

STAGE 4

GREAT COMMISSION CHURCH MOVEMENTS

INSIGHT FROM THE EARLY CHURCH,
GOD'S MISSIONARY PEOPLE



"WITH YOUR BLOOD YOU PURCHASED PEOPLE FOR GOD FROM EVERY TRIBE
AND LANGUAGE AND PEOPLE AND NATION." (REVELATION 5:9)

John L. Amstutz

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MANUAL AND STUDY GUIDE

FOREWORD BY GLENN BURRIS, JR.

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by John L. Amstutz

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Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	7
<i>Foreword</i>	9
<i>Preface</i>	11
<i>Introduction</i>	13
Part One—A Great Commission Church	15
Chapter 1 The Living God is a Missionary God (Luke 24:45–47)	17
Chapter 2 The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37–39)	21
Chapter 3 The Universal Commission (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19–20)	25
Chapter 4 The Spirit on All Flesh (Acts 2:17–18)	31
Chapter 5 The Church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:4; 11:19)	37
Chapter 6 The Gospel of Grace (Acts 15:11; Ephesians 2:8–10)	43
Chapter 7 The Grace of Giving (Acts 4:32–33)	51
Chapter 8 A House of Prayer for All Nations (Mark 11:17; Acts 1:14)	55
Part Two—Great Commission Church Movements	63
Chapter 9 The Church in Antioch (Acts 13:1–3)	65

Great Commission Church Movements

Chapter 10	The Churches in Galatia (Acts 13:49; 16:5)	69
Chapter 11	The Churches in Macedonia (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 8)	79
Chapter 12	The Churches in Achaia (Acts 18:8, 10; 2 Corinthians 10:15–16)	87
Chapter 13	The Churches in Asia Minor (Acts 19:9–10)	93
Chapter 14	The Church in Rome (Romans 1:8; 15:19–20, 23–24)	99
Chapter 15	Full-Circle Great Commission Church Movements (Matthew 24:14)	105
Conclusion		111
Notes		115
Bibliography		137
Appendices		141
Study Guide		157

Acknowledgements

A world map on the kitchen wall of my parent's home was my first exposure to missions. Pictures of missionaries were pinned to it. Frequently at mealtimes they prayed for these missionaries whom they were helping to support through the local church our family attended. When in town on furlough, Dad and Mom would invite them to our home for meals. Their stories were riveting. Their passion to make Christ known was remarkable. And so it was that I was introduced to the world of missions at a young age.

When our family moved from this small Midwestern town to Southern California, we began attending a local church. It was the church where my uncle and his family were attending. My exposure to world missions increased significantly, for the church we were attending was called The Missionary Church. It was a member of a denomination by the same name. Annual weeklong missions conferences brought missionaries from around the world, some of whom had been sent out from this church. Climaxing each conference was a call for workers, and the receiving and totaling of faith promises for world missions. Frequently the amount given exceeded the total of the faith promises. Some years close to forty percent of the total giving of the church went to world missions. Periodic reports and prayer for God's global work were a part of public services. Over the years, workers, including my youth pastor, were called and sent to the field. In fact, it was at one these annual missions conferences that the Lord called me and my fiancée to surrender our plans for his. Four months later we were married, I turned down a job offer to become a physicist with the U.S. government, and enrolled in seminary. Upon graduation and a year of training in a missionary internship program, we were sent overseas.

My mentors are many. Pastor Ben Jennings, under whose ministry we were sent out and supported as missionaries, modeled and taught me to pray for nations. Some years later Dr. Jennings and his wife served with Campus Crusade for Christ where he became the international prayer coordinator for this worldwide ministry. Pastor Jack Hayford, my pastor for nearly twenty-five years, taught me, along with thousands, the power of intercession and worship in spiritual warfare and advancing the kingdom. Dr. C. Peter Wagner was my missions professor and mentor. He taught and trained me

in missiology, and I served with him in the Department of Church Growth at the Fuller Evangelistic Association during my doctoral studies.

Dr. Donald McGregor mentored me in Foursquare missions. Don with his wife, Sally, served as missionaries in the Philippines. Subsequently, Don served as the U.S. missions director. Together he and I traveled the world and together discovered and developed an understanding of a four-stage missiology that characterized the growth and expansion of the early church described in the book of Acts. Today that missiology is increasingly characterizing the Foursquare missions movement around the world.

In addition, fellow field missionaries Dr. Zenas Gerig and Pastor David Clark, with great wisdom and much grace, patiently mentored this enthusiastic and inexperienced first-term missionary. Their experience as lifelong missionaries modeled and helped me understand healthy indigenization and appropriate contextualization of a national church. Further, to name a few among the many who have influenced and shaped my understanding of global missions, are Paul Watney, John Louwerse, Bill Kieselhorst, Ted Olbrich, Frank Greer, Paul Otremba, Umberto Paz, and Lee Schnabel, all seasoned, long-term missionaries.

And to all who have made possible the publication of this manual I am deeply grateful: to Glenn Burris, Jr. for his insightful and confirming foreword; to my gifted and perceptive copyeditor, Dean Christensen; to my perceptive and helpful readers, Jeff Lamont, Bill Keiselhorst and Kaj Martin; to my gracious and encouraging reviewers who endorsed the book, James Davis, Berin Gilfillan, Byron Klaus, Grant McClung Greg Parsons, Jim Scott, and Ted Vail; and to my generous and supportive publisher, Borden Newman of Editorial Renuevo, who again also facilitated the translation into Spanish, publishing the book in both English and Spanish.

To my wife, Dorene, I wish to give my most sincere and heartfelt thanks. She has been graciously understanding and enthusiastically supportive throughout the journey of the past five years, during which time she also has been writing and has become a published author. Ultimately, the highest praise belongs to the One to whom this and every book is dedicated, to Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Foreword

Great Commission Church Movements captures the big picture of God's redemptive plan for the world through His Church. It gives insight into not only what God does, but why He does it, and how He does it. It provides a biblical template for fulfilling Christ's commission of making disciples of all nations, a pattern found and followed in the early Church, God's initial missionary people.

The premise is straightforward. The Church has been called to be fruitful and multiply—disciples, leaders, churches, and missionary movements. It is an infinitely reproducible four-phase cycle. To stop with the last phase is not enough. It is not a finish line, it is a continuum. Failure to continue to make and multiply disciples, leaders, and churches is to cease to be a missionary movement, plain and simple.

Based on his initial book, *Disciples of All Nations*, Dr. Amstutz has written four subsequent works amplifying each of the four stages of this ongoing process. But there is something that sets these writings apart. Somehow, in the midst of this journey, John has tapped into the heart and mind of God. Becoming more than mere theory, it became revelation into the workings of a missionary God, the creator, who from eternity planned and set in motion the salvation of the human race. What seemed hidden became understandable and applicable. What was identified was that which can keep us from unfruitfulness in ministry and further fulfillment of Christ's commission.

Often we find ourselves searching for the latest techniques and programs, but the answer lies in discovering God's redemptive purpose and plan and carrying it out in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what this book and this series is all about.

John won't take much credit for the work. He readily admits he shares the insights of others. But it is his writing that the Lord is using to bring light to what had often been hidden. And its proof is shown in the rapid reproduction of disciples, leaders, churches, and missionary movements in nations around the world where these principles and pattern have been applied.

Great Commission Church Movements

In seeing firsthand the global results of an indigenous philosophy of ministry and a practical application of the Four-Stage process which has been embraced by The Foursquare Church, we have discovered an infinitely reproducible model. We have seen nearly fifty times the number of churches planted around the world as in the U.S. I personally attribute this to the embracing of God's power and design for being fruitful and multiplying in fulfilling His mission to reach the world with the gospel and to make disciples of all nations.

And now we are seeing missionary movements from the mission field sending workers to the U.S. who are increasingly reaching first generation immigrants, including those in unreached groups. Further, such missionary work also has the potential of facilitating awakening and revival in America at multiple levels. With the mission field becoming a mission force, it is no longer "the West to the rest," but the whole church, God's missionary people, taking the whole gospel to the whole world...until He comes.

*Glenn Burris, Jr., President
The Foursquare Church*

Preface

Christ's commission was clear: proclaim the good news to everyone and make disciples of all nations. With the promise of his authority, his power, and his presence until the end of the age, the earliest believers became his witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Led by the twelve apostles, the gospel initially spread to the Jews in Jerusalem and all Judea, and eventually into Galilee. Driven out of Jerusalem by persecution, Jewish Hellenists, such as Philip, took the good news to the Samaritans, with Peter and John subsequently preaching the gospel in villages throughout Samaria. Soon the gospel spread to Gentiles within Palestine as Philip shared the gospel with an Ethiopian eunuch and Peter preached Christ to the household of Cornelius, a Roman centurion.

Meanwhile, a number of Hellenistic believers, scattered by persecution, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch in Syria, telling the message only to Jews. However, in Antioch some also began to preach the good news to Gentiles. Many came to faith in Christ and, joining with Jewish believers, became members of the church in Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians. Eventually, from this multicultural church an initial missionary team was sent out. Thus began the first of multiple journeys of the Apostle Paul as the witness to Christ rapidly expanded among the Gentiles. By the end of the first century the gospel had spread throughout the Mediterranean region, and by the end of the third century the good news had penetrated much of the Roman Empire—"the ends of the earth" in that day. The early church was a Great Commission church that spawned a Great Commission movement. As God's missionary people they reached their world with the gospel.¹

In the book *Disciples of All Nations: Continuous Mission Until He Comes*, I identified the continuous process that characterized this growth and multiplication of the church described in the book of Acts. The early church grew and expanded in a four-stage, infinitely reproducible, "full-circle" progression of the multiplication of disciples, leaders, churches, and missions-sending movements (see Appendix A).

Making and Multiplying Disciples: The Master's Plan of Discipleship was the first of four subsequent manuals more fully developing each of

these four stages. This initial manual was a study of how Jesus and the early church made and multiplied disciples (Stage One). The second manual, *Discipling and Multiplying Leaders: Lessons in Leadership from Peter and Paul*, explored the transformative process of making and multiplying servant leaders as seen in the lives of Peter and Paul (Stage Two). The third manual, *Planting and Multiplying Churches: Learning from the Original Church Planting Movement*, examined the dynamics of the expansion of indigenous church planting movements in the early church (Stage Three).

This fourth manual, *Great Commission Church Movements: Insights from the Early Church, God's Missionary People*, considers how the church birthed at Pentecost developed and multiplied “full-circle” missions-sending congregations that bridged cross-culturally and extended the gospel into regions where Christ was not known (Stage Four). As such, these four-stage, “full-circle,” missions-sending churches initiated another cycle of the spread of the gospel and the making of disciples of all nations—the Great Commission Christ gave his church.

Disciples of All Nations, and each of the four subsequent manuals, are biblical studies using the Bible as the primary textbook—the book most widely available to pastors and leaders around the world. A study guide, which concluded the initial book and each manual, is designed to assist in learning, applying, teaching, and passing on what is found in God's Word about the making and multiplying of disciples, leaders, churches, and missions-sending movements...until he comes!

John L. Amstutz
January 2017

Introduction

What is the *mission* of the church? Answers are numerous and varied: preach the gospel, care for the poor, seek justice, promote reconciliation, expedite righteousness, facilitate societal transformation, advance the kingdom of God. Some see the mission of the church as including all that the church does, while others understand it primarily as spiritual, saving souls and building up the Body of Christ. Thus, it could be as general as doing good to all—a miscellaneous mixture of noble causes—or as specific as telling people about Jesus and helping them grow in their faith.¹

More recently, the word *missional* has been used to describe the purpose and direction of a church as outward-oriented and focused. The shift is from an internal, church-focused ministry to an external, kingdom-based ministry. Such a church is intentionally “adapting and reformulating...[what] it does in worship, discipleship, community and service—so as to be engaged with the non-Christian society around it.”² The *mission* of the church is *missional*.

Missions describes the sending of people to spread the gospel throughout the world. The word comes from the Latin word *missio*, a translation of the Greek word *apostello*, which means “to send forth.” This is the word Jesus used in choosing the twelve disciples that “they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.”³ It is the word he used of his own ministry: “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns also because that is why I was sent.”⁴ The word also is used to describe the Father sending his Son and the Son sending his disciples: “As you sent me into the world,” said Jesus, “I have sent them into the world.”⁵ “Sentness” is fundamental in understanding *missions*.

Paul, apostle to the nations, declared, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”⁶ But “how, then,” he asked, “can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?”⁷ This is the “missionary mandate”—the sending of people into all the world to preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations (*ethne*), both nearby and distant geographically and culturally. This is *missions*, local and global—“in Jerusalem, and

in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁸ This is the Great Commission. Clearly Christ’s final charge to his disciples made missions a primary focus of the church’s mission. “A church can be missional and yet miss the breadth of the command of Christ to take the gospel to the nations.”⁹ To be truly missional, *missions* must shape the mission.

Part One of *Great Commission Church Movements* describes the unfolding story of God’s chosen people who came to recognize the living God as not only their God but the God of the nations, and his Messiah, the Savior of the world. Their story reflects the process of how the earliest church came to understand God’s heart and their part in reaching a world with his salvation, the story of becoming a Great Commission church.

Part Two examines the expanding story of the first-century church. God’s people not only understood that their Messiah’s death was for all people, they embraced his commission to be sent as witnesses of his salvation to the ends of the earth. Their story reflects the process of how the early church became a world-embracing Great Commission Church movement, God’s missionary people.

What insights can we gain from the story of God’s people? How did the Great Commission shape mission? How did a largely Jewish church become a multinational, missions-sending church and movement to the nations? Why and how did making and multiplying disciples, leaders, and churches generate missions-sending Great Commission churches that continued to reach those yet unreached with the gospel of God’s grace in Christ?

Part One

A Great Commission Church

The story of God's people is the saga of a people with a somewhat slow but growing awareness of the nature of their God and the purpose of their calling. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob chose and called his people, the nation of Israel, to be his own special treasure, a holy nation. They were to be a kingdom of priests who reflected and revealed his nature, a light to the nations, mediating and ministering his salvation to the world.¹ Blessed as God's own people, they were to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. As Israel came to know "the identity of the true and living God, YHWH... they were trusted with bearing witness to that in a world of nations and their gods."²

"Ultimately, Israel existed *for the sake* of the nations."³ God's dwelling place was to be "a house of prayer for all nations."⁴ All nations were to come to "the mountain of the Lord's temple, to the house of Jacob" to learn his ways and walk in his paths— "in the light of the Lord."⁵ Sadly, God's people misrepresented their Creator and Redeemer, misinterpreted their calling and commission, and misused and mistook his blessings as intended only for themselves. Worship of other gods, sinful waywardness, pride of place and position, and narrow-minded provincialism dimmed and nearly extinguished the light.

However, from a faithful remnant came a deliverer after the line of King David, the Messiah. God called him to be his servant "to restore the tribes of Jacob [and be] a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."⁶

In Jesus, God's Messiah, is the climax of this story—his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. To the people of God, all who were descendants of Abraham through faith in the Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles, was given the mandate to take the good news of God's salvation in his Messiah to the world. As his disciples came to understand "the true identity of the crucified and risen Jesus... they [were] entrusted with bearing witness to that to the ends of the earth."⁷

During his last forty days before his ascension, Jesus spoke with his disciples about the worldwide spread of the gospel. Each of the four Gospels and the book of Acts record what he told his disciples about what is known as the universal, or “Great” Commission.⁸ Summarizing these accounts, here is what Jesus said:

All authority has been given to me. Therefore, going as my witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit, *preach the good news* of repentance and forgiveness of sin in my name, baptizing those who repent and believe, and *make disciples*, teaching them to obey all I have commanded. Do this in all nations, beginning in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, and I will be with you to the very end of the age.

A Great Commission church is a church that carries out this commission. It is their continuous mission until he comes. They *preach the good news* in all the world and *make disciples* of all nations (peoples), locally and globally.

Chapter One

The Living God Is a Missionary God

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45–47)

Two disheartened disciples were walking back home on the road to Emmaus. Returning from the Feast of Passover in Jerusalem, they were talking about what had happened the past weekend. Suddenly, a stranger joined them. He was curious, and asked them what they were discussing. Apparently he was unaware of what had just taken place—Jesus of Nazareth had been killed, crucified, along with two other criminals. And it was the religious leaders who had handed him over to the Roman authorities to carry out the sentence of death. They shared with this stranger about the hope they had, that this Jesus “was the one who was going to redeem Israel,”

*The Road to
Emmaus*

for he was “a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.”¹ Then they told him that earlier that morning, the third day since his death, several women had gone to the tomb, but the body was gone. They “came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.”²

Suddenly the stranger replied, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ [Messiah] have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”³ Then he began to explain what the Scriptures said about the Messiah, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets. As they approached Emmaus, the two disciples invited the stranger to stay with them overnight. While eating together, this unknown guest took a piece of bread, gave thanks, broke it and started to give it to them. Suddenly, they recognized who he was—Jesus! But just as suddenly as he had appeared, he disappeared. He was gone!

*Jesus Is
Alive!*

Hurriedly they returned to Jerusalem. When they found the eleven apostles, and others gathered with them, they excitedly declared, “It is true! The Lord has risen.”⁴

They explained how they had seen him, talked with him, and recognized him when he broke bread with them. While still talking, Jesus himself suddenly stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said.⁵ He showed them his hands and his feet. Knowing they were thinking he was a ghost, Jesus asked for something to eat. He was given a piece of broiled fish, which he ate before his amazed disciples.

*Opened
Minds*

Jesus then began to explain, just as he had with the two on the road to Emmaus, that everything written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to be fulfilled. He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them that what was written concerning him was found throughout the Tanakh, their Hebrew Bible.⁶ What was recorded in each of the three major sections of the Old Testament, Jesus explained, was that “the Christ [Messiah] will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”⁷ It was the message of the sacrifice of God’s Messiah for the salvation of the nations.

*Understanding
the Scriptures*

Although we have no indication that Jesus quoted any specific passages, he clearly taught them that “the whole of Scripture... finds its focus and fulfillment *both* in the life and death and resurrection of Israel’s Messiah, *and* in the mission to all nations, which flows out from that event.”⁸ As disciples of the crucified and risen Jesus, their minds were opened to understand the Scriptures messianically *and* missiologically. “Hence a messianic reading of the Old Testament [had] to flow on to a missiological reading—which is precisely the connection Jesus makes in Luke 24.”⁹ Recognizing Jesus as Messiah was also to recognize his redemptive role in God’s mission for Israel as a blessing to the nations. He was indeed the Savior of the world. Therefore, the good news of his salvation must be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations. And they were to be his witnesses.

*The Depth and
Breadth of God’s love*

The messianic and missiological reading of the Old Testament revealed both the depth and breadth of the love of the living God. In the Law of Moses was the story of the faith of Abraham. He willingly offered his son Isaac, whose life was spared by a ram God provided as a sacrifice. Thus, it was recorded that God declared, “because you have done this and not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you... and through your seed [the Messiah] all nations of the earth will be blessed because you obeyed me.”¹⁰ In the Prophets were found the words of Isaiah who spoke of God’s suffering servant. He was “led like a lamb to the slaughter.” The sacrifice of his life would “sprinkle many nations” and “justify many” because “he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.”¹¹ In the Writings was found the psalm of King David, who spoke of “the suffering of the afflicted one” whom God had forsaken. Yet God “listened to his cry for help.” As a result, “all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.”¹² This is what was written in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—the sacrifice of God’s Messiah for the salvation of all nations, a revelation of the depth and breadth of God’s love for a lost and dying world alienated from its creator (see Appendix B for additional references).

In Jesus of Nazareth—the seed of Abraham, the descendent of David, the Lamb of God—all that was written in Scripture was fulfilled, fully and finally. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

is the God “who spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all.”¹³ What is taught throughout the Old Testament concerning the sacrifice of God’s Messiah for humankind’s salvation finds its climactic fulfillment in the story of Jesus in the New Testament. The fathomless depth and boundless breadth of God’s love is succinctly expressed in the words of what is perhaps the most well-known verse in the Bible, John 3:16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” What amazing grace and unbounded mercy for the entire human race!

*The Living God Is
a Missionary God*

The living God is a missionary God, for he is a God of love. From eternity he planned humankind’s salvation. In Christ, “the Lamb slain from the creation of the world,” God intended to bring about “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of [his] grace.”¹⁴ Before the beginning of time God, who is love, chose his Messiah to be the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.¹⁵ God’s redemptive mission is from eternity and was revealed in the coming of his Messiah “in the fullness of time.”¹⁶ The mission of God to save the world began before creation. God has been on mission from eternity, and Scripture tells the story.¹⁷ Thus, rather than the Bible being the basis for missions, missions is the basis of the Bible. God is a missionary God. His book is a missionary book, a book about sending—the sending of his Son as the Savior of the world, the sending of his Spirit to give new life, and the sending of his people to bring the good news of the Savior to all.

Principle of A Great Commission Church

The understanding and embracing of the Scriptures that reveal the living God is a missionary God, his Messiah is the Savior of the world, and his people are his missionary people.

Chapter Two

The Great Commandment

“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
(Matthew 22:37–39)

God chose to bless all nations through Abraham. He entered into a “covenant of love” with him and his descendants.¹ He promised to be their God, they would be his people, and he would make his home among them.² Keeping covenant, God delivered Abraham’s descendants out of slavery. He freed them to worship and serve him, and brought them into a land “flowing with milk and honey” where they would live and God would have his dwelling among them. Having so graciously redeemed and released them, God called them to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength...and your neighbor as yourself.”³ As they had been loved, so they were to love God and those whom he loved—others.

*A Covenant
of Love*

*Commandments
to Love*

God's commands were the ways in which they were to express and show their love for the Lord their God and other people. So it was that the Ten Commandments began with the words, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."⁴ In response to God's great deliverance, his people were to worship and serve him alone, the true and living God. They were not to serve or make images of any other gods. They were not to misuse his name. Six days they were to work, and rest on the seventh day, setting it apart as holy to the Lord their God. Following these four commands concerning love toward God, six commands were given concerning loving others. They were to honor father and mother. They were not to murder, commit adultery, steal, or give false testimony against neighbors. They were not to covet anything that belonged to their neighbors. Following these commands, upon which all subsequent laws were based, was to love God and others as oneself. These commandments were grounded in his "covenant of love."

*Loving as
Jesus Loved*

Jesus, God's Messiah, lived a perfect life. He fully obeyed God's commands. His righteousness went beyond merely keeping the Law to fulfilling the Law. He loved his Father with all his heart, soul, and mind, and he loved others as himself. His obedience was the result of such love. Jesus was an example of what he taught in declaring that all the Law and the Prophets are summed up in "The Great Commandment." It is love that fulfills the intent and purpose for which the Law was given—that we might love God and others as he has loved us, loving as Jesus loved.

*Love Without
Limits*

Jesus deepened and broadened what law-fulfilling love meant. Loving God fully was to do the Father's will, not his own will. This is what led him to the cross—the will of the Father.⁵ Thus, "by that will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."⁶ Jesus "became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"⁷ The greatest commandment led to the greatest sacrifice—for all people. His love was unconditional and unlimited. There is no greater love than for a man to lay down his life, not only for his friends, but for the entire human race, including his enemies. Love without limits.

*Jesus, Friend
of Sinners*

For the disciples, Jesus' love of others was an eye-opening, heart-expanding experience. Jesus was a friend of all, including sinners of all kinds. He called Matthew, a tax collector, to follow him and Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to a meal at his home to meet all his friends, other tax collectors.⁸ At one point, Jesus did not even wait for an invitation, but made an appointment to meet a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, at his home, saying that he had come to "seek and to save the lost."⁹ On another occasion, while at dinner in a Pharisee's home, Jesus allowed a woman who had lived a sinful life to pour perfume on his feet and then declared her forgiven.¹⁰ Jesus even publicly talked with an immoral woman at a well in Samaria and told her that he was the Messiah. As a result, an entire Samaritan village came out to meet Jesus and invited him to stay with them. He did so for two days, and they confessed that he was indeed the Savior of the world, including Samaritans.¹¹ Further, Jesus spent time with those who were considered "unclean." He visited the home of a man known as Simon the Leper. On one occasion he healed ten lepers, including a Samaritan, and the only one returned to thank him—the Samaritan.¹² Although Jesus declared he was "sent only to the lost sheep of Israel," he responded to the faith of a Canaanite woman and healed her daughter.¹³ He did likewise for a Roman Centurion whose servant was sick.¹⁴ Jesus was a friend to outsiders.

*Go and Do
Likewise*

When tested by a Jewish expert in the law concerning who was his neighbor, Jesus told the story of a "Good Samaritan" who helped a Jewish traveler who had been beaten and robbed. Two Jewish religious leaders passed by and did not stop to help the wounded man. But a Samaritan did. Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'¹⁵ Jesus dramatically expanded and broadened the circle of neighbor love. Loving a neighbor as yourself included not only those near, but those in need, not only those like you, but those who were not. The Great Commandment got greater.

Shortly before this encounter with the lawyer, Jesus had set out from Galilee on his final trip to Jerusalem. As he and the disciples were approaching a village in Samaria, he sent some messengers on ahead to get things ready for him. But the people did not welcome him

because he was on his way to Jerusalem, and Samaritans resented Jews traveling through their territory. When two of the disciples, James and John, saw this they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?”¹⁶ And what was Jesus’ response? He rebuked them. Yes, the disciples had much to learn about loving others—including enemies!¹⁷

*The Great
Commandment*

Like Jesus, the disciples had not been sent to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to the lost sheep of Israel. However, they were to learn this was a matter of priority, not exclusivity. To the Jews first did not mean to the Jews only. It meant that what God began with the Jews was also to go to Samaritans and Gentiles—through them. It was not a matter of partiality or status, but of primacy and service. God is a missionary God, his love is deep and wide, sacrificial, and inclusive. His passion to save, and his compassion to save all, is why love for him is to be all-consuming and all-encompassing. The Great Commandment is response to God’s great love. Those who have been greatly loved, greatly love—God and all those he loves.

*Open
Hearts*

Jesus opened the minds of his disciples to a messianic and missiological understanding of their Bibles. The coming of a Messiah who would die and rise from the dead for the salvation of the human race revealed the nature and scope of God’s love—intentional and inclusive, unconditional and unlimited. His love had no limits. God is love. He chose to love all while all were yet sinners. This is why he is a missionary God. “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. . . . since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”¹⁸ God’s love prompts our love. Love for God and others is the result of and response to God’s love revealed in Christ. Opened minds to understand the depth and breadth of God’s love leads to opened hearts that love as he loves.

Principle of A Great Commission Church

The commitment to love the living God fully, and to love all people as themselves, loving as God loves.

Chapter Three

The Universal Commission

“Go into all the world and preach the good news to the whole creation...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
(Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19–20)

Jesus was a Galilean, and with the possible exception of Judas Iscariot, so were all the twelve disciples. They all came from the northern region of Israel, a region with a larger and more diverse population than the southern region of Judea. This area was known as “Galilee of the Nations.” It was surrounded on three sides by non-Jewish populations (“the nations”). Gentile influence was far greater than in the south, with several major trade routes going through Galilee. In contrast to the largely homogeneous Jewish population of Judea in the south, Galilee was a region where contact with non-Jews was a part of life. And this was the region where most of Jesus’ ministry took place. When he began his public ministry, Jesus left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, on the north end of the Sea of Galilee in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali “to fulfill what was said

*Galilee of the
Nations*

through the prophet Isaiah: ‘Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.’”¹

*A Light for
the Gentiles*

According to Isaiah, this region that God had humbled when the Assyrians conquered and deported the people would now be honored by the coming of a “great light.” A child was to be born, a son.

The government would be on his shoulders, and he would be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne, and over his kingdom.”² From the line of King David a Messiah was to come to “Galilee of the Nations (Gentiles).” Living in darkness, the people would see a great light—God’s servant who, in the words of Isaiah, will “restore the tribes of Jacob and...[bē] a light for the Gentiles... [to] bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”³

So Jesus began to preach the good news of the kingdom throughout Galilee. “News about him spread all over Syria...Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis (Ten Greek Cities), Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.”⁴ At the outset of his ministry, the first glimpse of a universal mission began to dawn as Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom throughout “Galilee of the Nations.”

*The Savior of
the World*

Yes, the Messiah was to come from David’s line, for “salvation is of the Jews” as Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria.⁵ But salvation was not restricted to the Jews. When Jesus revealed to her that he

was the Messiah, she went back to her village. “Come, see a man,” she exclaimed, “who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ [Messiah]?”⁶ When they came out to see Jesus, they urged him to stay with them and as a result many became believers because of what he told them. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”⁷ This was the confession of John the Baptist earlier when he declared that Jesus was “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”⁸

*The Initial
Commission*

Initially, Jesus sent out the Twelve telling them, “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.”⁹ Similar to Jesus, their focus was on the Jews. The descendants of Abraham were the first to be given God’s revelation of the covenant and the law, so they were first now to be given the message of the kingdom of God. Through the nation of Israel the revelation of God’s salvation was to be brought to the nations. This initial “local commission” focused on the Jews, but, as mentioned earlier, this was a matter of priority, not exclusivity. When non-Jews came to Jesus he ministered to them and, at times, discovered greater faith among them than even among the Jews.

When among the Jews, Jesus frequently warned those whom he healed and delivered not to tell anyone lest religious leaders seek his death. But to a man delivered of demons in the Gentile region of the Gadarenes, Jesus told him to “go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord had done for you.”¹⁰ As a result, he began to spread the news about what Jesus had done for him in the Decapolis (Ten Cities). Later, when some Greeks who had come to worship in Jerusalem wanted to see Jesus, he told the crowd that “when I am lifted up from the earth [crucified]...[I] will draw all men [Jews and Greeks] to myself.”¹¹ The “local commission” to the Jewish nation anticipated and was preparation for a “universal commission” to all nations.

*God’s Blessing
on His people*

The initial blessing given to Abraham was eventually to bless all nations. This universal blessing of all the families of the earth through Abraham’s seed is found five times in the book of Genesis, three spoken directly to Abraham and repeated to his son Isaac, and to his grandson Jacob.¹² The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob intended to bless the patriarchs and through them all nations. And what was this blessing of Abraham that was to come to all peoples? Was it riches, large families, land, fame?

*God’s Eternal
Covenant*

The descendants of Abraham were to be marked by their God, for he had entered into an eternal covenant with them. “I will establish my covenant,” God said, “as an everlasting covenant between me

and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come; to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”¹³ After delivering them from the bondage of Egypt, God told Moses to have the Israelites “make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.”¹⁴ This sanctuary would be called the “Tent of Meeting.” God told Moses, “I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated for my glory. . . Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.”¹⁵ God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants that he would be their God, they would be his people, and he would dwell among them. They were identified as belonging to God as his people among whom he had taken up residence. His “Name” was on them. And so it was that God told Moses and Aaron to bless the Israelites by saying to them, “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”¹⁶ In so doing, Moses and Aaron would “put [God’s] name on the Israelites,” and he would bless them.¹⁷

*The Blessing
of Abraham*

The blessing of Abraham is clearly identified with the gospel. “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles [nations] by faith,” Paul declared, “and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. . . Christ redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles [nations] through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”¹⁸ Through the gospel the blessing of Abraham is now given to all who have faith in Christ. Through faith in his sacrifice, all receive the promise of the Spirit, whether Jews or Gentiles, and are adopted into God’s family. By the Spirit, God becomes “Abba, Father” as “the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”¹⁹

*The Universal
Commission*

The eternal covenant made with Abraham is now extended by the new covenant, sealed with Christ’s blood, to all who believe, to all who are, by faith, Abraham’s descendants. God is now their Father, they are his children, and he lives with and in them. The blessing of Abraham—the blessing of relationship, kinship, and fellowship with God—is now extended to all who put their trust in God’s Messiah, the seed of Abraham. This is the blessing that is to come to all nations.

Therefore, Christ's command to preach the good news to all creation and make disciples of all nations has a two-thousand-year connection to God's word to Abraham to bless him, and through him to bless all peoples on earth. Although the universal commission comes after Christ's resurrection, it is no afterthought. It is an eternal forethought, embedded in the heart of a missionary God and expressed in the Abrahamic covenant.

The fact that Christ's universal commission is found in all four Gospels and the book of Acts, and was given within his last forty days on earth, indicates its importance.²⁰ In a sense, it was his "last will and testament." Thus, it is imperative to understand the commission Christ has given his church—*preach* the good news of repentance and forgiveness in his name to everyone, and *make disciples* among all the nations. Accompanying participles explain how these commands are to be accomplished—by "going, baptizing, and teaching." And with this final commission came promises assuring ultimate fulfillment, the promises of Christ's authority, his power, and his presence. This is the universal commission of Christ. It is to be carried out beginning in Jerusalem and continuing to the ends of the earth—until the end of the age.

Principle of A Great Commission Church

The involvement in Christ's universal commission as his witnesses to take the gospel to, and make disciples of, all nations, local and globally.

Great Commission Church Movements

Chapter Four

The Spirit on All Flesh

“In the last days’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.’”
(Acts 2:17–18)

Jesus told his disciples that they were to be his witnesses to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. But before they went into all the world, they were to wait. They were not to leave Jerusalem until they had been “clothed with power from on high.”¹ They were to wait for the promised gift of the Father, the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the Old Testament there is an expectation of a day when God’s Spirit would be given to all his people. Moses expressed this desire, wishing that “all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them” as he had on the seventy elders.² He recognized it was God’s presence that set Israel apart from all other nations. “If your Presence does not go with us,” Moses said to

*Spirit on All
God’s People*

God, “what else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”²³ Later the prophets spoke of a time when God would pour out his Spirit upon his people. Ezekiel saw a day when God would give his people a new heart and a new spirit. “I will remove from you,” said the Lord, “your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”²⁴ Jeremiah prophesied the coming of a new covenant. “I will put my law in their minds and write in on their hearts,” said God. “I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest.”²⁵ Joel spoke of a time when God would pour his Spirit on all flesh. “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women,” declared the Lord, ‘I will pour out my Spirit in those days.’”²⁶

*Spirit on
God’s Messiah*

As Jesus began his public ministry, he was baptized by John the Baptist to “fulfill all righteousness.”⁷ It was at this point that the Spirit of God descended upon him, and remained on him, “for the one whom God has sent speaks the word of God; to him God gives the Spirit without limit.”⁸ John confessed, “I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water [God] told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”⁹ Jesus, born of the Spirit, was anointed by the Spirit to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the bound, sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed.¹⁰ He was the Messiah, which means “anointed one.” Thus, he was known as Jesus, the Messiah (Greek, *Christos*).

Another Counselor

Jesus promised his disciples that when he left to return to the Father he would not leave them orphaned; he would come to them. “I will ask the Father,” he said, “and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever. . . he lives with you and will be in you.”¹¹ Jesus told them that when the Spirit comes, “he will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”¹² Further, as the Spirit of truth, Jesus said “he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell

you what is yet to come.”¹³ They had heard Jesus declare on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles, “If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” They would come to understand that he was referring to the Holy Spirit that those who believed in him were to receive when he was glorified. Jesus had told the woman at the well that “whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”¹⁴ And when the Spirit was poured out, this spring would become a stream of living water flowing out from within.

*Greater Works
than These*

Jesus told his disciples that “anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to my Father.”¹⁵ Apparently the coming of the Spirit would enable Jesus’ followers to do what he did on an even greater scale. The world was incapable of accepting or knowing the Spirit. But Jesus told his disciples that when the Spirit comes, “he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”¹⁶ Now, no longer through Jesus, but through his followers. The Spirit of truth was to continue his convicting work through them “in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me,” said Jesus, and “in regard to righteousness, because I am going to my Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”¹⁷ Thus it was that Jesus commissioned his disciples. “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you,” he told them. And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ What was received was released when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, when the “spring of water welling up to eternal life” within became a “stream of living water flowing out from their innermost being.”¹⁹ Through the witness of Christ’s followers the Holy Spirit would convince, convict, convert and confirm the truth of the gospel.

*Outpouring of
the Holy Spirit*

For forty days after his death Jesus showed himself alive to the disciples and taught them about the kingdom of God. As the time drew near of his return to heaven, Jesus told them that they were not leave to Jerusalem. He said, “wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few

days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”²⁰ Shortly thereafter, Jesus was “taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”²¹ As they were intently staring up into the sky, two angels spoke to them: “This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven.”²² Returning to Jerusalem, the disciples, along with over one hundred other followers of Jesus, joined in prayer in an upper room where the disciples were staying, waiting for the coming of the Spirit. Suddenly, on the tenth day, the Day of Pentecost, “a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”²³

*Spirit Within
Filling All Flesh*

The promised gift of the Father was poured out on all who were gathered, a group of about a hundred and twenty. All were baptized with the Holy Spirit. What Moses desired, the prophets foresaw, John the Baptist anticipated, and Jesus promised, happened—the Spirit poured out on all God’s people. God’s presence was now within and filling his people.²⁴ By his death and resurrection, Jesus initiated the new covenant. God’s eternal covenant would now include all who put their faith in God’s Messiah. All became his people, and he became their God. He redeemed them “that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles [nations] through Christ Jesus, so that by faith [they] might receive the promise of the Spirit.”²⁵ God’s family would now expand significantly as the outpouring of the Spirit on “all flesh” would include all whom the Lord God would call, both Jews and Gentiles. All born of the Spirit are God’s children and all are anointed with the Spirit as witnesses of His Messiah, his Anointed One. Thus, waiting for “power from on high” was essential in being true and effective witnesses of Jesus Christ as his anointed ambassadors.

*The Tower of
Babel Reversed*

On the Day of Pentecost, thousands had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the climactic day of the Feast of Weeks—the full ingathering of the barley harvest fifty days after the Feast of Passover. During the intertestamental period, Pentecost also became the day of the celebration of the supposed giving of the Law by angels in the languages of the seventy nations scattered after the Tower of Babel.²⁶

Pilgrims from over a dozen nations had gathered in Jerusalem for this great day of celebration in the courts of the temple, the house of prayer for all nations. Suddenly this multinational multitude heard a number of Galileans praising God in their native languages—a reversal of the Tower of Babel! What could this mean? Are these Galileans drunk? Have they gone mad? Peter, standing up with the Eleven, boldly proclaimed that this was what the prophet Joel had predicted would happen in the last days. The Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, and whoever called on the name of the Lord would be saved.

*An Empowered
Multitude*

Peter began to speak to the gathered throng about Jesus of Nazareth. He “was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead.”²⁷ And “we are all witnesses of the fact,” declared Peter. He told them that Jesus had been exalted to God’s right hand and had poured out what they now were seeing and hearing. Peter concluded, “Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”²⁸ So convicted by the Holy Spirit, many responded and said to Peter and the other disciples, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.” Further, Peter told them that they also would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . [for] “the promise is to you and your children and all who are far off [Gentiles] . . . all whom the Lord our God will call.” Three thousand accepted Peter’s message, were baptized, received the Spirit, and were added to the fellowship of believers. Among these three thousand believers were not only Hebrews, but many Hellenistic Jews from the diaspora, nations outside of Palestine. Thus, these first believers were a mixed multitude, a multilingual and multinational crowd, both Jews by birth as well as Gentile proselytes and God-fearers.²⁹ All were indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit, and along with the one hundred and twenty, all were empowered to be Christ’s witnesses.³⁰

Principle of A Great Commission Church

The experience and embrace of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to give life and empower all who believe as God’s children and Christ’s witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Great Commission Church Movements

Chapter Five

The Church in Jerusalem

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went....Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.”
(Acts 8:4; 11:19)

From the outset, the church in Jerusalem was multinational. Although all were Jewish in faith, the community of believers was made up of not only native-born Hebrews, but Diaspora-born Hellenists from the nations. It would appear that of the three thousand who believed and were baptized, a good number remained in Jerusalem beyond the Day of Pentecost. In fact, within a short time the number of believing men alone grew to about five thousand in Jerusalem.¹ Undoubtedly, many were Hellenistic Jews, such as the Seven, who would later take over the distribution of food to the widows.

*Multinational
Community*

Making Disciples

This multinational community gave themselves “to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”² These first believers became disciples. They gave themselves to “the apostles’ teaching.” All were taught to obey and put into practice what Jesus had taught the Twelve, beginning with the first command to be baptized.³ So consistent was this pattern that all who believed, were baptized, and received the promise of the Spirit were called disciples.⁴ Believing the good news and making disciples were linked, for this was the commission Christ had given his disciples. Thus, an ongoing discipleship process was initiated as disciples continued to learn and live what Jesus had commanded. Eventually, the pattern of being doers of the word included spreading the word and making disciples of those who believed. Those who continued in the word were true disciples who, in so doing, made disciples, who in turn did likewise. Disciples multiplied disciples. The church in Jerusalem was a discipled and discipling church.

Life Together

The church in Jerusalem gave themselves to “the fellowship” (*koinonia*), sharing with all who were in need. Of one heart and mind, gladly they sold their possessions, goods, and even their lands to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters. Their love for Christ was expressed in a love for one another, for God had poured out his love into their hearts by the Holy Spirit who had been given to them.⁵ By such love for each other, all in Jerusalem knew that they were Christ’s followers.⁶ Given to hospitality, they broke bread and ate together in their homes, remembering and proclaiming the Lord’s death as they celebrated the new covenant in his blood. Further, the church in Jerusalem was also a praying church as well as a giving church. These will be more fully addressed later.

*Multiplying
Prepared Leaders*

The Jerusalem church was initially led by twelve Hebrew apostles from Galilee. With the number of disciples rapidly increasing, some Hellenistic believers felt their widows were being overlooked by the Aramaic-speaking community in the daily distribution of food. It was apparent that the apostles could no longer continue to “wait on tables” lest they neglect their primary responsibility of “the ministry of the

word and prayer.”⁷ Multiplying leaders was essential—the right kind of leaders, prepared leaders. So they called the congregation together and told them to select seven men from among them, “full of the Spirit and wisdom,” whom they would appoint to oversee this growing ministry of “waiting on tables.” Seven were selected, all Hellenists. Showing their trust in the congregation, the apostles confirmed their choice, prayed, and laid hands on the Seven and set them apart to this ministry. As a result, “the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”⁸ Stephen and Philip, two of the Seven, were gifted leaders and joined the apostles in spreading the Word which was confirmed with miraculous signs. A multinational Jewish community was now being led and served by multinational Hebraic and Hellenistic Jewish leaders.

The Jerusalem church was born and was now growing as the gospel spread in a multinational Jewish environment. Although no longer able to meet together in the temple courts, the believers continued to meet in homes. As the apostles continued to preach the gospel, sick were brought into the streets and laid on mats to be healed. “Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.”⁹ This initial movement among the Jews was centered in Jerusalem. The witness to Christ was largely among those living in or coming into the city, both Hebrews and Hellenists.

*Scattered
Involuntarily*

However, the gospel was about to be spread beyond Jerusalem. When violent persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, believers were scattered. Coming from unbelieving Hellenistic Jews, the attack was directed primarily against Hellenistic believers, including leaders such as Stephen, who was stoned to death. Soon many, if not most, Hellenistic believers were forced to flee. Though scattered involuntarily, they “preached the word wherever they went.”¹⁰ Philip, one of the Seven, went to Samaria and preached the gospel, which was accompanied by miracles of healing and deliverance. As a result, many Samaritans believed and were baptized. When the church in Jerusalem heard of this, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they saw the genuineness of what had taken place, they laid hands on the new converts and they received the Spirit, thus confirming that they too were of the household of faith. Before returning to Jerusalem, Peter and John preached the gospel in many more Samaritan villages.

The gospel was now beginning to work powerfully among a nearby nation of people the Jews had shunned and avoided.

Divinely Directed

Shortly thereafter, Philip, led by the Spirit, left Samaria and journeyed south along a desert road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. While on his way, he came upon a high official from the court of the Queen of Ethiopia (Upper Egypt). He was a eunuch, in charge of the treasury. Returning home from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he was reading aloud from the scroll of Isaiah about a suffering servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53). When Philip heard what he was reading, he asked him if he understood what he was reading. “How can I, he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’”¹¹ Beginning with this passage, Philip told him the good news about Jesus. The eunuch, most likely a Gentile God-fearer, believed Philip’s message, was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing. According to tradition, this Ethiopian eunuch was the first to bring the gospel to his people in northern Africa.¹² Thus, with this “divine appointment” began a growing story of the spread of the gospel among the non-Jewish Gentile nations.

Going Voluntarily

Meanwhile, the gospel continued to spread throughout Palestine, into Galilee and throughout Judea. Peter voluntarily chose to leave Jerusalem to visit believers in Lydda in Judea. There a bedridden paralytic named Aeneas was healed. As a result, “all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and turned to the Lord.”¹³ In Joppa, near Lydda, Peter prayed for a woman who had died and she came back to life. “This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.”¹⁴ A people movement among the Jews was taking place as growing numbers, including entire villages, turned to the Lord.

Going Reluctantly

While in Joppa, Peter had a vision that prepared him to go to Caesarea, to the home of Cornelius, who was a Roman Centurion a Gentile God-fearer. While in prayer, he saw a sheet come down from heaven filled with unclean animals. When he heard a voice telling him to get up, kill, and eat, Peter protested saying that he had never eaten anything impure or unclean. Then he heard the voice speak again, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”¹⁵ The vision happened three times. While Peter was wondering what the

vision was all about, he heard some men calling for him at the gate of the home where he was staying, the home of Simon the tanner. Three messengers had come from Cornelius. In response to a vision he had seen, Cornelius had sent them to ask Peter to “come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.”¹⁶ Told by the Spirit to go, Peter went with the men, accompanied by six Jewish brothers. When they arrived, Peter found that this Roman Centurion had gathered his whole household. He explained why he had called for Peter. “Now we are all here in the presence of God,” said Cornelius, “to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”¹⁷

Cornelius was a God-fearer, a “person of peace.”¹⁸ God had prepared him, with his entire household, to receive the message of salvation. So Peter began to preach the good news about Jesus. While he was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who had gathered. Peter, along with the Jewish believers who had come with him, were amazed that “the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.”¹⁹ Thus, Peter concluded no one should be kept from being baptized in water, since “they have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”²⁰ So it was that the entire group was baptized. Word spread throughout Judea that the Gentiles “also had received the word of God.”²¹ When Peter returned to Jerusalem and reported what had happened, even skeptical Jewish believers had to conclude that God had “even granted the Gentiles repentance unto life.”²²

*Scattered to
Distant Nations*

Not only was the gospel spreading among nations in Palestine, it was spreading far beyond. And this may have begun shortly after Pentecost. Clearly, the earliest believers became Christ’s witnesses in Jerusalem, but others, undoubtedly, returned to their native lands with the gospel after the Day of Pentecost. This may well have been how the church in Rome began since there were “visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism,” at Pentecost.²³ We will have more to say about this later. Further, some of those scattered by the persecution after the death of Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia (modern day Lebanon), the island of Cyprus and Antioch in Syria.

*Monocultural
Evangelism*

Initially the church at Jerusalem reached their own kind of people, the Jews. Apparently for the first number of years the spread of the gospel was largely

confined to Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews. Peter recognized and affirmed God's working among the Samaritans and Gentiles, for he had seen God give them the same Spirit as he had given the Jews. Yet he remained "an apostle to the Jews."²⁴ Bridging into the Gentile world was difficult, especially for Hebraic Jews such as the apostles. Other than Philip, even the Hellenistic believers who were scattered by persecution as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch initially told the message only to Jews. Though geographically dispersed far beyond Jerusalem, they continued same-culture evangelism, reaching only their own kind of people, Jews living in these nations. Intentional cross-cultural evangelism to Gentile nations had yet to take place.²⁵ Jesus had commissioned his disciples to go only to the Jews, the lost sheep of Israel. But after the Spirit had come upon them, this initial commission was expanded to the whole world, beginning in Jerusalem and extending to the ends of the earth. The gospel was to be preached to the whole creation, and disciples made of all nations. Monocultural evangelism was eventually to expand to multicultural evangelism. Even the Twelve, according to tradition, would, in time take, the gospel to the nations (see Appendix C).

Thus, it was largely through the involuntary scattering of Hellenistic believers from the church in Jerusalem that the gospel initially spread among the nations within and beyond Palestine. Although perhaps hesitant at first, the Jerusalem church eventually became a Great Commission church. This "mother church" in due season confirmed and affirmed that "through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" both Jews and Gentiles are saved.²⁶ As a result, this largely Jewish church eventually gave birth to churches that spread the gospel to the Gentile nations.

Principle of A Great Commission Church

The dispersion voluntarily, and at times involuntarily, of witnesses that spread the gospel wherever they go, and establish communities of disciples among people of different cultures.

Chapter Six

The Gospel of Grace

“We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved. . . For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
(Acts 15:11; Ephesians 2:8–9)

Jesus was full of grace and truth. Full of grace, he had compassion for the sick and healed them, concern for the hungry and fed them, empathy for the oppressed and freed them, sympathy for the brokenhearted and restored them. In love he showed grace to all—young and old, men and women, insiders and outsiders, Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. What amazing grace! Full of truth, Jesus spoke with wisdom and insight. He taught the multitudes, instructed the disciples, forgave the repentant, answered the inquisitive, and confronted the self-righteous. In love he spoke truth to all—rich and poor, upper class and lower class, religious leaders and political rulers, Roman soldiers and tax collectors. What liberating truth! Jesus was

*Full of Grace
and Truth*

full of grace and truth—in that order. He was gracious and spoke the truth.

A Dying Messiah

Perhaps even more challenging was what Jesus said about himself and why came. He said he was the good shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep.¹ He said he had come to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, to seek and to save the lost, to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.² Shortly before his final journey to Jerusalem, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” “They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’”³ Then, asking them directly, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter responded, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”⁴ This revelation, Jesus told him, came not from man but from his Father in heaven. From that time on, Jesus began explaining to his disciples that he must suffer at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and on the third day be raised to life. Peter was so upset by what he heard that he rebuked Jesus, telling him this would never happen to him. How could the Messiah die? Unthinkable! Wasn’t Jesus the Son of the Living God? Wasn’t his kingdom eternal? But Jesus reprimanded Peter, calling him a tool of Satan. “You are a stumbling block to me,” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”⁵ It was clear, circumventing the cross was not God’s plan. No dying, no rising. No cross, no crown. No sacrifice, no salvation.

*Words of
Forgiveness*

A dying Messiah—the disciples just didn’t get it, at least not yet. They were slow to grasp the meaning and magnitude of their Messiah’s death. But they were committed to following Jesus, at least until the night before his death, the night when Judas betrayed him, Peter disowned him, and all deserted him. Even after his resurrection when he appeared to them, including a private appearance to Peter, the disciples struggled to believe. They knew he was alive, but what did it all mean? Apparently, they began to “get it” when Jesus “opened their minds” to understand their Scriptures—the Messiah was to suffer and die, and his suffering and death was for the sins of the people, all people. As a result, forgiveness in his name was to be proclaimed to all, including the nations. All this was in their Bibles! Most likely they also remembered Jesus’ words from the cross—words of forgiveness for (amazingly) those who were putting him to death: his enemies!

They also recalled the words of one of the two criminals crucified alongside of Jesus. This guilty thief admitted that he was being punished justly for what he had done, but that Jesus had done nothing wrong. He recognized an innocent man was suffering the punishment of the guilty. And when he cried out for Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom, they heard those astonishing words from Jesus: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”⁶ Forgiveness for the guilty pronounced, and life promised to a repentant criminal. A glimpse of the gospel of grace.

*Words of
Restoration*

Then, after Jesus rose from the dead, there was that meeting at the Sea of Galilee. Several of the disciples had gone fishing. All night they fished but caught nothing. Early in the morning, someone called out from the shore, “Friends, haven’t you any fish? Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”⁷ They did, and they caught so many fish they were unable to haul in the net. When the disciples finally got to shore they discovered who it was that had called out. It was Jesus! And he had prepared breakfast for them! After they finished eating, he began to question Simon Peter. “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these.”⁸ Three times Jesus asked him the same question, and three times Peter told him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”⁹ Each time Jesus responded, telling Peter to feed his lambs and his sheep. Had not Peter denied Jesus three times? Clearly Peter was being reinstated—forgiveness and restoration. Amazing grace! And this was true for all the disciples who had also deserted him. They were beginning to understand God’s grace.

*Grace for a
Multitude*

But it was when the Spirit came at Pentecost that the disciples finally got it. Their Messiah had to die and be raised from the dead to “take away the sin of the world.”¹⁰ This is what Jesus had opened their minds to understand from the Scriptures. The Spirit had been poured out, bringing to mind what Jesus had taught. The Spirit was bearing witness about Jesus, and they were to bear witness also.¹¹ Forgiveness and life in his name was now freely offered to all, the gift of God’s grace. Thus, Peter, with the Eleven, announced forgiveness and salvation to the multitude on the Day of Pentecost. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our

God will call.”¹² Day after day the apostles continued to proclaim the good news that Jesus was the Messiah and that salvation was “found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”¹³ What amazing grace—forgiveness and salvation, the gift of God in Christ!

*Grace for a
Persecuting Pharisee*

Perhaps few knew or understood God’s amazing grace better than the Apostle Paul. His pedigree was impressive: “Circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”¹⁴ No one was more dedicated and devoted than Saul of Tarsus. Not only was he dedicated to observing the law, he was devoted to defending the God who gave the law, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But everything changed when, one day, on the road to Damascus to apprehend and arrest followers of Jesus, he heard a voice speaking to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Confused, Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” came the reply.¹⁵ What a shocking revelation! Could it be that this zealous Pharisee was persecuting the very God he was seeking to defend? Yes, indeed that was the case! But then, amazingly, this violent persecutor was shown mercy. He later confessed “I acted in ignorance and unbelief...the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was poured out on me abundantly.”¹⁶ Amazing grace! Unmerited favor. Undeserved mercy.

*A Servant and
a Witness*

The Lord explained that he appointed Saul to be his servant and his witness of what he had seen and what he would yet see. He was sending him to his own people, the Jews, and to the Gentiles, the nations, “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”¹⁷ Saul, later known as Paul, was obedient to this “heavenly vision.” Beginning in Damascus, and then in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, he preached that “they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”¹⁸ With the twelve apostles, whose minds Jesus had opened to understand the Scriptures, Paul likewise declared that what he preached was what Moses and the prophets had said—“that the Christ [Messiah] would suffer and as the first to rise from

the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles [nations].”¹⁹

*The Gospel
According to the
Scriptures*

The gospel Paul preached was what he had received: “That Christ [Messiah] died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.”²⁰ Further, Christ appeared to many more, including over five hundred disciples and to Paul himself. Paul, as had the twelve apostles, came to understand what the Scriptures taught about the death and rising of the Messiah. The meaning of all this was further revealed and explained by the risen Messiah himself who had appointed him to be a servant and a witness to what he had seen and what he would yet see. Thus, Paul declared that “the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”²¹

*The Gospel of
God’s Grace*

The most complete explanation of the gospel Paul preached is found in the letter to the Romans. It was the gospel of God’s grace he had proclaimed to Jews and Gentiles alike. This gospel, Paul declared, is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentiles. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”²² Right standing with God is a gift, a gift to all, for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”²³ The Gentiles, although they knew God through what he had created, “neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish minds were darkened. . . they became fools, and changed the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”²⁴ So God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts, to sexual immorality, to perversion, and a depraved mind.

*The Need of
the Gospel*

And will the Jews, who passed judgment on such sinful, idolatrous Gentiles, but did the same things, think they will escape God’s judgment? Never, for they dishonored God by breaking his law, and so “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of [them].”²⁵ Clearly,

“Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one...all have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’”²⁶ The sin of rejecting God, known through either creation or commandment, led to idolatry and subsequent unrighteousness by all of humankind, whether Jews or Gentiles. Thus, “the whole world [is] held accountable to God, [for] no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law [written down, or written in the heart]; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”²⁷

*The Power of
the Gospel*

The entire human race is “in the wrong with God,” condemned by their own “law.” If sinful humanity is to be “put right with God,” God must provide the way. And he has! This is the good news of the gospel—a righteousness from God, apart from any law, has been revealed. “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and [therefore, all] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”²⁸ This good news is the power of God to save all who believe, Jew or Gentile, for Christ “was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification [declaration of being put right with God].”²⁹ This is truly amazing grace! The penalty of sin has been canceled, for the wages of sin have been paid by the death of the Righteous One, the spotless Lamb of God. The power of sin has been broken, for Christ has been raised from the dead so that all who put their faith in him may live a new life, no longer slaves of sin. In his cross he triumphed over evil powers and principalities and destroyed the works of the devil. And in his resurrection he defeated the power of death, for he is alive forevermore.

*Whosoever Will
May Come*

God’s amazing grace is for all. Grace opens the door of salvation to every person of every race in every generation. As Paul discovered, religion required the faithful observance of rites, rituals, and rules (“laws”) to be right with God. In contrast, the gospel is freely offered to all, based on repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, for in him God reconciled the world to himself.³⁰ Because Jesus is the way to God, the truth about God, and the life of God, all must come through him. This is God’s “narrow way” that excludes no one, for whosoever will may come, in contrast to all other ways which require

“works of the law.” The belief that “many ways to God” is broad-minded is, in reality, narrow-minded, for it requires God to exclude all who don’t “do it right.” When any kind of human works, religious or non-religious, is the basis of being right with God, God becomes partial, showing favoritism only to those who “measure up.” But God shows no such partiality, for the basis of being made right with him is what he has done in Christ for all humankind. Such grace is broad-minded because it is for all.³¹ If there is only one way to be cured from the terminal illness of sin through Christ, and it is available to all, is this narrow-minded?

The gospel of grace underscores the universality of the good news, for in the gospel “a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.”³² It is unrestricted. It is for all, because it is by faith in what God has done in Christ, not by what we have done. In the words of Paul, “he saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy. . . through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”³³

Freedom to Love

Further, the gospel of grace is the power of God not only to save apart from works, it is the power of God to do good works. “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—not by works, so that no man can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance.”³⁴ The gospel frees all who put their trust in Christ from a salvation by works to a salvation that works, a “faith expressing itself through love.”³⁵ Called to be free, Paul declared we are not to use our freedom “to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love, [for] the entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”³⁶ A gospel of freedom for all to love all—this is the gospel of grace. It is the gospel of God’s great grace in Christ that enables and empowers his church to fulfill the Great Commandment.

Principle of A Great Commission Church

The proclamation of the gospel of God's grace for all, freeing all who repent and believe from salvation by works, to a salvation shown in good works and a faith expressed in fully loving God and freely loving others.

Chapter Seven

The Grace of Giving

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions were his own, but they shared everything they had...and much grace was with them all.”
(Acts 4:32–33)

The early church was a giving church. The miracle of transformation was evident in the multitude that came to Christ on the Day of Pentecost. They “were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need...much grace was with them. There were no needy persons among them.”¹ The grace of giving. By the Spirit the love of God had been poured out into their hearts, and his love flowed through them to one another. Jesus had told his disciples that “all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”² As a result, these early disciples enjoyed the favor of all the people and “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”³ Their observable transformation had evangelistic impact.⁴

*No Needy Persons
Among Them*

As the practice of caring for those in need continued, some disciples, such as Barnabas, voluntarily sold lands and donated the money. Another couple did likewise, and donated a portion of the money, which they rightfully could do. But they lied, indicating the money they gave was the full amount. When their deception was revealed, both were instantly struck dead. Surprisingly, even such severe punishment had an evangelistic impact. Although the people continued to highly regard the community of believers, few dared join them. “Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”⁵⁵ And not only were people saved, many were healed as they brought the sick and those tormented with evil spirits from the surrounding towns to Peter and the apostles.

*One in Heart
and Mind*

In fact, the number of disciples were increasing so rapidly that some Hellenistic believers complained the needs of their widows were being overlooked by the Aramaic speaking community. As we saw earlier, the twelve apostles commissioned seven men, all Hellenists selected by the community, to oversee the ministry of “waiting on tables.” Thus, not only was a potential division within the community avoided, the apostles were able to give themselves fully to prayer and proclaiming the gospel. As a result, “the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”⁵⁶ Neither the shocking death of Ananias and Sapphira, nor the racially tinted complaints of Hellenists diminished the witness of a community of believers who were “one in heart and mind.”⁵⁷ Such was the power of the unity of a caring community. Their love for the Lord and each other transcended potentially damaging and divisive events and released the advance of the gospel. The grace of giving illustrated and expedited the spread of the gospel of grace.

Mutual Giving

Caring for those in need continued to characterize the early church. Some years later when prophets from Jerusalem came to the church in Antioch, one of them predicted by the Spirit a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. This indeed did happen during the reign of Emperor Claudius, when long and continuous droughts plagued the region. Acting on this prophecy, and with no request from Jerusalem, “the disciples, each according to their ability

decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.”⁸ Freely the Gentile church in Antioch had received from Jerusalem the gospel of grace through Barnabas and Paul. Now, in turn, they freely gave the gifts collected for the Jewish church in Jerusalem, sending them by the hand of Barnabas and Paul.

*Excelling in the
Grace of Giving*

This experience may well have inspired Paul several years later to collect offerings from the churches in Greece for the poor in Jerusalem. He told the churches in Macedonia about the eagerness of the Corinthian church in Achaia to give. Then, when he was about to visit Corinth, he let them know about the grace God had given the Macedonians. Out of a severe trial, “their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity...they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability...not [doing] as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.”⁹ Sometime earlier, the Corinthians had begun to collect an offering. So Paul encouraged them to bring to completion “this act of grace.”¹⁰ They had excelled in many ways. Now Paul wanted them also to “excel in this grace of giving.” He was not commanding them to give, but was testing the sincerity of their love by the example of the Macedonians and the amazing grace of Christ who, though rich, “became poor so that [they] through his poverty might become rich.”¹¹ It was not that he wished to relieve others while they were hard pressed. Rather, it was that there might be equality. “At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.”¹² The unity and community of believers transcending socio-economic and racial differences was shown by compassionate and generous giving. Thus, Paul could write to the Romans as he prepared to visit Jerusalem before coming to Rome: “Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem...for if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.”¹³ Again, the grace of giving was seen in those who had freely received. They freely gave.

*More Blessed to Give
than to Receive*

Paul was a giver. Although he had the right to receive support, at Corinth he did not do so, for he wanted to offer the gospel free of charge.¹⁴ In Corinth, as well as in other cities, he worked as a tentmaker not only to supply his own needs but also the needs of others. “In everything

I did,” he told the Ephesian elders, “I showed that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus himself [who] said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”¹⁵ And was it not Jesus who, when originally sending out the Twelve, told them to go and preach the good news of the kingdom, for “freely you have received, freely give”?¹⁶ Such giving of the gospel, as well as monetary resources, flows from those whom God has so blessed. From him come all gifts, and to him belongs all praise. Thus, he told the Corinthians that not only would their gifts supply the needs of God’s people, they would result in an overflowing of thanks to God. “Men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”¹⁷ So Paul concluded: “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” And so the grace of giving—a response to the gospel of grace—commended and advanced the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Principle of A Great Commission Church

The cultivation of the grace of giving to those in need, especially brothers and sisters in Christ, locally and abroad, which, transcending racial and cultural diversity, reflects and advances a universal gospel of grace.

Chapter Eight

A House of Prayer for All Nations

“Is it not written: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?’” “They all joined together constantly in prayer.”
(Mark 11:17; Acts 1:14)

The early church was not only a church that prayed, it was a praying church. Prayer was a priority. All, both leaders and people, gave themselves to prayer. They prayed consistently, persistently, and insistently. The church began with days of prayer. For over a week, about a hundred and twenty believers consistently met together to seek the Lord. In response to what the disciples had been told by Jesus, they waited for power from on high. Shortly before he returned to heaven, he had commanded his disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised. He had spoken to them about how John the Baptist had baptized with water, but now they were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So it

Consistent Prayer

was that the disciples, along with this group of over one hundred believers, including the mother and brothers of Jesus, “all joined together constantly in prayer.”¹ Then, on the Day of Pentecost, the climactic day of the Feast of Weeks, it happened. “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. . . . What seemed to be tongues of fire that separated. . . . came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.”² Thus, the church grew out of a ten-day prayer meeting.

Filled with the Spirit, Peter preached to the gathering throng and three thousand believed, were baptized, filled with the Spirit, and added to the fellowship of believers who “gave themselves to. . . prayer.” As members of the Jewish community, they most likely continued to observe the stated times of daily prayer at nine, twelve, and three o’clock.³ Giving themselves to the apostles teaching, they heard how Jesus had taught them to pray, daily. They learned to pray consistently, and their prayers were enriched and deepened in knowing God as their Father through his Son, their Messiah.

Persistent Prayer

The early church learned to pray persistently. Jesus had taught his disciples not only to pray consistently, but persistently. He told them they “should always pray and not give up.”⁴ He told them the story of an unjust judge, neither fearing God nor caring for people, who refused to grant the continuing request of a widow who wanted justice against an adversary. Finally, because she would not give up but constantly kept coming and bothering him, he relented and gave her what she requested. He did this not because it was right, but “so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming.”⁵ If this unjust judge finally granted the widow’s request, “will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you,” said Jesus, “he will see that they get justice, and quickly.”⁶

The apostles taught early believers what Jesus had taught them about asking, seeking, and knocking. He had told them a story about a man at midnight whose persistent knocking at the door of the house of a friend finally caused him to grant the man’s request for bread for visiting guests. Jesus then explained to his disciples that “everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the

door will be opened...If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?”⁷ Such persistent asking is how the church prayed when Peter was in prison. Herod Agrippa had arrested believers and intended to persecute them. He had the apostle James killed and the apostle Peter imprisoned. While Peter was kept in prison awaiting execution, “the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”⁸ The Lord heard and answered a surprised but grateful church. Peter was miraculously delivered. And shortly thereafter, an arrogant Herod was supernaturally stricken and died.

Insistent Prayer

The early church prayed insistently. When Peter and John reported how the chief priests and elders had threatened them and warned them no longer to teach or preach in the name of Jesus, the community of believers “raised their voices together in prayer.”⁹ They were convinced God was sovereign: “Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city [Jerusalem] to conspire against your holy servant Jesus...they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”¹⁰ David had predicted this would happen. Thus, knowing that the death of God’s Messiah by the hands of evil men accomplished his plan of salvation for all humankind, including those who put to death his Son, the gathered assembly prayed boldly. “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable our servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your hold servant Jesus.”¹¹ They refused to be intimidated, but insisted that God’s saving purpose be advanced by the bold proclamation of the word, confirmed with miraculous signs following. And heaven heard. “The place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”¹²

Teach Us to Pray

Prayer was a priority in the early church, as it was for Jesus. The Son of God was a person of prayer. He was in constant communion with his Father. He did only that which his Father did. “I tell you the truth,” he said, “the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son does also.”¹³ He said only that which the Father said. He told his disciples that the “words you hear are not my own; they belong to the

Father who sent me.”¹⁴ While in unbroken fellowship with his Father, it appeared that Jesus prayed regularly—frequently during the early morning hours, and sometimes all night. Apparently it was this habit of prayer that occasioned the disciples’ request one day after Jesus had finished a time of prayer. They said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John [the Baptist] taught his disciples.”¹⁵ In response, Jesus told them that when they prayed they were to pray in the manner of what we have come to know as the “Lord’s Prayer.” God’s glory, kingdom, and will were to be the first requests, followed by requests for daily provision, pardon, and protection.

*A Missionary
Prayer*

Prior to sending out the Twelve, Jesus had told them that because the harvest was plentiful but the laborers were few, they were to “ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest.”¹⁶ It was after the sending of the Twelve, as well as the Seventy, that Jesus, in response to the disciples’ request, teaches them how to pray. In the truest sense it is a missionary prayer. The ultimate goal and focus of missions is the glory of God, that his name be hallowed, honored, praised, and worshiped among all peoples. “All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.”¹⁷ The means and manner of missions is indicated—God’s glory is to be revealed among all peoples by the coming of his kingdom wherein his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Therefore, the good news of the kingdom is to be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations before the end comes.¹⁸

The result and fruit of missions is a people who are the children of God. They have come under the authority and reign of his Messiah. They are messengers of the kingdom whose daily needs are supplied, who are forgiven and forgiving, and who are delivered from the evil one. These are, declared Peter, “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”¹⁹ The pattern of daily prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, they, in turn, taught the believers after the Day of Pentecost, who “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...and to prayer.”²⁰ These new believers learned to pray as Jesus had taught the Twelve to pray. And it was these new believers who, filled by the Spirit, became his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

*A House of Prayer
for All Nations*

God's dwelling place on earth with his people was to be a place of prayer for all nations. At the dedication of the temple Solomon prayed, "When he [the foreigner] comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all peoples of the earth may know our name and fear you."²¹ God promised that "foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord and to worship him...I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer...for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."²² When Jesus found people buying and selling in the temple area, he was appalled and forcibly drove them out, accusing them of making the temple into a den of robbers. Why was Jesus so upset? It was not only because of what they were doing, but where they were doing it—in the court of the Gentiles! "Is it not written," he declared, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'?"²³ God's dwelling place was not only being desecrated, it was being usurped. The place of prayer for the nations was being polluted and taken away from foreigners who came to worship.

Of Highest Priority

Paul, missionary to the nations, clearly understood that Gentiles also were "fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household...[and they too were] being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."²⁴ Further, not only was God's dwelling place to be a house of prayer for all nations, it was to be a house that prayed for all nations. He urged Timothy to make prayer and intercession for all people and rulers of highest priority. This he was to do so that "we might live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Why? Because this "pleases God our Savior who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all men."²⁵

Power of Prayer

Such all-inclusive prayer was essential for the advance of the gospel among the nations. Thus, Paul, writing from a Roman prison, called the Ephesian churches to "put on the full armor of God." He told them to "take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...and pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of

prayer and requests.” He urged them to “always keep on praying for all the saints...[and] also for me that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains.”²⁶ And this apparently they did. They prayed, and God answered, and the gospel continued to advance. A short time later Paul wrote from the same prison in Rome to the Philippian church. He ended his letter with greetings from all the saints in Rome, “especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.”²⁷ The gospel had penetrated the highest levels of the Roman government. So it was that the early church became a house of prayer for all nations and a church that prayed for all nations, thus advancing the gospel and the making of disciples of all nations.

Principle of A Great Commission Church

The development of a praying church that becomes a place of prayer for all nations, and faithfully prays for the advance of the gospel among all nations.

Great Commission Churches

Becoming a Great Commission church is a process, as it was with the church in Jerusalem. Great Commission churches are churches that have come to understand and embrace the Scriptures, Scriptures that reveal the living God is a missionary God. In the sending of the Messiah as the Savior of the world, they recognize the depth and breadth of God’s love, a love that gave his only son as a sacrifice for sin for the entire human race. As God’s people and devoted followers of Jesus Christ, Great Commission churches have learned to love as they have been loved, loving God fully and loving those he loves. His love has compelled them to embrace his commission to take the good news of the gospel of God’s grace to the world. In light of his matchless gift of salvation in Christ, Great Commission churches are increasingly characterized by the grace of giving. Freely they have received, freely they give. Their gatherings have become houses of prayer, welcoming all nations and interceding for the advance of the gospel among all peoples. Missions shapes their mission. They are a sending and a sent people to proclaim the good news of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus’ name and make disciples among all peoples. Such Great Commission churches are on mission with the living God, a missionary God who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Given the gift of his Spirit, they are

his witnesses to the ends of the earth, ambassadors of reconciliation to the nations. They are God's missionary people.

Great Commission Church Movements

Part Two

Great Commission Church Movements

Jesus, God's Messiah, chose twelve disciples. Signifying the twelve tribes of Israel, they made up the initial band of a reconstituted and expanded people of God that would include all who were

*Church of All
Nations*

descendants of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ. God revealed to these first followers that Jesus truly was the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God. Based on this divine revelation, Jesus said he would build his church (*ekklesia*, a "called out people"). And not even the gates of hell (*hades*, the "grave"), the jaws of death, could stand against his church.¹ Although initially misunderstood as merely the King of the Jews who would restore the kingdom to Israel, the disciples came to understand that the Messiah's kingdom was not of this world and would embrace many others. The church he would build would encompass not just the Jewish nation but all nations.

*God's Missionary
People*

After Christ's death and resurrection, the disciples heard him speak on several occasions of a universal witness of the gospel. Shortly before his ascension he spoke of a coming of the Spirit who would empower his disciples as his witnesses to the ends of the earth. And it was after the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost that the disciples truly began to grasp the dimensions and significance of the coming of the Spirit on "all flesh." Racial provincialism and religious exclusiveness would be transcended. They discovered that being sent as his empowered witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem, would encompass peoples very different from them. And to be his faithful witnesses to the ends of the earth would require a multiplication of sent and sending communities of faith. It would mean the church being God's missionary people. It would mean the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world—the multiplication of Great Commission church movements. We now want to follow the story of how the church in Jerusalem, which eventually became a Great Commission church, gave birth to the church in Antioch in Syria, which in turn became a Great Commission church sending out apostolic missionary teams

Great Commission Church Movements

that spawned a Great Commission movement of Great Commission churches in four Roman provinces.

Chapter Nine

The Church in Antioch

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”
(Acts 13:1–3)

Antioch, capital of the Roman province of Syria, was a large city with a population approaching half a million. Under the Romans it enjoyed the status of a free and autonomous city. It had a mixed populace of Jews, Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Latins, and even Orientals from Persia, India, and China, and thus was more cosmopolitan than many cities. Antioch was an important commercial center located on the Orontes River with its seaport, Seleucia, some fifteen miles west on an excellent bay. The city, called “Antioch the Beautiful,” was noted for its architecture, paved streets, public and

*Antioch, a
Major Center*

private baths, central heating, plumbing, and lighting. The city was known for its luxurious living and had a reputation for moral laxity. The pleasure garden of Daphne and the temple of Apollo, which included ritual temple prostitution, were located just five miles south. A major center in the Roman Empire, Antioch was to become a key center for the spread of the gospel.

*Cross-cultural
Evangelism*

The Jewish community in Antioch was sizeable, numbering as many as twenty-five thousand. Early in the history of Antioch, Jews began migrating to the city, living in what was known as “the Jewish quarter.” It appeared they may have had a reputation of being more assertive and successful in proselytizing Gentiles than other Jewish communities. Nicolas, one of the Seven appointed by the apostles to wait on tables in Jerusalem, was “from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.”¹ A cosmopolitan and free city, Antioch was apparently an open and accepting society of diverse peoples and beliefs. When believing Hellenistic Jews who were driven out of Jerusalem came to Antioch, they spoke the word of God freely to the Jews, for we read of no opposition or persecution coming from the Jewish community.

*Gentiles Turn
to the Lord*

However, “some of them...men from Cyprus and Cyrene [northern Africa] began to speak to Greeks [Gentiles] also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.”² They went from merely monocultural to multicultural evangelism, presenting Jesus as Lord (*kyrios*) and Savior (*soter*), terms which were known in the first century. To have proclaimed Jesus as Messiah (*Christos*) to Gentiles, who knew nothing about the hope of Israel, would have been futile and meaningless. However, the preaching of a Savior who is Lord (*Kurios*) met with wide and immediate acceptance, for “the Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”³ When news of this reached the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas, a man “full of the Holy Spirit and faith.”⁴ When he witnessed what was clearly “evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”⁵ Soon an even greater number of people were brought the Lord. An Ethiopian eunuch might have come to know the Lord on a desert road in Judea, and a Gentile Roman centurion and his household might have believed the gospel in Caesarea, but this widespread turning of Gentiles to the Lord was something new. This multicultural mission to the Gentiles

in Antioch was a major breakthrough and a turning point in the advance of the gospel among the nations. Thus it was that the church in Jerusalem did eventually did become a Great Commission church, though somewhat involuntarily and unintentionally, through the dispersion of Hellenistic Jews driven out of Jerusalem by persecution. However, the church in Antioch became a Great Commission church rather quickly, and it did so voluntarily and intentionally.

*First Called
“Christians”*

The people movement among the Gentiles caused the church in Antioch to grow rapidly. Help was needed to disciple all the new believers. So Barnabas traveled to Tarsus to get Saul, the zealous, persecuting Pharisee who had been converted on the Damascus Road. Barnabas had introduced Saul to the church in Jerusalem some years earlier. During the intervening years Saul most likely was preaching, teaching, and strengthening the churches in Syria-and-Cilicia, the Roman Province, where Tarsus, his hometown, was located.⁶ When Barnabas found him, he brought him to Antioch and “for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.”⁷ Apparently this fast growing band of Jewish and especially Gentile believers was becoming known throughout the city. Who are these people? Apparently, they did not keep quiet about their faith but proclaimed it wherever they went. Thus it was that here in Antioch the disciples were first called “Christians,” a compound name (Greek, *Christos*, with a Latin ending, *ianos*) for a cosmopolitan, multicultural people. The word “Christian” is found only two more times in the New Testament, both used by outsiders to describe Christ-followers.⁸ Hence, it would appear that the name came not from believers, but from nonbelievers who attempted to describe a diverse group of people, both Jews and Greeks, who were known to be followers of *Christos*.

Solidarity in Christ

This multicultural church in Antioch continued to receive ministry from Jerusalem. The arrival of some prophets reflected the continuing interest of the mother church in the Christian community in Antioch. On one occasion while ministering to the church, one of the prophets, named Agabus, “stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world.”⁹ As with Joseph in Egypt, whose interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream of a coming famine brought about needed preparation, so the

prophetic word of Agabus did likewise. “The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide for the brothers living in Judea.”¹⁰ As we saw earlier, the church acted on the prophecy and gathered funds in anticipation of the need of their Jewish brothers and sisters in Judea. This expression of solidarity with Jewish believers by the church in Antioch was a powerful demonstration of the love and unity of the body of Christ, where “there is no Greek, or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all in all.”¹¹ Upon the collection of gifts from the community of believers in Antioch, Barnabas and Saul were sent to the elders in Jerusalem with the offering for those in need.

A Sending Church

The diversity of the church in Antioch was reflected in its leadership. The prophets and teachers were multinational, coming from Israel, Cyprus, northern Africa, and eastern Turkey.¹² One day, as these leaders were together fasting and worshiping the Lord, the Holy Spirit spoke through a prophetic word: “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”¹³ Immediately, responding in fasting and prayer, they confirmed the word of the Spirit and “placed their hands on them and sent them off.”¹⁴ Thus began the first of three apostolic missionary journeys launched from the church in Antioch with the sending of these two key leaders. The church in Jerusalem, scattered by persecution, gave birth to the church in Antioch, which became a sending church, deploying by the direction of the Holy Spirit an apostolic missionary band to the nations. And so began the sending of workers to spread the gospel and establish churches in regions where Christ was not yet known.

Principle of Great Commission Church Movements

The establishing of sending-base churches that, led by the Spirit, intentionally release and send teams as cross-cultural missionaries to preach the gospel of grace and plant indigenous, reproducing churches among the nations, with missionary teams continuing relationship with the sending church.

Chapter Ten

The Churches in Galatia

*“The word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region...So the churches were strengthened in faith and grew daily in numbers.”
(Acts 13:49; 16:5)*

Sent out from the church in Antioch, Barnabas and Saul made their way to their homelands, to Cyprus and then to Turkey. Joining them was a helper, John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas. Initially the team traveled to the island of Cyprus, Barnabas’s native country. Apparently the area had received an initial Christian witness from those scattered by persecution in Jerusalem, although nothing is indicated as to its effect.¹ In Salamis, the commercial center located on the east coast, was a sizeable Jewish community with several synagogues. The team went first to these Jewish synagogues, where Barnabas and Saul proclaimed the word of God. Luke did not include any account of the results of this ministry in the synagogues. However, this going “to the Jew first” would become the pattern of taking the gospel to the nations by the apostle Paul and his missionary teams.

Island of Cyprus

*Roman Proconsul
Believes*

Leaving Salamis, the team traveled westward through the island of Cyprus to Paphos, a major center of Roman rule. Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul, sent for Barnabas and Saul because, as Luke explained, “he wanted to hear the word of God.”² But one of his attendants, Bar-Jesus (son of Joshua), opposed them and tried to prevent the proconsul from believing. Elymas, as he was known, was a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet. Saul (now known by his Roman name, Paul) was upset and confronted Elymas. Calling him a son of the devil who perverted the ways of the Lord, he pronounced divine judgment on him. Immediately Elymas went blind. This power encounter, similar to that of Peter with Simon the Magician in Samaria, clearly demonstrated the greater power of the living God and the authority and truth of his word. When Sergius Paulus saw what happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching of the Lord. As far as we know, Paul did not revisit the area, but later Barnabas did, with his cousin Mark, “probably with a view to evangelizing further and helping the church to be established in the truth.”³ Although Luke does not record the expansion of the gospel in Cyprus, “the church there continued to flourish, sending years later three bishops to the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.”⁴

Province of Galatia

Clearly, Luke’s major focus was the advance of the gospel in the province of Galatia. Sailing from Paphos, the apostolic team arrived in Perga on the south coast of Turkey. At this point John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem, but Barnabas and Saul continued to travel into the southern region of the central province of Galatia. There they arrived in the city of Antioch near Pisidia (Pisidian Antioch), the civil and military center of that part of the province. On the Sabbath they went to the local synagogue where, after the reading of the Scripture, they were invited to speak to the congregation. Paul, now the primary speaker, addressed the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles present.

Pisidian Antioch

Luke’s rather lengthy summary of Paul’s message is probably to be understood as representative of what he spoke in the synagogues throughout the Jewish Diaspora. Similar to Stephen’s defense, Paul’s address took the form of a historical overview of God’s dealing with his people. Beginning from the time of the patriarchs, he spoke

of their stay in Egypt, their wandering in the wilderness, and their conquest of Canaan. He continued to speak of how God gave them judges until the time of Samuel. When the people demanded a king, God gave them Saul as their king who, because of disobedience, was replaced by David, a “man after my own heart.”⁵ Paul told them that it was from David and his descendants that “God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.”⁶ He explained that the people and their rulers in Jerusalem failed to recognize God’s Messiah, and had him put to death, but God raised him from the dead. Showing that the death and resurrection of the Messiah was found in Scripture and was fulfilled in Jesus, Paul declared that “through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you...[and] through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from the law of Moses.”⁷ He concluded with a word of warning from the prophet Habakkuk lest they respond in unbelief.

*Turning to
the Gentiles*

Paul’s message aroused great interest. So he and Silas were invited to speak further about all this the following Sabbath, for there were many Jews and Gentile proselytes who wanted to know more.

The next Sabbath a large multitude gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when unbelieving Jews saw the crowds they were envious and, filled with jealousy, began to speak abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul, with Barnabas, boldly answered, “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.”⁸ Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Paul declared that this is what the Lord had commanded them, for “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”⁹ God’s intention was clear. Gentiles were to receive the light of his salvation. As a result, many Gentiles believed and “the word of the Lord spread through the whole region.”¹⁰ The witness to Christ spread rapidly among the non-Jewish population. However, unbelieving Jews incited influential people in the city, who stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and had them expelled from their region. As they left they urged those who believed to continue in the grace of God, and Luke records that the disciples were “filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.”¹¹ Their testimony, even when opposed and persecuted, continued the spread of the gospel even after the apostles were forced to leave.

Iconium

Shaking the dust off their feet in protest, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Iconium, some eighty to ninety miles southeast of Antioch. Iconium (modern Konya) was the chief city in the district known as Phrygia in the province of Galatia. Located in a well-watered and fertile region, Iconium was a center of agriculture and commerce. Soon after Paul and Barnabas arrived in this city, they went to the Jewish synagogue, as was their practice. Though not described by Luke, *we* can safely assume their message was similar to what they preached in Pisidian Antioch.

Many Believe

So effective was the ministry of Paul and Barnabas that “a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.”¹² What accounts for such response? Was it their eloquence, their persuasiveness? No, it was that they spoke “boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.”¹³ Word and deed, proclamation and demonstration characterized the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. As with the twelve apostles, so it was with Paul and Barnabas who, also sent out, “preached everywhere...the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.”¹⁴ Initially there appeared to be some opposition to Paul and Barnabas, but it did not seem to prevent further preaching of the word, for they spent “considerable time there.”¹⁵ Eventually a plot was discovered among both the Jews and the Gentiles, who with their leaders, planned to mistreat and stone them. But when the apostles found out about their plans, they “fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news.”¹⁶ Again, as in Jerusalem, persecution expedited the spread of the gospel.

Healing in Lystra

Lystra, about twenty miles southwest of Iconium, was a Roman military colony, a somewhat obscure town. No mention is made of a synagogue. Thus, the ministry of Paul and Barnabas was most likely in the marketplace. As Paul was speaking he noticed a crippled man, lame from birth, listening to him. Looking directly at him, Paul saw that he “had faith to be healed, and called out, ‘Stand up on your feet’”¹⁷ Like Peter with the lame man at the temple gate in Jerusalem, the man jumped up and began to walk. When the crowd saw what

happened, they began shouting in the local Lycaonian dialect, “The gods have come down to us in human form!”¹⁸ Calling Barnabas “Zeus,” the father of the Greek pantheon of gods, and Paul “Hermes,” the spokesman of the gods, the local priest of the temple of Zeus began preparing sacrifices to offer to the ‘gods’ who had come to visit them.

*Preaching to
Pagans*

When Paul and Barnabas, probably not fully understanding their language, finally saw what was happening, they were appalled. They rushed into the crowd shouting, “Men, why are you doing this?

We too are only men, human like you.”¹⁹ Paul then told them why they had come. “We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.”²⁰ In contrast to the Jews and God-fearers in the synagogues where he appealed to the Scriptures, Paul appealed to the natural world which the Lycaonians knew. He explained that although God had let the nations go their own way, he had not left himself without a witness in the world he had made. He explained that God had shown his kindness in the rain he sent from heaven and the crops he made to grow in their seasons which provided abundant food and filled their hearts with joy.

Lynching in Lystra

Although Luke’s account is abbreviated, whatever Paul said barely kept the Lycaonians from offering sacrifices to him and Barnabas. But the crowd was fickle. Some unbelieving Jews from Antioch and

Iconium arrived and soon won over the crowd, convincing them that Paul deserved to die. The plot to kill the apostles in Iconium now took place in Lystra as the mob stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead. This was no judicial execution. It was a lynching. Disciples who had followed those who dragged Paul out of the city gathered around him and undoubtedly prayed for him, not sure whether he was dead or alive. Suddenly, Paul stood up and returned with them to the city. Miraculously healed, he and Barnabas left the next day for Derbe some sixty miles away. The mention of disciples indicates there apparently had been some fruit from Paul’s preaching in the marketplace in Lystra. Further, their rescue of Paul suggests these disciples were willing to risk persecution, even though they only recently had become believers.

Harvest in Derbe

When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Derbe “they preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples [literally, ‘they disciplined many’].”²¹ Since there is no record of going to a synagogue, their ministry most likely again took place in the marketplace, apparently without opposition. The response was immediate and widespread. Among those who became disciples was Gaius who would later become one of Paul’s traveling companions in Macedonia.²² The length of time Paul and Barnabas were in Derbe is not stated, but it was sufficient for the discipling of a large number of believers, which indicates a church was established in this frontier city, the most eastern point the apostles traveled in the province of Galatia.

Follow-up Visit

Apparently having no plans to travel beyond the provincial frontier, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps, returning to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. Why would they go back to the cities in which they had so recently been persecuted and driven out? Rather than pushing eastward, which most likely would have eventually taken them to Paul’s hometown of Tarsus, they retraced their steps. At this point we see what will become one of the most important points of Paul’s missionary strategy, namely, his care of the churches he had founded.²³ As apostolic church planters, Paul and Barnabas were committed to establish and nurture the churches they pioneered. So they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, “strengthening and encouraging them [the disciples] to remain true to the faith.”²⁴ Persecution directed against the apostles had come against the churches. Thus, they explained to the disciples that “we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”²⁵ Some years later Paul wrote to Timothy, one of his closest coworkers. He reminded him about the persecutions he endured in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, and how the Lord delivered him from all of them. “In fact,” Paul said, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”²⁶ He understood that such suffering produces perseverance which produces character and a hope that is certain, “because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.”²⁷ In every church disciples needed to be strengthened and grounded in the faith and encouraged to remain faithful to the Lord, especially when they were undergoing opposition and persecution.

*Local Elders
Appointed*

Further, “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church.”²⁸ Pastoral care and oversight were essential to feed, lead, and protect the flock. So with prayer and fasting Paul and Barnabas committed these elders “to the Lord in whom they had put their trust.”²⁹ These were leaders chosen and appointed from within the congregation. Such an indigenous principle reflected a conviction that “the church belongs to God and that he can be trusted to look after his own people.”³⁰ Thus, the churches had the teaching of the apostles, the shepherding of elders, and the empowering and guidance of the Holy Spirit to establish, strengthen, and guide them.

*Return and
Report to the
Sending Church*

Paul and Barnabas now began their return to Antioch, their sending church in Syria. On their way to the seaport of Attalia, they preached the word in Perga which they had passed through earlier when entering the province of Galatia. No mention is made of the results of their ministry in this city, the place where Mark had left them to return to Jerusalem. Upon arriving in Attalia, they set sail for Antioch “where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.”³¹ There they soon gathered the church together and reported “all that God had done through them...how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”³² Paul and Barnabas were no independent missionaries. Called by the Spirit, they were sent out by the church in Antioch. They had accomplished the work they had been called and sent to do. They felt responsible and accountable to the church that had confirmed their calling and “committed them to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.”³³ A mission accomplished required a mission report of “all that God had done through them.” As he had done in Antioch, God had now opened a door of faith to the Gentiles in the province of Galatia.

A Sharp Dispute

Paul and Barnabas remained with the disciples in Antioch for some time. Apparently, during those days Peter visited Antioch, spending time with Gentiles believers, enjoying their fellowship and hospitality. However, Peter separated himself from these Gentiles when certain Jewish believers came from Jerusalem because he feared their reaction for they belonged to the circumcision group known as Judaizers. They were teaching that unless Gentiles “are circumcised

according to the custom taught by Moses, [they] cannot be saved.”³⁴ Other Jews, including Barnabas, joined Peter in withdrawing from Gentile believers. When Paul saw that “they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel,” he publicly confronted Peter with his hypocrisy. “You are a Jew”, he told him, “yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”³⁵ As a result a sharp dispute and debate broke out with these Judaizers.

A Different Gospel

Further, it appeared that about this time Paul also was receiving reports from Galatia that such legalistic teaching had likewise infected the churches there as well. Deeply disturbed, Paul sent off a letter to the churches in Galatia. “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ,” he wrote, “and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all.”³⁶ The law cannot save. Rather, it reveals sin and the need of a savior. Thus, the law actually leads us to Christ, “that we might be justified by faith.”³⁷ Paul made it clear that “if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.”³⁸ Therefore, he charged that those who are compelling Gentiles to be circumcised are perverting the gospel of Christ and stand condemned. “All you are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,” wrote Paul, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”³⁹ He explained that in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but what counts is a new creation. Therefore, Paul urged the Galatians to “serve one another in love [for] the entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”⁴⁰

Jerusalem Council

So serious was this dispute with the Judaizers that the church in Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabas, along with some other believers, to go to Jerusalem and see the apostles and elders about this crucial matter. Upon arriving, they were welcomed by the church and its leaders and reported to them “everything God had done through them.”⁴¹ After much discussion, Peter reminded the gathering about the conversion of Cornelius and his household, how “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit

to them, just as he did to us.”⁴² The assembly then heard Barnabas and Paul speak of “the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.”⁴³ When they finished, James, the leading elder in the Jerusalem church, confirmed that God had indeed intended to take from the Gentiles a people for his name. He quoted the words of the prophet Amos: “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent...that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name.”⁴⁴ He concluded, and the assembly agreed, that “we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached to every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”⁴⁵ This conclusion was confirmed by the Spirit and the entire council. Thus, “the Jerusalem Council secured a double victory—a victory of truth in confirming the gospel of grace, and a victory of love in preserving the fellowship by sensitive concessions to conscientious Jewish scruples.”⁴⁶ The council then chose Judas and Silas, two leaders in the Jerusalem church, and sent them to Antioch, along with Paul and Barnabas, to deliver the decision. When the people read it, they were “glad for its encouraging message.”⁴⁷ And then before returning to Jerusalem, Judas and Silas spent some time in Antioch strengthening and encouraging the disciples.

*A Strategic
Breakthrough*

The decision of the Jerusalem Council was strategically significant. Non-Jews did not have to become Jews to be Christians—a major breakthrough for the spread of the gospel among the nations.

The evangelization of the Gentiles was now unleashed. And so it was that the church in Antioch, birthed out of the church in Jerusalem, continued as a key sending center for the spread of the gospel, spawning a Great Commission movement to the nations.

Principle of Great Commission Church Movements

The preaching of the gospel of grace freed of legalistic demands, the making of disciples, and the planting of indigenous churches led by local leaders who have been entrusted to God, with the missionary team returning to encourage and strengthen the churches.

Great Commission Church Movements

Chapter Eleven

The Churches in Macedonia

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. . . . The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.”
(1 Thessalonians 1:6, 8)

After the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch where “they and many others taught and preached the word of God.”¹ Sometime later Paul told Barnabas that he intended to go back to visit the churches to see how they were doing. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, his cousin, but Paul did not think it was wise to do so, for he felt Mark had deserted them when they had entered Turkey on the first journey. The disagreement was so sharp that Paul and Barnabas separated. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus. But Paul took Silas and traveled through Syria, Cilicia, and into the Province of Galatia strengthening the churches. When they had gone through Derbe, they came to Lystra. There Paul met a young disciple named Timothy, who was highly regarded by the churches in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to take Timothy along with him on

Second Journey

the journey. However, because Jews in the region knew his father was a Greek and his mother Jewish, Paul had him circumcised, not as a matter of salvation, but as a matter of cultural adaptation. “Because Paul’s *modus operandi* was to reside in the Jewish quarters in the unreached cities he was evangelizing and to attend the synagogues, he had to flex in whatever way was necessary to avoid offending Jews who lived there.”² As a cross-cultural missionary Paul understood cultural adaptation, becoming a Jew to the Jews, and a Gentile to the Gentiles that “by all possible means [he] might save some.”³ Further, as they traveled from city to city, they delivered the decision of the Jerusalem Council concerning circumcision of Gentiles and their relationship to Jewish believers. In essential matters of the faith, Paul was inflexible; in non-essential matters of culture, he was flexible. The gospel of grace was an essential matter of faith; circumcision was a non-essential matter of culture. Thus, “the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.”⁴

Macedonian Vision

The gospel now began to spread even more widely, eventually moving into what we today know as Europe. The first church was planted in the city of Philippi in northern Greece, the result of a vision Paul had during this second journey. Having been kept by the Spirit from preaching the gospel in the province of Asia, and then forbidden to enter the province of Bithynia, Paul arrived in the city of Troas on the coast of western Turkey. While there he had a vision one night of a man of Macedonia begging him to “come over to Macedonia and help us.”⁵ Conferring with his coworkers, they concluded that God had called them to preach the gospel in this northern province of Greece. So Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke made the two-day trip across the northern Aegean Sea, arriving at the port of Neapolis. From this coastal city they traveled about ten miles on the Egnatian Way, the Roman Road, to Philippi which Luke described as “the leading city of that district of Macedonia.”⁶

Philippi

Philippi was a Roman colony. Its settlers enjoyed the rights of those who lived in Italy: the liberty of self-government, and immunity from paying tribute to the emperor. The city followed Roman law, and its constitution was modeled on Rome’s. The city rulers were known as *praetors* (magistrates) who were accompanied by officials called *lictors*, who carried rods to “administer justice” to offenders.

The Jewish community was small, too small to have a synagogue, which required at least ten Jewish men. However, outside the city gate was a Jewish place of prayer by the river Gangites.

*Household
Conversion*

On the Sabbath, Paul and his companions found the place of prayer and joined the women there. One of the women who heard Paul speak was Lydia, a businesswoman from the city of Thyatira in the Province of Asia in western Turkey. She was a dealer in purple cloth and a God-fearer. The Lord opened her heart and she believed Paul's message, as did her entire household, and all were baptized. She then invited Paul and his team to her home, telling them that if they considered her a believer in the Lord they should come stay at her house.⁷ This they did. Thus, the first converts in Europe were a businesswoman from Turkey and her household.

*Another Household
Conversion*

Soon thereafter, Paul encountered a demonized fortune-telling slave girl. When he cast the evil spirit out, her owners, who had lost their source of income, dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace to face the authorities. They accused them of throwing the city into an uproar, advocating "customs unlawful for...Romans to accept or practice."⁸ As a result they were stripped, severely beaten, and thrown into prison. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. Suddenly an earthquake shook the prison, the doors flew open and the chains of all the prisoners came loose. The jailer, fearing the prisoners had escaped, took out his sword to kill himself. But Paul called out, "Don't harm yourself. We are all here."⁹ Badly shaken, he brought Paul and Silas out of the prison and asked them, "Men, what must I do to be saved?"¹⁰ They told him, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."¹¹ They then spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. The jailer washed their wounds, and he and his whole family believed the message and were baptized. Then they offered hospitality, serving Paul and Silas a meal. The whole house was filled with joy because they had come to believe in God. Before leaving the city, Paul and Silas, Roman citizens who had been wrongfully beaten and jailed, demanded that the authorities come themselves and escort them out of the prison. Alarmed, they came and quickly released them. Before leaving the city, Paul and Silas went to Lydia's house where "they met with the brothers and encouraged them." Thus, began the church

in Philippi, with two household conversions: a God-fearing Gentile businesswoman and a godless Gentile jailer.

*Partners in
the Gospel*

The Philippian church became one of Paul's most supportive congregations. From the beginning they invested in advancing the gospel, consistently sending gifts to Paul. After Paul left Philippi to go to Thessalonica, this young church invested in the mission in this city, sending Paul aid "again and again" to meet his needs.¹² And it was from the church in Thessalonica that "the Lord's message rang out" throughout the provinces in Greece and beyond.¹³ Sometime later, when Paul was a prisoner in Rome, the Philippians sent not only gifts but also Epaphroditus, one of their own, to help the apostle and take care of his needs. Paul called him "my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier... [who] was ill and almost died for the work of Christ."¹⁴ Further, the church in Philippi was a praying church. Paul rejoiced that his imprisonment was advancing the gospel among his jailers and even among "those who belong to Caesar's household."¹⁵ He wrote that "through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance."¹⁶ And apparently this is what happened as Paul was released some time later from this initial imprisonment in Rome. The Philippians were truly partners in advancing the gospel, investing by faithfully giving, sending workers, and praying for the spread of the gospel among the nations. Philippi became a Great Commission church, a church birthed out of the church in Antioch that sent out missionary teams that planted churches in Cyprus and Turkey, and now Greece.

*Harvest in
Thessalonica*

About one hundred miles southwest of Philippi was the city of Thessalonica, the capital of the province of Macedonia. It was a thriving commercial center located on a harbor where major roads met. The Egnatian Way, the major Roman road joining Rome with the east, passed through the city. It was a free city with its own rulers called "politarchs." On his way from Philippi, Paul passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, but there is no evidence of any preaching having taken place in these two cities. Although Thessalonica was the largest and most important city in the province and strategically located, it may well have been the presence of a Jewish population that drew Paul to the city. As was his custom, Paul, with his team, visited the local synagogue, where he was most likely invited to address the

congregation. For three Sabbaths he spoke and reasoned from the Scriptures that the Messiah “had to suffer and rise from the dead.”¹⁷ He told them that “this Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ [Messiah].”¹⁸ Paul’s preaching came “not simply in words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.”¹⁹ As a result, many believed—some Jews, a large number of Gentile God-fearers, and quite a few prominent women in the city. Once again, the synagogue proved to be the place where the harvest began, largely among receptive Gentile worshipers. And it appears the gospel again spread quickly into the Gentile community, for Paul later would write of “how [they] turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”²⁰ This was descriptive of Gentiles who were not found in the synagogue.

Religious Backlash

Although Paul’s ministry in the synagogue was only three Sabbaths, he apparently remained in Thessalonica longer, during which time he “worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while [he] preached the gospel of God.”²¹ Further, as we noted earlier, this young church in Philippi sent support to Paul on several occasions while he was in Thessalonica.²² This also suggests he may have continued to minister more than just three weeks as he taught, encouraged, and comforted the many new believers and urged them “to live lives worthy of God.”²³ However, Paul’s ministry in the city was cut short when jealous Jews rounded up some rabble-rousers and started a riot. Not finding Paul and Silas, they dragged Jason, their host, and other believers before the city officials shouting, “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.”²⁴ Such a serious charge of sedition alarmed the city officials. So they made Jason and the other believers post bond, apparently demanding that they would not allow Paul and Silas to return. That night, under the cover of darkness, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea, some forty to fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica.

Spreading Witness

The persecution directed against the apostles now came against the young church in Thessalonica. What would become of these new believers? Would they remain faithful to Christ? Would they be unsettled by these trials? Paul was deeply concerned and several

times attempted to return, but Satan stopped him.²⁵ Finally, when he could stand it no longer he sent Timothy to find out about their faith and strengthen and encourage them in the Lord. Paul had repeatedly told them when he was with them that they would be persecuted, and that's exactly what happened. When Timothy returned, he had a good report. The believers in Thessalonica were standing firm in their faith. Like their brothers and sisters in Judea, they were suffering the same things, and like them, not only did they not renounce their faith in Christ, they spread it. Despite severe suffering, they had welcomed the message and become a model for believers throughout the provinces. Later Paul wrote that "the Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere."²⁶ Again, as in Judea and Galatia, persecution aided the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles

Sending Workers

The church in Thessalonica also became a sending church. Aristarchus and Secundus joined Paul's missionary team. Aristarchus served with Paul in Ephesus and was one of the coworkers seized by the Ephesian mob. Later he and Secundus were among those who traveled with Paul to Jerusalem with the collection from the churches in Greece. Aristarchus was also with Paul when he set sail for Rome as a prisoner to await trial before Caesar.

Harvest in Berea

Forced to leave Thessalonica, Paul and Silas were sent to Berea, considered an out-of-the-way town, south of the Egnatian Way. It was a prosperous community, and within it was a Jewish colony. Upon arriving, Paul and Silas went to the local synagogue. Apparently Timothy, who had remained in Thessalonica, soon joined them. It turned out "the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness."²⁷ Here the Jews were more open-minded and receptive. Eager, but not gullible, they "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."²⁸ Apparently they were convinced that what was taught concerning the suffering and rising of the Messiah was indeed found in their Scriptures. They came to believe that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's Messiah, salvation was now offered to all who called upon the name of the Lord. As a result, "many Jews believed, as did a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men."²⁹

When Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul was preaching in Berea, they decided to go there to oppose him. Upon arriving, they stirred up the crowds against Paul as they had done in Thessalonica. Quickly, Paul was sent to the coast, accompanied by a number of believers who brought him to Athens, but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. As these believers prepared to return to Berea from Athens, Paul urged them to tell Silas and Timothy “to join him as soon as possible.”³⁰

Sending Churches

We have no letters from Paul to the church in Berea. We know little about this church. However, we do know that this young church did send one of their own to work with Paul in the province of Asia, Sopater son of Pyrrhus. As with Timothy and Gaius from Galatia, Tychicus, and Trophimus from Asia, Aristarchus and Secundus from Macedonia, Sopater was a worker from the harvest who joined Paul in the harvest.³¹ Thus, newly planted churches soon became involved in “missions” by sending workers to serve with Paul on his missionary journeys. As they sent their own, the missions vision of these young congregations expanded and their involvement grew in spreading the gospel. They became Great Commission churches.

A Great Commission movement was beginning to take place. The scattering of Hellenist Jewish believers from Jerusalem gave rise to the birthing of the largely Gentile church in Antioch. Antioch became a sending-base church, launching missions teams that planted churches in Cyprus, Turkey, and Greece. And from the newly planted churches in Greece the gospel spread throughout the province of Macedonia and eventually into the province of Achaia. These churches embraced the Great Commission and partnered in the spread of the gospel among the nations where Christ was not yet known.

Principle of Great Commission Church Movements

Faithfulness to Christ in persecution of newly planted churches and their partnership in the spread of the gospel by praying, giving, and sending workers from the harvest into the harvest.

Great Commission Church Movements

Chapter Twelve

The Churches in Achaia

“Many of the Corinthians who heard him [Paul] believed and were baptized. . . ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. . . because I have many people in this city’ . . . Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you.”
(Acts 18:8, 10; 2 Corinthians 10:15–16)

As a result of the “Macedonian vision,” the gospel came to Europe and spread throughout the northern province of Greece. Churches planted in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea began to take root and grow. The number of believers increased, disciples were made, leaders were raised up, and workers were sent into the harvest. Rather than preventing the spread of the gospel, opposition and persecution expedited and accelerated its advance, pushing it into the province of Achaia in southern Greece. The message of salvation was now to come to Athens and Corinth. And so Paul urged the church in Thessalonica to “pray for us, that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.”²¹

*Gospel Spreads to
Southern Greece*

Athens

When Paul was taken to Athens, it appears it was the first time he was alone, without any coworkers. It is unclear if Paul had planned to visit Athens, but now that he was in the city he took advantage of opportunities to preach the gospel. So, as was his custom, he went to the local synagogue. There he spoke, teaching and preaching from the Scriptures “with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks.”² While waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive from Berea, Paul also began going to the marketplace each day. There he reasoned, discussing and debating with those who happened to be there, which included Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.³ Politically, Athens had been eclipsed by Corinth, which was the capital of Achaia. A cultural and intellectual center in the past, Athens was now more noted for its religious shrines, temples, statues, and monuments. Seeing the many objects of worship, Paul became “greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.”⁴

*Preaching to
Philosophers*

In the marketplace Paul had been “preaching about the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.”⁵ Wanting to know more about the “foreign gods” that he seemed to be advocating, the philosophers with whom Paul had been debating took him to the Areopagus (literally, the “Hill of Ares/Mars”). This was the place where the council met, who were the guardians of the city’s religion, morals, and education. Here they could hear Paul explain his “strange new teaching.” Acknowledging that “in every way you are very religious,” Paul told the council that he “even found an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.”⁶ He then told them that what they worshiped as unknown, he was now going to proclaim. Rather than appealing to the Hebrew Scriptures as he did in the synagogues, Paul appealed to what was known to them by creation. He declared that the God who is the Creator of everything is Lord of all he has made. This God does not live in temples made by humans, nor is he served by humans, “as if he needed anything.”⁷ Rather, he is the God who gives life to human beings and has determined when and where they should live. “God did this,” Paul declared, “so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out to him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”⁸ In fact, Paul pointed out that some of their own poets had said, “In him we live and move and have our being,” and “We are his offspring.”⁹ If this is so, how could God be likened to an image made by men? Such ignorance God overlooked in the past, said Paul, “but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when

he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”¹⁰

Limited Response

Response to Paul’s message was mixed. Some sneered at the mention of resurrection, others wanted to hear more later. But a few believed, among them Dionysius, a member of the council; a woman, Damaris; and a number of others. There is no record of any baptisms or the planting of a church in Athens. Was Paul’s approach of “becoming all things to all men” a failure?¹¹ Why was there such limited response? Some have held that Paul’s statement when he arrived in Corinth to “know nothing...except Jesus Christ and him crucified” was the result of the lesson he learned from the lack of response at the Areopagus because he did not preach Christ and him crucified.¹² There is little to commend such an argument from silence.¹³ True, the preaching of the cross is not explicitly mentioned in Luke’s summary of Paul’s address to the Areopagus. But is it not implied? If Paul preached the resurrection of Christ, would this not assume the mention of his death? And what about Paul’s prior visit to the synagogue in Athens? Would not his reasoning from the Scriptures have included the death and rising of the Messiah, which was so typical of Paul’s preaching in synagogues? And does the absence of any mention of results in the synagogue imply Paul did not preach Christ and him crucified? This is most unlikely. Rather, it would appear that the preaching of the cross consistently characterized Paul’s preaching, whether in the synagogue, in homes, in the marketplace, or even in prison.¹⁴ “What Paul learned above all at Athens is that ‘the world through its wisdom did not come to know God’ (1 Co 1:21).”¹⁵ Although no church was planted by Paul, before the end of the second century a church had been established in Athens as noted by later Christian writers, most notably Origen (AD 185–254).¹⁶

Corinth

From Athens Paul traveled fifty miles west to the city of Corinth, a Roman colony and commercial center. Located on a land bridge connecting the Pelopannese peninsula and central Greece, it was strategically located with two seaports linking the Gulf of Corinth on the west and the Saronic Gulf on the east. A flourishing center of trade, Corinth was not only known for its commercial prosperity but also for its sexual license and promiscuity, with the temple of Aphrodite, goddess of

love, and its one thousand prostitutes, located on a hill overlooking the city.

*Bi-vocational
Ministry*

When Paul arrived in Corinth he found lodging in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, tentmakers, who had recently come from Rome because Emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave. A tentmaker himself, Paul worked with his hosts in the trade during the week and each Sabbath he “reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.”¹⁷ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself fully to preaching, “testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ [Messiah].”¹⁸ It may also be that, at this time, the Philippians sent financial assistance and thus Paul could more fully give himself to the preaching of the word.

Harvest in Corinth

Meanwhile Paul’s ongoing ministry in the synagogue eventually, but not unexpectedly, upset some Jews who began to oppose him. When they became abusive, Paul “shook out his clothes” and left the synagogue. Having fulfilled his ministry to the Jews, he declared as he left, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go the Gentiles.”¹⁹ As he had done in Pisidian Antioch, Paul now focused on the more receptive Gentiles. Paul did not have far to go. Titius Justus was a God-fearer living next door to the synagogue. He apparently had come to faith and made his house available. Eventually even Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, with his entire household also came to faith as did many Corinthians who believed and were baptized. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”²⁰ So Paul spent another year and a half teaching the word of God unhindered.

*Care for the
Churches*

Apparently during this time Timothy had been sent to Thessalonica to help establish and strengthen believers in the faith, and possibly Silas to Philippi for a similar reason. The news they brought, especially Timothy’s report of the steadfastness of the sorely tried believers at Thessalonica, was a great relief to Paul. So relieved was Paul, that he wrote his first of two letters to the church and sent it by the hand of

Timothy (1 Thessalonians). When Timothy returned with a report and many questions, Paul penned a second letter, which Timothy also carried back to Thessalonica (2 Thessalonians). The welfare of the churches was a constant concern for Paul. Thus, he prayed continually for them, sought to return as often as he could, sent coworkers to encourage them, and corresponded with them.

Gallio's Decision

Eventually the Jews again made a united attack against Paul and this time brought him into the court of Gallio, the proconsul of the province of Achaia. The charge leveled against him was that he was “persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”²¹ In this instance a verdict by a Roman governor would not only apply to his province but could set precedent for other provinces as well. However, when Gallio discovered that the complaint leveled by the Jews against Paul did not involve Roman law, but was “about words and names and your own law,” he refused to hear their case and told them to “settle the matter themselves.”²² Refusing to pass judgment, Gallio had the Jews ejected from the court. When onlookers turned on Sosthenes, the spokesman and ruler of the synagogue, and beat him, Gallio was indifferent and showed no concern whatsoever.²³ Gallio’s decision was significant. “Had the proconsul of Achaia pronounced a judgment unfavorable to Paul, the progress of Christianity during the next decade or so could have been attended by much greater difficulties than were actually experienced.”²⁴

*Growing Faith
Expanding Ministry*

After the failed attempt to banish him from the region, Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time before eventually departing for Syria. Later he would write to the church in Corinth: “Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you.”²⁵ And this hopeful expectation of increased ministry among and beyond them was expressed in a letter to a church with multiple problems that required more of Paul’s time and attention than any other. In fact, Paul had more frequent contact and personal involvement with the church in Corinth than with any other church, traveling to the city at least three times and writing three, possibly four, letters to the Corinthians. Plagued by divisions, struggling with disorder in public services, infected with false teachers, dealing with an immoral brother, and confused about marital relationships, the

church in Corinth needed to grow up and grow together and learn the more excellent way of love. Yet Paul had the hope that their faith would grow so that his ministry among them would greatly expand so that he could preach the gospel in the regions beyond. A strong, healthy church growing in the faith was essential in continuing the advance of the gospel. Strengthening the churches was as important as planting the churches, especially when there was opposition and even persecution.

*A Great
Commission Church
Movement*

Both in Galatia and Macedonia, opposition and attacks by the Jews against the apostles, and then against believers, pushed the gospel into Gentile territory throughout the province and even, in the case of Achaia, into an adjoining province.

In key centers such as Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Thessalonica, and Corinth, large numbers turned to the Lord. These people movements took place among God-fearing Gentiles and idol-worshipping pagans. Largely meeting in homes, churches multiplied and elders were appointed. Through the teaching of the apostles and by the working of the Spirit, the churches were “strengthened in the faith...[and] grew daily in numbers.”²⁶ Thus, the apostles were able to expand their ministry among them and preach the gospel in the regions beyond them.²⁷ None of the churches were without problems, especially Corinth. Nevertheless, as their faith grew, the gospel continued to spread. Disciples were made, meeting places multiplied, leaders were appointed, and workers were sent. Young churches became sending and supporting churches that advanced the gospel to the regions beyond, becoming Great Commission churches that spawned Great Commission church movements.

Principle of Great Commission Church Movements

Large numbers of people turning to the Lord who become disciples, continue to grow in their faith, and facilitate the further spread of the gospel within and beyond their familial, social and cultural networks.

Chapter Thirteen

The Churches in Asia Minor

“So Paul left them [unbelieving Jews]. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who live in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”
(Acts 19:9–10)

Ephesus was the leading city in the Roman province of Asia. With nearly one-third of a million population, it was a commercial center with extensive commerce from both east and west. It was the administrative center for the province, a free city, with its own senate and civic assembly. Ephesus was also a religious center and a headquarters of magic, sorcery, and belief in the powers of darkness. The temple of Artemis (Latin, “Diana”), reckoned as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was located at Ephesus. Four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens, the city prided itself on its self-designated title as the “Temple Warden of Artemis.” This massive temple housed an image of Artemis, the great earth-mother goddess, which, it was claimed, “fell from heaven.”¹ Ephesus was also a center of emperor worship with temples built to several Roman

*Ephesus, a
Leading City*

emperors. An administrative, commercial, political, and religious center, Ephesus was a gateway city for the advance of the gospel.

Third Journey

On his third missionary journey Paul, in the will and timing of the Lord, was finally able to travel to and remain in Ephesus. He had been divinely redirected to Macedonia during his second journey. Then, at the end of this second journey, when returning to the church at Antioch in Syria by way of Jerusalem, he was able to spend only a few days in Ephesus. After spending some time in Antioch, Paul left and again traveled throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia “strengthening all the disciples.”² It was on this third journey that the Lord opened “a great door for effective work.” So, Paul remained in this key city for nearly three years.

House Church Plant

It was after his brief visit at the end of his second journey that the church actually began. Aquila and Priscilla had traveled with Paul from Corinth where they had worked together as tentmakers and assisted the apostle in the pioneering of the church. When Paul departed from Ephesus after a brief ministry in the Jewish community, he left this Jewish couple who continued to minister and attend the local synagogue. There they heard Apollos teach, a native of Alexandria in North Africa, who recently had come to Ephesus. Well-versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, he taught accurately and with great fervor about Jesus, even though he only knew the baptism of John the Baptist. They invited him to their home and “explained to him the way of God more adequately.”³ Apparently at some point a house church had developed, led and hosted by Aquila and Priscilla, for now there was a group of believers in Ephesus. And it was these believers who “encouraged him [Apollos] and wrote to the disciples there [in Corinth] to welcome him.”⁴ When Paul returned to Ephesus he found a dozen disciples who, like Apollos, knew only the baptism of John the Baptist. He too explained “the way of God more adequately,” baptized them “in the name of the Lord Jesus” and, when he laid hands on them, “the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.”⁵ And so began the opening of a “great door for effective work” in Ephesus.

*Rapidly Growing
Church*

For three months Paul spoke in the synagogue, “arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.”⁶ However, some Jews were stubborn, refused to believe, and spoke against the way of the Lord.

So Paul left and took with him the disciples who had believed and become followers of the Messiah. They went to a public lecture hall, the Hall of Tyrannus. There Paul had discussions daily for the next two years. While teaching publicly he also taught “from house to house...[and] declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”⁷ Many came to the Lord as Paul continued to preach about the kingdom of God and “testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”⁸ He did not “hesitate to preach anything that would be helpful...to proclaim ...the whole will [counsel] of God.”⁹ Evangelism and discipleship were continually taking place. House churches, such as the one in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, were forming, leaders were raised up, and overseeing elders were appointed. The church in Ephesus was rapidly growing and the witness to Christ expanding.

Power Encounter

Unusual miracles began to take place through Paul. People were healed and set free of evil spirits when cloths that had touched him were taken to them. Even some Jewish exorcists attempted to use the name of the Lord Jesus, as Paul did, to cast out demonic spirits. Sceva, a renegade Jewish chief priest, and his seven sons were doing this, saying, “In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.”¹⁰ But they encountered a spirit in a demon-possessed man that answered back, “Jesus I know and Paul I know about, but who are you?”¹¹ The man with the evil spirit then pounced on them, overpowered and beat them, sending them running off, bleeding and naked. Word of this dramatic power encounter spread throughout the city.¹² Both Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus were gripped with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was “held in high honor.”¹³ Many believers openly confessed their practices, and a considerable number of those who were practitioners of magical arts brought their scrolls and publicly burned them. Fifty thousand drachmas (a drachma was about a day’s wage) went up in smoke. Thus, “the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.”¹⁴

Expanding Witness

The gospel was spreading throughout Ephesus and beyond during the two years Paul was teaching in the Hall of Tyrannus. The multiplying number of disciples, like salt and light, were penetrating the darkness and spreading the light of the gospel. As witnesses of Christ, their lives had impact in their network of relationships. Families, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and acquaintances were hearing the good news and seeing its effect in the lives of these followers of Christ.

Workers Sent

Although it appeared that Paul never left Ephesus, many others did. Workers were sent out—such as Epaphras, Tychicus, Trophimus, Philemon, and Archippus—all who apparently came to faith through the ministry of Paul in the Hall of Tyrannus.¹⁵ Epaphras, who apparently returned to his hometown of Colossae, brought the gospel and planted the church in this city.¹⁶ It appeared he also spread the gospel and started churches in the tri-cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis.¹⁷ In addition, the churches in Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia mentioned in the book of Revelation may also have been planted out of the church in Ephesus during this time.¹⁸ The province of Asia was intensively evangelized through workers sent out from the church in Ephesus. “All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”¹⁹ Even Demetrius, speaking on behalf of his fellow silversmiths who had lost their business making silver shrines of Artemis, admitted the widespread impact of Paul’s ministry. He accused him of convincing and leading astray “large numbers of people¼in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.”²⁰

*Great Commission
Church Movements*

The church in Ephesus was a Great Commission church. It began with a Jewish couple who opened their home. It expanded when a dozen disciples were baptized and filled with the Spirit. It continued to grow with the winning of converts and making of disciples in the synagogue. And when Paul left the synagogue and began preaching and teaching in a public lecture hall and going from house to house, expansion came even more rapidly. Multiplication began to take place as disciples became Christ’s witnesses, leaders were raised up and elders appointed to oversee the growing number of house churches. Miraculous healings, exorcisms, and a dramatic power encounter had

a significant impact in the city, creating a hearing for the gospel. The spiritual effect was profound and the economic impact pervasive. Further, the discipling, training, and sending of workers spread the gospel beyond the city and throughout the province of Asia. Churches were planted that multiplied, resulting in a cascading church-planting Great Commission movement that spread the gospel widely. Such was the ever-expanding witness of the church in Ephesus, a sending church and a church sent to the nations. In the provinces of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia Minor, a Great Commission church movement was taking place as the churches planted during Paul's missionary journeys became Great Commission churches, praying, giving, going, and sending workers in an ever-expanding witness to Christ.

Principle of Great Commission Church Movements

The recognition and timely entry of divinely opened doors for effective work in spreading the gospel, making disciples, multiplying churches, and equipping and sending cross-cultural workers to plant indigenous, reproducing, Great Commission churches that reach a region with the gospel.

Great Commission Church Movements

Chapter Fourteen

The Church in Rome

“I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all the world. . . . From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. . . . But now that there is no place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there.”
(Romans 1:8; 15:19–20, 23–24)

Near the end of his ministry in Ephesus, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,’ he said, ‘I must visit Rome also.’”¹

*I Must Visit
Rome Also*

On his way back to Jerusalem, Paul traveled through the provinces of Greece. Arriving in Achaia, he spent time in Corinth. While there he completed the collection of the offerings from the churches in Greece for the poor saints in Jerusalem. During this time Paul also prepared

for his visit to Rome by writing a letter to the church in this city in the heart of the empire. Rome was a cosmopolitan city of about one million people. All roads led to and from Rome, the diplomatic and trade center and capital of the Roman Empire, which stretched from Britain to Arabia. Paul had planned many times to come to Rome, but had been prevented because of his constant pioneering of new frontiers in the eastern Mediterranean region. However, over the years he had prayed continually for the believers in this city. Thus he wrote, "I pray now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you."²

Church in Rome

The church in Rome was a strong church. It had been in existence for some years, and as mentioned earlier, was possibly pioneered by returning "visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes" who were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.³ Most likely, some had come to faith when they heard Peter preach and brought the gospel back home. The Jewish community in Rome was large. Presumably, the good news initially spread among the Jews, as happened in other cities. And it would appear it did so voluntarily, as in Antioch, for there is no evidence of Jewish hostility that drove believers out of the synagogues. And even though Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews at one point, including believing Jews such as Aquila and Priscilla, the gospel had most likely begun to penetrate Gentile communities so that the church continued to grow. As the gospel spread, house churches multiplied throughout Rome, house churches such as the one that met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila, who had returned to Rome from Ephesus, where, we have seen, they also had planted a house church.⁴ As the gospel spread to the Gentiles, the number of believing Gentiles soon was greater than the number of believing Jews. Again, in Rome, the gospel proved to be the "power of God for everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."⁵

*All One in
Christ Jesus*

In his letter Paul encouraged the church: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For...Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy."⁶ Quoting from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, Paul indicated this inclusion of Gentiles in the community of God's chosen people was seen throughout the Hebrew

Scriptures.⁷ Initially, Jews and Gentiles came to faith along familial and cultural lines, as “birds of a feather tend to flock together.” But the door of faith opened into a larger family, the family of God, where, as Paul had written to the Galatians, “all are sons [children] of God through faith in Christ Jesus...there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”⁸ Thus, Paul urged the believers, Jew and Gentile alike, to “accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”⁹ He encouraged them to be “devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves... share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality...Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.”¹⁰

A Spreading Faith

The witness of the Roman church spread widely. Paul wrote that their “faith is being reported all over the [Roman] world.”¹¹ Travelers to and from Rome carried the gospel wherever they went. Although Paul had never been to Rome, he apparently met and came to know many believers from the church during his travels. In his letter he sent personal greetings to over two dozen believers in the church there, whom Paul knew by name.¹² Some were fellow workers who had previously served with him, such as Priscilla and Aquila. Others were relatives who had been in prison with him in earlier days. Many were active workers, including a number of women who “worked hard in the Lord.”¹³ The church in Rome was a growing church. Their witness was spreading the good news far and wide. It was a Great Commission church that was making the gospel known among those who had not yet heard. For, as Paul wrote, “how can they believe in one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news?’”¹⁴ The church in Rome was a sent and sending church with “beautiful feet.” And now Paul was writing to challenge them to advance the gospel even farther.

The Gospel Fully Proclaimed

Paul was convinced that the believers in Rome were “full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”¹⁵ Therefore, he wrote to them quite boldly, by way of reminder, because of the grace God had given him “to be a minister of Christ

Jesus to the Gentiles [nations] with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles [nations] might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶ Over the past decade Paul had been instrumental in leading the Gentiles (nations) to the obedience that comes from faith in Christ through the proclamation of the gospel accompanied by signs and miracles done in the power of the Spirit. “So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum [modern day Albania],” Paul declared, “I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.”¹⁷ Apparently he believed the gospel was now so well established in this eastern Mediterranean region that the churches planted would continue the further evangelization of this part of the empire. Thus, he instructed Timothy in Ephesus to “do the work of an evangelist.”¹⁸ He encouraged the church in Colossae to “make the most of every opportunity...that you may know how to answer everyone.”¹⁹ And Paul prayed that the church in Philemon’s house in Colossae would be “active in sharing your faith.”²⁰

No Place Left

As an apostle to the nations, Paul’s ambition was to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, lest he “build on someone else’s foundation.”²¹ Paul was a frontier, pioneer missionary. He acknowledged that what he planted, others would water, and God would make grow.²² Thus, he concluded that since there was no more room left for him to work in the eastern regions, he would go to Spain. And on his way he hoped to visit the church in Rome to assist him on his journey there.²³ Paul was asking this Great Commission church to help further the advance of the gospel in the regions beyond where Christ was not yet known. He was seeking their assistance in sending him to the western Mediterranean region of the empire. He wrote, “I urge you by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.”²⁴ He requested they pray that his service to the poor in Jerusalem would be acceptable and that he would be rescued from unbelievers in Judea, so that, by God’s will, he might come to them with joy in the full measure of the blessing of Christ, and be refreshed as he made his way to Spain.

*Paul’s Witness
in Jerusalem*

Paul did get to Rome, but as a prisoner. While in Jerusalem a riot broke out. Paul was wrongly accused of defiling the temple by supposedly bringing Greeks into the temple area. Further, he was charged by the Jewish leaders, as was Stephen, of teaching “against our people

and our law and this place [the temple].”²⁵ When the crowd attempted to kill him, Roman soldiers intervened, arrested Paul, bound him in chains, and reluctantly allowed him to address the riotous crowd. As Paul made his defense, telling of his conversion to Christ, the crowd began shouting for his death. It was then that the Roman commander ordered him flogged and questioned to find out why the people were clamoring for his death. As the soldiers were preparing to beat him, Paul asked, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” The commander was alarmed. So, he ordered the chief priest and all the Sanhedrin to assemble the following day to try to ascertain the charges. When the Roman commander brought Paul before the Jewish council the next day, Paul declared he was on trial “because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.”²⁶ Again, an uproar broke out and the commander feared for Paul’s life. That night the Lord spoke to Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”²⁷

*Paul’s Witness
in Rome*

When a plot to kill Paul came to light, he was quickly transferred to Caesarea. There he appeared before Governor Felix. The chief priest and elders came from Jerusalem, along with a lawyer, to press charges against Paul, but all were false. Felix, wanting to grant a favor to the Jews, left Paul in prison. When two years passed and Festus replaced Felix, the Jews urgently requested the new governor to have Paul be transferred back to Jerusalem for trial. On the way back the Jewish leaders had planned to have him killed. When Festus asked Paul if he was willing to stand trial in Jerusalem, Paul refused. He declared that the charges were false and that no one had a right to hand him over to the Jews. Therefore, as a Roman citizen, Paul appealed to Caesar to be tried in Rome. So Paul was kept in Caesarea and made his defense before Governor Felix and Herod Agrippa II. Nothing could be found that made him guilty of imprisonment or death. After hearing Paul, Agrippa confessed to Felix, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”²⁸ And so it was, Paul was sent to Rome. Surviving a disastrous shipwreck, Paul finally arrived in the capital city. There, while awaiting trial before the emperor, Paul was placed under house arrest. Staying in a house he had rented, for two whole years Paul “welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁹ And apparently during this time, as previously indicated, Paul’s witness even reached the household of the emperor.³⁰

*Reaching the
Unreached*

As far as we know, Paul never did reach Spain, but eventually the gospel did.³¹ Nevertheless, his desire to travel west to Spain, with the assistance of the Roman church, marked a major move. It signaled an initiative to spread the gospel beyond the Greek to the Roman half of the civilized world, to the regions beyond, possibly including Gaul, Britain and Germany. Paul's constant ambition was to reach those yet unreached with the gospel. This frontier focus was passed on to the churches he planted as he encouraged them to pray for him and release workers to join him in spreading the gospel. This is why strengthening the churches was so essential, for as their faith continued to grow Paul's area of ministry among them greatly expanded so that he could preach the gospel in the regions beyond them. The "ends-of-the-earth" focus of the Great Commission in making disciples of all nations was Paul's driving passion. And this passion birthed churches that became Great Commission churches that continued to expand the spread of the gospel—a Great Commission movement.

Principle of Great Commission Church Movements

The focus on the regions beyond and the enlisting of strong, sending-base, Great Commission churches to collaborate in spreading the gospel to the unreached where Christ is not yet known.

Chapter Fifteen

Full-Circle Great Commission Church Movements

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”
(Matthew 24:14)*

Christ’s universal commission called his Church to preach the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name in the whole world, and make disciples of those who believe among all peoples. He promised his authority, power, and presence for all who go in his name. Going to the ends of the earth until the end of this age required an infinitely reproducible way of carrying out this Great Commission.

*Infinitely
Reproducible*

*An Empire-
Penetrating
Movement*

The expansion of the gospel in the first century was remarkable. Less than a decade after Pentecost, Luke could write, “The church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria...was strengthened, and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”¹ Less than three decades after Pentecost, the Apostle Paul wrote, “From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum [Albania], I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ...Now there is no more place for me to work in these regions.”² Multiplying church planting movements evangelized entire provinces. The church had been established so widely throughout the eastern Mediterranean region that Paul planned to go west to Spain. Later Paul penned these amazing words to the Colossian church: “All over the [Roman] world this gospel is producing fruit and growing...This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”³ “Disciples of all nations” was well on its way as the gospel was proclaimed and churches were planted throughout the Roman Empire.

Stage One

Luke’s account in Acts indicates this “making disciples of all nations” happened as the gospel took root and bore fruit through the establishing of strong, reproducing, sending-base churches in key centers such as Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus. In these churches which generated missions-sending movements at least four stages or phrases were evident.⁴ The first was an *initiating stage*, in which the gospel was preached in the power of the Holy Spirit and a church was started. Those who repented and believed the gospel were baptized, received and were filled with the Spirit, and incorporated into the fellowship of believers. Commitment to Christ was commitment to his Body. Beginning with baptism, new believers were discipled and taught what Christ had commanded. Evangelism and discipleship were connected. Thus, a church (*ekklesia*, a community of “called out ones”) was formed as believers were brought together, most frequently meeting in homes, and also at times in more public gatherings as was true initially in Jerusalem and Ephesus and most likely in Antioch. The making and multiplying of disciples and the initiation of a church characterized this first stage of the spread of the gospel in these key cities.

Stage Two

A *nurturing stage* followed as the community of faith regularly met together for teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread (meals, possibly including the Lord's Table), and prayer. Taught the truth and the way of the Lord, they learned to live a life of faith in Christ. Walking in the Spirit they grew in the fruit of the Spirit. They learned to love, forgive, and bear one another's burdens. As disciples, they continued in the teaching of Christ and their good works. Loving and caring for one another gave expression to their faith in the Lord. Filled with the Spirit, they were Christ's witnesses as they lived and shared the good news about Jesus with family, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. In actively sharing their faith they grew in their understanding of all they had in Christ. Gifted apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic leaders, along with pastors and teachers, equipped disciples for the work of ministry. Gifted by the Spirit, every member contributed to the building up of the Body of Christ. Strengthened in the faith, the church matured and grew in numbers. As the number of disciples increased, additional leaders were needed, frequently drawn from those who led and managed their own families well. Elders were appointed who oversaw and continued to care for, lead, and teach the emerging church. The growing number of leaders continued to shepherd and guide the church and made possible the multiplication of fellowships as they taught disciples and discipled and equipped additional leaders. Initially, apostolic leaders led the church in Jerusalem and Antioch. As the church grew, additional leaders, including elders, were added. In Ephesus the raising up and appointing of elders took place early on. The nurturing and strengthening of the church and the discipling and multiplying of leaders characterized this second stage.

Stage Three

An *expanding stage* began to take shape as the church took root in the culture and became increasingly indigenous: self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-expressing. The selection and appointment of local leaders took place quickly, sometimes within a year or two of the initiation of a church. Prior leadership within the family and possibly within the synagogue may account for such rapid appointment. Whether rapid or slower, ongoing leadership was local and home grown, and such leaders were supported with local funds and perhaps initially by working bi-vocationally. There is little if any evidence of external financial support. If offerings were sent from other churches, they were for the support of an apostolic

team leader such as Paul, or they were gifts sent to help those in need. Ongoing funding was local. Further, the continuing witness of disciples after the initial evangelization by an itinerant apostolic team was the primary way in which the gospel continued to spread through familial, social, and cultural connections. Ongoing evangelization was local. The communication of the gospel and the expression of the faith and life of the church were indigenous and culturally contextualized. Neither looked foreign. The church was fully “native.” Thus, the gospel spread more rapidly, the number of disciples increased, local leaders were raised up and supported, and churches multiplied. The result was an emerging national church movement within the culture that eventually penetrated and evangelized a nation (ethnos). In Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus an initial people movement among the Jews also eventually took place among the Gentiles—especially in Antioch and Ephesus. The expansion and multiplication of indigenous churches characterized this third stage.

Stage Four

An important *sending stage* took place when the church began to take the gospel to other cultures and peoples, as believers reached out to those who had not yet heard or understood the gospel. Initially it was opposition and persecution that dispersed disciples to other nations nearby such as the Samaritans. Monocultural evangelism among Jews, reaching only their own kind of people, expanded to multicultural evangelism, as disciples scattered by persecution eventually spoke not only to Jews, but to Gentiles as well in Antioch. As the gospel spread cross-culturally, disciples were made, leaders were trained, and churches were planted and workers were sent. Thus began another cycle of four stages within a new group, making possible the continuous spread of the gospel to unreached cultures and peoples. The churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome were such four-stage churches. They made and multiplied disciples, leaders, churches, and missionary-sending movements. They became Great Commission churches.

*Full-Circle “Wheel
of Missions”*

The church in the Book of Acts was characterized by that which was “infinitely reproducible.” They made disciples who made disciples, leaders who multiplied leaders, churches that planted churches, and missionary-sending churches that spawned missionary-sending Great Commission movements. This full-circle, four-stage, “infinitely

reproducible life-cycle” was how the early church carried out Christ’s command to reach the world by making disciples of all nations. Like a wheel, the gospel kept “rolling” farther and farther into the regions beyond, to unreached groups where Christ was not known—the “wheel of missions.”

Interestingly, there is little if any explicit reference to the Great Commission after Pentecost either in the book of Acts or in the epistles. It is implicit, for what is evident is that the early church preached the gospel and made disciples in ever expanding spheres of ministry, beginning in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the nations. The coming and outpouring of the Holy Spirit ignited a flame that spread the light of the gospel to the world of the first century. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the church became Christ’s witnesses, God’s missionary people—the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world of their day.

Principle of Great Commission Church Movements

The development of full-circle Great Commission churches that make and multiply obedient disciples, servant leaders, new churches and missionary-sending movements, continually advancing the spread of the gospel to unreached cultures and peoples.

Great Commission Church Movements

Conclusion

The depth and breadth of God's redeeming love for all nations is found throughout the Old and New Testaments. It is an integrating and pervasive theme of the Bible. In a sense, it is what the Bible is "all" about. It is about four "alls," four universals.

1. *All* have sinned and come short of the glory of God. All are without God and without hope. There is none righteous, no not one. *Humankind's condition is desperate and universal.*

"Worse than being trapped and not knowing the way out is to be lost and not even know it, for then one does not look for salvation, recognize it when it comes, nor accept it when it is offered. That's being lost...The lost condition of human beings breaks the Father's heart. What does it do to ours?"¹

2. Christ died for *all* so that *all* who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can a person call on his name if they have not heard it? The good news of salvation through Jesus Christ must reach all nations and every person. *Christ's Great Commission is urgent and universal.*

"The missionary commission is from the very beginning an ecumenical mission, a commission which concerns the whole inhabited world. Thus the criterion is simply: that one must have heard of Christ in order to believe in Him. Thus He must be preached everywhere, and to that end messengers of the gospel must be sent."²

3. God is not willing that any should perish but that *all* should come to repentance. He sought Adam, called Noah, chose Abraham, dispatched prophets, pursued Israel, humbled nations, and sent His Son, the Messiah, to redeem a wayward race. *God's missionary nature is unrelenting and universal.*

"The supreme arguments for missions are not found in any specific words. It is in the very being and character of God that the deepest grounds of the missionary enterprise is to be found. We cannot think of God except in terms which necessitate the missionary idea."³

4. *All* nations God has made will come and worship before Him. His

Son is worthy to receive the reward of His suffering, for with His blood He purchased men from every tribe, language, people and nation. All God has made is for His glory. *God's glory is ultimate and universal.*

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.”⁴

These four “universals” underscore why the Great Commission is important and finishing the task is imperative—humankind's lost condition, Christ's last command, God's great love, God's ultimate glory.

Christ's Great Commission is a finishable task. The “wheel of missions” is not a pinwheel that merely spins around. It is a moving wheel that continues to roll and one day will “roll” across the finish line. The gospel *will* be preached in all the world, disciples *will* be made of all nations. There *will* come a day when John's vision of “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” will be a reality.⁵

When this will happen only God knows, for he alone knows when the commission is complete and disciples have been made of all nations. When this has taken place, the trumpet *will* sound, Christ *will* return.⁶

It can be done! The delegation of Christ's authority, the provision of the Spirit's power, and the promise of Christ's presence until the end of the age makes possible the finishing of the task. The “wheel of missions” describes the process. The early church provides an example of multiplying what is infinitely reproducible in keeping the wheel rolling. They did it. And so must every generation, “for this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness to every nation” before the end comes (Matthew 24:14).

In concluding his study of the book of Acts, Dr. C. Peter Wagner ends with these hopeful words:

The fulfillment of Jesus' desire that His followers 'make disciples of all the nations' (Matthew 28:19) had started with great power and determination. It has continued through almost 2000 years, and now for the first time in history some missiologists are saying there is light at the end of the tunnel. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the Great Commission can actually be fulfilled in our generation!⁷

More than sixty generations have come and gone since Christ returned to heaven. Over the past two thousand years there have been waves of expansion and advance in the spread of the gospel followed by times of contraction and retrenchment.⁸ Currently we are in a fifth wave of expansion. Will it be followed yet again by a time of contraction, or will this be the final wave that brings in the tide? Could the Great Commission be fulfilled in this generation and the task finished? If so, the age-long cry of *maranatha* ("our Lord, come"), must be accompanied by the worldwide call to "whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."⁹ With the yearning of the Bride of Christ for the Bridegroom to return must be the extending of the invitation to every tribe, language, people and nation to come to salvation in Christ, for all are to be present at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

Great Commission Church Movements

Notes

Introduction

1. “The Church of the first Christian generation was a genuinely missionary Church.... What is clear is that every Christian was a witness. Where there were Christians, there would be a living, burning faith, and before long an expanding Christian community.... Nothing is more notable than the anonymity of these early missionaries.” (Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, revised edition, London: Penguin Books, 1964), 21–22.
2. Three approaches in understanding the mission of the church have characterized evangelicalism: (1) the historic orientation of evangelism and the development of thriving church movements among people groups, (2) a holistic orientation of evangelism and issues of social justice and reconciliation with a priority given to evangelism, and (3) a radical orientation of evangelism and social justice with priority given to neither (see A. Scott Moreau, ed., “Mission and Missions” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* edited by A. Scott Moreau, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 636–638.
3. Timothy Keller as quoted in David Horner’s *When Missions Shapes the Mission: You and Your Church Can Reach the World* by David Horner (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 3.
4. Mark 3:14.
5. Luke 4:43.
6. John 17:18; cp. 20:21.
7. Romans 10:13; Joel 2:32.
8. Romans 10:14–15.
9. Acts 1:8.
10. David Horner, *When Mission Shapes the Mission*, 3.

Part One—A Great Commission Church

1. Exodus 19:4–5; Isaiah 49:1–6.
2. Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 66.
3. Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 57.
4. Isaiah 56:7.
5. Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2.

6. Isaiah 49:6.
7. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 66.
8. Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:15–20; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:21–23; Acts 1:8.

Chapter One—The Living God is a Missionary God

1. Luke 24:19–21.
2. Luke 24:22.
3. Luke 24:25–26.
4. Luke 24:34.
5. Luke 24:36.
6. *TaNaKh* is an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of each of the three major sections of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament): *Torah* (“Teaching,” also known as the Five Books of Moses), *Nevi'im* (“Prophets”) and *Ketuvim* (“Writings”).
7. Luke 24:46–47.
8. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 30.
9. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 31.
10. Genesis 22:16, 18; See Romans 4:17–25 and Galatians 3:6–9, 14.
11. Isaiah 52:15; 53:7, 11, 12. See John 1:29, 35; Revelation 5:1–9.
12. Psalms 22:1, 24, 27. See Matthew 27:45–54.
13. Romans 8:32.
14. Revelation 13:8; Ephesians 1:7.
15. See 1 Peter 1:18–20.
16. Galatians 4:4.
17. The Latin phrase *Mission Dei* was used by the Ecumenical Movement in the 1952 Willingen Conference as a missiological term to stress the mission is God’s, not the church’s. It focuses “on everything God does in his task of establishing his kingdom in all its fullness in all the world. While it includes what the church does, it is not limited to that, for God works both in and out of the church” (A. Scott Moreau, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, 637). “S” was dropped from “missions” to reflect the total task (mission) of the church.

Chapter Two—The Great Commandment

1. Deuteronomy 7:9, 12.
2. This is God’s eternal covenant made to Abraham and his descendants. This unilateral (initiated by one party for the blessing of a second party) covenant was fulfilled initially with the nation of Israel and then fully and finally among all nations

- with all who had placed their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (the Church). See Genesis 17:1; Exodus 29:45–46; 2 Samuel 7:24; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 37:27; 2 Corinthians 6:16–18; Hebrews 9:15; Revelation 5:9; 7:9–10; Revelation 21:3–4.
3. Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18 (cf. Matthew 22:35–40). Jesus linked love of God and neighbor with the great confession of Israel (the Shema): “Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (see Mark 12:28–34).
 4. Exodus 20:2.
 5. See Luke 22:42–44.
 6. Hebrews 10:10.
 7. Philippians 2:8.
 8. Matthew 8:9–14.
 9. Luke 19:10.
 10. Luke 7:36–50.
 11. John 4:4–42.
 12. Mark 14:3; Luke 17:11–19.
 13. Matthew 15:21–28.
 14. Matthew 8:3–13.
 15. Luke 10:36–37.
 16. Luke 9:54.
 17. Matthew 5:43–48.

Chapter Three—The Universal Commission

1. 1 John 4:10.
2. Matthew 4:14–16; Isaiah 9:1–2.
3. Isaiah 9: 6–7.
4. Isaiah 49:6.
5. Matthew 4:24–25.
6. John 4:22.
7. John 4:29.
8. John 4:42.
9. John 1:29.
10. Matthew 10:5–6.
11. Mark 5:19 (compare Mark 1:25, 34, 43–44; 3:11–12; 6:43; 8:30; 9:9).
12. John 12:32.
13. Genesis 12:2–3; 18:17–19; 22:15–18; 26:2–5; 28:12–14.
14. Genesis 12:7.
15. Exodus 25:8.
16. Exodus, 29:42–43, 45.
17. Numbers 6:22–26.

18. Numbers 6:27.
19. Galatians 3:8–9, 14; Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18.
20. Romans 8:16.
21. Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–20; Luke 24:44–48; John 20:21–23; Acts 1:8.

Chapter Four—The Spirit on All Flesh

1. Luke 24:49.
2. Numbers 11:29.
3. Exodus 33:15–16.
4. Ezekiel 36:26–27.
5. Jeremiah 31:33–34 (cp. Hebrews 8:8–12).
6. Joel 2:28–29.
7. Matthew 3:15.
8. John 3:34.
9. John 1:33–34.
10. Luke 4:18–19 (cp. Isaiah 61:1–2).
11. John 14:17.
12. John 14:26.
13. John 16:13.
14. John 4:14.
15. John 14:12.
16. John 16:8.
17. John 16:9–11.
18. John 20:21–22. “This recalls the creation of man (Genesis 2:7), as though to announce the new creation, resulting not so much from the infusion of the breath of God as from the reception of the Holy Spirit (cf. 7:39). This need not rule out any relation to the Spirit in the days of earlier discipleship any more than it rules out the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost. Here the Spirit was the necessary equipment for the task that lay ahead, which is stated next [vs. 23]” (Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, London: Oliphants, 1962), 1120.
19. See John 4:13; 7:38–39.
20. Acts 1:4–5.
21. Acts 1:9.
22. Acts 1:11.
23. Acts 2:2–4.
24. There are seven occurrences connecting the word “baptism” and “Holy Spirit” found in the New Testament (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:4–5; 11:16–17; 1 Corinthians 12:13). The four references in the gospels and the two in the

book of Acts all refer to the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Of the five accounts of the reception of the Spirit in the book of Acts (Acts 2:1–4; 8:14–15; 9:17–18; 10:44–47; 19:1–6), two occurred at the time of conversion (Saul, Cornelius’ household) and three occurred subsequent to conversion (the 120, the Samaritans, and the Ephesians). The subsequent receptions of the Spirit appear to be unusual rather than normative. Luke concurs with other New Testament writers, including Paul, that “from a theological standpoint, the work of the Spirit is one package (Acts 2:38–39), but in the experience of the church not all aspects of his work are necessarily manifested simultaneously. Luke emphasizes the prophetic-empowerment dimension of the Spirit so much that he rarely mentions other aspects of the Spirit’s work” (Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 345. As to “the sign” of the coming of the Spirit, in each of these five occurrences in the book of Acts there was a definite manifestation. In three instances tongues occurred (120, Cornelius’ household, Ephesians). In two instances it was an observable manifestation. With the Samaritans the manifestation was unidentified, but so evident that Simon the Magician sought to buy the power. With Saul it was healing from blindness. Thus, no one sign is “the evidence” of the reception and immersion of the Spirit. Rather, “the simple evidence in God’s Word is that He never intended spiritual language as a proof, but that He offered it as a provision—a resource for readiness in prayer and praise [1 Corinthians 14]” (Jack Hayford, *The Beauty of Spiritual Language*, Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1992), 98.

25. Galatians 3:14.
26. See the table of nations in Genesis 10 that were scattered at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9).
27. Acts 2:23–24.
28. Acts 2:36.
29. See Acts 2:8–11. “Although these are Jews, they are culturally and linguistically members of many nations; thus, even from the church’s inception, the Spirit proleptically [prophetically] moved the church into multicultural diversity under Christ’s lordship” (Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*), 327.
30. It is of note that the movement known for its claim to have experienced Pentecost (i.e., Pentecostals) is also known for its evangelistic passion and missionary vision. Pentecostal missiologist Grant McClung writes that “From the inception

of the Pentecostal Movement, our mission has always been missions. Indeed, Pentecostalism cannot be understood apart from its self-identity as a missionary movement raised up by God to evangelize the world in the last days” (“Pentecostals: The Sequel: What Will It Take for This World Phenomenon to Stay Vibrant for Another 100 Years?”, *Christianity Today*, April 2006), 30.

Chapter Five—The Church in Jerusalem

1. Acts 4:4.
2. Acts 2:42.
3. See John L. Amstutz, *Making and Multiplying Disciples: The Master’s Plan of Discipleship* (Fresno, CA: Editorial Renuevo, 2013). “The apostles taught what Jesus taught them: to obey all he commanded....These commands are found in the Gospels, especially in the Gospel of Mathew where the sayings of Jesus are arranged according to topic rather than chronology. Of all the Gospels, it appears that Matthew may well have designed his Gospel as a discipling manual” (25). The book reviews the five major teaching passages in Matthew which summarize what Jesus taught about His Way (chapters 5–7), His witnesses (chapter 10), His Kingdom (chapter 13), His People (chapter 18), and His Return (chapters 24–25).
4. The word “disciple” appears thirty times in the book of Acts (see Acts 6:1–2, 7; 9:1, 10, 19, 25, 26, 38 etc.). It was not until Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians” (Acts 11:26), a word that appears only two other times in the New Testament (Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).
5. Romans 5:5.
6. John 13:34–35. See also 1 John 3:16–18.
7. Acts 6:2.
8. Acts 6:7.
9. Acts 5:16.
10. Acts 8:1.
11. Acts 8:31.
12. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.12.10.
13. Acts 9:35.
14. Acts 9:42.
15. Acts 10:15.
16. Acts 10:22.
17. Acts 10:33.
18. Luke 10:5–7.

19. Acts 10:46.
20. Acts 10:47.
21. Acts 11:1.
22. Acts 11:18. "In Acts almost every evangelistic endeavor involves the crossing of boundaries. One of the most significant events in Acts is the conversion of Cornelius. It was the first full-blown encounter between a Christian Jew and a Gentile, with significant implications for the future mission and evangelism of the early church.... It is clear that the Cornelius story is about the social barrier to the Gentile missions. For the Jerusalem church to overcome such a barrier, Peter first has to experience a conversion, learning firsthand that 'God shows no partiality' (Acts 10:54). Peter's conversion then leads to the conversion of the church from ethnocentrism to multiculturalism" (Joong-Sik Park, "The Gospel and the Practice of Hospitality", *Global Mission: Reflections and Case Studies in Contextualization for the Whole Church*, Rose Dowsett, editor, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011), 192–193.
23. "It is at least a possibility that the Roman church, whose origins are so obscure, may go back to some of those 'visitors from Rome' who heard the gospel in Jerusalem that day and carried it home when they returned" (F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts*, revised edition, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 57. "By the autumn following the Crucifixion it is quite possible that Jesus was honored in the Jewish community at Rome as He was at Damascus" (F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *Peter, Prince of Apostles*, New York: George H. Doran, 1927), 195.
24. Galatians 2:8.
25. Same-cultural evangelism has been called E-1 evangelism (crossing the "stained glass barrier" between believers and non-believers of the same culture). Cross-cultural evangelism has been called E-2 evangelism (crossing a cultural barrier of a similar culture, in addition to the "stained glass barrier") or E-3 evangelism (crossing a cultural barrier of a very different culture, in addition to the "stained glass barrier"). See C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* (Ventura, CA; Regal Books, 1987), 116. The ability to evangelize and plant churches cross-culturally has been called the "missionary gift" (C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: a Comprehensive Guide*, Ventura, CA: Regal Books. 1990, 78–80).
26. Acts 15:11.

Chapter Six—The Gospel of Grace

1. John 10:11.
2. See Luke 4:43; 19:10; Mark 10:45.
3. Matthew 16:14.
4. Matthew 16:16.
5. Matthew 16:23.
6. Luke 23:43.
7. John 21:5–6.
8. John 21:15. “More than these” probably refers not to the fish, but to the other disciples, for Peter had declared on the night of betrayal that “Even if all fall away, I will not” (Mark 14:29).
9. John 21:15–17.
10. John 1:29.
11. See John 15:26; 27, 16:13–14.
12. Acts 2:38–39.
13. Acts 4:12.
14. Philippians 3:5–6.
15. Acts 26:15.
16. 1 Timothy 1:13–14.
17. Acts 26:18.
18. Acts 26:20.
19. Acts 26:23.
20. I Corinthians 15:3–5.
21. Galatians 1:11–12.
22. Romans 1:16–17.
23. Romans 3:23.
24. Romans 1:21–22.
25. Romans 2:24 and Isaiah 52:5 (cp. Ezekiel 36:22).
26. Romans 3:9–12 (see Psalms 14:1–3; 53:1–3; Ecclesiastes 7:20).
27. Romans 3:19–20.
28. Romans 3:22–24.
29. Romans 4:25.
30. 2 Corinthians 5:19.
31. “The notion of God’s love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of *karma*, the Jewish covenant, and Muslim code of law —each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God’s love unconditional” (Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 45.
32. Romans 1:17.

33. Titus 3:5–7.
34. Ephesians 2:8–9.
35. Galatians 5:6.
36. Galatians 5:13–14.

Chapter Seven—The Grace of Giving

1. Acts 2:44–45; 4:33–34. This was not Christian communism, but Christian community (*koinonia*). “This was not a forsaking of the principle of private ownership, since the disposal and distribution of their possessions was occasioned ‘as anyone had need.’ When the need became known, action was taken based on loving concern (1 John 3:17). So the Christian society differed from that of Qumran, where the pooling of resources was obligatory when one was taken in the group” (Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 66.
2. John 13:35. “When the love of God wells up in the hearts of a group of His children, they will more likely show a willingness to freely share what they have. It’s the lifestyle of love. *We received* when we *believed*, so now we *give* as a way to *live*. That’s what they did at the church’s beginning. And that’s all that any of us are asked to do today” (Jack W. Hayford, *The Key to Everything*, Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1993), 169.
3. Acts 2:47.
4. “Earning the respect and even admiration of outsiders is, however, not enough. Christians’ lifestyle should not only be exemplary, but also winsome. It should attract outsiders and invite them to join the community. Put differently, the believers should practice a missionary lifestyle” (David J. Bosch, *Transforming Missions: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 137.
5. Acts 5:14.
6. Acts 6:7.
7. Acts 4:32.
8. Acts 11:29.
9. 2 Corinthians 8:2–3, 5.
10. 2 Corinthians 8:6.
11. 2 Corinthians 8:9.
12. 2 Corinthians 8:14. Paul supported this principle of equality from the way in which the Lord provided manna day by day in the wilderness for the Israelites. There was always enough for the entire camp of thousands as everyone collected enough to meet their needs that day, some more, some less (Exodus 16:18).

Excess manna rotted. Thus, there was not a needy one among them as they gathered only what was needed day by day.

13. Romans 15:27.
14. 1 Corinthians 9:13–18.
15. Acts 20:35.
16. Matthew 10:8.
17. 2 Corinthians 5:13–14.

Chapter Eight—A House of Prayer for All Nations

1. Acts 1:14.
2. Acts 2:2–4.
3. See Psalms 55:17; Daniel 6:10; Acts 3:1; 10:3, 9.
4. Luke 18:1.
5. Luke 18:5.
6. Luke 18:7–8.
7. Matthew 7:8, 11 (see Luke 11:1–13).
8. Acts 12:5.
9. Acts 4:24.
10. Acts 4:27–28.
11. Acts 4:29–30.
12. Acts 4:31.
13. John 5:19.
14. John 14:24.
15. Luke 11:1. “Jesus Christ was essentially the teacher of prayer by precept and example. We have glimpses of His praying which, like indices, tell how full of prayer the pages, chapters, and volumes of His life were. The epitome which covers not one segment only, but the whole circle of His life, and character, is preeminently that of prayer!” (E. M. Bounds, *The Best of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 178–179.
16. Matthew 9:38.
17. Psalms 86:9–10; See Revelation 7:9–10.
18. Matthew 24:14. See Psalms 47:8–9; 96:1–9.
19. 1 Peter 2:9–10. See 2 Corinthians 5:14–21. “God has given us prayer because Jesus has given us a mission. We are on earth to press back the forces of darkness, and we are given access to headquarters by prayer to advance this cause” (John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993, 47–48. See also David Shibley, *A Force in the Earth: The Move of the Holy Spirit in World Evangelization*, Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1997, 75–78.)

20. Acts 2:42.
21. 2 Chronicles 6:32–33.
22. Isaiah 56:6–7.
23. Mark 11:17.
24. Ephesians 2:19, 22.
25. 1 Timothy 2:2–6.
26. Ephesians 6:17–20 “Without question, the missionary effectiveness of Paul and his missionary teams was the result of collaborative prayer partners interceding for divine intervention. There was reciprocity in their prayers—Paul prayed for them as they also made intercession for him and his team” (Mark L. Williams, “Collaborating the Commission: Working Together in World Evangelization,” Arto Hamalainen and Grant McClung, editors, *Together in One Mission: Pentecostal Cooperation in World Evangelization*, Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2012), 120.
27. Philippians 4:22.
28. Part Two: Great Commission Church Movements
29. Matthew 16:15–18.

Chapter Nine—The Church in Antioch

1. Acts 6:5.
2. Acts 11:20. Some have suggested there were two separate missions to Antioch, the first by the Hellenistic Jews from Jerusalem to the Jews (verse 19), and a second mission later by Hellenistic Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene to the Gentiles (verse 20). See C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit, a Modern Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books), 244–250. The text literally reads “Therefore, the ones being scattered from the affliction occurring over Stephen, passed through to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except only to Jews. But some of them were men, Cypriotes and Cyrenians, who coming to Antioch, spoke also to the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus.” The phrase “but some of them” would suggest that those from Cyprus and Cyrene were a part of the same mission that came from Jerusalem and, in addition to speaking to the Jews, they “spoke also to the Greeks.” Thus, the simplest reading of the text points to one mission with two audiences.
3. Acts 11:21.
4. Acts 11:24.
5. Acts 11:23.
6. At the beginning of his second missionary journey, Paul “went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (Acts

- 15:41). “Where did these churches come from? Nothing is said about them previously in Acts. Yet Paul knew about them and wanted to give them additional strength.... I cannot escape the feeling that Saul had been responsible for founding them” (William Sanford LaSor, *Church Alive*, Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1972, 169).
7. Acts 11:26.
 8. Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16.
 9. Acts 11:28.
 10. Acts 11:29.
 11. Colossians 1:10.
 12. “Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul” (Acts 13:1).
 13. Acts 13:2.
 14. Acts 13:3. Ralph D. Winter has identified what he calls “the two structures of God’s redemptive mission.” The early church was structured along the pattern of the Jewish synagogue that embraced old and young, male and female, a congregational structure (a “modality”). But when the church in Antioch sent out Barnabas and Saul a second, quite different, structure developed, that of a missionary band, a missions structure (a “sodality”). The “modality” is defined as a single decision community open to all. The “sodality” is defined as a second decision fellowship which involves an additional commitment beyond modality membership and is limited by age or gender.
 15. The modality is inclusive and nurture-oriented. The modality is limited in focus and task-oriented. Winter points out that throughout the history of the Christian movement God has used both the modality structure (local congregation, parish church, diocese, denomination) and the sodality structure (missionary band, monastic order, mission agency) to advance his kingdom. Both are legitimate, interdependent, and essential structures in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. See “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” *Missiology: An International Review* (January 1974), 121–139.

Chapter Ten—The Churches in Galatia

1. See Acts 11:19.
2. Acts 13:7.
3. Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church*, 207. See Acts 15:39.

4. J.D. Douglas, editor, *The New Bible Dictionary*, first edition (London: The Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962), 285.
5. Acts 13:22.
6. Acts 13:23.
7. Acts 13:38–39.
8. Acts 13:46.
9. Acts 13:46–47; Isaiah 49:6.
10. Acts 13:49.
11. Acts 13:43, 52.
12. Acts 14:1.
13. Acts 14:3; See Galatians 3:5.
14. Mark 16:20. “The attribution of the title ‘apostles’ to Barnabas as well as Paul, both here and in verse 14, is perplexing, until we remember that the word is used in the New Testament in two senses. On the one hand, there were the ‘apostles of Christ,’ personally appointed by him to be witnesses of the resurrection, who included the Twelve, Paul and probably James (1:21; 10:41). There is no evidence that Barnabas belonged to this group. On the other hand, there were the ‘apostles of the churches’ [2 Corinthians 8:23], sent out by the church or churches on particular missions, as Epaphroditus was an apostle or messenger of the Philippian church. So too, Paul and Barnabas were both apostles of the church of Syrian Antioch, sent out by them, whereas only Paul was also an apostle of Christ” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 229.
15. Acts 14:3.
16. Acts 14:7.
17. Acts 14:9.
18. Acts 14:11.
19. Acts 14:15a.
20. Acts 14:15b.
21. Acts 14:21.
22. Acts 20:4.
23. See William Sanford LaSor, *Church Alive*, 221.
24. Acts 14:22a.
25. Acts 14:22b.
26. 2 Timothy 3:12.
27. Romans 6:5.
28. Acts 14:23a.
29. Acts 14:23b. Such seemingly rapid appointment of elders in newly planted churches may reflect prior leadership experience in the synagogue and the recognition of their place in a familial,

multigenerational society. It is doubtful they met the no-recent-convert requirement Paul later laid down for elders in his letter to Timothy (see 1 Timothy 3:6).

30. John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 235.
31. Acts 14:26.
32. Acts 14:27.
33. Acts 14:26.
34. Acts 15:1.
35. Galatians 2:14.
36. Galatians 1:6–7. I am following the south Galatian theory of most scholars that the letter to the Galatians was written to the churches Paul pioneered on his first missionary journey in the Province of Galatia, rather than to churches farther north in what was geographically known as Galatia, of which we have no account of their beginning. See Hermon N. Ridderbos, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 22–31.
37. Galatians 3:24.
38. Galatians 2:21.
39. Galatians 3:26–29.
40. Galatians 5:13b, 14.
41. Acts 15:4.
42. Acts 15:8.
43. Acts 15:12.
44. Acts 15:15–17 (Amos 9:11–12).
45. Acts 15:19–21.
46. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 257.
47. Acts 15:31.

Chapter Eleven—The Churches in Macedonia

1. Acts 15:35.
2. C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, 381–382.
3. 1 Corinthians 9:22.
4. Acts 16:5.
5. Acts 16:9.
6. Acts 15:12.
7. Acts 16:15.
8. Acts 16:21.
9. Acts 16:28.
10. Acts 16:30.
11. Acts 16:31,

12. Philippians 4:16.
13. I Thessalonians 1:8.
14. Philippians 2:25, 27, 30.
15. Philippians 4:22.
16. Philippians 1:19.
17. Acts 17:3a.
18. Acts 17:3b.
19. I Thessalonians 1:5.
20. I Thessalonians 1:9.
21. I Thessalonians 2:9. Most likely, Paul worked as a tentmaker, as he later would do also in Corinth (Acts 18:3) and probably in Ephesus (Acts 20:34).
22. Philippians 4:16.
23. I Thessalonians 2:12; 4:1.
24. Acts 17:6–7.
25. I Thessalonians 2:18.
26. I Thessalonians 1:8.
27. Acts 17:11a.
28. Acts 17:11b.
29. Acts 17:12.
30. Acts 17:15.
31. Acts 20:4.

Chapter Twelve—The Churches in Achaia

1. 2 Thessalonians 3:1.
2. Acts 17:17.
3. The Epicurean “school of thought was named after its founder, Epicurus. Deistic in point of view, the Epicureans emphasized pleasure (in the sense of tranquility and freedom from pain) as the chief end of human existence—an idea that suited the Greek temperament rather well. The Stoic system of thought, founded by Zeno of Cyprus, derived its name from the Stoa, or portico in Athens, where Zeno first taught. It was pantheistic in its outlook and emphasized duty and self-discipline, proving especially congenial to the Roman temperament” (Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church*, 267).
4. Acts 17:16.
5. Acts 17:18.
6. Acts 17:23.
7. Acts 17:25.
8. Acts 17:27.

9. Acts 17:28. Paul quotes two Greek poets: Epimenides from Crete (c. 600 B.C.), and Aratus from Cilicia (born 310 B.C.)
10. Acts 17:30–31.
11. 1 Corinthians 9:22.
12. 1 Corinthians 2:2.
13. See Ned B. Stonehouse, *Paul Before the Areopagus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdman's Publishing Company, 1957), 31–40.
14. See Acts 13:26–39 (cf. Galatians 3:1).
15. Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church*, 274.
16. “No mention is made of the formation of a church in Athens, nor is there any record of a later visit by Paul to shepherd this small flock. Yet there was a church, and it is noted by patristic writers of a later time, especially by Origen” (Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church*), 273. Although response was limited, Paul’s preaching was not a failure for some did believe, among whom was “Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others” (Acts 17:33).
17. Acts 18:4.
18. Acts 18:5.
19. Acts 18:6.
20. Acts 18:9–10.
21. Acts 18:13.
22. Acts 18:15. “Gallio’s ruling meant in effect that Paul and his associates, so long as they committed no breach of public order, continued to share the protection which Roman law granted to the practice of Judaism.... It meant that for the next ten to twelve years, until imperial policy toward Christians underwent a complete reversal, the gospel could be proclaimed in the provinces of the empire without fear of coming into conflict with Roman law” (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*), 354.
23. Acts 18:17.
24. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 352.
25. 2 Corinthians 10:15–16.
26. Acts 16:5.
27. In his letter to the Romans, Paul mentioned “the church in Cenchrea” (16:1), an Aegean seaport outside of Corinth which may have been planted during his extended stay in Corinth. He encouraged the church in Rome to give to Phoebe, a deacon of the church, “any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me” (16:2).

Chapter 13—The Churches in Asia Minor

1. Acts 19:35.
2. Acts 18:23.
3. Acts 20:26.
4. Acts 20:27 (see I Corinthians 16:19).
5. Acts 19:6.
6. Acts 19:8
7. Acts 20:21.
8. Acts 20:24–25.
9. Acts 20:20, 27.
10. Acts 19:13.
11. Acts 19:15.
12. “A power encounter is a practical, visible demonstration that the power of God is greater than the power of the spirits worshiped or feared by the members of a given social group or by individuals” (C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, 292). Other such “power encounters” of the gospel with evil powers took place in Samaria with Simon the Magician (Acts 8:9–24), in Paphos with Elymas Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6–12), and in Philippi with the fortune-telling slave girl (Acts 16:16–24). Here in Acts 19, “Luke’s purpose . . . [was] to emphasize the sweeping victory of the Lord over the powers of darkness even in Ephesus, noted center of magical arts” (Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 90.
13. Acts 19:17.
14. Acts 19:20.
15. See Colossians 1:7; 4:7; Ephesians 6:21; Acts 20:4; Philemon 1:1–2.
16. Colossians 1:6–7.
17. Colossians 4:12–13.
18. “His [Paul’s] strategy was to evangelize the hinterland (uncharted, unevangelized regions) through people he had brought to Christ and trained for service. This latter activity must have included instruction on how to reach ‘both Jews and Greeks.’ It is clear that Paul did not go out into the province, but remained in the city (Ephesus)” (Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church*) 291.
19. Acts 19:10.
20. Acts 19:26.

Chapter Fourteen—The Church in Rome

1. Acts 19:21.

2. Romans 1:10.
3. Acts 2:10–11. “It may be significant that these Roman visitors are the only European contingent to receive express mention among the pilgrims” (F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 13.
4. Romans 16:3–5; cf. Acts 18:18–26; 1 Corinthians 16:19.
5. Romans 1:16.
6. Romans 15:7–9.
7. Romans 15:9–12; cf. Deuteronomy 32:43; Isaiah 11:10; Psalms 18:49; 117:1.
8. Galatians 3:26, 28–29; cp. Ephesians 2:11–22; Colossians 3:9–14. The homogenous unit principle (HUP) is an evangelistic principle, for “people like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class A barriers” (Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, third edition, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 163. However, if perpetuated beyond the first generation of believers, this principle can be misapplied and misused to countenance racial and social prejudice and segregation.
9. Romans 15:7.
10. Romans 12:9–10, 13, 16.
11. Romans 1:8.
12. Romans 16:3–15.
13. Romans 16:12.
14. Romans 10:14–16; cf. Isaiah 52:7.
15. Romans 15:14.
16. Romans 15:16.
17. Romans 15:19.
18. 2 Timothy 4:5.
19. Colossians 4:5–6.
20. Philemon 6.
21. Romans 15:20. “We must understand that the first goal of missions—to birth the Church where it is not present toward the ultimate goal of discipling nations” (Stan Parks, “Training Movement Catalysts,” *Missions Frontiers*, Issue 38:2, March/April 2016), 17.
22. 1 Corinthians 3:6. “Paul’s role was to enter a place where Christ was not being ‘named’ or ‘known’ (v. 20), share the gospel, make disciples, plant churches that could multiply to reach that region.... [Church Planting] Movements of the kingdom were starting in each region with sufficient life and momentum embedded in them to carry the proclamation of the gospel to

every nook and cranny. Paul didn't have to plant every church—just a few church-planting churches with a vision for their region and beyond” (Steve Smith, “No Place Left as the Benchmark,” *Missions Frontiers*, Issue 38:3, May/June 2016), 40.

23. Romans 15:24.
24. Romans 15:30.
25. Acts 21:28; cp. 6:11–14.
26. Acts 23:6.
27. Acts 23:11.
28. Acts 26:32.
29. Acts 28:30. 31.
30. Philippians 4:22.
31. “From the most reliable historical and archaeological evidence, Spain was not evangelized until the middle of the third century” (John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 9–16*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 344.

Chapter Fifteen—Full Circle Great Commission Church Movements

1. Acts 9:31.
2. Romans 15:19, 23.
3. Colossians 1:6, 23.
4. Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 43–44. Van Engen identifies seven stages in the emerging of a local and national missionary church which he indicates are repeated time and again in church planting situations. These seven developmental stages are similar in sequence and content to the four stage, 360-degree developmental process proposed by C. Peter Wagner in *Stop the World I Want to Get On* (103–105), and *On the Crest of the Wave* (164–165). The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel has sought to define its missions strategy in terms of the four-stage developmental process. See Phil Starr, “What Does It Mean to be a Church Planting Mission?,” *Foursquare World Advance* 22 (September/October 1986), p. 5, and Foursquare Missions International's Global Resource Guide (1994), 1–2.
5. Conclusion
6. Robertson McQuilkin, *The Great Omission: A Biblical Basis for World Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 39–40, 51.

7. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1962), 112.
8. Unidentified source. See Robert E. Speer, *Missionary Principles and Practices* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1902, 9: “The work of missions is our duty, not chiefly because of the command of Christ’s lips, but because of the desire of His heart.”
9. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 11.
10. Revelation 7:9. See Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net) for data and current listing of unreached people groups (groups lacking enough followers of Christ and resources to evangelize their own people).
11. “How can we know when Jesus will return with the task of world evangelization complete? We can’t, though we may discern when the time draws near. Jesus spoke these words just before His death: ‘This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come’ (Matthew 24:14, RSV). The timing of His return seems to be intimately connected with the evangelization of the world—and there with our own obedience” (Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church*, Colorado Springs, Co: Biblica, Inc., 2011), 237.
12. C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, 541. Wagner adds insightful words, “Furthermore, to the degree that we use Acts as our missionary training manual, that possibility can even more readily become a reality.”
13. See David B. Barnett, ed., “A Chronology of World Evangelization, AD 27–1983” in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 23–32.
14. Revelation 22:17, 20.

Conclusion

1. Robertson McQuilkin, *The Great Omission: A Biblical Basis for World Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 39–40, 51.
2. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1962), 112.
3. George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1984), 55 where Peter quotes Robert Speer. See Robert E. Speer, *Missionary Principles and Practices* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1902, 9: “The work of missions is our duty, not chiefly because of the command of Christ’s lips, but because of the desire of His heart.”

4. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 11.
5. Revelation 7:9. See Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net) for data and current listing of unreached people groups (groups lacking enough followers of Christ and resources to evangelize their own people).
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7. C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, 541. Wagner adds insightful words, “Furthermore, to the degree that we use Acts as our missionary training manual, that possibility can even more readily become a reality.”
8. See David B. Barnett, ed., “A Chronology of World Evangelization, AD 27–1983” in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 23–32.
9. Revelation 22:17, 20.

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Appendix A

National Church Development

(Disciples of All Nations: Continuous Mission Until He Comes, pages 27–35. Used by permission.)

An Infinitely Reproducible Pattern: A Life Cycle

Christ’s call to “make disciples of all nations” requires an infinitely reproducible way of doing things. Throughout the first and subsequent centuries, the growth and expansion of the Church has been characterized by the development of indigenous national church movements within cultures and countries. Such multiplying movements are characterized by what is infinitely reproducible.

Full development of a national church movement is similar to a life cycle, which moves through the stages of life from childhood to adolescence to young adult to older adult.

Like a ***child***, the church is birthed by the Spirit and grows in the way of the Lord.

Like a ***youth***, the church is nurtured and matures in unity and love.

Like a ***young adult***, the church is fruitful and multiplies and gives birth to other churches.

Like an ***older adult***, the church is supportive and sends workers to take the gospel to regions yet untouched with the gospel.

Perhaps the most full-orbed way in which to picture the full cycle national church development is a wheel consisting of four stages or phases. Each stage in the cycle has the goal of reproducing what is infinitely reproducible. The goal of Stage 1 is to develop responsible disciples who reproduce disciples, becoming a local congregation. The goal of Stage 2 is to develop responsible leaders who reproduce leaders, edifying and equipping the congregation. The goal of Stage 3 is to develop responsible congregations that reproduce congregations, becoming a national movement. The goal of Stage 4 is to develop

responsible national movements that send missionaries and reproduce other national movements, becoming an international movement. Such a pattern is infinitely reproducible and is somewhat like a wheel that continues to roll. More specifically, the process could be described in the following way:

Stage 1

From sinner to believer; from believer to obedient disciple of Jesus Christ.

Stage 2

From obedient disciple to contributing member of the body of Christ; from contributing member to equipping leader in the body of Christ.

Stage 3

From reproducing leader to church growth and expansion; from church expansion to church multiplication into a national movement.

Stage 4

From church multiplication to cross-culture involvement; from cross-culture involvement to sending missionaries.

...which initiates another national church movement cycle.

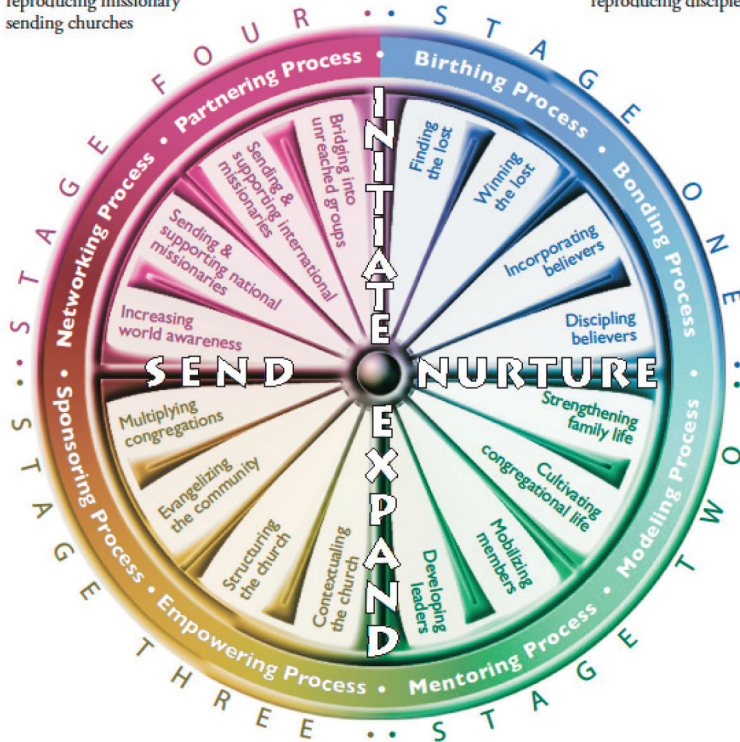
National Church Development – Four Stages

Stage 4 - Send - extending

Goal: to make responsible, reproducing missionary sending churches

Stage 1 - Initiate - evangelizing

Goal: to make responsible, reproducing disciples



Stage 3 - Expand - multiplying

Goal: to make responsible, reproducing congregations

Stage 2 - Nurture - strengthening

Goal: to make responsible, reproducing leaders

Stage 1: Initiate – evangelizing. Goal: to make responsible, reproducing disciples.

We evangelize by winning the lost to Christ and by planting churches. The goal of Stage 1 is to make responsible, reproducing disciples. The task, therefore, is twofold. First, it requires communicating the gospel to people who are without Christ, the lost. Transferring believing church members from one church to another church is not evangelism. Rather, the lost must be sought, found, and won. Like Jesus' methods,

the pattern is one of “go and tell” evangelism as well as “come and see” evangelism. Effective ways must be found to get the gospel to people. Then effective ways must be found to explain the gospel for people so that they can respond and make a meaningful decision concerning God’s gracious offer of forgiveness of sin and eternal life based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The message is authenticated by both the lifestyle of believers showing the love of God and the presence of the miraculous that demonstrates the power of God. This gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to convict of sin and give new birth, bringing about genuine conversion.

Second, the task of Stage 1 requires planting the church. As with a newborn child, the birthing process must be followed by the bonding process. Those who repent and believe the gospel must be openly identified with and warmly welcomed into the family of God. Therefore, in obedience to Christ’s command, repentance and faith are to be followed by public confession in the waters of baptism and the receiving of the promised Holy Spirit as occurred on the Day of Pentecost. Beginning a local fellowship of believers is essential, for new converts need care and teaching. They need to be integrated into the family and taught to continue in obedience to all Christ commanded, thereby proving to be His disciples. Such responsible disciples will begin to reproduce themselves by winning their families and friends to the Savior. In the case of a pioneer situation, the sending church will seek to avoid incomplete strategies, namely, evangelizing without making disciples, making disciples without planting churches, or merely establishing a “token presence” in a region or country.

Stage 2: Nurture – strengthening. Goal: to make responsible, reproducing leaders.

We strengthen the church by establishing sound doctrine and by training leaders. The goal of Stage 2 is to make responsible, reproducing leaders. Therefore, the task of this stage is also twofold. First, the developing of godly character is essential for a healthy church. The primary arena for shaping such Christ-like character is in the home, which is the church in its simplest and most original form. Here the soundness of doctrine can be put to the test. If the Christian faith is to become truly a part of the culture, it must be modeled by the parents and owned by the children. It must become multi-generational. Thus, parents, especially fathers, need to be trained to lead their families in the ways of the Lord. Since the church is in reality an extended family, the strengthening of family life is foundational to the cultivating of healthy congregational life.

Second, the task of Stage 2 requires training leaders. As with a maturing adolescent, the modeling process must be supplemented by the mentoring process. Training in maturity must be complemented by training in ministry. Growing up must result in giving out. Transforming takers into givers is the challenge. Because each member of the body of Christ has something to give, believers must be helped to identify, develop, and use their divine giftedness for the good of others. Leaders, therefore, are gifted to serve, and they are gifted to equip others to do likewise. Such a releasing ministry is first seen in the home. Mobilizing people for the good of others is initially a family affair. Those who model servant-leadership and lead their families well are those who are to lead the body of Christ. Thus, emerging leaders are identified and developed so that the leadership base can be enlarged and the body of Christ edified and expanded. Making responsible, reproducing leaders is training leaders not only as leaders of followers but also as leaders of leaders. In Stage 2, leadership development and training are high priorities, aiding in increasing both the quantity and quality of leaders in anticipation of the type of expansion required for nationalization in Stage 3. In the case of a pioneer situation, the sending church will seek to avoid overuse of event-centered ministry, one-generational perspectives, edifice mentalities, rigid institutionalism, or excessive indebtedness.

Stage 3: Expand – multiplying. Goal: to make responsible, reproducing churches.

We multiply congregations within a region or nation by structuring for self-expression and self-government and by evangelizing through self-propagation and self-support. The goal of Stage 3 is to make responsible, reproducing congregations who multiply culturally appropriate churches that together become a regional or national church movement. Therefore, the task of Stage 3 is again twofold. First, it requires releasing the church in self-expression and self-government. A church must find a way to fit its environment so that it does not appear foreign and, thereby, erect unnecessary barriers to understanding and acceptance of the gospel. Its style of worship, fellowship, teaching, caring, and outreach must be appropriate to the culture in which it is ministering. Such contextualizing of ministry releases the church to serve its society more effectively and fruitfully. Further, the church must be structured in such a way as to release contextualized ministry. Form must follow and free function. Therefore, church government, organization, and administration should be kept simple, flexible, and practical, empowering the church to carry out its ministry in its community and culture.

Second, the task of Stage 3 requires multiplying into a regional or national movement through evangelizing its “Jerusalem” and multiplying churches in its “Judea.” As with a growing young adult, the empowering process to help them “stand on their own two feet” must be complemented with the sponsoring process to give them meaningful opportunities to “try their wings.” Expansion growth through winning the lost in its own culture requires a church to be involved in continual evangelism that is both sensitive and flexible. A combination of media, and mass and personal evangelistic methods will probably be necessary. Both programmed and spontaneous evangelism will be needed. This involves the witness of the corporate body of believers as well as the witness of individuals to family and friends within their sphere of influence. Extension growth through the starting of new churches within the larger region should follow. Like young adults, young congregations tend to be most reproductive within the first half of their life span. Church planting by local churches may need to be complemented by mobile apostolic type church planting teams that can pioneer churches at greater distances. The development of appropriate regional structures will be essential. Where a sending church has been involved in pioneering another region or country, it will seek to provide affirming and freeing family-type relationships which avoid paternalism while retaining New Testament order. Further, it will seek to avoid politicizing or external ownership while the newly nationalized church will seek to avoid moving from Stage 1 to Stage 3 with inadequate focus on Stage 2.

Stage 4: Send – extending. Goal: to make, responsible, reproducing missionary-sending churches.

We extend the church and advance the kingdom by sending and supporting missionaries and by bridging into other peoples, cultures and languages. The goal of Stage 4 is to make responsible, reproducing missionary-sending national churches who make disciples of the nations in fulfillment of Christ’s mandate. Therefore, the task of Stage 4 is twofold. First, it requires reaching nearby cultural groups. Many national churches have a blind spot when it comes to developing home missions outreaches among “Samaritans” who are culturally different but geographically near. Increasing awareness of the diversity of the world around them and its need for the gospel is best done initially through intercession. As people develop hearts of compassion, they will hear and respond when the Lord of the harvest begins to call laborers into his harvest. The national church will catch a vision

and begin sending and supporting missionaries to culturally diverse groups within its own region and country.

Second, the task of Stage 4 requires reaching distant cultural groups in other countries, and is similar to an older adult who anticipates becoming a grandparent. The networking process of linking together those with common vision must be complemented by the partnering process of actually sharing together in a common task. Sending and supporting missionaries in another nation is a great challenge, especially when working among unreached groups. It frequently requires the expert counsel and the prayer and financial support of another national church. In some cases it may also require coordination and cooperation with missionaries from another national church who are also working within the same country. Sending churches will seek to avoid exporting their culture and methodologies or jumping from Stage 2 to Stage 4 with insufficient attention to Stage 3.

Great Commission Church Movements

Appendix B

The Sacrifice of God's Messiah for the Salvation of All Nations

The Depth and Breadth of God's Love: The Witness of the Old Testament

Luke 24:44–47

“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms... This is what is written: The Christ [Messiah] will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem,”

A. The Law of Moses.

1. God's Heart: The Depth of His Love (His passion to redeem).
 - a. God's judgment on the serpent after man's disobedience is redemptive (Genesis 3:15).
 - b. God's covering of man's nakedness involves the life of an animal (Genesis 3:21).
 - c. God's expulsion of man from the Garden of Eden is merciful (Genesis 3:22–24).
 - d. God reverses the curse upon the ground upon Noah's sacrifice of clean animals (Genesis 3:17; 5:29; 8:20, 21).
 - e. God's confusion of languages is redemptive (Genesis 11:8–9; cp. Acts 17:26–27).
 - f. God's call of Abram issues in a covenant of blessing: a great nation, a great name, a land and relationship with God (Genesis 17:1–8).
 - g. God provided a ram as the sacrifice when Abraham obediently offered his only son of promise, Isaac (Genesis 22:8–14).
 - h. God's compassion motivated the rescue of Israel from Egypt (Exod. 3:7–9).
 - i. God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt required the death of an unblemished lamb to spare the firstborn (Exod. 12:3–5, 23).
 - j. God provided atonement for sin through the shedding of blood (Lev. 17:11).

- k. God provided deliverance from death through the lifting up of a serpent on a pole
 - l. (Num. 21:8–9; cp. John 3:14).
2. God's Heart: The Breadth of His Love (His compassion for all nations).
 - a. Abram's blessing is for the blessing of all nations/families (Genesis 12:2, 3; 18:17–19; 22:16–18; cp. Gal. 3:8).
 - b. Abraham's blessing for all nations is reconfirmed with Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 26:2–5; 28:12–14).
 - c. God's judgment on Egypt's gods was to release God's people to worship Him and to show His power and proclaim His Name in all the earth (Exod. 9:13–16).
 - d. God chose Israel to be a kingdom of priests for the whole earth (Exod. 19:4–6).

B. The Prophets.

1. God's Heart: The Depth of His Love (His passion to redeem).
 - a. God alone is the God who redeems and saves (Isaiah 45:22; Micah 7:18–19).
 - b. God's suffering servant will be pierced and crushed for man's transgressions (Isaiah 53:4–6).
 - c. God's people will be called the Redeemed of the Lord (Isaiah 62:12).
 - d. God will create a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:17–19).
 - e. God will make a new covenant and will forgive wickedness and remember sins no more (Jeremiah 31:31–33).
 - f. God's covenant of peace will be everlasting and he will put His dwelling place among His people forever (Ezekiel 37:26–27).
2. God's Heart: The Breadth of His Love (His compassion for all nations).
 - a. The ark of the covenant is the ark of the Lord of all the earth (Joshua 3:11, 13).
 - b. Like the drying up and crossing of the Red Sea, so the Jordan River was dried up and crossed so all the peoples of earth might know God's power (Joshua 4:24).
 - c. David's victory over Goliath was so that the whole world would know there is a God in Israel (I Sam. 17:46).
 - d. God's inclusion of Ruth the Moabite as a forebear of King David reflects his heart for nations beyond Israel (Ruth

- 1–4).
- e. God’s concern for people outside of Israel is seen in the book of Jonah (Jonah 1–4).
- f. God’s temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7; cp. 2 Chr. 6:32–33; Mark 11:17).
- g. God’s servant is to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6–7; 49:6; cp. Acts 26:18–19).
- h. All the ends of the earth will see God’s salvation (Isaiah 52:10).
- i. God’s suffering servant will sprinkle many nations and they will understand his suffering (Isaiah 52:15–53:12).
- j. Many nations will go to Jerusalem to seek God and learn His ways (Micah 4:1–2; Isaiah 2:2; Zechariah 8:22–23).
- k. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord (Habakkuk 2:14, 20).

C. Psalms/Writings.

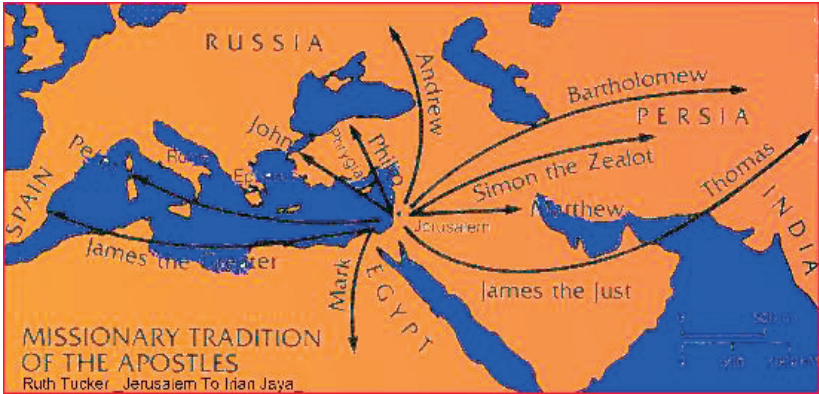
- 3. God’s Heart: The Depth of His Love (His passion to redeem).
 - a. God delivers those who fear Him (Psalms 33:13–19).
 - b. Rest and salvation come from God alone (Psalms 62:1–8).
 - c. God is a God who bears burdens and saves from death (Psalms 68:19–20).
 - d. The redeemed of the Lord give thanks to Him, for He is good, His love endures forever (Psalms 107:1–2).
 - e. Who is like the Lord our God who raises the poor, lifts the needy and gives children to the barren woman? (Psalms 113:5–9).
 - f. The Lord protects the simplehearted and saves those in great need (Psalms 116:6).
 - g. The Lord is on our side and we have escaped like a bird because our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth (Psalms 124:1–8).
- 4. God’s Heart: The Breadth of His Love (His compassion for all nations).
 - a. A fear of the Jews caused other nationalities to identify themselves with God’s people in the time of Esther (Esther 8:17).
 - b. The kingdom of God rules over all other kingdoms (Daniel 2:44).
 - c. No other god can save in the way the God of the three Hebrew children saves (Daniel 3:29).

- d. All are to fear the God of Daniel whose kingdom endures forever (Daniel 6:26–27).
- e. All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord (Psalms 22:27–28).
- f. The earth is the Lord's and all who live in it (Psalms 24:1).
- g. God is King over all the earth and reigns over the nations (Psalms 47:7–9).
- h. God's blessing on His people is to make known His salvation among all nations (Psalms 67:1–2).
- i. All the nations God has made will come and worship before Him (Psalms 86:9–10).
- j. God's glory is to be declared among the nations and his marvelous deeds to all peoples (Psalms 96:3).
- k. All the earth is to shout for joy to the Lord and serve Him with gladness (Psalms 100:1–2)
- l. Every creature is to praise God's holy name forever and ever (Psalms 145:21; 150:6).

Appendix C

Traditional Missionary Journeys of the Apostles

First Century



<http://natewilsonfamily.net/natespics/historygraphics/01apostles.jpg>

“The Acts of the Apostles records only a few apostles’ ministries. Most of the apostles’ widespread ministries are known to us through Christian tradition and records written generations later. Some of the dates and stories are open to challenge and revision, but the essential historicity of their ministries ... is certain” (Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church*, 23).

Great Commission Church Movements

Appendix D

Summary of the Principles of Great Commission Churches and Movements

Principles of Great Commission Churches

1. The understanding and embracing of the Scriptures that reveal the living God is a missionary God, his Messiah is the Savior of the world, and his people are his missionary people. (Luke 24:45–47)
2. The commitment to love the living God fully, and to love all people as themselves, loving as God loves. (Matthew 22:37–39)
3. The involvement in Christ's universal commission as his witnesses to take the gospel to, and make disciples of, all nations, locally and globally. (Mark 16:15; Luke 28:19–20)
4. The experience and embrace of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to give life and empower all who believe as God's children and Christ's witnesses to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:4–5, 8)
5. The dispersion voluntarily, and at times involuntarily, of witnesses that spread the gospel wherever they go, and establish communities of disciples among people of different cultures. (Acts 8:4; 11:19)
6. The proclamation of the gospel of God's grace for all, freeing all who repent and believe from salvation by works, to a salvation shown in good works and a faith expressed in fully loving God and freely loving others. (Acts 15:7–9, 11)
7. The cultivation of the grace of giving to those in need, especially brothers and sisters in Christ, locally and abroad, which, transcending racial and cultural diversity, reflects and advances a universal gospel of grace. (Acts 4:32–33)
8. The development of a praying church that becomes a place of prayer for all nations, and faithfully prays for the advance of the gospel among all nations. (Mark 11:17; Acts 1:14)

Principles of Great Commission Church Movements

1. The establishing of sending-base churches that, led by the Spirit, intentionally release and send teams as cross-cultural missionaries to preach the gospel and make disciples among the nations, with the missionary teams' continuing relationship with the sending church. (Acts 13:1–3)
2. The preaching of the gospel of grace freed of legalistic demands, the making of disciples, and the planting of indigenous churches led by local leaders who have been entrusted to God, with the missionary teams returning to encourage and strengthen the churches. (Acts 13:49; 16:5)
3. Newly planted churches' faithfulness to Christ in persecution and their partnership in the spread of the gospel in praying, giving, and sending workers from the harvest into the harvest. (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 8)
4. Large numbers of people turning to the Lord who become disciples, continue to grow in the faith, and facilitate the spread of the gospel within and beyond their familial, social and cultural networks. (Acts 18:8, 10; 1 Corinthians 10:15–16)
5. The recognition and timely entry of divinely opened doors for effective work in spreading the gospel, making disciples, multiplying churches, and equipping and sending cross-cultural workers to plant indigenous, reproducing Great Commission churches that reach a region with the gospel. (Acts 19:9–10)
6. The focus on the regions beyond and the enlisting of strong, sending-base, Great Commission churches to collaborate in spreading the gospel to the unreached where Christ is not yet known. (Romans 1:8; 15:19–20, 23, 24)
7. The development of full-circle Great Commission churches that make and multiply obedient disciples, servant leaders, new churches, and missionary-sending movements, continually advancing the spread of the gospel to unreached cultures and peoples. (Matthew 24:14)

GREAT COMMISSION CHURCH MOVEMENTS

INSIGHT FROM THE EARLY CHURCH,
GOD'S MISSIONARY PEOPLE



“WITH YOUR BLOOD YOU PURCHASED PEOPLE FOR GOD FROM EVERY TRIBE
AND LANGUAGE AND PEOPLE AND NATION.” (REVELATION 5:9)

Study Guide

John L. Amstutz

PREFACE

1. What was the commission Christ gave his followers? Is this for us today? Why?
2. What promises did Christ say would accompany this commission? Why are they important in carrying out his commission?
3. How effective was the early church in carrying out Christ's commission?

Great Commission Church Movements

4. Why do you think the early church was effective in carrying out Christ's commission?

INTRODUCTION

1. What is the mission of the church?
2. What does it mean to be missional?
3. What is missions?

4. Is it possible to be missional without missions? Why?

Great Commission Church Movements

4. Why did God send his Messiah; what was his mission?

5. Why the Great Commission?

6. What is a Great Commission Church?

CHAPTER ONE

The Living God is a Missionary God

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”

(Luke 24:45–47)

1. Jesus “opened the minds” of his disciples to a new understanding of their Bibles. What was this new understanding?
2. Why was this new understanding important?
3. What did this new understanding of Scripture reveal about the love of God?

4. What did this new understanding reveal about the death of the Messiah?

5. What did this new understanding reveal about the mission of the followers of the Messiah?

6. How has your mind been opened to this messianic and missiological understanding of the Bible?

7. Why would a Great Commission Church be characterized as a missionary people?

4. What is God's eternal covenant?

5. What was the blessing of Abraham that God wanted to come to all peoples?

6. What was Christ's great, universal commission? How is it related to the blessing of Abraham?

Great Commission Church Movements

CHAPTER FOUR

The Spirit on All Flesh

“In the last days’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.’”

(Acts 2:17–18)

1. What is the difference between the coming of the Spirit in the Old Covenant and the coming of the Spirit in the New Covenant?

2. Jesus told his disciples that they would do greater works when he returned to the Father. What do you believe are the “greater works”? Why would Christ’s followers be able to do these “greater works”?

3. Why do you think Jesus told his disciples to wait for the promise of the Father before they went as his witnesses?

4. Peter told the 3,000 that all who repented and were baptized would also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit because the promise is for “all whom the Lord God will call.” Why is there no more waiting for the coming of the Spirit? What do you believe is the significance of this for the worldwide witness to Christ?

5. Jesus called the Holy Spirit “another comforter/helper” (paraclete). Who was the first “comforter/helper”? In what ways did the Spirit continue the ministry of Jesus to and through believers (see John 14:26–27; 15:26; 16:7–11)?

6. In what sense was the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost a reversal of the Tower of Babel?

7. Why is the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh essential for a Great Commission Movement that spreads the gospel globally and makes disciples of all nations?

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Church in Jerusalem

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went... Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch.”

(Acts 8:4; 11:19)

1. The gospel spread rapidly in Jerusalem after the Day of Pentecost, but primarily among Jews. Why do you think it took some time before the witness to Christ moved beyond Jerusalem?
2. What caused the gospel to spread beyond Jerusalem? Who were scattered? Who were not? Why?
3. Those who were scattered preached the gospel wherever they went. Why did persecution not stop them from spreading the good news?

7. A Great Commission Movement is characterized by moving from merely a centripetal inward movement to a centrifugal outward movement in spreading the gospel. What do you believe is needed for this to take place?

Great Commission Church Movements

CHAPTER SIX

The Gospel of Grace

“We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved. . . . For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

(Acts 15:11; Ephesians 2:8–9)

1. What evidence is there that Jesus was full of grace and truth? Why in that order?
2. Why was it so difficult for the disciples to understand that, as Messiah, Jesus must die?
3. How did Jesus show grace to the dying thief? The deserting disciples? The violent persecutor, Saul?

4. What is the gospel of God's grace? Why is it needed? Why is it powerful?

5. How is God's grace in Christ different from all other ways of salvation?

6. Why is God's grace in Christ the only way of salvation? Isn't this narrow-minded? Why?

7. What do you believe is the relationship of works to the gospel of grace? Why?

8. Why would a Great Commission Church be characterized by the preaching of a gospel of grace?

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CHAPTER EIGHT

A House of Prayer for All Nations

“Is it not written: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?’” “They all joined together constantly in prayer.”
(Mark 11:17; Acts 1:14)

1. The early church was a praying church. When did they pray?
How did they pray?

2. Why was prayer a priority in the early church?

3. Why do you think the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray?

Great Commission Church Movements

4. In what sense is the “Lord’s Prayer” a missionary prayer?
5. Why was Jesus so upset when he found people buying and selling in the temple area?
6. Why do you think Paul told Timothy to make prayer a high priority?

7. Do you believe there is a relationship between prayer and the advance of the gospel? Why?

8. A Great Commission Church is a praying church. Why?

Great Commission Church Movements

PART TWO

Great Commission Movements

1. Jesus initially chose and sent twelve disciples who became the primary leaders in the early church. Why twelve?

2. What is the foundation upon which Jesus would build his church that eventually would include all nations?

3. Why would it take the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world?

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CHAPTER NINE

The Church in Antioch

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”
(Acts 13:1–3)

1. The Hellenist Jews who had been scattered by persecution traveled to cities outside of Palestine, but spoke only to Jews in these communities. Why?
2. In Antioch in Syria some Hellenist Jews began to preach the gospel to the Gentiles also. Why?
3. What was the response to the gospel in Antioch among the Gentiles? What do you believe accounts for such a response? Why in Antioch?

CHAPTER TEN

The Churches in Galatia

“The word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region.... So the churches were strengthened in faith and grew daily in numbers.”
(Acts 13:49; 16:5)

1. To what two countries did Barnabas and Saul go when sent out from the church in Antioch? Why these two?
2. To what cities in Cyprus did Barnabas and Saul go? Why these cities? What were the results in each?
3. What do you think is the significance, if any, of the change of the name from “Saul” to “Paul,” and the change in the order of the names, with Paul’s name now coming first?

Great Commission Church Movements

4. Why do you think their helper, Mark, left the team when they went to Turkey? Why did Paul refuse to take him along on the second missionary journey?

5. Where did Paul and Barnabas go first to preach the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium? Why? Who was more receptive, the Jews or the Gentile God-fearers? What was Paul's response to those who were resistant? Why?

6. In Lystra a crippled man was healed. How did the crowd respond? Why? How was Paul's message here different from his message in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia? Why this change?

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Churches in Macedonia

“You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.... The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.”

(1 Thessalonians 1:6, 8)

1. Why was the Jerusalem Council a major breakthrough in the spread of the gospel?
2. What was the “Macedonian vision”? After the vision, where did Paul and his missionary team go, and why the city of Philippi?
3. The church in Philippi began with two household conversions. What two households, and why are they significant?

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CHAPTER TWELVE

The Churches in Achaia

“Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you.”

(2 Corinthians 10:15–16)

1. Where did Paul go first when he arrived in Athens? Why?
2. Where else did Paul go? Why? Who were the people with whom he spoke?
3. How did Paul preach to these people? How was it different from the synagogue? Why?

4. What was the response? Why so minimal? Was Paul a failure? Why?

5. When Paul was taken to Athens he was, for the first time, alone without any coworkers. What difference, if any, do you think this made in terms of his ministry in Athens?

6. In Corinth Paul went to see and stayed with Aquila and Priscilla because they were tentmakers like he was. Why do you think Paul worked as a tentmaker? What are your thoughts about such a bi-vocational “tent-making ministry”?

7. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching in the synagogue. What was the response?

8. Why was Paul able to stay so long in Corinth? Why do you think the response was greater in Corinth than in Athens?

9. Paul had more contact with the Corinthian church than any other. Why?

10. Paul's hope for the Corinthian church was that as their faith continued to grow, his area of activity among them would greatly expand. What then would be the result (see 2 Corinthians 10:15–16)? Why?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Churches in Asia Minor

“So Paul left them [resistant Jews]. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who live in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”

(Acts 19:9–10)

1. Why was Paul delayed in getting to Ephesus?
2. How did the church in Ephesus get started?
3. Why do you think the church in Ephesus grew so rapidly?

Great Commission Church Movements

4. What caused the church in Ephesus to spawn a church planting movement?

5. In what sense was the church in Ephesus both a sending church and a sent church?

6. Would you call Ephesus a Great Commission church? Why?

7. What is a Great Commission movement? What evidence was there that a Great Commission movement was taking place?

4. What did Paul mean when he wrote that he had fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ throughout the entire eastern Mediterranean region? What evidence is there that the region was reached, but not yet fully evangelized?

5. Paul believed there was no more room for him to minister any longer in the eastern Mediterranean region. Why?

6. Where did Paul want to go now? Why the stopover in Rome to visit the church?

Great Commission Church Movements

c)

d)

3. The early church was characterized by that which was “infinitely reproducible.” What was that which was “infinitely reproducible.”

4. What is the “wheel of missions”?

5. Why do you think there is little if any reference to the Great Commission after Pentecost? What kept the “wheel of missions” rolling?

Great Commission Church Movements

Great Commission Church Movements

3. From these four “universals” what, then, are the motives for missions?

a)

b)

c)

d)

4. Do you believe the Great Commission is a “finish-able” task? Why?

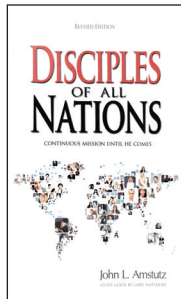
5. How will we know when the Great Commission has been completed?

6. What do you believe is your place in helping to finish the task of the Great Commission, namely, proclaiming of the gospel in the whole world and making of disciples of all nations? Why?

7. What evidence, if any, do you see that the Great Commission could be fulfilled in our generation?

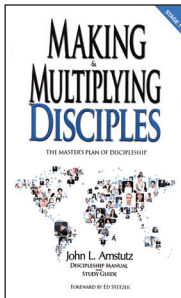
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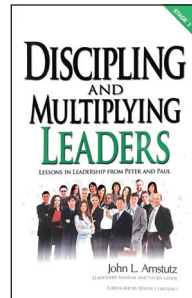


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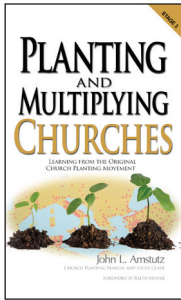
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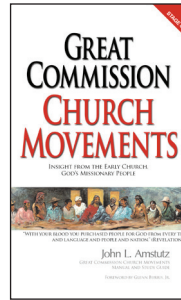
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Great Commission Church Movements examines the story of the multiplication of Christ followers in the first century. How did a largely Jewish band of disciples become an empire-penetrating movement? Why did the gospel spread so rapidly? What can be learned from this initial generation of God's missionary people? The early church became a Great Commission church movement, spawning disciple-making, church-planting, missionary-sending movements among the nations. Such a Spirit-empowered, infinitely reproducible, "full-circle" process has kept the "wheel of missions" rolling throughout the past two millennia. One day the "wheel" will roll across the finish line. The gospel will be proclaimed in all the world, disciples will be made of all nations, then the end will come. Could it happen in our day?

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Dr. John L. Amstutz is a consultant for Foursquare Missions and a former assistant to the director. He has served as a missionary, pastor, professor, educator, and leadership trainer for churches in the U.S. and overseas. He is the author of the missions textbook, **Disciples of All Nations**, and training manuals, **Making and Multiplying Disciples**, **Discipling and Multiplying Leaders** and **Multiplying Churches**, as well as numerous missions articles. He received his B.A. from Pasadena College (now, Point Loma University), and his M. Div., Th. M., and D. Min. from Fuller Theological Seminary. He is married to Dorene and has four children, ten grandchildren and one great grandchild.

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