the gospel messenger that hinders the communication of the gospel?

5. Has there been sufficient prayer and dependence upon God for results or are gospel messengers working in their own strength?

Such questions will go a long way in evaluating oneself in terms of faithfulness to the evangelistic task.

To those missionaries and agencies who minister in areas where they see little or no response, harvest theology should lead one to rigorous self-examination. If one finds that lack of results is in reality a lack of faithfulness, then the appropriate response is repentance and a recommitment to faithful evangelistic witness. If, however, the gospel

has indeed been faithfully proclaimed—if it has been proclaimed abundantly, clearly, and free from unbiblical barriers—we can stand in faith that God's sovereign purposes will be accomplished. We must remain faithful to our calling regardless of response and continue to exercise faith in a God whose will is to save, trusting that "in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary." We can and must examine ourselves. We can and must be faithful witnesses. In the end, however, faithfulness is something assessed by God alone (1 Cor 4:3-4). To one's own master he stands or falls. Numbers do tell a story. They do not tell the *whole* story.

Further Research

A few issues remain that were not covered in this dissertation and require further research. One of these issues is McGavran's belief that God makes whole peoples receptive to the gospel. There may be a consensus among evangelicals that God works in individuals to draw them to himself. Few, however, have explored whether God draws entire peoples, making them receptive to the gospel. Additionally, while anthropologists and sociologists have observed sociological and cultural factors which make a change of worldview possible, few have explored whether the Bible speaks of such factors as the deliberate move of God to draw peoples to himself.

Another area for further research, if human agents are indeed responsible, concerns where the responsibility for evangelism lies. That is, does the responsibility for reaping a harvest fall on the pastor, the individual believer, or the church corporately? This dissertation asserts that the role of gospel agents includes results and that faithfulness in evangelism is related to results. A question remains, however, concerning corporate versus individual responsibility. Further research is required to assess in what way persons, as church leaders, individual lay persons, and collectively in a local church, are responsible for evangelism and numerical growth.

A final area that we have mentioned, but have not explored in this dissertation, is the concept of "sterile areas." McGavran qualifies harvest theology by lessening the

responsibility for results in those areas that are "sterile" and not ripe for harvest. Further, as we have discussed, McGavran promotes a strategy that focuses on "receptive" areas. In the biblical analysis, we did not observe evidence of whole geographical areas that were "sterile" or where God was not at work. As one looks at both church history and the current world scene, however, there appear to be times, locations, and peoples that have been more or less receptive than others. Further research is needed to determine what if anything the Bible has to say about these so-called "sterile" fields. This dissertation suggests that church growth is *normative*. Is it biblically correct, however, to say that faithful churches *only* and *always* grow? While the pattern of growth in the New Testament seems well established, does that pattern carry forward to future generations? Are there periods in the church age in which God desires little or no growth or should the entire church age in all places and among all peoples be characterized by growth?

Conclusion

In the final analysis, McGavran was right in his general principle. Gospel messengers have a responsibility beyond mere proclamation. Our role is to be bearers of salvation, fully dependent on God and co-workers with Him. In the task, we must do everything we can to make sure the gospel is proclaimed clearly, contextually and often. While only God can bring them, results are a sign of our faithfulness in the evangelistic task. May we follow McGavran's example in being consumed with the mission of God and doing everything we can to faithfully serve him.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by Donald A. McGavran

Books

McGavran, Donald A. *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions.* New York: World Dominion Press, 1955.

_____. *Church Growth in Jamaica: A Preview of Things to Come in Many Lands.* Lucknow, U.P., India: Lucknow Publishing House, 1962.

_____. *Church Growth in West Utkal.* Indianapolis: Division of World Mission, the United Christian Missionary Society, 1956.

_____. *The Church in a Revolutionary Age.* The United Christian Missionary Society. Missionary Education Department. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1955.

_____. *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate.* Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988.

_____. *Ethnic Realities and the Church.* South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979.

_____. *How Churches Grow: The New Frontiers of Mission.* London: World Dominion Press, 1959.

_____. *How to Grow a Church.* Glendale, CA: Regal, Books Division, G/L Publications, 1973.

_____. *Momentous Decisions in Missions Today.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.

_____. *Multiplying Churches in the Philippines.* Manila: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1958[?].

_____. *The Satnami Story: A Thrilling Drama of Religious Change.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1990.

_____. *Understanding Church Growth.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970.

_____. *Understanding Church Growth.* Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980.

_____. *Understanding Church Growth.* 3rd ed. Revised and edited by C. Peter Wagner. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990.

McGavran, Donald A., and Winfield C. Arn. *Ten Steps for Church Growth.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977.

McGavran, Donald A., John Huegel, and Jack Taylor. *Church Growth in Mexico.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963.

McGavran, Donald A., and Norman Riddle. *Zaire: Midday in Missions.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979.

Articles

McGavran, Donald A. "The Adaptation-Syncretism Axis." In *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* ed. Tetsunao Yamamori and Charles R. Taber, 225-43. South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1975.

_____. "After the First Flush of Success." *International Review of Mission* 48 (1959): 265-75.

_____. "Barred Populations and Missionaries." *International Review of Mission* 64 (1975): 56-61.

_____. "Basics of Effective Missions Anywhere." In *Indigenous Missions of India,* ed. R. E. Hedlund and F. Hrangkhuma, 45-48. Madras, India: Church Growth Research Centre, 1980.

_____. "Beyond the Maintenance Mentality." *Christianity Today,* 3 February 1989, 28-29.

_____. "A Bigger Bang for Your Buck: Or How to Get More for Your Missionary Dollar." *World Vision* December 1967: 16-17.

_____. Review of *Christianity in Today's World: An Eerdmans Handbook,* ed. Robin Keeley. *Missiology* 15 (1989): 140-41.

_____. "Church Growth in Europe and America." *Church Growth Bulletin* 6, no. 6 (January 1970): 73-74.

_____. "Church Growth Strategy Continued." *International Review of Mission* 57 (1968): 335-43.

_____. "The Church Growth Viewpoint." *Church Growth Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (March 1965): 7-8, 26.

_____. "Comity: A Tool of the Growing Church." *World Dominion* 30 (1952): 37-44.

_____. "Comment." *Church Growth Bulletin* 6, no. 6 (July 1968): 14-15.

_____. "Comment by Donald McGavran." *Church Growth Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (March 1968): 3-5.

_____. "Conclusion." In *Church Growth and Christian Mission*, ed. Donald A. McGavran, 228-45. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.

_____. "Crisis of Identity for Some Missionary Societies." *Christianity Today*, 8 May 1970, 10-14.

_____. "Crisis of Identity for Some Missionary Societies." In *Crucial Issues in Missions Tomorrow*, ed. Donald A. McGavran, 188-201. Chicago: Moody Press, 1972.

_____. "The Dimensions of World Evangelization." In *Let the Earth Hear His Voice.* J. D. Douglas, International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, 94-107. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975.

_____. "The Discipling of Africa in This Generation." *Church Growth Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (January 1966): 12.

_____. "The Discovery of Church Growth." In *Church Growth: Strategies that Work*, by Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III, 13-27. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.

_____. "The Dividends We Seek." *Christianity Today*, 19 January 1973, 4-5.

_____. "Essential Evangelism: An Open Letter to Dr. Hoekendijk." In *Eye of the Storm: The Great Debate in Mission*, ed. Donald A. McGavran, 56-66. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972.

_____. Foreword to *Why Churches Die*, by Hollis L. Green. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972.

_____. "A Foundation of Fact under the Churches of Africa and Asia." *International Review of Mission* 51 (1962): 352-54.

_____. "The Future of the Christian Religion: The Place of Christianity in a World of Many Religions." In *Religion and Future: Essays in Honour of Prof. G. C. Oosthuizen*, ed. Gerald J. Pillay, 109-30. Pretoria: HSRC Publishers, 1992.

_____. "The God Who Finds and His Mission." *International Review of Mission* 51 (1962): 303-17.

_____. "God's Royal Power in Zaire: An Evaluation of the State of the Church." *Missiology* 6 (1978): 81-90.

_____. "The Great Debate in Missions." *Calvin Theological Journal* 5 (1970): 163-79.

_____. "Have We Lost Our Way in Missions?" *Christian Herald* 81, no. 3 (March 1958): 20.

_____. "The Hottest Race Issue in the World." *Transformation* 2, no. 2 (1985): 15-19.

_____. "How Can an *Ethnos* Be Discipled." In *Missions Now: This Generation*, by Roger S. Greenway, John E. Kyle, and Donald A. McGavran, 68-76. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.

_____. "Imperialism and Church Multiplication." *Church Growth Bulletin* 3, no. 5 (May 1967): 7-8.

_____. "The Institute of Church Growth." *International Review of Mission* 50 (1961): 430-34.

_____. "Loose the Churches: Let Them Go! An Essential Issue in Indian Evangelism." *Missiology* 1 (1973): 81-94.

_____. "Making Doctrines Missionarily Effective and Biblically Correct." In *Contemporary Theologies of Missions*, by Arthur F. Glasser and Donald A. McGavran, 126-36. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983.

_____. "The Mandala Mission Field." In *Church Growth and Group Conversion*, by Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III, 36-48. 3rd ed. Lucknow, U.P., India: Lucknow Publishing House, 1956.

_____. "Missiology Faces the Lion." *Missiology* 17 (1989): 335-41, 352-55.

_____. "Missionary Confession of Faith." *Calvin Theological Journal* 7 (1972): 133-45.

_____. "Missions Today and Tomorrow." In *Contemporary Christian Trends: Perspectives on the Present*, ed. William M. Pinson Jr. and Clyde E. Fant Jr., 85-104. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972.

_____. "The Modern World and God's Will." In *Missions Now: This Generation*, by Roger S. Greenway, John E. Kyle, and Donald A. McGavran, 15-22. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.

_____. "The Mosaic of Mankind." In *Missions Now: This Generation*, by Roger S. Greenway, John E. Kyle, and Donald A. McGavran, 57-67. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.

_____. "My Pilgrimage in Mission." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 10 (1986): 53-58.

_____. "New Methods for a New Age in Missions." *International Review of Mission* 44 (1955): 394-403.

_____. "1965 Model—Basic Policy in Evangelism (Part II)." *Church Growth Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (November 1964): 3-4.

_____. "1965 Model—Basic Policy in Evangelism (Part III)." *Church Growth Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (January 1965): 2-3.

_____. "One Goal or Many?" *World Vision*, October 1966, 9, 28.

_____. "Particular Theologies and Theology of Mission." In *Contemporary Theologies of Missions*, by Arthur F. Glasser and Donald A. McGavran, 137-49. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983.

_____. "The Passive and Active Role in Mission." *Church Growth Bulletin* 3, no. 5 (May 1967): 10-11.

_____. "The People Movement Point of View." In *Church Growth and Group Conversion*, by Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III, 1-7. 3rd ed. Lucknow, U.P., India: Lucknow Publishing House, 1956.

_____. "Presence and Proclamation in Christian Mission." In *Eye of the Storm: The Great Debate in Mission*, ed. Donald A. McGavran, 205-18. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972.

_____. "Quantifying World Evangelization." *Church Growth Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (January 1967): 7-8.

_____. "Revival in Sterile Areas." *The United Church Review* September 1936: 253-57.

_____. "Salvation Today." In *The Evangelical Response to Bangkok*, ed. Ralph Winter, 27-32. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1973.

_____. "Satan and Missions: A Chapter in the High Strategy of Hell." *World Dominion* 33 (1955): 98-104.

_____. "Self-Centeredness and the Choke Law." *Church Growth Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (November 1969): 25-28.

_____. "Social Justice and Evangelism." *World Vision* (June 1965): 7-8, 26.

_____. "Sown Fields." *World Call* 9, no. 9 (1925): 55.

_____. "Ten Emphases in the Church Growth Movement." In *Unto the Uttermost: Missions in the Christian Churches / Churches of Christ*, ed. Doug Priest Jr., 248-59. South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1984.

_____. "Theological Bed Rock in Mission." *Religion in Life* 30 (1961): 603-09.

_____. "Today's Basic Policy in Evangelism." *Church Growth Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (September 1964): 1-3.

_____. "Using the Present Adversity for Advance." *International Review of Mission* 32 (1943): 187-95.

_____. "Variations in Adjustments." In *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* ed. Tetsunao Yamamori and Charles R. Taber, 153-68. South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1975.

_____. "What Is the Nature of the Church?" *Religion in Life* 27 (1958): 323-34.

_____. "What Makes Pentecostal Churches Grow." In *Azusa Street and Beyond: Pentecostal Missions and Church Growth in the Twentieth Century*, ed. L. Grant McClung Jr., 121-23. South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1986.

_____. "When the Church Grows." In *Church Growth and Group Conversion*, by Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III, 97-116. 3rd ed. Lucknow, U.P., India: Lucknow Publishing House, 1956.

_____. "Why Neglect Gospel-Ready Masses?" *Christianity Today*, 29 April 1966, 17-19.

_____. "Why Some American Churches Are Growing and Some Are Not." In *The Complete Book of Church Growth*, ed. Elmer L. Towns, John N. Vaughan and David J. Seifert, 284-94. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1981.

_____. "Will Uppsala Betray the Two Billion?" In *Eye of the Storm: The Great Debate in Mission*, ed. Donald A. McGavran, 56-66. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972.

_____. "Without Crossing Barriers." *Church Growth Bulletin* 8 (1971): 135-37.

_____. "Wrong Strategy—The Real Crisis in Mission." In *Eye of the Storm: The Great Debate in Mission*, ed. Donald A. McGavran, 97-107. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972.

Glasser, Arthur F., and Donald A. McGavran. *Contemporary Theologies of Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983.

McGavran, Donald A., and Victor Hayward. "Without Crossing Barriers: One in Christ vs. Discipling Diverse Cultures." *Missiology* 2 (1974): 203-24.

Other Works

Books

Abraham, William J. *The Logic of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989.

Allen, Roland. *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours: A Study of the Church in the Four Provinces*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913.

Barnett, Paul. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians.* New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997.

Barrett, C. K. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians.* Harper's New Testament Commentaries. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

_____. *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians.* Harper's New Testament Commentaries. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

_____. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles.* 2 vols. 2nd ed. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, 1998.

_____. *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text.* London: SPCK, 1955.

Barth, Karl. *The Doctrine of Reconciliation.* Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Church Dogmatics, vol. 4, no. 2. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958.

_____. *The Epistle to the Romans.* Translated by Edwyn C. Hoskyns. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

Bauer, W., W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker,. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Beasley-Murray, George R. *John.* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987.

Bernard, J. H. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John.* 2 vols. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928.

Betz, Hans Dieter. *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia.* Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

Black, David Alan. *Paul, Apostle of Weakness: Astheneia and its Cognates in the Pauline Literature.* American University Studies. Series 7, Theology and Religion, vol. 3. New York: Peter Lang, 1984.

Black, Matthew. *Romans.* 2nd ed. New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1989.

Blauw, Johannes. *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission.* London: Lutterworth Press, 1962.

Blomberg, Craig L. *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*. New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 19. Downers Grove, IL: Apollos and InterVarsity Press, 2005.

_____. *1 Corinthians*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

_____. *Matthew*. New American Commentary, vol. 22. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.

_____. *Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

_____. *Luke*. 2 vols. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.

Borchert, Gerald L. *John 12-21*. New American Commentary, vol. 25b. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002.

Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Boucher, Madeline I. *The Parables*. New Testament Message, vol. 7. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1981.

Bovon, François. *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas*. 3 vols. Evangelische-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament. Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996.

Brooks, James A. *Mark*. New American Commentary, vol. 23. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991.

Brown, Raymond E. *The Gospel According to John*. 2 vols. Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966, 1970.

Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988.

_____. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philiemon, and to the Ephesians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984.

_____. *1 and 2 Corinthians*. New Century Bible. London: Oliphants, 1971.

_____. *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982.

_____. *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*. 2nd ed. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis*. Interpretation. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971.

_____. *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*. Translated by Roy A. Harrisville. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965.

Burton, Ernest De Witt. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921.

Byrne, Brendan. *Romans*. Sacra Pagina, vol. 6. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996.

Caird, George B. *Paul's Letters From Prison*. The New Clarendon Bible. Oxford: University Press, 1976.

Carson, D. A. *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003.

_____. *The Gospel According to John*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991.

_____. *Matthew*. In vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Biblical Commetary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas, 1-599. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.

Carver, William Owen. *Missions in the Plan of the Ages: Bible Studies in Mission*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951.

Chamblin, J. Knox. *Paul and the Self: Apostolic Teaching for Personal Wholeness*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.

Chaney, Charles L., and Ron S. Lewis. *Design for Church Growth*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1977.

Cheeseman, John. *Saving Grace*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999.

Clark, Andrew C. *Parallel Lives: The Relation of Paul to the Apostles in the Lucan Perspective*. Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs, vol. 4. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2001.

Clarke, Andrew D. *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6*. Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums, vol. 18. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993.

Cole, Canon R. A. *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary.* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989.

Collins, Raymond J. *First Corinthians.* Sacra Pagina, vol. 7. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999.

Conzelmann, Hans. *1 Corinthians.* Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

Costas, Orlando E. *The Integrity of Mission: The Inner Life and Outreach of the Church.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.

Craddock, Fred B. *Luke.* Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990.

Cranfield, C. E. B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.* 2 vols. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975, 1979.

Cullmann, Oscar. *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr.* Translated by Floyd V. Filson. New York: Living Age Books, 1958.

Culver, Robert Duncan. *A Greater Commission: A Theology for World Mission.* Chicago: Moody Press, 1984.

Daube, David. *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism.* London: Athlone, 1956.

Davids, Peter H. *The First Epistle of Peter.* New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Davies, Glenn N. *Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study in Romans 1-4.* Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, vol. 39. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990.

Davies, W. D., and Dale C. Allison. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew.* 3 vols. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988.

Dayton, Edward R., and David A. Fraser. *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000.

Dillon, Richard J. *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24.* Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978.

Dodd, C. H. *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963.

_____. *More New Testament Studies.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968.

_____. *The Parables of the Kingdom.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961.

Dollar, Harold E. *A Biblical-Missiological Exploration of the Cross-Cultural Dimensions in Luke-Acts*. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993.

Dubose, Francis M. *How Churches Grow in an Urban World*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978.

Duguid, Ian M. *Ezekiel*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

Dunn, James D. G. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996.

_____. *Romans 1-8*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38a. Dallas: Word Books, 1988.

_____. *Romans 9-16*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38b. Dallas: Word Books, 1988.

Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.

Eller, Vernard. *The Outward Bound: Caravaning as the Style of the Church*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980.

Elliot, John H. *1 Peter*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Elliot, Ralph H. *Church Growth that Counts*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1982.

Engel, James F., and William A. Dyrness. *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987.

_____. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995.

Fernando, Ajith. *Acts*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible, vol. 31. New York: Doubleday, 1998.

_____. *Luke*. Anchor Bible, vol. 28. New York: Doubleday, 1970.

Flemming, Dean. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

Frame, James Everett. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979.

France, R. T. *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary.* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985.

_____. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text.* New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.

_____. *The Gospel of Matthew.* New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007.

Fung, Ronald Y. K. *The Epistle to the Galatians.* New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988.

Furnish, Victor Paul. *II Corinthians.* Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1984.

_____. *Theology and Ethics in Paul.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968.

Garland, David E. *Colossians and Philemon.* NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

_____. *1 Corinthians.* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

_____. *Mark.* NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996.

_____. *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel.* New York: Crossroad, 1993.

_____. *2 Corinthians.* New American Commentary, vol. 29. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.

Garlington, Don B. *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul's Letter to the Romans.* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, vol. 79. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994.

_____. *'The Obedience of Faith': A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context.* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Reihe 2, vol. 38. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991.

George, Timothy. *Galatians.* New American Commentary, vol. 30. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994.

Gibbs, Eddie. *I Believe in Church Growth.* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981.

Gilliland, Dean. *Pauline Theology & Mission Practice.* Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria: Albishir Bookshops, 1983.

Gnilka, Joachim. *Das Matthäusevangelium*. 2 vols. 2nd ed. Herders Theologischer Kommantar zum Neuen Testament. Freiburg: Herder, 1986, 1988.

Goppelt, Leonhard. *A Commentary on I Peter*. Translated by John E. Alsup. Edited by Ferdinand Hahn. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993.

Goulder, Michael D. *Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth*. Library of Pauline Studies. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001.

Grassi, Joseph A. *A World to Win: The Missionary Methods of Paul the Apostle*. Maryknoll, NY: Maryknoll Publications, 1965.

Green, Gene L. *The Letters to the Thessalonians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.

Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997.

Green, Michael. *Evangelism in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970.

_____. *Thirty Years That Changed the World: The Book of Acts for Today*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.

Grosheide, Frederick Wihelm. *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthains*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1953.

Grundmann, Walter. *Das Evangelium Nach Matthäus*. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968.

Guelich, Robert A. *Mark 1-8:26*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a. Dallas: Word Books, 1989.

Gundry, Robert H. *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982.

Guthrie, Donald. *Romans*. New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973.

Hagner, Donald A. *Matthew 1-13*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33a. Dallas: Word Books, 1993.

_____. *Matthew 14-28*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b. Dallas: Word Books, 1993.

Hahn, Ferdinand. *Mission in the New Testament*. Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 47. Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1965.

Hanson, K. C., and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

Harrington, Daniel J. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Sacra Pagina, vol. 1. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991.

Harris, Murray J. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005.

Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Philippians*. Revised and expanded by Ralph P. Martin. Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004.

Hays, Richard B. *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983.

_____. *First Corinthians*. Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997.

Hedlund, Roger E. *The Mission of the Church in the World: A Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985.

Hemer, Colin J. *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. Edited by Conrad H. Gempf. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Hesselgrave, David J. *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.

_____. *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.

Héring, J. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. London: Epworth, 1962.

Hock, Ronald F. *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.

Holmes, Michael W. *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998.

Hubbard, Benjamin Jerome. *The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28: 16-20*. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, vol. 19. Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholar's Press, 1974.

Hudnut, Robert K. *Church Growth Is Not the Point*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Hughes, Kent, and Barbara Hughes. *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008.

Hultgren, Arland J. *The Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000.

Hunter, Kent R. *Foundations for Church Growth: Biblical Basics for the Local Church.* Corunna, IN: Church Growth Center, 1994.

Hurd, John Coolidge. *The Origin of I Corinthians.* New York: Seabury Press, 1965.

Jenkins, Daniel. *Christian Maturity and the Theology of Success.* London: SCM Press, 1976.

Jeremias, Joachim. *The Parables of Jesus.* Translated by S. H. Hooke. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955.

Jervis, L. Ann. *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation.* Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, vol. 55. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991.

Jobes, Karen H. *1 Peter.* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

Johnson, Dennis E. *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Gospel of Luke.* Sacra Pagina, vol. 30. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991.

Jones, Peter Rhea. *Studying the Parables of Jesus.* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1999.

Kane, J. Herbert. *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976.

Käsemann, Ernst. *Commentary on Romans.* Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980.

Kee, Howard Clark. *To Every Nation Under Heaven: The Acts of the Apostles.* The New Testament in Context. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997.

Keener, Craig S. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999.

Kelley, Dean M. *Why Conservative Churches are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion.* New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

Kemmler, Dieter Werner. *Faith and Human Reason: A Study of Paul's Method of Preaching as Illustrated by 1-2 Thessalonians and Acts 17,2-4.* Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975.

Kingsbury, Jack Dean. *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism.* Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969.

Kistemaker, Simon J. *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980.

Köstenberger, Andreas J. *John*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

_____. *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Köstenberger, Andreas J., and Peter T. O' Brien. *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*. New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 11. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Kruse, Colin G. *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987.

Kuiper, R. B. *God-Centred Evangelism: A Presentation of the Scriptural Theology of Evangelism*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966.

Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Edited by Donald A. Hagner. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993.

Lane, William L. *The Gospel According to Mark*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974.

Litfin, A. Duane. *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Lohse, Eduard. *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.

Longenecker, Richard N. *The Acts of the Apostles*. In vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Biblical Commetary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas, 205-573. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.

_____. *Galatians*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41. Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990.

Longman, Tremper, III. *How to Read Genesis*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2005.

Love, Julian Price. *The Missionary Message of the Bible*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941.

Lund, Nils Wilhelm. *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942.

Machen, J. Gresham. *The Origin of Paul's Religion*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1947.

Maddox, Robert. *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982.

Mann, C. S. *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY, 1986.

Marshall, I. Howard. *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary.* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980.

_____. *The Gospel According to St. John.* New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971.

_____. *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text.* New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978.

_____. *Luke: Historian and Theologian.* Grand Rapids: Acadamie Books, 1971.

Marshall, Peter. *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians.* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.23. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987.

Martin, D. Michael. *1, 2 Thessalonians.* New American Commentary, vol. 33. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995.

Martin, Dale B. *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Paulline Christianity.* New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1990.

Martin, Ernest D. *Colossians, Philemon.* Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993.

Martin, Ralph P. *Colossians and Philemon.* New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973.

_____. *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology.* Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.

_____. *2 Corinthians.* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986.

Martyn, J. Louis. *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* Anchor Bible, vol. 33A. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Matthews, Christopher R. *Philip, Apostle and Evangelist: Configurations of a Tradition.* Supplements to Novum Testamentum, vol. 55. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

McIntosh, Gary L. *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003.

McQuilkin, J. Robertson. *How Biblical Is the Church Growth Movement?* Chicago: Moody Press, 1973.

Metzger, Will. *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person by Whole People.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984.

Michaels, J. Ramsey. *1 Peter*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988.

Miles, Delos. *Church Growth: A Mighty River*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981.

Mitchell, Margaret M. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*. Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie, vol. 28. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991.

_____. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigtion of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

Montgomery, James H., and Donald A. McGavran. *The Discipling of a Nation*. Santa Clara, CA: Global Church Growth Bulletin, 1980.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996.

Morris, Leon. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988.

_____. *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Rev. ed. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991.

_____. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999.

_____. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992.

_____. *The Gospel According to St. John*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971.

_____. *The Gospel According to St. John*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971.

_____. *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988.

Moule, C. F. D. *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and Philemon*. Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary. Cambridge: University Press, 1957.

Müller, Jac J. *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1955.

Murray, John. *The Epistle to the Romans*. 2 vols. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1959, 1965.

Mylander, Charles. *Secrets for Growing Churches*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *Mission in Christ's Way*. New York: Friendship Press, 1987.

_____. *The Open Secret*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978.

Nolland, John. *The Gospel of Matthew*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005.

_____. *Luke 1-9:20*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35a. Dallas: Word Books, 1989.

_____. *Luke 9:21-18:34*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35b. Dallas: Word Books, 1993.

Okoye, James Chukwuma. *Israel and the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006.

Okure, Teresa. *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Reihe 2, vol. 31. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988.

Olsen, Mark A. *Moving Beyond Church Growth: An Alternative Vision for Congregations*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

Olson, C. Gordon. *What in the World is God Doing?* 5th ed. Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers, 2003.

O' Brien, Peter T. *Colossians, Philemon*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982.

_____. *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991.

_____. *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.

Packer, J. I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961.

Pao, David W. *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Reihe 2, vol. 130. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2000.

Park, Eung Chun. *The Mission Discourse in Matthew's Interpretation.* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Reihe 2, vol. 81. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995.

Peters, George W. *A Biblical Theology of Missions.* Chicago: Moody Press, 1972.

_____. *A Theology of Church Growth.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.

Plummer, Alfred. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians.* 2nd ed. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978.

_____. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke.* 5th ed. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901.

_____. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.* International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915.

_____. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians.* International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978.

_____. *The Gospel According to St John.* Rev. and enl. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910.

Plummer, Robert L. *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* Paternoster Biblical Monographs. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006.

Pogoloff, Stephen M. *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation in 1 Corinthians.* Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, vol. 134. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.

Pointer, Roy. *How Do Churches Grow?* Basingstoke, Hants, UK: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1984.

Polhill, John B. *Acts.* New American Commentary, vol. 26. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Genesis: A Commentary.* Translated by John H. Marks. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961.

Rainer, Thom S. *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles.* Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993.

_____. *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works and What Doesn't.* Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996.

Ray, David R. *The Big Small Church Book.* Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1992.

Read, David H.C. *Go . . . and Make Disciples.* Nashville: Abingdon, 1978.

Reasoner, Mark. *The Strong and the Weak: Romans 14.1-15.13 in Context.* Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 103. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Reisinger, Ernest C. *Today's Evangelism: Its Message and Methods.* Phillipsburg, NJ: Craig Press, 1982.

Reymond, Robert L. *Paul: Missionary Theologian.* Fearn: Mentor, 2000.

Ridderbos, Herman N. *The Gospel According to John.* Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997.

Rima, Samuel D. *Rethinking the Successful Church: Finding Serenity in God's Sovereignty.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002.

Robertson, A. T. *Epochs in the Life of Simon Peter.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943.

Robertson, Archibald, and Alfred Plummer. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians.* International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: Clark, 1914.

Robinson, Darrell W. *People Sharing Jesus.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995.

Robinson, John A. T. *Twelve New Testament Studies.* Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962.

Rogers, Cleon L., Jr., and Cleon L. Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998.

Ross, Allen P. *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.

Samkutty, V. J. *The Samaritan Mission in Acts.* Library of New Testament Studies, vol. 328. New York: T & T Clark, 2006.

Sanders, E. P. *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.

Schmithals, W. *Gnosticism in Corinth.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971.

Schnabel, Eckhard J. *Early Christian Mission.* 2 vols. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Leicester, England: Apollos, 2004.

Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel According to St John.* 2 vols. Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament. London: Burns & Oates; New York: Herder and Herder, 1968.

_____. *The Gospel of Matthew.* Translated by Robert R. Barr. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.

Schrage, Wolfgang. *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*. Evangelische-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, vol. 7:2. Düsseldorf: Benzinger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *1, 2 Peter, Jude*. New American Commentary, vol. 37. Nashville: Broadman Press, 2003.

_____. *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.

_____. *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

_____. *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.

Schütz, John Howard. *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Scott, James M. *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, vol. 84. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995.

Seifrid, Mark A. *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme*. Supplements to Novum Testamentum, vol. 68. Leiden: Brill, 1992.

Senior, Donald, and Carroll Stuhlmueller. *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983.

Silva, Moisés. *Philippians*. 2nd ed. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

Smith, Ebbie C. *Balanced Church Growth*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984.

Snyder, Howard A. *The Community of the King*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977.

Soards, Marion L. *1 Corinthians*. New International Bible Commentary. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.

Spencer, F. Scott. *Acts*. Readings: A New Biblical Commentary. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.

_____. *The Portrait of Philip in Acts*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, vol. 67. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992.

Squires, John T. *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 76. Cambridge: University Press, 1993.

Stanton, Graham N. *Jesus and Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Stein, Robert H. *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981.

_____. *Luke*. New American Commentary, vol. 24. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.

Stetzer, Ed. *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003.

Stott, John R. W. *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975.

_____. *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, & the World*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990.

Stuhlmacher, Peter. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*. Translated by Scott J. Hafemann. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.

Tannehill, Robert C. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*. 2 vols. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986, 1990.

Tasker, R. V. G. *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1960.

Theissen, Gerd. *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*. Edited and translated by John H. Schütz. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982.

Thielman, Frank. *Philippians*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000.

Thrall, Margaret E. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. 2 vols. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994.

Tippett, Alan R. *Church Growth and the Word of God*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970.

Towns, Elmer, Craig Van Gelder, Charels Van Engen, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Howard Snyder. *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: Five Views*. Edited by Gary L. McIntosh. Counterpoints: Church Life. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

Towns, Elmer L., and Ed Stetzer. *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Evangelical Church*. Chicago: Moody, 2004.

Towns, Elmer L., John N. Vaughan, and David J. Seifert. *The Complete Book of Church Growth*. 2ⁿᵈ ed. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1981.

Trites, Allison A. *The New Testament Concept of Witness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Van Engen, Charles. *The Growth of the True Church*. Amsterdam: Ropodi, 1981.

Volf, Judith M. Gundry. *Paul and Perseverance: Staying in and Falling Away*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990.

Wagner, C. Peter. *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000.

_____. *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.

_____. *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Evangelism and Mission*. Ventura: Regal Books, 1987.

Wagner, J. Ross. *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul "In Concert" in the Letter to the Romans*. Supplements to Novum Testamentum, vol. 101. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

Wall, Robert W. *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*. New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 10. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002.

Walton, Steve. *Leadership and Lifestyle: The Portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 108. Cambridge: University Press, 2000.

Wanamaker, Charles A. *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Webster, Douglas D. *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong with Marketing the Church?* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Weiss, Johannes. *Der erste Korintherbrief*. 9ᵗʰ ed. Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament. Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910.

Westermann, Claus. *The Parables of Jesus in the Light of the Old Testament*. Edited and translated by Friedemann W. Golka and Alistair H. B. Logan. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Wilkins, Michael J. *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel*. 2ⁿᵈ ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995.

Wilson, R. McL. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*. International Critical Commentary. London: T & T Clark International, 2005.

Wilson, Stephen G. *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 23. Cambridge: University Press, 1973.

Witherington, Ben, III. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

_____. *Conflict and Community at Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006.

Wright, N. T. *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986.

_____. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Zunkel, C. Wayne. *Church Growth Under Fire*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987.

Articles

Argyle, A. W. "A Note on John 4:35." *Expository Times* 82 (1971): 247-48.

Arias, Mortimer. "Rethinking the Great Commission." *Theology Today* 47 (1991): 410-18.

Bailey, James L. "Church as Embodiment of Jesus' Mission (Matthew 9:36-10:39)." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30 (2003): 189-96.

Bailey, Mark L. "The Parable of the Mustard Seed." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): 449-59.

_____. "The Parable of the Sower and the Soils." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): 172-88.

Ballard, Paul H. "The Question of Church Growth." *Baptist Quarterly* 28 (1980): 361-72.

Barr, Browne. "Smaller and Smaller, Better and Better?" *The Christian Century* 95 (1978): 828, 830.

Barrett, C. K. "Boasting (καυχᾶσθαι, κτλ.) in the Pauline Epistles." In *L'Apôtre Paul*, 363-68. Leuven: University Press, 1986.

Barth, Karl. "An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20." Translated by Thomas Wieser. In *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson, 55-71. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.

Barton, Stephen C. "'All Things to All People': Paul and the Law in the Light of 1 Corinthians 9.19-23." In *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn, 271-85. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001.

Beare, F. W. "The Mission of the Disciples and the Mission Charge: Matthew 10 and Parallels." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970): 1-13.

Betori, Giuseppe. "Luke 24:47: Jerusalem and the Beginning of the Preaching to the Pagans in the Acts of the Apostles." In *Luke and Acts*, ed. Gerald O'Collins and Gilberto Marconi, 103-20. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.

Beyer, Hermann W. "διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964.

Bietenhard, Hans. "ὄνομα, κτλ." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Friedrich Gerhard. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1967.

Bishop, Jordan. "Numerical Growth: An Adequate Criterion of Mission?" *International Review of Mission* 57 (1968): 284-90.

Black, David Alan. "Weakness." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Blomberg, Craig L. "The Miracles as Parables." In *The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. by David Wenham, and Craig Blomberg. Gospel Perspectives, 6:327-59. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986.

_____. "New Testament Miracles and Higher Criticism: Climbing up the SLippery Slope." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984): 425-38.

Boer, Harry R. "The Holy Spirit and Church Growth." In *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk, 249-59. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983.

Boissard, Edmond. "Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen." *Theology Digest* 3 (1955): 46-50.

Bolt, Peter G. "Mission and WItness." In *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howrad Marshall and David Peterson, 191-214. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Bornkamm, Günther. "The Missionary Stance of Paul in I Corinthians 9 and in Acts." In *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Maryn, 194-207. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1966.

_____. "πρεσβεύω." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968.

Bosch, David J. "Church Growth Missiology." *Missionalia* 16 (1988): 13-24.

_____. "The Scope of Mission." *International Review of Mission* 73 (1984): 17-32.

_____. "The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16-20." In *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk, 218-48. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983.

Bowers, Paul. "Fulfilling the Gospel: The Scope of the Pauline Mission." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987): 185-98.

Bowers, W. Paul. "Paul and Mission." In *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, 731-34. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000.

Braun, F. M. "L'Arrière-Fond Judaïque du Quatrième Évangile et la Communauté de L'Alliance." *Revue Biblique* 62 (1955): 5-44.

Brehm, H. Alan. "The Significance of the Summaries for Interpreting Acts." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33, no. 1 (1990): 29-40.

Brindle, Wayne A. "'To the Jew First': Rhetoric, Strategy, History, or Theology?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 221-33.

Bruce, F. F. "The Grace of God and the Law of Christ: A Study in Pauline Ethics." In *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob*, ed. Clifton Orlebeke and Lewis Smedes, 22-34. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975.

Brunt, John C. "Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility: The Contribution of 1 Cor. 8-10 to an Understanding of Paul's Ethical Thinking." *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 20 (1981): 19-33.

Buckwalter, H. Douglas. "Testimony." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.

Bühner, Jan-Adolf. "ἀπόστολος." In *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Bultmann, Rudolf. "καυχάομαι, κτλ." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965.

Byrne, Brendan. "Ministry and Maturity in 1 Corinthians 3." *Australian Biblical Review* 35 (1987): 83-87.

Cadbury, Henry J. "Dust and Garments." In *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, 5:269-77. London: Macmillan and Co., 1933.

Caird, George B. "Uncomfortable Words: II. Shake the Dust from Your Feet (Mk 6 11)." *Expository Times* 81 (1969): 40-43.

Capper, Brian J. "The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods." In *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, 323-56. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995.

Carpenter, John B. "The Parable of the Talents in Missionary Perspective: A Call for an Economic Spirituality." *Missiology* 25 (1997): 165-81.

Carroll, Jackson W. "Understanding Church Growth and Decline." *Theology Today* 35 (1978): 70-80.

Carson, D. A. "Pauline Inconsistency: Reflections on 1 Cor 9:19-23 and Gal 2:11-14." *Churchman* 100 (1986): 6-45.

_____. "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:30-31 Reconsidered." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 439-51.

Carter, Phyllis N. "Church Growth: A Response." *Brethren Life and Thought* 25 (1980): 237-39.

Casey, Robert P. "Μάρτυς." In *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, 5:30-37. London: Macmillan and Co., 1933.

Cerfaux, Lucien. "Témoins du Christ d'après le Livre des Actes." In *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux: Études d'Exégèse et d'Histoire Religieuse de Monseigneur Cerfaux*, 157-74. Gembloux: Éditions J Duculot, 1954.

Chadwick, Henry. "All Things to All Men." *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954): 261-75.

Chamblin, J. Knox. "Freedom/Liberty." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Charette, Blaine. "A Harvest for the People?: An interpretation of Matthew 9.37f." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38 (1990): 29-35.

Chenoweth, Ben. "Identifying the Talents: Contextual Clues for the Interpretation of the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)." *Tyndale Bulletin* 56 (2005): 61-72.

Clark, Andrew C. "The Plan of God in the Acts of the Apostles." In *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, 169-90. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Coenen, Lothar, and Allison A. Trites. "Witness, Testimony." In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Edited by Colin Brown. Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1986.

Conn, Harvie M. "God's Plan for Church Growth: An Overview." In *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth*, ed. Harvie M. Conn, 1-20. Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976.

Copeland, E. Luther. "Church Growth in Acts." *Missiology* 4 (1976): 13-26.

_____. "The Great Commission and Missions." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (1967): 79-89.

_____. "What Do the Gospels Have to Say about Church Growth?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 9 (1973): 294-300.

Costas, Orlando E. "Church Growth as a Multidimensional Phenomenon: Some Lessons from Chile." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5 (1981): 2-8.

_____. "A Wholistic Concept of Church Growth." In *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk, 95-107. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983.

Cullmann, Oscar. "The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 (1955): 213-26.

Culver, Robert Duncan. "What is the Church's Commission?: Some Exegetical Issues In Matthew 28:16-20." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 (1968): 239-53.

Davies, J. G. "Church Growth: A Critique." *International Review of Mission* 57 (1968): 291-97.

Davies, W. D., and Dale C. Allison. "Matt. 28:16-20: Texts Behind the Text." *Revue D'Historie et de Philosophie Religieuses* 72 (1992): 89-98.

Davis, John Jefferson. "'Teaching Them to Observe All that I Have Commanded You': The History of the Interpretation of the 'Great Commission' and Implications for Marketplace Ministries." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25 (2001): 65-80.

Derrett, J. Duncan M. "Paul as Master-builder." *Evangelical Quarterly* 69 (1997): 129-37.

deSilva, David A. "Paul's Sermon in Antioch of Pisidia." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (1994): 32-49.

Detwiler, David F. "Paul's Approach to the Great Commission in Acts 14:21-23." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (1995): 33-41.

Dillon, Richard J. "Easter Revelation and Mission Program in Luke 24:46-48." In *Sin, Salvation and the Spirit: Commemorating the Fiftieth Year of The Liturgical Press*, ed. Daniel Durken, 240-70. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979.

Dipboye, Carolyn. "Matthew 25:14-30—To Survive or to Serve?" *Review and Expositor* 92 (1995): 507-12.

Dodd, C. H. "ENNOMOΣ XPIΣTOY." In *Studia Paulina: In Honorem Johannis de Zwaan Septuagenarii*, ed. J. N. Sevenster and W. C. van Unnik, 96-110. Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn N.V., 1953.

Donfried, Karl P. "Peter." In *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Driver, John. "Paul and Mission." In *Mission Focus: Current Issues*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk, 47-67. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980.

Duff, Paul Brooks. "Metaphor, Motif, and Meaning: The Rhetorical Strategy Behind the Image "Led in Triumph" in 2 Corinthians 2:14." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991): 79-92.

Dunn, James D. G. "'The Law of Faith,' 'the Law of the Spirit' and 'the Law of Christ'." In *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney, 62-82. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Elliot, Ralph H. "The Church Growth Movement." *Covenant Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1984): 29-37.

_____. "Dangers of the Church Growth Movement." *Christian Century* 98 (1981): 799-801.

Ellison, H. L. "Paul and the Law: 'All Things to All Men.'" In *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays presented to F. F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin, 195-202. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970.

Engel, James F. "Getting Beyond the Numbers Game." *Christianity Today*, 7 August 2000, 54-58.

Evans, Robert A. "Recovering the Church's Transforming Middle: Theological Reflections on the Balance between Faithfulness and Effectiveness." In *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978*, ed. Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, 288-314. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. "Reconciliation in Pauline Theology." In *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies*, 162-85. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Livonia, MI: Dove Booksellers, 1998.

Freeman, Hal. "The Great Commission and the New Testament: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 1, no. 4 (1997): 14-23.

Furnish, Victor Paul. "Fellow Workers in God's Service." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961): 364-70.

Garrett, Robert. "The Gospels and Acts: Jesus the Missionary and His Missionary Followers." In *Missiology*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson, 63-82. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998.

Glasser, Arthur F. "Church Growth and Theology." In *God, Man and Church Growth: A Festschrift in Honor of Donald Anderson McGavran*, ed. Alan R. Tippett, 52-69. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973.

_____. "An Introduction to the Church Growth Perspectives of Donald Anderson McGavran." In *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth*, ed. Harvie M. Conn, 21-42. Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976.

Graham, David J. "Witness." In *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*. Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Grant, Frederick C. "The Mission of the Disciples: Mt. 9:35-11:1 and Parallels." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 35 (1916): 293-314.

Green, Joel B. "Acts of the Apostles." In *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*. Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Green, Michael. "Evangelism in the Early Church." In *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 173-80. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975.

Greenway, Roger S. "God's Plan of Missions . . . and Your Place in It." In *Missions Now: This Generation*, by Roger S. Greenway, John E. Kyle, and Donald A. McGavran, 23-33. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.

Guder, Darrell L. "Evangelism and the Debate over Church Growth." *Interpretation* 48 (1994): 145-55.

Hadaway, C. Kirk. "Is Evangelistic Activity Related to Church Growth?" In *Church and Denominational Growth*, ed. David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway, 169-87. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Hadaway, Robin. "Balancing the Biblical Perspectives: A Missiological Analysis." *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 2 (2003): 103-14.

Hafemann, S. J. "Letters to the Corinthians." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, 164-79. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Hall, Barbara. "All Things to All People: A Study of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23." In *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul & John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa, 137-57. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990.

Hammett, John S. "The Great Commission and Evangelism in the New Testament." *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 10 (Fall 1999): 3-14.

Harrington, Daniel J. "Polemical Parables in Matthew 24-25." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 44 (2005): 287-98.

Harrison, Everett F. "Is the Great Commission God's Command?" In *Momentous Decisions in Missions Today*, ed. Donald A. McGavran, 74-83. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.

Harvey, A. E. "Forty Strokes Save One: Social Aspects of Judaizing and Apostasy." In *Alternative Approaches to New Testament Study*, ed. A. E. Harvey, 79-96. London: SPCK, 1985.

Henry, Carl F. H. "The Cultural Relativizing of Revelation." *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980): 153-64.

Hensel, Robert. "καρπός." In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Edited by Colin Brown. Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1986.

Hertig, Paul. "The Great Commission Revisited: The Role of God's Reign in Disciple Making." *Missiology* 29 (2001): 343-53.

Hicks, John Mark. "Numerical Growth in the Theology of Acts: The Role of Pragmatism, Reason and Rhetoric." *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 8 (Spring 1997): 17-34.

Hock, Ronald F. "Paul's Tentmaking and the Problem of His Social Class." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978): 555-64.

Hodges, Melvin L. "A Pentecostal's View of Mission Strategy." *International Review of Mission* 57 (1968): 304-10.

Holladay, Carl R. "Church Growth in the New Testament: Some Historical Considerations and Theological Perspectives." *Restoration Quarterly* 26 (1983): 85-102.

Holtz, Darrell. "Numbers: The If and How." *Christianity Today*, 17 June 1983, 65.

Hooker, Morna D. "A Partner in the Gospel: Paul's Understanding of His Gospel." In *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney, 83-100. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Horsley, Richard A. "Wisdom of Word and Words of Wisdom in Corinth." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 224-39.

Howe, Allan H. "The Church: Its Growth and Mission." In *The Challenge of Church Growth: A Symposium*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk, 49-64. Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1973.

Jacobsen, Wayne. "The Numbers Game: A Threat to Churches Large and Small." *Leadership* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 49-53.

Jeremias, Joachim. "Palästinakundliches zum Gleichnis vom Säemann." *New Testament Studies* 13 (1967): 48-53.

John, Mathew P. "Evangelism and the Growth of the Church." *International Review of Mission* 57 (1968): 278-83.

Johnson, H. Wayne. "The Paradigm of Abraham in Galatians 3:6-9." *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987): 179-99.

Kilian, Sabbas J. Review of *Understanding Church Growth*, by Donald A. McGavran. *Theological Studies* 33 (1972): 182.

Kingsbury, Jack Dean. "Luke 24:44-49." *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 170-74.

Knox, John. "Romans 15:14-33 and Paul's Conception of His Apostolic Mission." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (1964): 1-11.

Kodell, Jerome. "'The Word of God Grew': The Ecclesial Tendency of Λόγος in Acts 6,7 ; 12,24; 19,20." *Biblica* 55 (1974): 505-19.

Krause, Richard A. "'All Things to All men': Where is the Limit? An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 93 (1996): 83-105.

Kruse, Colin G. "Afflictions, Trials, Hardships." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

_____. "Apostle." In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Krüger, M. A. "Tina Karpon, 'Some Fruit' in Romans 1:13." *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 167-73.

Kuhli, Horst. "οἰκονόμος." In *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991.

Kuske, David. "Exegetical Brief: The Meaning of μαθητεύσατε in Matthew 28:19." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 94 (1997): 115-21.

Kvalbein, Hans. "Go Therefore and Make Disciples: The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament." *Themelios* 13 (1988): 48-53.

Legrand, L. "The Missionary Command of the Risen Christ." *Indian Theological Studies* 23 (1986): 290-309.

Liao, David C. E. "The Orient Awaits an Optimistic Missiology." In *God, Man and Church Growth: A Festschrift in Honor of Donald Anderson McGavran*, ed. Alan R. Tippett, 14-17. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973.

Lim, Timothy H. "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom, But in the Demonstration of the Spirit and Power." *Novum Testamentum* 29 (1987): 137-49.

Litfin, A. Duane. "The Perils of Persuasive Preaching." *Christianity Today*, 21 February 1977: 14-17.

Luter, A. Boyd., Jr. "Discipleship and the Church." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980): 267-73.

Mánek, Jindrich. "Fishers of Men." *Novum Testamentum* 2 (1957): 138-41.

Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts.* In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament.* Edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, 513-606. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007.

_____. "Luke's Portrait of the Pauline Mission." In *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission,* ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson, 99-113. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000.

_____. "The Meaning of 'Reconciliation'." In *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd,* ed. Robert A. Guelich, 117-32. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978.

Martin, Marie-Louise. "Does the World Really Need Fantastically Growing Churches?" *International Review of Mission* 57 (1968): 311-18.

Martin, Ralph P. "Center of Paul's Theology." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters.* Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

McFaul, Thomas R. "'Strictness' and Church Membership." In *Mission Trends No. 2: Evangelization,* ed. Gerald P. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, 56-63. New York: Paulist Press; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975.

McIntosh, Gary L. "A Critique of the Critics." *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 2 (2003): 37-50.

McKnight, Scott. "Gentiles, Gentile Mission." In *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments.* Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

McSwain, Larry L. "A Critical Appraisal of the Church Growth Movement." *Review and Expositor* 77 (1980): 521-38.

Meier, John P. "Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 94-102.

Metzger, Bruce M. "Seventy or Seventy-Two Disciples?" *New Testament Studies* 51 (1958-59): 299-306.

Meyer, Ben F. "Many (= All) Are Called, But Few (= Not All) Are Chosen." *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990): 89-97.

Meyer, Matthew M. "Church Growth: A Response." *Brethren Life and Thought* 25 (1980): 239-42.

Meyer, Paul W. "The Parable of Responsibility." *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 6 (1985): 131-34.

Miller, Donald E. "Church Growth: A Response." *Brethren Life and Thought* 25 (1980): 245-47.

Miller, Glenn T. "2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13." *Interpretation* 54 (2000): 186-88.

Milne, Bruce. "'Even So Send I You': An Expository and Theological Reflection on John 20.21." In *Mission To the World: Essays to Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Ordination of George Beasley-Murray to the Christian Ministry*, ed. Paul Beasley-Murray, 47-51. Didcot, Oxfordshire: Baptist Historical Society, 1991.

Minor, Mitzi. "Luke 13:22-30—The Wrong Question, The Right Door." *Review and Expositor* 91 (1994): 551-57.

Mitchell, Margaret M. "Pauline Accommodation and 'Condescension' (συγκατάβασις): 1 Cor 9:19-23 and the History of Influence." In *Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, 197-214. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Moore, Thomas S. "The Lucan Great Commission and the Isaianic Servant." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (1997): 47-60.

_____. "'To the End of the Earth': The Geographical and Ethnic Universalism of Acts 1:8 in Light of Isaianic Influence on Luke." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 389-99.

Musurillo, Herbert. "Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen." *Theological Studies* 7 (1946): 583-89.

Neller, Kenneth V. "1 Corinthians 9:19-23: A Model for Those Who Seek to Win Souls." *Restoration Quarterly* 29 (1987): 129-42.

Newbigin, Lesslie. "The Church as Witness: A Meditation." *Reformed World* 35 (1978): 5-9.

_____. "Context and Conversion." *International Review of Mission* 68 (1979): 301-12.

_____. "Cross-currents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Missions." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 4 (1982): 146-51.

Nida, Eugene A. "Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 73-89.

Oepke, Albrecht. "κενός, κτλ." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965.

Oke, C. Clare. "Paul's Method not a Demonstration but an Exhibition of the Spirit." *Expository Times* 67 (1955): 35-36.

Okure, Teresa. "'The Ministry of Reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:14-21): Paul's Key to the Problem of 'the Other' in Corinth." *Mission Studies* 23 (2006): 105-21.

Ollrog, Wolf-Henning. "συνεργός, συνεργέω." In *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993.

O'Toole, Robert F. "Luke's Message in Luke 9:1-50." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 74-89.

Padilla, C. René. "Evangelism and the World." In *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 134-46. International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975.

_____. "A Steep Climb Ahead for Theology in Latin America." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 7 (1971): 99-106.

Paulsen, Henning. "ἐνεργέω." In *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Payne, P. B. "The Order of Sowing and Ploughing in the Parable of the Sower." *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979): 123-29.

Petersen, J. Randall. "'Church Growth': A Limitation of Numbers?" *Christianity Today*, 27 March 1981, 18-23.

Plevnik, Joseph. "'The Eleven and Those with Them' According to Luke." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 205-11.

_____. "The Eyewitnesses of the Risen Jesus in Luke 24." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 90-103.

Plummer, Robert L. "The Great Commission in the New Testament." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9, no. 4 (2005): 4-11.

Porter, Stanley E. "Peace, Reconciliation." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Rainer, Thom S. "Church Growth and Evangelism in the Book of Acts." *Criswell Theological Review* 5 (1990): 57-68.

Reinhardt, Wolfgang. "The Population Size of Jerusalem and the Numerical Growth of the Jerusalem Church." In *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, Edited by Richard Bauckham, 237-65. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995.

Richardson, Don. "The Hidden Message of 'Acts'." In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph Winter and Steven H. Hawthorne, 89-99. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981.

Richardson, Peter. "Pauline Inconsistency: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and Galatians 2:11-14." *New Testament Studies* 26 (1980): 347-62.

Rodriguez, Vanessa. "95 Florida Baptist Churches Honored for Evangelism." *Florida Baptist Witness*, 14 October 2004, 5.

Rogers, Cleon L. "The Great Commission." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130 (1973): 258-67.

Rosner, Brian S. "The Progress of the Word." In *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, 215-33. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Sandnes, Karl Olav. "Paul and Socrates: The Aim of Paul's Areopagus Speech." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993): 13-26.

Scherer, James A. "The Life and Growth of Churches in Mission: A Review Article." *International Review of Mission* 60 (1971): 125-35.

_____. "McGavran's Lion: Real or Imaginary." *Missiology* 17 (1989): 344.

Schmidt, Paul. "The Bible and the Evangelistic Task." In *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham, 2:11-13. World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1966.

Schnabel, Eckhard J. "Mission, Early Non-Pauline." In *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*. Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Schreiner, Thomas R. "Circumcision." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

_____. "Law of Christ." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Schrotenboer, Paul G. "Response to the Article by Lesslie Newbigin." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 4 (1982): 152-53.

Seamands, John T. "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Church Growth." In *God, Man and Church Growth: A Festschrift in Honor of Donald Anderson McGavran*, ed. Alan R. Tippett, 95-107. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973.

Seifrid, Mark A. "Judgment." In *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*. Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Shanor, Jay. "Paul as Master Builder: Construction Terms in 1 Cor." *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 461-71.

Sheeley, Steven M. ""Lift Up Your Eyes": John 4:4-42." *Review and Expositor* 92 (1995): 81-87.

Shenk, Wilbert R. "Church Growth Studies: A Bibliography Review." In *The Challenge of Church Growth: A Symposium*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk, 1-23. Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1973.

_____. "Kingdom, Mission, and Growth." In *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk, 207-17. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983.

Sieber, John H. "The Spirit as 'The Promise of My Father' in Luke 24:49." In *Sin, Salvation and the Spirit: Commemorating the Fiftieth Year of The Liturgical Press*, ed. Daniel Durken, 271-78. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979.

Smith, Charles W. F. "Fishers of Men: Footnotes on a Gospel Figure." *Harvard Theological Review* 52 (1959): 187-204.

Smith, David. "The Church Growth Principles of Donald McGavran." *Transformation* 2, no. 2 (1985): 25-30.

Snyder, Howard A. "An Evangelistic Lifestyle for the Congregation." In *Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth*, ed. C. Norman Kraus, 82-108. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980.

Spencer, F. Scott. "'Follow Me': The Imperious Call of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels." *Interpretation* 59 (2005): 142-53.

Squires, John T. "The Plan of God in the Acts of the Apostles." In *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, 19-39. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Stafford, Tim. "The Father of Church Growth." *Christianity Today*, 21 February 1986, 19-23.

Stanton, Graham N. "The Law of Christ: A Neglected Theological Gem?" In *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology*, ed. David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, 169-84. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003.

Stein, Robert. H. "Jerusalem." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Storms, C. Samuel. "Prayer and Evangelism Under God's Sovereignty." In *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, vol. 1, *Biblical and Practical Perspectives on Calvinism*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, 215-31. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995.

Stott, John R. W. "The Biblical Basis of Evangelism." In *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*. International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, ed. J. D. Douglas, 65-78. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975.

Strathmann, Hermann. "Μάρτυς, κτλ." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1967.

Strecker, Georg. "εὐαγγελίζω." In *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991.

Taber, Charles R. Review of *Momentous Decisions in Missions Today*, by Donald A. McGavran. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 10 (1986): 139.

Theide, C. P. "Babylon, der andere Ort: Anmerkungen zu 1 Petr 5,13 und Apg 12,17." *Biblica* 67 (1986): 532-38.

Thielman, Frank. "The Coherence of Paul's View of the Law: The Evidence of First Corinthians." *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 235-53.

_____. "Law." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Thompson, M. B. "Strong and Weak." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Thrall, Margaret E. "Salvation Proclaimed, V. 2: 2 Corinthians 5:18-21." *Expository Times* 93 (1982): 227-32.

Tippett, Alan R. "The Biblical Imagery of Growth." *Church Growth Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (March 1965): 4-5.

_____. "Functional Roles and Ingathering." *Church Growth Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (September 1965): 3-4.

_____. "Numbering: Right or Wrong?" *Church Growth Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (January 1965): 1-2.

_____. "Portrait of a Missiologist by his Colleague." In *God, Man and Church Growth: A Festschrift in Honor of Donald Anderson McGavran*, ed. Alan R. Tippett, 14-17. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1973.

Trakatellis, Demetrios. "'Ἀκολούθει μοι/Follow me' (Mark 2:14): Discipleship and Priesthood." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (1985): 271-85.

Trites, Allison A. "Church Growth in the Book of Acts." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988): 162-73.

_____. "The Importance of Legal Scenes and Language in the Book of Acts." *Novum Testamentum* 16 (1974): 278-84.

Ulrich, Daniel W. "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 64-83.

Van Engen, Charles. "The Relation of Bible and Mission in Mission Theology." In *The Good News of the Kingdom*, ed. Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland and Paul Pierson, 27-36. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.

Wagner, C. Peter. "On the Cutting Edge of Mission Strategy." In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph Winter and Steven H. Hawthorne, 531-40. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981.

_____. "Response to the Article by Lesslie Newbigin." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 4 (1982): 153-54.

Wall, Robert W. "Peter, 'Son' of Jonah: The Conversion of Cornelius in the Context of Canon." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (1987): 79-90.

Walvoord, John F. "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the End of the Age: The Parable of the Talents." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972): 206-10.

Watts, Rikk E. *Mark.* In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, 111-249. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007.

Weber, Hans-Ruedi. "God's Arithmetic." *Frontier* 6 (1963): 298-301.

Wendland, Ernst H. "Church Growth Theology." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 78 (1981): 104-20.

_____. "An Evaluation of Current Missiology." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 79 (1982): 167-94.

White, K. D. "The Parable of the Sower." *Journal of Theological Studies* 15 (1964): 300-07.

Wilkins, Michael J. "Discipleship." In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Willis, Wendell. "An Apostolic Apologia?: The Form and Function of 1 Corinthians 9." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 24 (1985): 33-48.

Winter, Bruce W. "Rhetoric." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Winter, Ralph D.. "Quality or Quantity." In *Crucial Issues in Missions Tomorrow*, ed. Donald A. McGavran, 175-87. Chicago: Moody Press, 1972.

Wise, Philip D. "Theological Issues Raised by the Church Growth Movement." *The Theological Educator* 51 (1995): 95-105.

Wolff, Hans Walter. "The Kerygma of the Yahwist." *Interpretation* 20 (1966): 131-58.

Wong, Emily. "All Things to All People." *Tripod* 45 (1988): 67-68.

Wright, Christopher J. H. "Truth with a Mission: Reading All Scripture Missiologically." In *Text and Task: Scripture and Mission*, ed. Michael Parsons, 140-156. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005.

Wuellner, Wilhelm. "Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation." In *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant*, ed. William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken, 177-88. Paris: Beauchense, 1979.

Yoder, John H. "Church Growth Issues in Theological Perspective." In *The Challenge of Church Growth: A Symposium*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk, 25-47. Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1973.

Young, John M. L. "The Place and Importance of Numerical Church Growth." In *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth*, ed. Harvie M. Conn, 57-73. Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976.

Zwonitzer, Rodney E. "Effective or Faithful?" In *Testing the Claims of Church Growth*, 65-74. St. Louis: Concordia, 2002.

Dissertations and Theses

Bates, Matthew David, Jr. "Growing the Church, Resisting the Powers, Reforming the World: A Theological Analysis of Three Options for Ecclesial Faithfulness in North American Protestantism (Donald A. McGavran, John Howard Yoder, Walter Rauschenbusch)." Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 2005.

Bowers, William Paul. "Studies in Paul's Understanding of His Mission." Ph.D. diss., Clare College, University of Cambridge, 1976.

Buice, Shawn Leroy. "A Critical Examination of the Use of Selected New Testament Passages in the Writings of Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner." Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996.

Burkhalter, William Nolan. "A Comparative Analysis of the Missiologies of Roland Allen and Donald Anderson McGavran." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984.

Crabtree, John Albert, Jr. "The Divergence of Donald McGavran's Church Growth Movement in North America, 1955-2000." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003.

_____. "Donald Anderson McGavran's Theology of Evangelism and Church Growth as a Basis for Theological Education." Th.M. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997.

Glahn, Robert Gale. "A Biblical Analysis of Donald A. McGavran's Church Growth Principles." Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980.

Good, N. Sanford. "A Biblical Analysis of the Receptive People Principle in the Writings of Donald A. McGavran and the Modern Church Growth Movement." Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1981.

Lee, Sang-Man Jonah. "A Missiological Assessment of People Movement Theory in Church Growth (Korea)." Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria (South Africa), 1997.

Melancon, Patrick Julian. "An Examination of Selected Theological Topics in the Thought of Donald A. McGavran (Church Growth)." Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997.

Middleton, Vernon James. "The Development of a Missiologist: The Life and Thought of Donald Anderson McGavran, 1897-1965." Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990.

Mills, David Charles. "Donald A. McGavran's Theology of Church Growth." M.Div. thesis, Emmanuel School of Religion, 1990.

Mitchell, Morley Charles. "Church Growth: What Jesus Had to Say! What We Have to Do!" D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1985.

Pinola, Sakari. *Church Growth: Principles and Praxis of Donald A. McGavran's Missiology.* Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1995.

Rietveld, John N. "A Critical Examination of I Corinthians 9:19-23 as It Pertains to Paul's Missionary and Apologetic Strategy." Th.M. Thesis, Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1983.

Smith, James Clapsaddle. "Without Crossing Barriers: The Homogeneous Unit Concept in the Writings of Donald Anderson McGavran." Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1976.

Son, Young J. "The Missiological Significance of Matthew 28:16-20 with Special Reference to Donald M. McGavran." Th.D. diss., Potchefstroom University, 1983.

Sunukjian, Donald Robert. "Patterns for Preaching: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Sermons of Paul in Acts 13, 17, and 20." Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972.

Waldock, Raymond. "Current Theological Issues in Donald A. McGavran's Missiology." Ph.D. diss., University de Montreal, 1989.

Internet

Schmucker, Matt. "Things I've Seen and Heard—On Numbers." 9 Marks [on-line]. Accessed 19 December 2006. Available from http://www.9marks.org/CC/ article/0,, PTID 314526 %7CCHID598016% 7CCIID1552870,00.html; Internet.

ABSTRACT

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF DONALD A. MCGAVRAN'S
HARVEST THEOLOGY PRINCIPLE

Todd Alan Benkert, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Chairperson: George H. Martin

This dissertation provides a biblical analysis of McGavran's harvest theology

principle as it relates to the relationship between faithfulness in the evangelistic task and

actual numerical church growth. Chapter 1 introduces the problem and outlines the

research method.

Chapter 2 contains a detailed explanation of harvest theology as presented by

McGavran in his published works. The chapter outlines the concept of harvest theology

in terms of the role of gospel messengers, the importance of strategy and effective

methods, and numerical results.

Chapter 3 examines the biblical text to discover the role assigned to gospel

messengers. The key question for this chapter is as follows: What role, biblically, do

human agents play in the evangelistic task? The role of gospel messengers is examined in

the teaching and ministry of Jesus in the gospels, the book of Acts, and the Pauline

epistles.

Chapter 4, examines the biblical text as it pertains to the use of strategy and

methods in the evangelistic task. The key question for this chapter is as follows: What, if

any, strategy or method is employed in the New Testament and for what purpose? In

addition, this chapter examines the concept of "receptivity" as a factor in determining

evangelistic strategy. The use of strategy and methods is examined in the ministries of the

Twelve and of Paul.

Chapter 5, examines those biblical texts that deal with numerical results and their relationship to evangelistic activity. The key question for this chapter is as follows: What does the New Testament say concerning numerical results? This chapter examines both the records of actual numerical results as well as how the New Testament writers view numerical results. The existence and attitude toward numerical results is examined in the Gospels, Acts, and the Pauline epistles.

Chapter 6 serves as the summary and conclusion of the dissertation. This chapter summarizes the findings of the previous chapters and offer an analysis of harvest theology based on those findings. Additionally, this chapter offers a theological understanding of the relationship between faithfulness and church growth. Finally, the chapter offers implications of the research for contemporary ministry.

VITA

Todd Alan Benkert

PERSONAL
- Born: January 26, 1970, Niles, Michigan
- Married: Heidi Lee Bockaj, June 3, 1995
- Children: Ashley, born August 23, 1997
  - Max, born April 3, 2000
  - Kaitlin, born, June 16, 2005.

EDUCATION
- Diploma, 1988, First Assembly Christian School, Niles, Michigan
- Bachelor of Music, December 1993, Belmont University
- Master of Divinity, May 1998, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

ACADEMIC
- Garrett Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003-07
- Adjunct Professor—Distance Learning, The Baptist College of Florida, 2005-06
- Adjunct Professor—Distance Learning, Liberty University, 2006-

MINISTRY
- Minister of Youth and Music, Worthville Baptist Church, Worthville, Kentucky, 1995-1997
- Church Planter/Pastor, Rensselaer Community Church, Rensselaer, Indiana, 1998-2002
- Industrial Chaplain, Work Life Services, Louisville, Kentucky, 1999-2001
- President and Charter Member, Jasper County Interfaith Alliance, Indiana, 1999-2001
- Associate Pastor, Charlestown Road Baptist Church, New Albany, Indiana, 2002-03
- Industrial Chaplain, Allied Automotive Group, Louisville, Kentucky, 2002-06
- Research Assistant to the Executive Director, Kentucky Baptist Convention, Louisville, Kentucky, 2003-08
- Interim Pastor, Irvington Baptist Church, Irvington, Kentucky, 2005-06
- Interim Pastor, Irvington Baptist Church, Irvington, Kentucky, 2007-08
- Pastor, Harvest Baptist Fellowship, Merrillville, Indiana, 2008-

ORGANIZATIONAL
- Evangelical Missiological Society