

The Spirit Speaks On Missions

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by Harold R. John

This study is an effort to see this aspect of the life of the Church as the Lord sees it. It is an effort to see it as the Holy Spirit describes it and as he directs and encourages us to participate in it. Preparing this material involved reading through the entire Bible and trying to select anything that was quite directly connected with missions. More than likely, I have missed some significant portions of Scripture that touch on this subject and have failed to see some important facets of the portions of Scripture that I am treating. If you notice such omissions, I would appreciate your bringing them to my attention.

In drawing on Scripture for the Spirit's message regarding missions, a decision had to be made as to what sort of material to consider as pertaining to missions. I tried to include things that fit under any of the following three categories: 1. *One genuine religion for all mankind.* 2. *Outreach to the lost.* 3. *Shepherding recent converts.* The last category could, of course, include almost the entire New Testament. I tried to choose those things, which might be especially significant for the newly converted, and also those things, which might be particularly relevant to our situation today.

Since the Tower of Babel mission work, that is reaching out to the lost, has been to a large degree cross-cultural work. Whenever a Gentile such as Rahab or Ruth was brought into the Old Testament fold of believers, this involved cross-cultural communication. When the followers of Jesus carried the message regarding the Savior out to the rest of the then known world, this was to a large extent cross-cultural communication. In those first years after our Lord's ascension it was for the most part a matter of Jewish apostles or evangelists proclaiming this Jewish Savior who had come in fulfillment of the promises and prophecies found in the Jewish book of religion, the Law and the Prophets. The Jewish disciples of Jesus were charged with the task of proclaiming this Jewish message to the Gentiles.

As the Church up to the present time has continued to reach out ever farther and farther to the ends of the earth, the proclamation of the Gospel has continued to be to a great extent a matter of cross-cultural communication. This is the case simply because since Babel the population of this planet has been fragmented into countless language groups and cultures. For this reason I have added a fourth category of material to be included in this study. That is the things the Holy Spirit has to say about *cross-cultural communication*.

For a more thorough study of this subject as we have it in the New Testament see Prof. Balge's essay, "Cross-cultural Ministry In The New Testament," which he presented to the South Central and Arizona-California district conventions in 1992.

Let me at this point remind you that any study of the Holy Scriptures is unique in this respect, we have the Author himself personally present with us as we study his book. Please join me in looking to him to bless our efforts to understand what he has to say about missions.

Genesis

Chapters One and Two

God's intention for man as expressed in Ge 1:26 involved fellowship between creature and Creator. It involved a personal relationship between man and his Creator. For example, the wonders of the universe all; created and sustained just for us should cause us to praise our

Creator endlessly. We see an example of that before the fall in regard to the crowning blessing that God put into this life for his creatures, namely marriage. When Adam saw Eve and recognized her for what she was, he became poetic and praised God for this blessing. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil offered an easy way for Adam and Eve to express their confidence in God and also their respect for him as the Creator. By obeying his command not to eat of the tree, they would be expressing their respect for his authority to determine how we are to use and enjoy his creation.

Chapter Three

There was no middle ground for Eve. Her Creator had said that eating of the tree would bring death. Satan said that eating of the tree would bring blessings. Her actions showed which of the two she believed.

God's intention for man, his creature, was that man should live trusting his Creator totally and in love praise his Creator constantly. That intention was thwarted.

This left God with several options. He could annihilate his creatures, Adam and Eve, and in doing so would annihilate mankind. He could punish them. He chose a third option. He chose to restore his creatures. His method was not something like brain surgery, which would irrevocably cause them to think differently. Rather his method was to restore them through repentance and faith in the Savior whom he would send to redeem them.

This is how mission work began. It began in the mind of God with his intent to rescue his fallen creatures. The Creator himself became the first missionary when he went looking for Adam and Eve and called to Adam, "Where are you?" in order to bring his fallen creatures to repentance and faith in his Son. All mission activity that has followed, yours and mine, has its beginning in and is an extension of, that first mission activity of our Creator. The ultimate cause for any mission work being done at any time on this planet is the fact that the Creator of the universe is a person who seeks sinners.

There are a few characteristics of that first mission endeavor, which I would like to note. It is really a proclamation of Law and Gospel to specific people. God exposes Adam's sin and disobedience to him. The Creator calls for an admission of guilt. "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" Adam and Eve's first response to this law proclamation is not repentance but evasion.

The first Gospel tells Adam and Eve that they shall be in opposition to Satan, their real enemy who had deluded them. They shall no longer be in opposition to God who had so lovingly created them and the entire universe for them. The Creator assures them of victory over Satan through the promised Savior. God's Gospel message does not offer what so many false missionaries do offer. It does not offer the converts constant joy but rather tells them that they are going to experience pain, sorrow, and frustration in this life. Nevertheless Adam and Eve laid hold of God's promise of rescue and trusted their Creator to fulfill that promise. Their faith is most likely witnessed to by the fact that Adam called his wife "Eve", that is "life" or "living". By this choice of name for her he is most likely expressing their confidence that through her offspring God would restore fallen human beings to life, which is life indeed, that is life with God.

Chapters 4 and 5, which include the account of the first murder and a death knell genealogy, show us that the mission field is a world of corrupt human beings who are doomed to die.

Chapter Eight

God assures his post-flood creatures that the seasons shall not cease. Think of the Apostle Paul's mission approach to the people at Lystra. He tells them that they are obligated to recognize and respect their benevolent Creator who made all things and provides, "rain from the heavens and crops in their seasons."

Chapter Nine

This chapter together with its setting can cause us to do some serious thinking about reaching people with the Gospel while there still is time. God had just killed a lot of people. He insists that he is the one who determines the length of the time of grace for the individual and for an entire world. In the meantime we are to simply continue preaching as Noah did. God wants those who terminate someone else's time of grace to receive the ultimate punishment, which is the termination of their own time of grace.

Japheth—even in our day—continues to live in the tents of Shem (v.27) as his descendants continue to populate the Church, which had for so long been made up mostly of Jewish people. Recent statistics indicate that Europe and the Western Hemisphere combined have about 1,178,084,000 Christians whereas Africa numbers 296,288,000 and East Asia only 112,191,000.

Chapter Eleven

The most penetrating cultural difference of all is language. The difference in language is critical in the extreme because the Gospel, and therewith eternal salvation, is transmitted to people by means of language. God determined this method of bringing rescue to the individual. What God did at Babel is surprising to say the least. Instead of aiding the spread of the Gospel and salvation, he introduces this impediment. Pentecost, on the other hand, shows that he can and does remove any obstruction to the Gospel as he wills.

In a sense you might say that God himself crossed a "cultural" barrier many times when he used human language, revelation, visions, etc. in order to communicate with his creatures in a way that humans can understand. God crossed the "cultural" barrier between himself and his creatures in the ultimate degree when he became a human being himself. I wouldn't want to try to make a doctrine out of this, but I would like to offer the opinion that God himself shows us the way. When we wish to bring the Gospel to people of another culture we need to understand where they are at and feel with them. We need to communicate with them in a way that they can understand. That's what our Savior God did when he came to live among us, actually becoming one of us.

Chapter Twelve

At the point where the Genesis account narrows down to the people chosen to bring the Savior into the world, the Lord tells Abraham that all peoples on earth shall be blessed through him. This redemption is going to be a redemption of all mankind. It seems that the Holy Spirit doesn't want the reader to lose sight of this fact as he narrows the narrative down to the history of Abraham and his descendants.

Chapter Fourteen

Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High. He apparently served people—believers—outside of Abraham's family. The bloodline of the Savior's family was restricted to the descendants of Abraham. The Church, the body of believers, however, had no such restrictions even in the Old Testament era. The example of Melchizedek demonstrates this.

Chapter Fifteen

God declares Abraham righteous. Not race nor works, but faith in the promise of God makes the Old Testament believer righteous before his Creator. The mission message has always remained the same.

Chapter Seventeen

Circumcision, like the entire Ceremonial Law that came later, was first of all a divine command, but it also became a part of Jewish culture. The Jews placed special emphasis on this rite that at the same time seems to have been especially offensive to the Gentiles. Think of how Moses' wife reacted to circumcising their son on the way to Egypt. The entire Ceremonial Law, but especially circumcision, served to isolate the Jews culturally from the people around them.

Chapter Twenty-four

Abraham apparently feared that intermarriage with people outside his extended family would undermine faithfulness to the Lord. He seems to have reached out to others to bring them to the Lord, but he does not do so through intermarriage.

Chapter Twenty-seven

As Isaac blesses Jacob he speaks of many nations serving him. This may well be a prophecy of the spread of the Church. Isaac also says, "May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed." If there was any uncertainty as to the matter of being designated an ancestor of the Savior of the world, that uncertainty was removed a short time later when the Lord spoke to Jacob at Bethel.

Chapter Twenty-eight

Like Abraham both Rebekah and Isaac do not want their son to marry a heathen. By means of the dream at Bethel, God not only assures Jacob that he has been designated as a forefather of the Savior, but he also assures Jacob that all peoples on the earth shall be blessed through him and his offspring. God keeps repeating the fact that his plan of salvation in which this family was to play such a key part was nevertheless a plan of salvation for all people. Repeating the promise in this form, impressed this fact upon the patriarchs. By including this repetition in the account the Holy Spirit is impressing the same fact upon us .

Chapter Forty-one

It is interesting to note that others such as Potiphar and Pharaoh sensed that Joseph's God was blessing him and that they too might receive a material blessing through association with Joseph.

Joseph testifies to Pharaoh that God is the one who would give Pharaoh the meaning of the dream. Thinking about this incident can lead one to begin to appreciate the difficulties involved in cross-cultural communication. We know what Joseph meant when he said, God. The word Joseph used is translated *Elohim* in the Hebrew text. (I am assuming that Joseph used an Egyptian word for "god".) We can only guess as to what it might have meant to Pharaoh considering his background.

Chapter Forty-seven

Jacob and his family appear to have settled in an enclave. This would reinforce the cultural barrier between them and the Egyptians. It no doubt helped to preserve the race, but it also must have had a hindering effect on any conversions among the Egyptians.

Chapter Forty-nine

When Jacob blesses his sons shortly before his death, his blessing upon Judah includes the words, "the obedience of the nations is his." Jacob is saying that this descendant of Judah shall bring salvation for all people.

Prof. J. P. Meyer saw a prophecy regarding the Apostle Paul in the blessing pronounced upon Benjamin. "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder." This man who early on tried to destroy the Church, later worked hard to distribute the blessings of salvation to others.

Exodus

Moses married a lady who was not of his culture. The first reference to Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, in chapter 2:16, speaks of him as a priest. It is difficult to say whether he knew the true God at this time or not. Later when Jethro visited Moses and the Israelites during their journey, Jethro says that all the wonders the Lord did for Israel have convinced him that Israel's God is greater than all other gods. (Rahab, another non-Israelite, makes a similar statement in Joshua, chapter two. She says the things that their God had done for the Israelites convinced her that Israel's God is the God in heaven above and on earth below.) Jethro then brought sacrifices to God. At that time Aaron, Moses, and all the elders of Israel ate together with him in the presence of God. (Chapter 18) Whether or not he knew the true God before meeting Moses, the example of Jethro demonstrates that the Old Testament Church was not limited to the descendants of Abraham through Isaac.

Although the above is true, chapter 19:5,6 show that the Israelites were to be God's special people. "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Chapters Thirty-five through Thirty-nine

The construction of the tabernacle was elaborate and costly. The amount of gold alone that was used would be valued today at about twelve million dollars. Remember that the tabernacle was constructed according to the plan and specifications given by God himself. The Lord also showed his presence and approval by means of the cloud that covered the tent of meeting. I find it difficult to agree with those who use the cause of missions as an argument against spending relatively large amounts of money for such things as beautiful buildings, appointments, and other articles to be used for worship. The example of the tabernacle shows us that the very best is none too good when it's a matter of worshipping our Savior God.

Leviticus

This book together with Numbers and Deuteronomy gives us some insight into the involvement of the resident alien in the life of the Israelites. For example, such aliens were required to "deny themselves" and rest on the Great Day of Atonement along with the Israelites, (Lev 16:29). The alien is also included in the Passover observance, (Nu 9:14). The rules regarding the sin offering apply to the alien just as they do to the Israelite, (Nu 15:29. Lev 22:18,) presupposes that the alien will bring offerings to the Lord. The cities of refuge were there not only for the Israelites but also for "aliens and any other people living among them." "The alien within your gates" is required to observe the Sabbath day, (Dt 5:14). The Lord, "loves the alien," (Dt 10:18). The Israelites are to love the aliens because they had been aliens themselves in Egypt, (Dt 10:19).

At least one distinction between Israelites and aliens is mentioned with regard to food laws. The Israelite was not allowed to eat an animal that was found dead, but he could give it to an alien, (Dt 14:21). Possibly this verse is making reference to an unbelieving alien or it could be saying that the alien who was a believer was not required to keep the entire Ceremonial Law. The reason given for the directive in this verse is, "You are a people holy to the Lord your God."

The tithes that were gathered and stored every three years were not only for the Levites, but also for the aliens, the fatherless, and the widows so that they could, “come and eat and be satisfied and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands,” (Dt 14:29). According to Deuteronomy Chapter 16, the aliens are to participate in the festivals of Weeks and Tabernacles. The leftovers of the grain, olive, and grape harvests were not to be gathered but left for the alien and the fatherless and widows. The alien is to join in the celebration of firstfruits, (Dt 26:11). The aliens are required to follow the terms of the covenant along with the Israelites, (Dt 29:11; 31:12). In Dt 29:11, the aliens are described as, “living in your camps, who chop your wood and carry your water.”

All of the above passages assume that there would be aliens living among the Israelites. This began already at the time that the Israelites left Egypt (Ex 12:38). At the very least the passages regarding offerings indicate that some of the aliens would come to faith. This would make them people of God, members of his Church, even though they were not descendants of Abraham. Nevertheless social distinctions which set the alien apart from the Israelite were maintained.

Numbers

Chapter Thirteen

The confidence that the Lord shall bless our efforts certainly has a proper role in our mission planning and in the work itself. At what point, however, does such “faith” become religious enthusiasm? Looking at Chapter 13, the exploration of the Land of Canaan, may help us sort these matters out.

God had promised the land of Canaan to the Israelites. Nevertheless he commanded them to explore the land in advance. We have a similar promise regarding the success of missions, but this does not nullify the need to do exploratory work, weigh priorities, etc. The Israelites had a specific promise regarding this geographical territory. They could therefore confidently move in regardless of the strength of the people living there. We have no such specific promise regarding any one mission field. We need therefore to use the things God has given us such as discernible facts, common sense, wisdom, experience, etc. to make responsible decisions regarding our mission work. This is a matter of good stewardship, making the best possible use of the resources the Lord has entrusted to us for the work of spreading his Gospel.

Chapter Fourteen

When the Israelites rebel and God threatens to destroy them, Moses argues with God to be merciful to them. He bases his argument upon God’s reputation among the heathen nations. The way God treats his chosen people determines that reputation. Thus Israel’s experience—Israel’s history itself—becomes a testimony regarding their God to the nations around them. This had its effect upon people such as Jethro and Rahab.

Chapters Twenty-three & Twenty-four

In his first oracle Balaam sees Israel as a people living apart, a people who do not consider themselves to be, “one of the nations,” a people whom Balaam envies because of God’s blessing upon them.

As I see it, during the Old Testament era the people outside of Israel could see that Israel was a nation that had a special blessing resting upon it. This showed them that Israel’s God is the real God. At the same time there was something about Israel that made them a nation apart. The most visible demonstration of this separateness was, no doubt, the Ceremonial Law that God himself had decreed for them. God’s purpose with this law was in part just that, to keep Israel separate from other nations.

Balaam's third oracle seems to echo God's promise to Abraham. "May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed,"(24:9).

Chapter Thirty-three

Here and in Deuteronomy chapter 7, we see that God instructed the Israelites to drive out or destroy the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. They are not to try to incorporate these people into their way of life. This certainly does not sound like mission work. God did not always use his Old Testament people to bring outsiders into the fold. There were times when he used the Israelites to destroy a people whose time of grace he was terminating.

Deuteronomy

I believe that it is significant that you can read so much of the Old Testament without finding anything specific about missions. Our risen Savior's words to his disciples in Luke twenty-four imply that reaching out into all the world was something new, something that really wasn't done before. Worldwide evangelism is part of the prophecy of the Old Testament. Paul seems to be saying the same thing even more strongly in Eph 3:4-6, where he speaks of his involvement in carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul writes about the mystery of Christ, "which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." Paul also speaks of this mystery being kept hidden in God in ages past (Eph 3:9).

Chapter Thirty-two

Paul quotes Dt 32:21 in Ro 10:19. The Deuteronomy passage reads, "They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding." Paul experienced the jealousy of the Jews over against the believing Gentiles again and again. On many occasions this jealousy caused Paul to turn from the Jews and direct the main thrust of his proclamation to the Gentiles. The fact that the Church today is overwhelmingly Gentile no doubt has some of its historical roots in this jealousy of the Jews. Their jealousy over against the Gentiles apparently was coupled with a rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. That rejection has continued to the present time.

The final verse of the Song of Moses calls upon the nations, the Gentiles, to rejoice with God's people, the faithful among the Israelites. Paul, as he quotes from this verse in Romans chapter 15, sees this happening in his day. It still is happening in our day as well.

Joshua

Chapter Two

God's wonders done for his people impressed Rahab and her family as they had earlier impressed Jethro. Rahab was convinced that Israel's God is the real God. She wanted to be on his side in this war.

The wonders that are to impress the "Rahabs" of today are the changed lives and hearts brought about by the powerful working of God's Holy Spirit. Consider Mt 5:16, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Consider also Jn 13:35, "By this all men will know that you, are my disciples, if you love one another." This selfless love for others which is so radically different from the ways of the world needs to be seen. It can make an impression upon the people who as yet do not know our Savior.

The missionary's presence itself on a foreign field is an expression of such love that some observers may recognize. The way the missionary interacts with other people needs, of course, to

reinforce this impression that his love makes on those around him who are not Christians. Demonstrations of love need to be a part of our outreach. The outsiders need to see that Christians are different. They need to see that the Christian's God works wonders in the hearts of his people.

Among all the ancient religions the Jewish religion alone reveals the true God to men. We have, from a human point of view, made a selection. Among all these religions we have chosen to cast our lot with the God of ancient Israel. This has come about because he has chosen us to be his own. In this sense we are doing what Rahab did. In this sense as we proclaim the Gospel to the heathen today, we are asking them to do what Rahab did, to place their hope for time and eternity upon the God of Israel. "Salvation is from the Jews," (Jn 4:22).

Chapter Nine

The Gibeonites who tricked Joshua into sparing them were permitted to live among the Israelites as woodcutters and water carriers. There is no hint of evangelism in the account. However, the things noted previously about the alien living among the Israelites would, no doubt, apply to them.

Ruth

Ruth is an example of a Gentile who came to faith in Israel's God. The fruits of faith were evident in her way of life. God blessed her and caused her to be an ancestor of the Savior. Ruth's example certainly is a strong statement that God intended to include Gentiles among his people. This may well have been one of Matthew's reasons for mentioning her in his genealogy of the Savior.

II Samuel

Chapter Seven

The promise to David regarding his Descendant who would be an eternal king does not make mention of the Gentiles. This is also true of the account in 1Chronicles, chapter seventeen.

I Kings

Chapter Five

When Hiram of Tyre answers Solomon's request for timber for the temple, Hiram sounds like a believer, or at the very least like a man who respected Israel's God. He says, "Praise be to the Lord today, for he has given David a wise son to rule over this great nation." On the other hand Hiram's response might simply have been diplomatic flattery which was in keeping with the culture of that day.

Chapter Eight

At the dedication of the temple Solomon prays that the prayer of the foreign visitor might be answered, "so that all the people of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel,"(v.41-43). Solomon obviously expected that people outside of Israel would learn to know Israel's God and come to worship him at this temple.

Chapter Ten

The queen of Sheba has nothing but praise for the God of Israel. Whether she became a believer is hard to say.

Chapter Seventeen

The Lord sent his prophet into Gentile territory, to a widow of Zarephath who was led to confess, "Now I know that you (Elijah) are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is truth."

2 Kings

Chapter Five

As a result of his miraculous healing, Naaman recognizes that, “There is no God in all the world except in Israel,”(v.15). He goes on to say, “Your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord.” As with other outsiders the obvious miracle convinced Naaman that the God of Israel is the only real God. What convinced us? How are we to convince others? The word and sacraments are the only means of grace, but there are things, which God uses to draw people to the means of grace.

This new convert immediately sees a possible conflict between his new-found faith and the obligations that are part of the responsibility that goes with his position in his home society, which is heathen. When his master, the king, would enter the temple of Rimmon, Naaman would be obligated to accompany the king as well as bow down in that temple. Naaman asks that the Lord might forgive him for doing this. Elisha responds with the words, “Go in peace.”

This passage is not easy to interpret, nor is it easy to apply in a heathen society today. In order to do so, I think we need to begin with clear passages that express the principles. Jesus says in Jn 14:23, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.” (The word translated “obey” is “*teerew*” and the word translated “teaching” is “*logos*”.) Consider also Mt 10:33 where Jesus says, “Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.” Evidently Elisha felt that Naaman would not be denying the God of Israel, nor compromising the faith by bowing in the temple of Rimmon. The example of Elisha and Naaman certainly teaches us to strive hard to understand the real situation and to be very considerate when we make applications in regard to what a convert may or may not do in his heathen society.

Chapter Seventeen

After the people of the Northern Kingdom were deported and the Assyrians moved other peoples into Samaria, an Israelite priest was sent back to teach these new people, “what the God of the land requires.” He “came to live in Bethel and taught them how to worship the Lord.” When you consider the kind of religious life that had been common in the Northern Kingdom before its fall, it is no wonder that the result was a syncretistic religion. Nevertheless this incident probably needs to be looked at as an attempt to teach outsiders to know the God of Israel.

1 Chronicles

Chapter Seventeen

We have already discussed God’s promise to David regarding this Descendant who would have an eternal kingdom, (2 Sa 7).

2 Chronicles

Chapter Six

For the inclusion of supplication for the foreigner in Solomon’s dedicatory prayer see comments on 1 Kg 8:41ff.

Chapter Nine

Regarding the Queen of Sheba’s visit see comments on 1 Kg 10:1-13.

Chapter Thirty

Aliens from Israel and Judah join in the Passover celebration which Hezekiah had arranged (v. 5).

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

The Lord continues to preserve a remnant of this race, even bringing them back to their land so that they might bring forth the Savior of all people according to the promise given to their forefather, Abraham.

Job

Job most likely is not a descendant of Abraham. If Job lived in the era of the patriarchs, he becomes an example similar to Melchizedek demonstrating the fact that worship of the true God at that time was not limited to Abraham and his household.

Psalms

The Psalms have scattered references to peoples outside the nation of Israel. In some instances these passages speak of the universal proclamation of the Gospel and the inclusion of Gentiles among the people of God.

Psalm Nine

11-20. David calls upon God's people to proclaim to the nations God's judgement upon the nations. This may include a call to repentance.

Psalm Twenty-two

25-31. The rescued sufferer praises the Lord. People from all the ends of the earth shall hear of Israel's God and worship him.

Psalm Forty-seven

7-9. God not only reigns over all the earth but, "Nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham." Why study the life of Abraham with people of the Orient? Abraham seems extremely far removed from such people until we remember that God gave this patriarch a very important part in his plan of salvation which includes every person on this planet today. Because of this, God's dealings with this ancient patriarch are significant and full of meaning for all people of all time. When people anywhere are brought to faith, they are brought to faith in the God of Abraham.

Psalm Forty-eight

10. The name of God and the praise of Israel's God reach to the ends of the earth.

Psalm Sixty-seven

The entire Psalm expresses the desire that the ways of the God of Israel may be known and praised all over the earth.

Psalm Sixty-eight

18. The Apostle Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians, chapter four. J. P. Koehler in his commentary on Ephesians sees these passages saying that God gathers his people from among his enemies and then gives these converted enemies to his Church as trophies of war. These enemies of Israel's God would of course be, or at least include, the Gentiles.

28-35. These passages speak of such things as kings bringing gifts to God and the kingdoms of the earth singing praise to the God of Israel.

Psalm Seventy-two

11,17. The Psalmist speaks of such things as all nations serving the God of Israel and being blessed by him.

Psalm Eighty-six

9. David says to his God, "All nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name."

Psalm Ninety-six

The entire psalm calls upon the nations to praise the Lord.

Psalm Ninety-eight

This psalm tells us that the Lord has made his salvation known to the ends of the earth and calls upon the peoples of all the earth to shout for joy before the Lord. Psalms like this seem to look ahead to the time when the Gospel would be brought to all nations.

Psalm Ninety-nine

The psalmist exhorts the nations to tremble before the Lord who is enthroned between the cherubim and to praise his holy name.

Psalm One Hundred and Two

Consider especially verses 15-18 and again verses 21-22. The psalmist says that the nations will fear the Lord when he rebuilds Zion. He will be praised in Jerusalem when the peoples and kingdoms assemble to worship him.

Psalm One Hundred and Seventeen

1. All the nations are invited to join in praising the Lord.

Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-seven

This psalm, which expresses the captive Jews' bitter hatred for their Babylonian captors, nevertheless indicates that the very presence of this captive nation in Babylon gave the gentile Babylonians opportunity to hear about the true God.

Psalm One Hundred and Forty-five

The psalmist says that God's people will tell of the glory of his kingdom, "so that all men might know of your mighty acts,"(v. 12).

Psalm One Hundred Forty-seven

19,20. This passage serves to remind us that the Lord revealed himself to Israel alone. It is through Israel that he then reaches out to other nations. This is, of course, still going on today since Christianity is of Jewish origin.

Psalm One Hundred and Forty-eight

11. Among those called to praise the Lord the psalmist includes, "kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on the earth."

Among all the pleas for help against the enemies of Israel, the Psalms also see people from all nations included in the people of God who then worship and praise the God of Israel. By means of these thoughts interspersed throughout the Psalms, the Holy Spirit not only reminds us that Israel's religion is the one world religion, but he is also inviting us to share now in the joy of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations. He is also encouraging us to live now in the joyous anticipation of one day standing before the throne and praising him together with people from every nation.

Isaiah

As you read through the Old Testament, Isaiah seems to come upon you suddenly with the richness of his message. One of the motifs that I see running through Isaiah's book is found in Isa 2:1-5. Judah shall not only be restored, but she shall fulfill her destiny determined by the Lord. She shall not only bring forth the Messiah, but she shall be the source of blessing for people of all nations.

I believe that part of the message that the Spirit has for us in Isaiah is cumulative. The fact that the nations, the islands, the ends of the earth come up as often as they do, tells us how prominent the thought of a worldwide church is in this book. For that reason I will limit the comments on some of these passages.

When you consider the fact that Isaiah for one has such a plethora of passages regarding a world wide church, it seems strange that Paul in Ephesians should speak of the Gentiles coming in as such a great mystery, something even the angels learned to understand only through observing it as it began to actually happen in Paul's time. In some cases these Old Testament passages may have been overlooked. No doubt the fact that the Gentiles would come in as

Gentiles, that is without submitting to the Ceremonial Law, was the part of God's plan that no one in Paul's day dreamed of at all.

Chapter Two

1-5. Isaiah not only prophesies the restoration of God's people but he sees the mountain of the Lord's temple established in the Last Days as chief among the mountains and many peoples coming to the house of the God of Jacob.

Chapter Eleven

This Chapter, regarding the Shoot from the stump of Jesse, tells us that the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord and this Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will rally to him. He will also reclaim his people from among the scattered exiles of Israel. This last expression may well include the thought of bringing alienated Jewish people into the Kingdom. I will have more to say on this subject in connection with chapter 14 but especially under chapter 49:22.

Chapter Fourteen

The first verses of this chapter speak of aliens uniting with the house of Jacob. The nations will also bring the Israelites back to their own place. This reverse mission thrust, namely Gentiles bringing Jews into the Kingdom, shall be spoken of again especially in chapter 49 .

Chapter Eighteen

Verse 7 speaks of, "a people tall and smoothskinned, ... a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers," which shall bring gifts to Mount Zion, the place of the Name of the Lord.

Chapter Nineteen

19-25. This section seems to be speaking of a conversion of Egypt and Assyria, super powers, that were a threat to little Judah. Perhaps this is a symbolic way of saying that God's little Church shall not only overcome her enemies, great as they may seem, but these enemies shall also join her in worshipping the one true God.

Chapter Twenty-five

6 ff. On Mt. Zion the Lord will prepare a sumptuous banquet for all people. He will remove the shroud of death that covers all people. He will wipe away the tears from all faces. The Spirit invites the believing people of faltering little Judah to rejoice in the future glory of the Church. We are living in a time when the Church is already experiencing much of that glory. We do have cause to rejoice over what is happening now.

Chapter Twenty-six

18,19. The Lord assures his people that in spite of their tribulation and apparent weakness they shall accomplish the purpose for which God has chosen them, namely to bring salvation to the earth.

Chapter Thirty-seven

20. Hezekiah, at the end of his prayer for deliverance from Sennacherib, asks the Lord to do this, "so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

Chapter Forty

3-5. This well known passage about preparing the way for the Lord ends with the assurance that all mankind together shall see the glory of he Lord.

Chapter Forty two

The Lord's chosen Servant shall bring justice to the nations, (v.1). The islands will put their hope in him, (v.4). This Servant will be a light for the Gentiles, (v 6). From verse 10

through verse 12, the peoples of the islands and the desert, the people at the edge of the then known world, are called upon to sing praises to the God of Israel.

Chapter Forty-three

1-7. The Lord who has control of the nations shall use his power to protect and benefit his people. He shall gather his people from all over the earth. August Pieper in his *Isaiah II*, pg. 214- 215, says that the prophet must have had in mind the deportation of the Northern Kingdom but also the impending Babylonian exile of Judah. In view of verse 21, however, Pieper feels that ultimately, the Spirit is here speaking of all the elect of God. Verse 21 reads, “the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”

Chapter Forty-four

According to Pieper in *Isaiah II*, verse 14 speaks of Israel’s, “spiritual conquest of its most powerful enemies.” Of these nations he says, “They represent the entire gentile world. The prophecy thus extends into New Testament times.” In verse 15 we have these peoples saying that among the nations God has revealed himself only to Israel. The God who is the Savior of Israel, he alone is the true God.

Chapter Forty-five

Verse 6 stands out in this chapter as God tells his Servant that he shall use him not only to bring back his chosen ones from among the people of Israel, but he shall cause his Servant to be a light for the Gentiles to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. The reason given for this is significant. To restore the Israelites alone would be too small a thing. God intends to glorify his Servant by extending the rescue he won to people from all over the earth. We see the consummation of that glory as that great multitude of people from every nation, tribe, language, and people stands before the throne and in front of the Lamb crying out in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb,” (Rev 7).

In regard to verse 22 which speaks of Gentiles bringing the Israelites’ sons and daughters in their arms and carrying them on their shoulders. A. Pieper writes in his *Isaiah II*, pg. 379, “The Christian mission among the Jews has been assigned to the church among the nations as a task that continues till the Day of Judgement.” If we let the Scriptures determine our thinking about missions, we will realize that we dare not forget about bringing the Gospel to the Jewish people.

Chapter Forty-six

4,5. “The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm.” Remember that “the islands” is Isaiah’s term for distant peoples.

Chapter Forty-seven

15. The suffering Servant will sprinkle many nations.

Chapter Forty-eight

1. Paul sees the Galatians (Gal 4:27) as a part of that multitude of children promised to barren Zion. Repeated examples in the New Testament show that the Apostolic Church recognized events in her time as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. I believe that we need to do more of this and bring such examples of fulfillment to the attention of our people. This serves to enrich our understanding of what is happening in our day as well as to deepen our appreciation for Old Testament prophecy.

Chapter Forty-nine

This exceptionally beautiful chapter includes, among many other things, an invitation to all people to receive the waters of life. It assures God's people that the invitation shall not go unheeded. The nations will come to Israel because of her God who has endowed her with splendor, (v.5). Again we have that motif of the Gentile nations worshipping the God of Israel. This, of course, is what is happening all over the world today.

Chapter Fifty-six

No one, such as a foreigner, shall be excluded from coming to the Lord's holy mountain, (v.3). His house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, (v.7). The Lord shall gather them together with the scattered exiles of Israel,(v. 8).

Chapter Fifty-nine

Let's turn to A. Pieper again. In the "breath of the Lord" (v.19) he sees the Spirit of God bringing both retribution upon the enemies and rescue to the people who are God's own. Finally, this will result in many Gentiles from west to east fearing the name of the Lord. It will also result in a remnant of Israel being brought to faith, (v.20). These comments are on pages 565-567 of A. Pieper's *Isaiah II*.

Chapter Sixty

This chapter is filled with exuberant prophecies in regard to the Gentiles coming to Zion. Gentiles, who are at the same time, carrying the scattered children of Israel back to their home, the Church of the one true God. See especially verses 3-5 as well as 8 and 9.

Chapter Sixty-two

11. The Lord's proclamation regarding the Savior who comes to Israel shall reach to the ends of the earth.

Chapter Sixty-five

God shall reveal himself to the Gentiles whom he describes as a nation that did not ask for him, seek him, or call upon his name, (v.1). When in verse two God speaks of Israel as an obstinate people, we recognize the familiar theme of the Gospel going to the Gentiles after or because it has been rejected by the Jews.

Chapter Sixty-six

18-21. These few verses, close to the end of Isaiah's book, depict the great things that shall take place in these last days in which we live. All nations and tongues shall see the Lord's glory. Some of the "survivors" of Israel, Jewish people such as Paul, will proclaim God's glory among the nations. The Gentiles in turn will bring Israelites to God's holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Can we perhaps say that one of these prophecies has been fulfilled, one is still being fulfilled and one remains to be fulfilled? It was, for the most part, Jewish converts who first brought the Gospel to the Gentiles in the Apostolic Age. From that time to the present, more and more nations and tongues are learning to know the glory of the Lord. To my knowledge, however, not many Jewish people have been or are being brought to Christ. Either this third prophecy still is awaiting fulfillment, or perhaps we see numbers differently than the Holy Spirit and therefore do not recognize the fulfillment that is now taking place.

The book of Isaiah certainly provides a strong message regarding worldwide evangelism. In spite of the fact that in the prophet's time the people of Israel, and with them God's plan of salvation, appear to be in extreme jeopardy; the time is coming when people from the ends of the earth shall not only worship the God of Israel but shall also bring a remnant of Israel itself back

to the Lord. For more on this see Edgar Hoenecke's article, "The Mission Mandate in Isaiah and Other Old Testament Books," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol.79, No. 4, pp. 263-291; Vol. 80, No.1, pp.15-60.

Jeremiah

3:17,18. Jeremiah sees a future church in which all nations shall gather to honor the name of the Lord.

16:19-21. After pronouncing judgement upon Israel, Jeremiah says that nations shall come to the Lord from the ends of the earth confessing that their gods are no gods, and that the Lord alone is God.

Ezekiel

17:22-24. Ezekiel's parable of the tender sprig that shall become a splendid cedar, has birds of every kind nesting in it and all the trees of the field recognizing this as the work of the Lord. It seems that Ezekiel sees not only the restoration of Israel but also a universal church in the future, in spite of the destruction of the temple and the captivity of the people of Judah.

39:21-28. As the nations see the punishment and the restoration of Israel, they shall recognize the glory of Israel's God. This may imply repentance and faith on the part of some the Gentiles.

47:1-12. This spectacular vision pictures a stream of water flowing from the temple through the desert to the Dead Sea. Although it has no tributaries the stream gets deeper as it goes along. Wherever this stream flows it brings life and nutrition and healing. What a beautiful picture of the Gospel's effect in our day. The river of the water of life flowing through the New Jerusalem of Revelation, Chapter 22 seems to echo this vision of Ezekiel.

47:27. In the new land which God shall give his people the alien shall have an equal share with the native-born Israelites. This is a sharp departure from the way the land was apportioned at the time of Joshua. Ezekiel is obviously speaking of the New Testament era. Paul says in Gal 3:28 "...there is neither Jew nor Greek...for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Daniel

Chapter Two

Daniel testifies to Nebuchadnezzar regarding the God who is in heaven, the God who shall through Daniel interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. In the dream Nebuchadnezzar saw a rock that was not cut out by human hands strike an enormous statue and break it into pieces. In fact the rock broke the statue down to such fine dust that the wind blew it all away without leaving a trace. But the rock itself became a huge mountain that filled the entire earth.

Daniel interprets the dream to say that the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall destroy all other kingdoms but never be destroyed itself. You and I are witnessing the establishment of that eternal kingdom. We are not only a part of that kingdom ourselves, but God has given us the privilege of helping establish it.

Nebuchadnezzar was so impressed with Daniel's interpretation that he says surely Daniel's God is the God of gods.

3:16-18. The three men who were thrown into the fiery furnace testify to the true God, the God whom they serve. Their God is able to rescue them no matter what the circumstances. They intend to remain faithful to their God whether he chooses to rescue them or let them die. What a testimony! Serve him, not just because of some good you may get out of it. Serve him rather because of who he is. They saw their death sentence as an opportunity to testify to this Gentile king regarding the God of Israel.

3:25-29. Nebuchadnezzar says of the fourth person in the furnace that he looked like a son of the gods. Since these words were spoken by a heathen monarch, I feel that he saw an angel and in his own frame of reference took the angel to be a son of the gods.

Again Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the God of the Israelites as the most high God, and issues a decree forbidding anyone to speak against this God.

Chapter Four

Even though Nebuchadnezzar—after recovering from his insanity—praises the God of the Israelites as the king of heaven who humbles the proud, I doubt whether this is saving faith.

Chapter Five

Daniel tells Belshazzar that his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had acknowledged that the most high God, namely Israel's God, is sovereign over the kingdoms of men. This was something Belshazzar had failed to do. Daniel testifies that Belshazzar is defying the God who holds Belshazzar's life and all his ways in the palm of his hand. To say that Daniel was a man of courage is to put it lightly. What followed verified Daniel's testimony. Certainly these events must have made a deep impression on many Babylonians.

Chapter Six

Daniel's miraculous rescue in the lion's den, brought the same truth home to the new heathen rulers who appeared to have God's chosen people in their power. In his decree to the people in his empire King Darius shows that he has learned the lesson. He testifies that the God of Daniel is the living God.

It is my personal opinion that God worked these wonders during the captivity chiefly to assure his people that he had not forgotten them and was fully capable of caring for them in his foreign land. At the same time he impressed upon the Babylonians that these Israelites, whom they had taken captive, were not ordinary people. They had a God who could rescue them, no matter what the circumstances, whenever he chose. Through it all we can see God calling Babylonians to repentance and faith.

Hosea

1:10; 2:23. Paul quotes these verses in reverse order in Ro 9:25, 26. Peter seems to allude to Hos 1:10 in chapter 2:10 of his letter. The exegetes go separate ways in regard to Hos 2:23. I favor Stoeckhardt who says that Paul properly quotes this passage to underscore what he said in Ro 9:24 about God calling people from among the Gentiles. This, and the reference in 1 Peter, would make these passages in Hosea prophecies, which look ahead to the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's Kingdom.

Joel

2:28-32. The great high point in the fulfillment of this prophecy came on Pentecost, but God continues to pour out his Spirit on all people as his Gospel is proclaimed throughout the world today. Peter recognized this fulfillment in his day. Do we recognize it in ours? In Ro 10:13, Paul testifies that verse 32 of Joel's prophecy, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" means just that. It means everyone including Gentiles.

Amos

9:11, 12. At the Jerusalem Council—after Peter, Barnabas, and Paul had testified to the Spirit's work among the Gentiles—James points out that what God did through these men agrees with this prophecy spoken by Amos. The Holy Spirit was teaching people like James to interpret the Old Testament in the light of what the same Spirit was doing in their New Testament era. James is saying that bringing the Gentiles into his kingdom had been God's intent all along.

Jonah

This entire book is one of the strongest statements we have in the Old Testament declaring that Israel's God is the one Savior God for all people. The incident and the book were a strong message to Israel saying that God had compassion on others as well as on Israel.

Luther comments, that in sheer numbers, Jonah accomplished more with one sermon than Christ or the apostles ever did. Luther's Lectures on Jonah, 1525, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974) vol. 19, pp. 35-37.

We can draw some very practical lessons regarding missions from this book. It shows us, for example, that at times God's choice, as to who should hear the Gospel, is most surprising. It is not a matter of where we want to go, but where God wants us to go, sometimes to places where we don't want to go. Running away from our call may lead to great trouble. God at times forgives when we can not forgive. Do our physical comforts and perhaps other joys of this life mean more to us than the salvation of the guilty?

Micah

2:12. In this and in other verses where Micah speaks of bringing back the remnant of Israel, there seem to be world mission overtones. The remnant will join the many others, presumably Gentiles, who belong to the Good Shepherd's flock.

4:1-5. Micah foresees that in the Last Days many nations shall come to the mountain on the Lord so that the God of Jacob might teach them his ways. Micah's contemporary, Isaiah, has the same words in the second chapter of his book.

7:11,12. In these verses the Lord tells his people that in the day that they again build their walls and extend their boundaries "people will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, even Egypt to the Euphrates and from sea and from mountain to mountain."

Nahum

At times when we look at God's dealings with men, we see only judgment. That is what we see here in the book of Nahum. The People of Nineveh had repented when they heard Jonah's preaching, but that was a thing of the past. They had rejected the Gospel. Now their time of grace would soon end.

In the work of missions we need to recognize the reality of divine judgment. We don't always know where or when, but it does occur. We need to remember that God is a person, not some never-ending principle. There are times when this Person's patience comes to an end, when he says, "This is enough," even though he wants all men to be saved.

Habakkuk

2:14. "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." The words are almost the same as those used by Isaiah when he describes the accomplishments of that Shoot that shall come up from the stump of Jesse, (Isa 11:9). Habakkuk seems to be saying that all the selfish endeavors of the nations accomplished nothing and can not prevent God from establishing his kingdom all over this planet.

In our own time we have seen how the Lord caused Communism to crumble and how he now is bringing the Gospel into those lands that had been closed to missions before.

Zephaniah

As Zephaniah speaks of the destruction of their enemies, but especially when he speaks of Israel's future restoration, he says that distant peoples shall join in worshipping Israel's God. "The nations on every shore shall worship him, everyone in his own land,"(2:11). "Then I will purify the lips of the peoples that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder,"(3:9).

Haggai

2:6-9. The Lord shakes the nations in the interest of his Church. Verse 7 says that he does this so that his chosen people from among all nations may come into his Church. This is the way Laetsch interprets this passage in his *Bible Commentary, The Minor Prophets*, pg. 395.

Zechariah

6:15. "Those from far away shall come and help build the temple of the Lord, and you will know that the Lord almighty has sent me to you." We see Zechariah's prophecy being fulfilled in the continuing activity of the Gentiles in the work of the Church.

8:20-23. Peoples from many cities and powerful nations, people of different languages will come to Jerusalem to entreat the Lord because they have been convinced that the true God is with the Jews.

Malachi

1:11. In place of the hypocritical worship of the Jews of Malachi's day, God's name shall become great among the nations and they shall bring him pure offerings.

Old Testament Summary

The Old Testament teaches that God's plan of salvation was intended to rescue all mankind. Since Adam and Eve were all mankind at the time, the universal nature of this rescue is implied already in the first Gospel promise. From the call of Abraham on, the prophecies speak repeatedly of people from all nations becoming people of the God of Israel. The regulations regarding the alien who became resident among Jewish people demonstrate that people of other nations were welcome to share in the blessings of the people of God.

At the same time, however, God's plan of salvation called for keeping the descendants of Abraham intact as a people so that the Savior of the world could be born from among them as God had promised Abraham. One of the functions of the Ceremonial Law was to serve as a barrier between the Israelites and the Gentiles to keep the Israelites separate. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 2, even speaks of the hostility between Jew and Gentile that was brought about by the Ceremonial Law. As a result, the Old Testament Jew did little by way of outreach beyond his own people and very few Gentiles came into the fold.

I feel that any attempt to reconcile the lack of outreach in the Old Testament era with God's intent that all men be saved falls flat. Perhaps such an attempt is worse than that, because it seems to begin with the premise that justifying our Creator's actions lies within the scope of our proper activity. This is not the case. This is forgetting what we are. I think we creatures do best not to attempt to explain or justify the inscrutable wisdom of our Creator, Savior God.

That barrier between the Jew and all other peoples did come down. The barrier was broken down in a most inscrutable way. When a Jew named Jesus who was spiked to a cross died on Calvary some 2000 years ago, the Ceremonial Law, the barrier between Jew and Gentile was jettisoned. It was jettisoned by God because it had accomplished its two-fold purpose and was no longer needed. It was no longer needed to picture and portray the blood sacrifice that was to remove the guilt of mankind. That was accomplished the moment Jesus died on the cross. Now men could look to the real thing not a portrayal. The Ceremonial Law was no longer needed to keep the Israelite people intact because these descendants of Abraham had fulfilled the purpose for which God had been keeping them intact. They had brought forth the world's Savior. Hear how Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, speaks of this removal of the barrier, the barrier to Gentile missions in Eph 2:14-18:

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new

man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”

With the barrier of the Ceremonial Law removed the Church could burst out of the confines of Judaism and carry the Gospel of free salvation to all the world.

Matthew

As we move into the Gospel according to Matthew we need to remember the historical setting in which it was written, as well as the target group to which it was especially directed.

It is quite obvious that Matthew had especially Jewish Christians in mind as he wrote his Gospel. Remember that many of these Jewish Christians had difficulty accepting the fact that God had jettisoned the Ceremonial Law. Some, if not many of them, could not imagine that a person could belong to the people of God without being subject to the Ceremonial Law. These people were in favor of reaching out to the Gentiles, but they felt that these Gentile Christians could not free from the requirements of the Ceremonial Law. It is with such people in mind, no doubt, that Matthew reports how the Messiah himself healed on the Sabbath, permitted his disciples to pick heads of grain, and eat them on the Sabbath—as well as praise the faith of a Roman centurion and a Canaanite woman. Think of how these portions of Matthew’s gospel must have struck his Jewish readers and hearers. Matthew must be striving to quiet the fears of some and to end the opposition of others with regard to preaching a free Gospel of salvation by grace alone without any requirements of the Ceremonial Law.

Chapter One

The inclusion of such people as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba in the genealogy reminds Matthew’s Jewish readers that the Messiah himself had Gentile ancestors. If the Lord included these Gentiles of the past in the blood line of his Son, then certainly the Gentiles of Matthew’s day could be included in the people of God.

Chapter Two

The gospel that is directed especially to the Jews is the one that has the account of the Magi. Since they were following a miraculous star, there could be no question that God had directed these Gentiles to the newborn Messiah. A Jewish hearer or reader would no doubt be struck by the absence of any mention of the Ceremonial Law in this account. These Gentiles apparently worshipped the Messiah as Gentiles apart from the Ceremonial Law. The fact that the chief priest and the teachers of the law, the ultimate observers of the Ceremonial Law, did not go to Bethlehem to worship the Messiah, whereas these Gentiles did, could hardly have been lost on Matthew’s Jewish audience.

Chapter Five

14-16. We are to be salt and light. If we live our faith, if we have saving faith, we will be different and we will make a difference. The responses from the people of the world will vary but we hope they will see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. Our way of life is not a means of grace but it can serve to make the Gospel attractive. A Japanese student once told me that a teacher in his secular school introduced their historical study of Christianity as the study of the religion of love.

Chapter Eight

1-4. I believe that the cleansing of the leper as recorded in this chapter is an outstanding example of reaching across cultural barriers. The lepers were a subculture that had its own special characteristics. The lepers had to remain separate from all who did not have this disease.

They must have felt terribly isolated and lonely. Their condition must have seemed hopeless to them. They were avoided by all other people and most likely looked down upon.

Note well how Jesus approaches this man. He doesn't simply heal the man in a mechanical or professional way. Jesus touches, possibly grasps him. (The Gk verb is *haptw*.) You didn't do that to a leper. You didn't get anywhere near a leper. Think of what this must have meant to the leper. How long had it been since he had felt the touch of a healthy human being? How long since he had felt the touch of anyone besides a fellow leper? The leper must have assumed that Jesus was doing this at high risk of contagion to himself. Jesus was doing something not only about this man's leprosy, but he was also doing something about this man's loneliness. By the way he healed the leper, Jesus showed that he not only had an understanding of and a feeling for the man's leprosy but for his entire situation especially his loneliness.

Isn't this what you and I must always try to do? Whether it is a matter of reaching across to a person who is forty years older or forty years younger, whether it is a person of different race and heritage than we are, you and I must strive to understand where that person is at. We must also convey to him that we understand or are at least trying to understand. We must present the gospel to others on the golden platter of genuine concern for them not on the paper plate of disinterest in them.

5-13. The healing of the centurion's servant is certainly a telling account that must have rung in the ears of Matthew's Jewish readers. The Messiah not only praises this Gentile's faith above that of the Jews, he also says that in the future many such Gentiles from distant places shall come and take their places at the banquet table of the patriarchs, while physical descendants of Abraham will be thrown outside. This account must have served to encourage the Jewish Christians to welcome Gentiles into the fold, but at the same time it must have caused these Jewish Christians to lament the fact that so many of their fellow Jews were rejecting the Messiah.

14-16. In this chapter as in so many other settings in the Gospels we have accounts of Jesus healing many. Why does he do this? Certainly it is not to eradicate disease or he would have done so. Such accounts of healing show us among other things that Jesus not only preached the Gospel to these people; he also demonstrated his love for these people. Dare we proclaim the Gospel without accompanying demonstrations of love? Can we proclaim the Gospel without accompanying demonstrations of love?

28-34. Jesus' experience with the people of the Gadarenes where he healed two demon-possessed men serves to remind us that the unbelieving populace may not always welcome the preaching of the Gospel in its midst. Their reaction to a great degree may depend on how they see the work of missions affecting their material gain. Think of the silversmiths at Ephesus.

Chapter Nine

1-8. Think of the friends who brought this paralytic to Jesus. Think of the obstacles they had to overcome. It meant carrying this man through the streets. The accounts in Mark and Luke tell us that they finally went to the top of the building, dug through the roof and lowered the man into the middle of the crowd right in front of Jesus. What caused them to go to such lengths to get this man to Jesus? They were convinced that Jesus could and would help him. It is the same sort of conviction that will move you and me to overcome the many, sometimes incredible obstacles involved in carrying on the work of missions.

35-37. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." We who are concerned about how men spend eternity, live with this tension as Jesus did. May this tension move us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest. When is the last time that you or I

prayed for larger classes at our seminary or at all Christian seminaries? We need not live only with this tension. We can also live and work with the confidence that all the elect, the entire 144,000, shall be brought in before our Savior returns.

Chapter Ten

So many things remain the same as they were when Jesus sent out the twelve. The Kingdom is at hand. We are to seek out and work among those who welcome the message. Where there is rejection we are to move on. We are to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. There will be persecution. Combine concern for your testimony with trust in the Spirit. The preaching of the Gospel shall cause divisions. If you are like Christ the world will vilify you as it did your Master. We are to fear God rather than men. We can trust God to care for us; individually. What we say and do is to be a confession of Christ. The Gospel works disruption and turmoil. Sacrificing for Christ enriches our lives. Whoever receives us and our message is receiving the Lord himself. God's blessing rests upon those who receive his disciples.

Chapter Twelve

In this chapter especially we can see that Matthew's gospel fits into the debate current at his time regarding the necessity of the Ceremonial Law. The examples that Matthew cites show Jesus, the Messiah, teaching by word and by example that the Ceremonial Law is not absolute.

1-8. Jesus permitted his disciples to "work" on the Sabbath by picking heads of grain, rubbing them, and then eating the kernels. Matthew points out that in this connection Jesus reminded his critics of Hosea's words, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," and that he also tells them that he is Lord of the Sabbath.

9-14. Matthew also reports how Jesus, so to speak, broke the Sabbath by healing the man with a shriveled hand. The quotation from Isaiah includes the statement that the Messiah shall proclaim justice to the nations.

39-42. Matthew has Jesus reminding his Jewish critics of the gentile people of Nineveh who repented when they heard Jonah preach and of the Gentile Queen of Sheba who came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom.

All of the above showed that God did receive and bless Gentiles and that the Messiah himself did not consider the Ceremonial Law to be an absolute necessity.

Chapter Thirteen

The parables are in a sense prophecies. They tell us what to expect also on mission fields. We shall encounter the four kinds of soil. In spite of failures we can expect an extraordinary harvest. There are times when God hardens the hearts of the hearers. Men will sow weeds among the good seed. Think of the problems at Corinth or of Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. Little beginnings shall bring great results. Think of the motley little group at the time of Jesus' ascension and the Christian Church spread all over our planet today.

Chapter Twenty-one and Twenty-two

The parables of the unfaithful tenants and the wedding banquet, picture the Jews losing their favored status and the Gentiles taking their place. It was a warning that was not heeded.

Chapter Twenty-three

The point Jesus is making in verse 15 has to do with work righteousness and religious externalism, but what he says does indicate that the Pharisees tried to make proselytes of Gentiles.

Chapter Twenty-four

We are seeing the fulfillment of Jesus statement that the Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, (v.14). The original readers of

Matthew's gospel were witnessing the beginning of this worldwide outreach. In the end the angels shall gather the elect from one end of the heavens to the other, (v.31). When Jesus returns his Church shall have spread over the entire planet.

Chapter Twenty-eight

In the great commission Jesus is telling his disciples what to do and what to expect after his ascension. They are to trust his authority, make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching people to keep all he has commanded, and they can count on his personal presence until his return in glory. To Matthew's Jewish readers it must have been significant that Jesus made no mention of the Ceremonial Law as he commissioned his disciples to make converts among the nations.

If we take Matthew's target group, the Jewish Christians, into account, we see how throughout this gospel the Holy Spirit again and again taught them and is still teaching us that our Savior wants his Gospel proclaimed to men everywhere without any requirements of Ceremonial Law.

Mark

Chapter Sixteen

In the twenty verses of chapter 16, Mark takes us from Jesus' resurrection to the disciples' preaching of the Gospel everywhere. In so brief an account of so many things it is significant that Mark and the Holy Spirit chose to include the command to preach the gospel to all creation. I believe it indicates that this was central to what Jesus taught his disciples during those forty days from his resurrection to his ascension. Reaching out to all the world was also something very new to these Jewish disciples. The use of the term *Ktisis* seems to emphasize the broad scope of the command.

For those who hear the message there are only two possible results, believing unto salvation or not believing which results in eternal condemnation.

During the first mission thrust into a unchristian society, it is only natural that conversion follows the pattern of hearing, believing, and being baptized. It is only after you have Christian couples and Christian families that infant baptism becomes common and the pattern changes somewhat.

It is interesting to note the assurances of God's blessing upon the work as the Evangelists each in their own way report the great commission. Matthew has the Savior assuring his disciples of his authority and personal presence. Here Mark has the promise of signs and wonders plus the report that when the disciples did go out and preach everywhere, the Lord confirmed the word with signs. Luke will report the resurrected Savior's promise of power from on high, namely the Holy Spirit.

Luke

Chapter Two

When he told the shepherds that the news he was bringing was of great joy for all people, the angel used the term *laos* which usually means God's people or Israel. Even though the angel was announcing the birth of the Savior of all mankind, it seems to me that we would be forcing it a bit if we were to say that the angel's words to the shepherds clearly expressed the world wide scope of his redemptive work.

Simon is an example of the joy that this news brought to the people of God who were waiting for the Messiah. When Simeon praises the infant Savior he also uses *laos* but in the plural and then follows up by saying that this child will be a light for revelation to the Gentiles.

Luke is telling us that already in his infancy Jesus was recognized as the world's Savior. Mary and Joseph could only marvel at what was said about this child.

Chapter Four

During his visit to his hometown Jesus enraged his hearers by reminding them of how God in the past had chosen to bless the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. Jesus was telling these people that they did not have an exclusive claim on God because of their race. This early in his ministry Jesus is already saying that God reaches out beyond the Jews with his blessings.

Chapter Seven

Luke also reports Jesus' praise of the Gentile centurion's faith.

Chapter Eight

Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee to a region where people raised pigs and worked a miracle there. His actions in themselves seem to be a statement in regard to reaching out to people who are not under the Ceremonial Law. The population in this area seems to have been mixed Jewish and Gentile.

Chapter Twenty

All three synoptic evangelists record Jesus' parable of the unfaithful tenants which warns the Jews that if they reject his message their favored position will be given to others, namely the Gentiles. In the New Testament the outreach to the Gentiles is spoken of both as a blessing to the Gentiles and as a Judgement upon the Jews.

Chapter Twenty-four

I like to speak of this chapter as describing the "Hinge of History". While speaking to the two on the way to Emmaus and later in the day to the eleven, Jesus opened their minds so that they could understand the Old Testament and realize that once the Messiah had completed the work of redemption, the Gospel of forgiveness was to be preached to all nations. He had carried out the work of redeeming mankind alone, but now he intended to use them, his disciples, in the proclamation of this good news to all the world. The Holy Spirit would give their words the power needed to bring the hearers to their Savior.

Just as the Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming and work of the Messiah were fulfilled, so also the prophecies regarding the coming in of the Gentiles from all over the world shall be fulfilled. The evangelization of the world that God intends shall be brought to completion with or without our little synod and us. In our day we are seeing how marvelously far that work is being brought toward its completion.

Note how the two men, who asked their traveling companion to stay with them overnight at Emmaus because evening was coming on, sometime later thought nothing of heading back to Jerusalem that same night. What made the difference? They knew their Jesus was alive. They had to tell the others. Being convinced of Jesus' resurrection propels people into outreach.

John

Chapter One

John the Baptist points to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the entire world. John was already telling the Jews of his day that this Jesus, their Messiah, was a world Savior. Speaking of him in Old Testament terms, as John did, implies that redeeming the entire world has been understood as the Lamb's function all along. We need to remember that even though John the Baptist spoke these words to Jewish hearers, our Gospel that records these words was intended for a church made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Statements such as this

would serve to encourage the Jews to continue to accept the Gentiles and they would at the same time assure the Gentiles that the Messiah came also to rescue them.

Chapter Three

To the Pharisee Nikodemus, who probably had a narrow view regarding who can belong to the people of God, Jesus says, “God so love the world that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This shows that Jesus proclaimed himself not only to be the Messiah, but the Messiah who rescues all mankind.

Chapter Four

This chapter brings to light many facets of outreach. The fact that Jesus traveled through Samaria showed his lack of prejudice. Also the very fact that he addressed this Samaritan woman served to break down the social ethnic barriers between them. The woman said immediately that this man was different from other Jews. Jesus began by asking for a drink but he very soon led the conversation to his real message. He soon had her thinking about such things as who he really is, her sin, and her need of forgiveness. He pointed out that the Jews had the saving truth about God. He led her away from externals and directed her toward worshipping God in spirit and in truth. This new “convert” feels compelled to tell others that this man, Jesus, is the Messiah. Her neighbors in turn want to hear him themselves.

Isn't the pattern simple and familiar? Wouldn't we do well to follow it?

Chapter Six

We have already seen how Jesus' miracles of compassion served to demonstrate his love for the people he had come to save. In this case, the response of the people took a wrong direction. They wanted to make him king. Today we might say that they took his gospel to be a Social Gospel and his theology to be a Liberation Theology. You run the risk of that sort of thing when, in the name of the church, you help others in a material way. Even Jesus experienced the risk of being misunderstood, but it didn't stop him from easing the suffering of the people about him. Should it stop us?

Chapter Ten

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has other sheep which are not of the same sheep pen. At the time Jesus spoke of these “other sheep,” his hearers may not have understood that he had Gentiles in mind. At the time that John recorded these words, however, the meaning had become obvious. John is telling the people of his day that during his ministry Jesus already spoke of the Gentiles being included in his flock. These sheep from the other sheep pens shall also listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd. Just like the rest of his sheep they will know their Good Shepherd and he will know them. Knowing that Jesus had foretold these things would be reassuring to John's Gentile readers and it would encourage his Jewish Christian readers to recognize the Gentile believers as equals in God's kingdom.

Chapter Eleven

John shows his readers that Jesus spoke of the Gentiles being included in God's people. God even used his enemy, Caiphas, to prophesy that Jesus would die, not only for the Jews, but also for all people, that they too might be gathered into the one Church.

Chapter Twelve

In verse 32 we hear Jesus saying, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself.” John then goes on to explain that Jesus said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. To be crucified is not a very good way to attract a following, but men from all over this planet have been drawn to this crucified Savior throughout the New Testament Era.

Chapter Seventeen

In his high priestly prayer, Jesus asks the Father to give his followers spiritual unity, that they may have a greater impact upon the world,(v.23). Greater spiritual unity will lead to greater unity of purpose especially in the cause of missions.

Chapter Twenty

As the risen Savior sent his disciples out, he authorized them to forgive and retain sin. To this very day as law and gospel are proclaimed all over this planet, the individual is touched and his sin is dealt with either through forgiveness or through condemnation.

Chapter Twenty-one

The commission that Jesus gave Peter in regard to his work was certainly not exceptional, but rather typical. The reinstated Peter was to do the same things the other apostles had been commissioned to do. That included feeding and shepherding. They were not only to make new converts, but they were to also be pastors to the converts. Any mission strategy—that is in keeping with our Lord's will—must include adequate provision for shepherding those who have been brought to repentance and faith.

The Gospels show us a Savior who knew that he would have followers from all over the earth, because he had come to take away the sin of all mankind. The Gospels show us a Savior who also desired such a worldwide following. Thus the Gospels served to encourage the believers of that day as well as encourage believers ever since, to seek out ever more people to become followers of our Savior.

Acts

During those precious forty days from our Lord's resurrection to his ascension, he met with his disciples again and again speaking to them about the Kingdom of God. I believe he was telling them how they might expect the Church to fare in this world, what they might expect to be called upon to do. By speaking to them about the Kingdom, he must have been equipping them for the work he wanted them to do after his ascension.

By the time the people who had experienced those forty days were no longer present, the book of Acts was. I believe that the book of Acts does for the Church of all time what Jesus' teaching during those forty days did for that first generation of believers.

The book of Acts is not a general history of the early Church. It shows us only one segment of the activity of the early Church, namely its expansion to the North and to the West. Certainly the Church must have expanded to the South and to the East as well. This sample of the early life of the Church, however, does for us what Jesus did for his disciples during those forty days. It tells us about the Kingdom of God. This sample history shows us what we can expect to happen, what we can expect to be called upon to do as the Church continues to expand in our day.

Chapter One

Luke, the historian, is telling Theophilus and us that we need to know not only how God, through this lowly Jesus, accomplished the redemption of all mankind; but we also need to know how God, through the frail followers of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, then began bringing the saving truth regarding Jesus to men everywhere. That history is still being written in the life of the Church to this present day. The last page of that history shall not be written until that day when this same Jesus who ascended into heaven shall return in glory. Once again the small segment of that history, which the Spirit gives us in the book of Acts, tells us what to expect also in our moment in that history.

The instructions the Savior gives to his disciples include complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit. They are not to try to begin their work until he begins his work.

The question, which the disciples put to the Lord, regarding the restoration of Kingdom, shows how much they needed instruction. After all Jesus had defeated sin, Satan, and death. Wasn't the time of humiliation and apparent weakness over? Wasn't this the time when the people of God would exercise, experience, and demonstrate their full glory and power? That is what anyone would expect. The theology of glory does make sense. To our way of thinking the history of the Church all too frequently does not. Acts shows us that.

In spite of outward appearances to the contrary, the Kingdom shall expand with power. It is power provided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus wanted his disciples to think in terms of ever widening circles: Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. As the Gospel moved out in various directions, it appears to have met with somewhat of a dead end. I'm thinking of Africa and the East. Europe however is the exception. God used the people of Europe to carry his word to the rest of the planet. Perhaps this is why the Holy Spirit chose to give us this segment of that early history, showing us how the Gospel was brought from Jerusalem to Europe.

The ascension of our Lord assures his disciples of all time that he is in command, that he shall use his power and authority to bless us, that the things he has taught us about these last days remain valid, and that the directives he has given us are to be carried out until that moment when he returns in full demonstration of his glory to bring the history of this fallen planet to a close.

As the believers sought to choose a replacement for Judas, Peter gives us what for him was a capsule description of the activity of an apostle. He says, "One of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." His resurrection is the thing that demonstrates that this Jesus is the only real Savior. Think of how often Jesus' resurrection surfaces in the preaching and writing of the apostles. It has to be a constant in our proclamation as well. Especially in our approach to people with no Christian background at all, this most preposterous fact regarding Jesus is at the same time the most convincing that he is genuine.

Chapter Two

I think that it is significant that Luke provides so much detail regarding Pentecost and gives such prominence to Pentecost. Pentecost is the critical moment in this history. Pentecost is when the real action began. It is because of Pentecost that the real action, the action for which the universe exists, the gathering in of God's elect, continues and shall continue until the end of time.

The event itself assures us that this all-powerful Person accompanies our preaching of the Gospel. It demonstrates that our God can and shall overcome the barriers of language and distance, barriers, which he himself imposed.

In his address to the crowd, Peter points out that what they were witnessing and experiencing was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, which spoke of the establishment and the flourishing of God's Kingdom in the Last Days. This matter of recognizing the fulfillment of prophecy is a motif, which runs through much of the New Testament—especially the book of Acts. We have it already in chapter 1 where Peter says that the things, which the Scriptures had prophesied regarding Judas, were fulfilled. I think we would do well to give more attention to fulfillment of prophecy in our time and then bring them to the attention of our people.

Peter loses no time in coming to the main subject of his sermon, Jesus of Nazareth. He spares no words in telling the people of their guilt. Jesus' resurrection is prominent in Peter's message. He speaks of the resurrection also as fulfillment of prophecy. He calls these people to repentance and faith in this Person whom they had crucified.

Certainly the Holy Spirit caused Luke to record Peter's Pentecost sermon for us, that we might have an example to follow as we strive to proclaim the same Gospel.

The response, "What shall we do?" and the fact that many were saved show us what we can hope for and what we can expect when we preach the Word, preach Jesus of Nazareth, preach law and gospel as Peter did.

Chapter Three

In the healing of the crippled beggar at the Beautiful Gate, the Spirit shows us how a miracle of love drew a crowd of people who were willing to listen to the apostles' message. Today the miracle is our love itself.

Chapter Four

Notice the recognition of the fulfillment of prophecy motif again. The believers see the joining of Herod and Pilate with the conspirators opposing Jesus as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 2. There is another important motif, which appears in this chapter. It is this that the followers of Jesus are more concerned about the spread of the Gospel than they are about their own physical well being. They do not ask God to end the persecution but rather that he would enable them to speak his word with great boldness. As for persecution, perhaps the things Jesus had taught them during those forty days before his ascension convinced them that they could only expect more of the same. The earthquake which followed on the heels of their prayer assured them and assures us that such prayers for boldness to speak the word are answered.

Chapter Six

After the choosing of the seven deacons and before the martyrdom of Stephen, Luke in verse 7 gives us a reassuring report on the progress of the Kingdom. "The Word of God spread." Martin Franzmann sees this as the basic motif running through all of Acts. It is repeated several times in this book. "The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly." Statistics can, of course, be misused, but the Holy Spirit is indicating here that large numbers of converts are cause for rejoicing and for praising God. "A large number of people became obedient to the faith." It seems especially significant that these men who were most deeply involved in the Old Testament ritual saw this crucified and risen Jesus as the reality which so much of the Ceremonial Law had only pictured. (Quarterly on Fulfillment)

Chapter Seven

Stephen's death brings home the sobering truth that followers of the Savior have and shall continue to experience injustice—sometimes in the extreme. Luke reports that Stephen died victorious. He kept the faith. He continued to love his enemies to the end. Especially on mission fields where the injustice inflicted upon Christians may tend to be more flagrant, we need to put the emphasis not so much upon obtaining justice as upon keeping the faith, which expresses itself in love.

Chapter Eight

Persecution became intense in the Jerusalem area but God used the scattered refugees to carry his work to new areas. His methods of doing mission work are not always what we might expect or desire. The Apostles in Jerusalem set a good example for missions of all time by making a visitation and checking out this new field in Samaria. There were things that needed to be corrected as is witnessed by the fact that Simon thought Peter and John would be able and willing to give him the power to bestow the Holy Spirit upon others, if he paid them enough cash for the privilege.

Philip's call to the desert road where he encountered the Ethiopian shows us that at times God may choose unexpected, seemingly low potential places for mission work. We need to

remember that Philip had a direct call from the Lord delivered by an angel. Unless we have something similar, a call to a specific place, our responsibility to God for the use we make of his gifts to our church requires that we analyze potential fields carefully and strive to use good judgement in selecting new fields for entry. Luke and the Holy Spirit chose not to tell us of the consequences for others that may have resulted from this African coming to faith in Jesus as his Savior. Notice how Philip tailored the message to fit the moment and the man. This man was reading a prophecy of Isaiah, so Philip began by using that passage to tell this African proselyte the good news about Jesus.

Chapter Nine

Paul's conversion shows us, among many other things, that we can only marvel at the way the Lord at times directs the work of missions. Who would have dreamt that the ascended Savior would choose to use this extreme Pharisee to spearhead the initial thrust of the Gospel to the Gentiles of all people.

Chapter Ten

Peter is an example of how deeply imbedded cultural feelings can be. Peter had heard the risen Lord repeatedly, as he spoke of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles. It is hard to imagine that the Lord did not speak of the fact that the Ceremonial Law was no longer a requirement. Even in a dream Peter displays his aversion for food that is ceremonially unclean.

Although it went against his feelings, Peter did get the message and obeyed the Lord's call without question. Peter apparently knew that he might be called into question for his actions so he wisely took several witnesses along when he went to the Gentile, Cornelius. When there is a chance that what you say and do might be questioned later, it is always better not to travel alone.

Cornelius apparently was very much aware of the barrier between Jew and Gentile. Note how he comes out to meet Peter as Peter is about to enter the house, (v. 25). The episode of Cornelius falling down before Peter apparently takes place at the entrance to Cornelius' house. Luke reports in verse 27 that it was after this that Peter actually entered the house. When Peter has entered this Gentile's house and sees the group of people gathered there, the very first thing Peter does is to acknowledge that what he is doing is an extraordinary act for a Jewish person. Peter immediately goes on to explain that God has shown him that the barrier between Jew and Gentile has been removed.

Again Peter is giving us a good example to follow when approaching people of another culture. He does not pretend that the cultural barrier does not exist. Rather from the beginning he explains that this barrier is irrelevant for him and for God as he comes to bring them the message about the Savior.

Chapter Eleven

Verses 19 and 20 of this chapter tell us that although most of the Christians who fled the persecution in Jerusalem spread the Gospel only to Jews, at Antioch in Syria some began to tell the good news about the Lord Jesus to Greeks as well.

Barnabas must have known that the Lord had chosen Paul as his special messenger to the Gentiles. When Barnabas saw the work being done among the Gentiles in Antioch, he must have concluded that this was the time and place for Paul to work at fulfilling his special calling. Paul must have agreed because he came back to Antioch with Barnabas. There are times when we draw conclusions in a similar way. For example, when the Lord of Nations causes Communist governments to crumble, we conclude that he wants his people to bring his Gospel into these

lands at this time. We are working in Siberia and Bulgaria and have already begun doing exploratory work in Cuba.

Luke completes the picture of the church at Antioch by reporting that these believers demonstrated their love for their Jewish fellow Christians in Judea by sending material help in their time of need.

Chapter Twelve

A number of the things that Luke reports here show us the inscrutable ways of our God. The early death of James shows us that his way of using manpower doesn't always make sense to us. The Lord does choose to rescue Peter. Why the one and not the other? We also have more than a little difficulty with the fact that the Lord of Nations permits his people to be subject to and suffer under ruthless despots like Herod Agrippa I while unbelievers look on with approval.

In verse 24 Luke reminds us that through it all the Word of God continued to spread.

Chapter Thirteen

Paul certainly wanted to carry out his commission to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. He must have thought he was doing this at Antioch. The Holy Spirit now shows Paul that his vision is too narrow. The words used here are saying that the Lord had something beyond Antioch in mind when he called Paul.

Trying to determine the scope of the mission responsibility God has given us is a never-ending task. The debate as to whether our mission vision is too wide or too narrow has continued through much of the history of our synod.

Paul and Barnabas were sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, but apparently human factors played into their choice of their first mission field. Barnabas was from Cyprus. This made the island a natural choice. We need to put our best judgement to use when making such decisions today while at the same time asking the Holy Spirit for his guidance.

Before the proconsul God supported the proclamation of the word with miracles. Today he does the same with the miracle of our love.

John Mark left the team at Perga in Pamphylia. As you know, this caused Paul and Barnabas to disagree as to whether John was a dependable co-worker. Later in 2 Ti 4:11, Paul expresses full confidence in Mark once again. We shouldn't be surprised when men leave a mission field early today. We should, of course, do everything we can to prevent such early departures. This involves choosing our people carefully and giving them all the assistance we can, both before and after arrival on the field, to equip them and their families to meet the special challenges of overseas service.

When Paul and Barnabas arrived at Antioch in Pisidia, they used the normal means available for preaching the Gospel, namely the Sabbath Day service in the synagogue. Paul started his message from where his hearers were at as Old Testament Jews waiting for the Messiah. He centered his message in Jesus, declaring that this Jewish man is the Messiah. Paul stresses Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy and his resurrection from the dead as evidence that he is the promised Savior. Paul assures his hearers of complete and free forgiveness through this Jesus and then ends with a warning against rejecting his message. In all of the above, Paul and the Holy Spirit are certainly giving us an excellent example to follow.

The reactions to Paul's message show us what sort of things may happen when we proclaim the Gospel. Some believed and wanted to hear more. Soon the Jews, however, became jealous and, "talked abusively against what Paul was saying." When the Jews' outright rejection of the Gospel became evident, Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles. For us today, closing a mission station may be a very difficult step to take, but there are times when it is the wisest thing

to do. Through it all, the believers at Antioch continued to rejoice in the Lord. We can expect such joy as well no matter what the circumstances.

Chapter Fourteen

If anything, the opposition was even more severe at Iconium. Satan won't give up opposing the Gospel until the day our Lord returns. We can count on that. Paul and Barnabas chose to leave Iconium rather than become martyrs. During the time that the drug cartels were warring with each other in Colombia, our executive committee and our people on the field were continually wrestling with the question as to how bad it has to get before it's time to leave. They did have an emergency evacuation plan in place. Like Paul and Barnabas our missionaries did not intend to make martyrs of themselves or their families.

At Lystra Paul again begins where his hearers were at. In this case, these Gentiles were at square one rather than the Old Testament prophecies. As in Acts chapter 3, the healing attracted an audience. Paul does not enter into dialogue with their false religion, but rather directs them to the real God, the Creator, the Preserver.

Lystra gives us a good example of the sort of thing that can happen when you don't know the local language. Paul and Barnabas didn't know what was going on until the actions of these people showed what they were thinking. Some of our missionaries can tell some pretty good stories about things that can happen on our fields when the missionaries don't know the language.

The crowd went all the way from worshipping Barnabas and Paul as gods to stoning Paul and leaving him for dead. We need to remember that people can be fickle. One can't help but marvel at the personal bravery and concern for their converts which Paul and Barnabas displayed by stopping at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch on their return trip home. Paul and Barnabas were experiencing hardships. Their converts certainly were too. Paul is telling them that this is normal. New converts frequently need to hear this. They can easily have overly optimistic opinions as to what the Christian life is like.

Since Paul and Silas were not staying, the congregations needed to have their own leaders. Luke makes only brief mention of the appointment of elders. Some of Paul's own writings show us that Paul took the matter of proper qualifications very seriously when appointing people to positions of leadership in the congregations.

Paul and Barnabas reported to the congregation that had sent them out. They owed this to the Christians at Antioch in Syria. Their report certainly gave these people cause for joy. These people especially needed to hear how God was bringing in the Gentiles as Gentiles apart from the Ceremonial Law.

Chapter Fifteen

The Jerusalem Council dealt with that problem which severely vexed the early church: Can Gentiles become people of God without being subject to the Ceremonial Law? In the course of the many centuries, during which the Ceremonial Law had been in force, it had become the most deep seated and determining factor in the culture of this religiously and culturally isolated people that were descendants of Abraham. Now that God himself had jettisoned the Ceremonial Law, these regulations and ceremonies were only a matter of Jewish culture.

Many Christian Jews had great difficulty recognizing and accepting this change in the status of the Ceremonial Law—the change from divine requirement and culture to only culture. For them the Ceremonial Law, in part at least, simply had to continue to be a divine requirement. The council's letter directed the Gentile Christians to respect the feelings of the Christian Jews

and at the same time hold firm to the principle of salvation by grace alone apart from any requirements of any law.

As we carry the Gospel to people of another culture, we need to try to distinguish very carefully between what is determined by our Lord in his word and what is our cultural baggage. If the people of another culture are happy with some of our cultural baggage, fine, but we dare not insist that they live or worship according to our customs.

At this same Jerusalem Council, James made the point that the mission work being done among the Gentiles was in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. This served to verify that what Peter and Paul and Barnabas were doing was in accord with God's will. We have already seen that recognizing events in your own time as fulfillment of prophecy is a motif that runs through the New Testament. I think that we would do well to do more of this regarding events which occur in our time.

Actually in New Testament times, many of the congregations must have been bi-cultural, having both Gentile and Jewish members. We have a similar situation in more than a few of our congregations today. In such congregations, the matter of adapting to the other group's culture becomes a two-way street. There are no rules as to who changes what. Where there is mutual love, respect, and concern, Christian people of different cultures will find the way to not only live with their differences but even enjoy those difference to the glory of their common Savior.

Before long Paul felt compelled to, "go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing" (v. 36). Such pastoral concern for your converts is as normal as a father's concern for his child. The New Testament letters are for the most part expressions of this pastoral concern. In my opinion, to abandon your converts to the care of novices from their own midst while you seek only to make new converts is unthinkable.

We have already commented on Mark's early return before the First Missionary Journey was over. Missionaries will have differences of opinion, perhaps even different convictions, with regard to some aspects of the work. The important thing is to work out a solution the way Paul and Barnabas did, a solution whereby the spread of the gospel does not suffer.

Chapter Sixteen

Circumcision was a volatile issue in the church in Paul's day. He was willing to have Timothy circumcised out of consideration for the feeling of the Jews. At another time when a principle was involved Paul refused to submit to pressure to have Titus circumcised. (Gal 2) The missionary who like Paul follows principles rather than rules may at times appear to be inconsistent.

This may be a good time to consider some of the human elements and human judgement that determined the geographical direction of Paul's mission thrust. Since Cyprus was Barnabas' home, it was natural that they begin there. In general we see Paul moving to areas adjacent to those already covered. Galatians chapter 1, seems to indicate that Paul was active in Syria and Cilicia before Barnabas brought him down to Syrian Antioch. That would make Pamphylia and Galatia adjacent areas. In our chapter we see Paul planning to go on to the next adjacent areas which were the provinces of Asia and Bithynia. The Holy Spirit had to block Paul's way and nudge him in order to get him to leapfrog, instead of following his strategy of moving into adjacent areas. We can understand Paul's choice of new fields. After all, the Lord himself had indicated this kind of strategy in Ac 1:8.

As we make plans for new mission ventures we need to use good judgment as Paul certainly must have done. We can not claim to have a “Macedonian Call” unless God grants us a vision or something similar.

At Philippi Paul waited “many days” before exorcising the slave girl. He may not have wanted to do anything that might cause a disturbance and cut short his stay in the city. Try to imagine what it was like for Silas and him in jail that night. When you are in stocks, how do you find a position that would minimize the pain caused by the wounds resulting from a severe flogging? Their singing, in spite of it all, was not only praise of God it also was a testimony to others regarding their God. Paul and Silas proclaimed the Gospel not just by profession but by compulsion no matter what the circumstances. There were probably a number of jailbirds among the founding fathers of the congregation at Philippi. What about the slave girl? We certainly hope she was brought into the fold too. Sometimes you find God’s elect in strange places. This is part of the excitement and surprise of missions.

Paul’s insistence upon an escort from prison was probably his way of making sure that his converts in Philippi would enjoy their full civil rights after his departure. The missionary who today follows in Paul’s footsteps will do everything he properly can for his people, not just preach the gospel at his people.

Chapter Seventeen

At Thessalonica apparent success brought on civil disturbance. Paul and Silas got out of town to enable them to preach another day. Today it is more common to have missionaries leave a field because of such things as another call, health problems, family problems, cultural pressures, etc.

Where it is possible, missionaries certainly need to encourage their people to follow the example of the Bereans in searching the Scriptures. It seems that converts coming out of a totally unchristian background will feel a stronger need to read “the whole book” before committing themselves to this religion which is based on the Bible.

At Athens Paul gave instructions to have Silas and Timothy join him as soon as possible. Paul was no “Lone Ranger.” Not only was it Paul’s policy, but he probably also felt a strong emotional need to see his co-workers, consult with them, exchange stories with them, etc. Today such personal contact on the field, as well as between the executive committee and the field, is extremely important.

Consider the sort of places in which Paul presented his message. When arriving in a town he consistently looked for the synagogue—the best place. At Athens he also talked in the market place. He was ready to use any place. Later he accepted the invitation to speak to a meeting of the Areopagus. This apparently was their place, the Athenians accustomed place, for such presentations. Paul was ready to proclaim Christ there even though the invitation must have been pretty much on their terms. Let me give you a contemporary example. Japanese wedding receptions take the form of a banquet in a plush hotel with a number of the prominent guests giving a speech during the course of the festive meal. Our missionaries in Japan regularly use this forum for a Law and Gospel presentation.

In the presentation itself, Paul began where the Athenians were at by speaking about the “Unknown God” and the natural knowledge of God. From there we see Paul trying to lead his hearers into Biblical truth. I would call this “contextualization” in the good sense. Much that is called “contextualization” today leads the unbeliever from his false religion to a compromise with Biblical truth. He presents Christ as judge before speaking of him as the Savior—Law before Gospel. Quite early on, Paul is already speaking about Christ’s resurrection. The

resurrection especially made Paul's message preposterous. If our message is not preposterous in the ears of those who do not have the Spirit, then it's the wrong message.

Chapter Eighteen

The emperor Claudius' order, which evicted Jews from Rome, served God's purposes in a way that we can see. It brought Aquila and Priscilla to Corinth where they could meet Paul. They were just the right couple to assist Paul. Among more important things, they were also tent-makers who could thus help Paul provide for his own keep. Note how flexible Paul was with regard to financial support. Whenever he could, he worked as an evangelist and pastor full time. When necessary, he willingly labored hard at secular work in order to earn money. Secular work may have been necessary at times because there were no people to support him. At Corinth it seems it was the spiritual climate, which kept him from looking to his people for support.

We need to be willing to be flexible even though it may not be necessary at the present time. It is my feeling that our synod provides material support for our missionaries in a measure that is fully adequate. I do not know of any of our missionaries being involved in secular work. It is not unusual for a missionary's wife to have a secular job. If her job takes the missionary away from his work in any significant measure, then he is practicing a shared time ministry.

At Corinth Paul again turned from the Jews to the Gentiles. When do you stop talking to an individual? When do you close a mission? When do you pull out of a field? These are judgement calls. Perhaps one way of arriving at a decision is this: when what you are doing no longer glorifies the Savior, then it is time to make a change. For Paul to continue preaching to these abusive Jews would have been casting pearls before swine.

Early on in Corinth, Paul apparently became discouraged—even afraid. You and I should not be surprised if we experience similar feelings. By means of a vision, God assured Paul that he was gathering in God's elect and the Lord would not let anything get in the way of accomplishing that, (v.9,10). You and I and our missionaries, dare not expect a vision, but we do have the same assurance.

11. What terminated Paul's stay in Corinth at this time? God issues a call to a given place for a given time. How does God terminate it? When dealing with a call we are dealing with something that is not just a human thing. After a year and a half in Corinth, there most likely were circumstances that brought Paul to the conviction that the Lord wanted him to move on.

12-17. At times God uses civil government to provide freedom or even protection for his Church. This was the case in the Roman Empire while the government treated Christianity as a Jewish sect or school of thought. To my knowledge it is not until modern times that the Church has again in some countries enjoyed such freedom and protection. Do we appreciate this rare privilege which we enjoy in our country every day?

18-22. Luke reports that before embarking on his return journey, Paul had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because he had taken a vow. As a Jew, Paul exercised his Christian freedom in worshipping the Lord in accord with the Ceremonial Law. His practice with regard to such things was determined by whether doing these things would cause offense, undermine, or even hinder the spread of the Gospel. As a Jew, Paul most likely not only felt at home with the Ceremonial Law but also yearned to practice some of these customs. We today have similar feelings about worship forms and practices that are a part of our heritage.

We need to determine our practice of these things as Paul did, that is by giving first consideration to the furtherance of the Gospel and not to our likes or dislikes.

On this return trip Paul made a brief stop at Ephesus. There we see that Paul's mission planning does include making projections, but note how he does so. "I will come back if it is God's will."

Remember that earlier on this trip the Lord had prevented him from working in the province of Asia.

Leaving Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus probably was in keeping with Paul's plans for the future. They could get set up in the tent-making business in anticipation of Paul's return to Ephesus.

23. Note Paul's pastoral concern for these new Christians. Paul had visited these people twice on his first journey, again as he began his second journey, and now he visits them for the fourth time. Much of the New Testament is an expression and an exercise of this pastoral concern for those who have been brought into the fold.

24-28. The ascended Lord continues to supply the people needed for the spread of the Gospel. Sometimes he does so in surprising ways. He supplied not only Apollos but also Aquila and Priscilla to teach Apollos. Note that we have a man and a woman teaching another man on a seminary level.

Chapter Nineteen

1-7. As he begins his work in Ephesus, Paul checks to see where these people are at. With our preliminary, investigative visits we do something similar when we receive requests for guidance and support from overseas groups. Examples are: Nigeria, Cameroon, Brazil, India, and Portugal.

8-10. Again, when do you give up on a group? These people had become obstinate, refused to believe, and publicly maligned the way. It sounds like reason enough to turn to others. Paul's experiences with regard to visible success seem so similar to ours in world missions. There are frequent setbacks but the Gospel continues to spread. In this case it spread throughout the province of Asia.

11-16. God continues to demonstrate his power in our day, but chiefly through the changed lives of his people.

17-20. These verses tell us of people burning their scrolls that had to do with sorcery. It is not easy to leave the old ways in which you were reared, ways that were handed down for centuries and seem to have produced results. Our people in such places as Japan and Central Africa offer many examples of that.

21,22. Paul is again making plans for the future. He intends to return to Jerusalem via Macedonia and Achaia and then go to Rome. Paul's experience is a good example of how we may plan and project, but it is God who determines what happens. Before very long Paul's thinking about the future went in the opposite direction. He became convinced that he would die in Jerusalem and never get to Rome. The Lord did bring him to Rome but in a way that he probably had not anticipated.

23-41. The Gospel can at times have an economic impact. The opposition can get very religious when its pocketbook is hurting. Again the Holy Spirit is showing us what sort of things we can expect as we proclaim the Word.

Chapter Twenty

1,2. These verses need to be studied in connection with 2 Co 2:12,13. Paul's concern for the Corinthians was deep and anxious. He left an outreach opportunity in Troas to go to Corinth. It seems that when he had to choose between the two, Paul chose to shepherd the converts God had already given him rather than seek new converts. Jesus not only told his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all creation but he also told Peter to shepherd and feed his sheep. All of this certainly has implications for our planning and budgeting on the synodical and congregational levels. It has implications for our distribution of our personal offerings as well.

3. Paul most likely wrote his letter to the Romans during this three-month stay in Greece. According to Romans chapter 15, he wanted to go to Rome and on to Spain, but he felt he had to deliver the offering for the saints in Judea first. Would we put such high priority upon acts of love? As it turned out, delivering the offering to Jerusalem first delayed his arrival in Rome by at least two years.

4. Try tracking these men down in the New Testament. Some of them surface again and again. Their service in regard to the offering alone would take a good chunk out of a year. Some of them at least did not stop with this one mission, but continued to serve in special ways. In keeping with what I believe is the chief purpose of the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is showing us what we can expect. The ascended Savior provides such people in every age. I believe any of us could mention several by name, people who spend a great deal of their valuable time in special service to the church. We need to recognize them, use them, and thank God for them.

7-12. A strong personal tie develops between a missionary and his people. The believers of Troas were willing to listen to Paul through most of the night. They thought this was their last opportunity to hear him in this life.

13,14. Paul walks from Troas to Assos. The missionary may at times need to be alone and also need physical exercise. The missionary needs to arrange for time when he can be alone with his Lord.

15-21:1. At Miletus we again see the strong personal attachment between Paul and his people. The work of missions includes all too many heart wrenching good-byes. A missionary should be able to defend his own intentions and track record as Paul does here while speaking to the Ephesian elders. How many of our missions have been spared from attack by savage wolves? Very few if any. We need to warn them and prepare them as Paul does not only here but also in his letters as well.

Chapter Twenty-one

2. Luke continues to describe the journey. Then, as now, mission work involves much travel. This means experiencing such things as danger, waiting, frustration, discomfort, fatigue along with the excitement of new places and new faces.

13. Paul was not only willing to die for the name of the Lord Jesus, but he was also convinced that he would never get to Rome to say nothing of Spain. At times the Lord makes less use of a person than expected. At other times he uses a person for more, perhaps much more, than that person himself or others had anticipated.

16. Don't overlook people like Mnason whom God puts in the right place at the right time for service in his kingdom.

17-19. Paul reports to the leaders of the church, to the brethren, to those interested. The offering which he was delivering would be a strong demonstration of what the Holy Spirit had accomplished in the hearts of the Gentile believers.

20-26. In the interest of removing offense and for the sake of unity in the Church, James and the elders in Jerusalem wanted Paul to demonstrate by his actions that he was not forbidding all adherence to the Ceremonial Law. These men were knowledgeable. Their intentions were the best. Nevertheless the scheme backfired. Should we be surprised if some of our plans go awry?

27-40. The accusations were false. Emotions ran high. In the name of faithfulness to God these people resorted to violence. We have reason to thank God for sparing us from much of this on most of our mission fields. It is perhaps best to not even try to explain why God permits his chosen ones to be under the authority of such inept and dishonest people as this Roman commander.

Chapter Twenty-two

What place does personal testimony have in the life of the church or the work of missions? Paul's testimony was factual. It gave glory to God. It was aimed at winning people over. He did not draw attention to himself for selfish reasons. A missionary may ask one of his converts to tell inquirers how he or she became a Christian. The missionary's presence on a "foreign" field itself is a strong personal testimony. Certainly the Lord may and frequently does give the missionary opportunity for personal testimony that furthers the Gospel.

10. Even though we do not await a special revelation the missionary's question must always be the same as Paul's, "What shall I do, Lord?" The Lord will lead. Are we ready to follow? Paul had planned to go to Rome and Spain, but was ready to die in Jerusalem at the end of his third journey.

22. Paul's call most likely would not have been his choice. He was a Jew at heart who dearly loved his people. Nevertheless he accepted the Lord's call to go to the Gentiles and threw himself into that work totally.

25. As he is about to be flogged Paul asks whether it is legal to do this to a Roman citizen who has not been found guilty. Paul uses the legal privileges his government granted him as a citizen. We certainly can do the same when it doesn't hurt the cause of the Gospel.

Chapter Twenty-three

11. The Lord appears to Paul assuring him that he shall testify in Rome. The Lord has real concern about a discouraged missionary and does something about it. Paul had given up on ever going to Rome. He expected to die in Jerusalem. God did bring Paul to Rome but in a way far different from what Paul had expected. Certainly God expects us to make plans, but we shouldn't be surprised when he changes them for us. My guess is that Paul got to Rome without paying for a ticket.

27-30. The commander's letter is quite an example of deceitful scheming. Justice required him to release Paul. He says so in the letter. Political expediency made it advisable for him to turn Paul over to the governor. The commander sensed that this might be a chance for the governor to gain favor with at least some of the Jews. The surprising thing is that God permits such men to do such things with and to his servants. We see this happening throughout Paul's stay in Caesarea.

35. The governor also decided against justice and in favor of crooked politics.

Chapter Twenty-four

Paul tries to convert the governor. For the person who is a missionary at heart, whoever is within hearing is a candidate for outreach. God has blessed our synod with some missionaries who have a special gift for turning any contact with an unbeliever into an opportunity for evangelism.

Paul must have appeared naive since he offered no bribes. In some countries bribing government officials is part of the way of life. What do you do in such cases? Why did Paul put up with this for two years? Did it take something like a proposed change of venue to give him the opportunity to appeal to Caesar? At any rate Paul never seems to hesitate to use his civil rights for the benefit of the Gospel.

Chapter Twenty-five

Paul apparently sensed that moving the trial to Jerusalem was sure death for him. He had a legal way of avoiding this and he used it rather than making himself a martyr or putting God to the test.

Chapter Twenty-six

Paul uses his hearing before Agrippa II as an opportunity to bring the king into the fold. Familiar motifs appear in Paul's testimony. Since Agrippa was familiar with Old Testament prophecy, Paul speaks of God's promises to the people of Israel. Paul focuses on Christ's resurrection from the dead. Paul does not hesitate to talk about his own conversion and service to his Savior. Note too that Paul is speaking in a very personal way. He is calling the individual to repentance and faith in Jesus, the Savior. Again Paul offers us an excellent example to follow both as to the content of his message and the fact that whenever possible he uses any given situation as an opportunity for outreach.

It is interesting to note that in verse 17, Paul quotes Jesus as saying that he will rescue Paul from his own people and from the Gentiles. Even though he is a prisoner and has been for two years, Paul testifies in verse 22 that he has been receiving Jesus' help to that very day. Sometimes we need to work at recognizing the help that our Savior is providing for us each day.

In his final words Paul expresses the missionary's mindset. "I want you to have what I have," namely eternal rescue through Jesus, the Savior.

Chapter Twenty-seven

Paul's shipwreck certainly shows that God may not always smooth our path in the way that we would expect. As a synod we certainly have reason to thank God that in all the millions of miles of mission travel through the years we have not as yet had one fatal accident.

Chapter Twenty-eight

Whatever the conditions, whatever the restrictions on his activity, Paul seeks means and methods of bringing the Gospel to more people. This missionary is determined not to let anything keep him from trying to witness to others regarding their Savior.

The book of Acts offers us innumerable examples of what we can expect to experience as we strive to bring the Gospel to ever more people. In my opinion there are two motifs that do stand out. The first is that in spite of all sorts of difficulties the Kingdom does continue to advance. The second is that the Lord continues to direct his Church according to his wisdom that all too often does not agree with our own.

Romans

As we begin studying the epistles I would like to point out that these letters were written to mission congregations or to people involved in the work of missions. The letters to the Thessalonians were most likely written shortly after the founding of the congregation. This means that all the members were new converts. In other cases, such as the letter to the Romans, a number of years had most likely elapsed since the church was founded. Nevertheless recent converts probably made up a good part of the membership. The very fact that so much of the New Testament is made up of letters to young churches shows us the degree of pastoral concern that missionaries like Paul had for their converts. Since these are inspired letters they also show us the degree of concern that the Holy Spirit has for mission congregations. We need to share that concern.

Chapter One

5. Paul sees his call from the Lord as his reason for writing, his authorization for writing to the Romans. Today the missionary needs to be convinced that God has called him. His call then becomes his reason for being where he is.

11-13. See Paul's planning again. How thankful we can be that he did not get to Rome as early as he had intended. Otherwise he might never have written this letter to the Romans. This example can give us comfort and assurance when our mission plans don't work out the way we had intended. In this case God turned Paul's frustration into a blessing far beyond his wildest

dreams, a blessing which is reaching all the way to us here this afternoon as we consider this letter.

4. Paul is obligated to preach the Gospel because of his call and because he knows the only way of salvation. Need we say that missionaries today are under the same obligation?

16,17. The missionary's confidence in the power of the Gospel will determine where he places the emphasis in his work.

18-32. The mission field is made up of various types of people. None of them want to know God. Some of them want to live only for the carnal pleasures of the flesh. Some of them have been abandoned by God.

Chapter Two

1-16. Some are moralists, perhaps noble heathen, who judge others but do not keep God's law themselves.

17-28. Some of them were Jews who considered themselves to be people of God for the wrong reasons.

Chapter Three

No one keeps God's law. All are justified by faith without the works of the law. The more we see the need, the more we appreciate the cure, and the more we will strive to bring the Gospel to others.

Chapter Four

God made Abraham to be an heir of the world (v.13), a father of many nations. It is in keeping with his promise to the patriarch that God still enables us to gather in spiritual descendants of Abraham on our mission fields today.

Chapter Nine

In terms of this chapter, the Holy Spirit is telling us that through the work of missions we are increasing the descendants of Abraham and bringing into the Kingdom people who in Old Testament times were never thought of as being people of God.

Chapter Ten

I believe that this Chapter has to do with missions only in a secondary sense. I believe that the main point Paul is making is this: God gave the people of Israel every opportunity but they rejected his Gospel. He points out that salvation never was limited to this race, but it is especially because the Jews have rejected God's grace that the Gospel is going to the Gentiles.

Chapter Eleven

We can not overlook the Jewish people. God doesn't. You might think of them as his first love. Verse 11 tells us that at Paul's time there was a remnant of Jewish people chosen by God's grace. Paul himself belonged to that remnant as did the other apostles and disciples, many priests (Ac 6:7), people like the Lord's brothers, the converts on Pentecost, later converts, as well as believing Jews today.

The switch to proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles began in Paul's day. The immediate cause was the Jews' rejection of Jesus. Soon the Gentiles became the mainstream.

The Holy Spirit doesn't want us to forget that we have been grafted into the faith that God first revealed to and through the Jews.

In regard to the Church's ongoing obligation to bring the Gospel to Jewish people see August Pieper's comments on Isaiah 49:22, *Isaiah II*, page 379. (This quote can be found under Is 49:22 in this study.)

Chapter Fifteen

In verses 7 and 8, Paul depicts Christ's work in a striking way. He became a servant of the Jews, for the sake of God's truth, so that he might confirm the promises that God had made to the patriarchs. Paul adds another infinitive to show that he is thinking especially of the promises that pertain to the people of the rest of the world, the Gentiles, becoming people of God. Then Paul adds several Old Testament quotations that show that the Scriptures spoke of the Messiah as causing the Gentiles to praise God for his mercy.

From verse 14 on, Paul speaks of his own ministry again. He describes his work in terms of a priest's functions. He is bringing the Gentiles to God as an offering that is pleasing to God. They are an offering that has been made holy by the Spirit of God. Thinking of our converts as such offerings to God certainly will add joy to the work of missions. Paul glories in what Christ has accomplished through him in leading Gentiles to obey God. We can do the same. Paul's desire and intention to preach the Gospel where it was not known led him from Jerusalem to Illyricum. We, along with all of the Lord's disciples, have been given the task of bringing the Gospel to all the world. We strive to carry out that mandate in practical terms just as Paul did as the Lord gives us opportunity.

Verses 23 and 24 indicate that Paul felt he had finished the task of planting the seed in the eastern Mediterranean region. Now his real aim is to go to Spain. He is looking to the Romans for support in this endeavor. Paul, however, chose to deliver the gift to Jerusalem before embarking on this new mission thrust. Through it all we see a missionary who is carefully making his plans, weighing his priorities, and making difficult decisions. If we are to carry on the work of missions in a responsible manner today, we must do much of the same.

When Paul asks for the Romans' prayers, that he might be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, his end purpose is not his own safety, but that he might come to Rome and from there go on to Spain. Paul lived for his work, literally. He wanted to stay alive in order to carry the work further. This does not mean that our lives must have such a single purpose. God has given each of us a number of responsibilities, but certainly our call must rank high among them.

Chapter Sixteen

Recommendations, such as that given Phoebe, are necessary in this world where deceivers and false teachers are not uncommon even in the visible church. From experience we have learned that we need to be extremely careful about whom we trust on a mission field. When people approach us we need to, and we do, investigate them very carefully before accepting them as brothers or providing assistance.

The greetings demonstrate the closeness between Paul and his assistants and these people. At the same time, they are an expression of confidence in these people at Rome as people who were following the teachings of Paul and the other apostles. These are some of the deep joys that we continue to experience in the work of missions today.

1 Corinthians

Just a few years had passed since Paul first came to Corinth with the Gospel. Paul was writing to a congregation of recent converts. They certainly were a troublesome group. All the more cause for Paul's pastoral concern to permeate this letter.

Chapter One

4. In spite of the problems in this congregation, Paul thanks God for the grace that he had given the Corinthians. When our mission efforts are crowned with visible success we have reason to rejoice, but above all we have reason to thank God for what he is doing through us.

8,9. Again, in spite of the problems, Paul is convinced that our faithful God will keep these converts in the faith to the end so that they will be blameless on the day that our Lord

returns. Again and again Paul views his work in the light of how the results will appear on Judgement Day.

12. Allegiance to a missionary can be and often is very strong. The immature may be drawn more to the missionary than to the Savior whom the missionary proclaims.

22,23. A crucified Savior is offensive in any culture. We need to accept that. Paul who was ready to be all things to all men would not, could not budge regarding the core content of his message. The Gospel itself is offensive. The method of presenting it should not be.

26-31. God continues to choose especially the weak and lowly of this world. In missions it is often the refugees (Mozambique), the people whose government and philosophy have collapsed (Russia), people who have suffered at the hands of other nations (South Korea) who are most ready to give the missionary a hearing.

Chapter Sixteen

1-4. Paul does not hesitate to speak of other missions. He encourages them all to work together on a project. We need to think not only of our relationship to our mission churches, but also of the relationship of these missions to one another. The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference is a big step in this direction. Some of our mission churches do give limited financial support to other missions.

Note how Paul involves these people in this project and shows respect for their judgement especially when it is a matter of choosing someone from their midst to carry responsibility.

5-9. Paul weighs his priorities. Even though he is needed in Corinth, he decides to stay in Ephesus longer because he sees great challenges there. Later at Troas where there was opportunity for outreach, he quickly moves on to Macedonia and Corinth because of his concern for the Corinthians.

10,11. Paul is thinking of sending Timothy to Corinth. The example of Timothy here is just one among many which show that Paul placed high value upon having spiritually mature, capable men make visits and bring reports back to him. He repeatedly sent his assistants on such errands or missions in spite of the fact that travel then was far more difficult, often more dangerous, and always slower than it is today. Certainly such visits must have a sound purpose. They must be planned carefully. The people sent must be chosen with scrutiny. There is no getting around the fact, however, that such personal contact with the people on the field very often is in the best interest of missions.

2 Corinthians

Chapter One

This letter gives us further evidence of the importance Paul placed upon personal contact with his people. Not only the visit itself, but the timing of his visit is very important to him. He is concerned about the visit being a happy event. For this reason he is sending others ahead and hopes that by the time he comes himself their major problems shall for the most part have been resolved. The letter itself is preparing the Corinthians for his coming visit.

Chapter Two

We have already spoken of Paul's difficult decision at Troas. For Paul there must have been an almost constant tension between the mandate to bring the Gospel to ever more people and the need to shepherd those who had already been brought into the fold. For us as a church body such tensions may exist not only between making new converts and shepherding our people; they may, and I feel should, exist also between such responsibilities as foreign missions and home missions, or missions in general and ministerial education. Since workers and/or funds

are always in short supply, I feel that it is only when we sense these tensions that we are capable of making responsible decisions.

Chapter Four

15. Paul sees the results of missions not only in terms of lost people being rescued, but also and perhaps even more so, in terms of more and more people giving more and more thanks to God. Paul sees missions as glorifying God. This thanking, this glorifying God not only grows here in time as the work of missions prospers but it shall continue throughout all eternity.

Chapter Five

God was in Christ reconciling the entire world unto himself. The deeper this fact penetrates a church, the deeper it penetrates the individual's soul, the more committed that church, that individual shall be to getting the good news out to as many people as possible.

Chapter Eight

Again as in 1 Co 16:1, we have Paul speaking of other mission churches. He uses some missions as examples to challenge others. There is probably more of this going on in our Board for World Missions meetings than the board members themselves are aware of. At these meetings the executive committees for the various fields each report on their individual fields. Such reports can't help but become a challenge or an example to other fields.

In verses 16-24, Paul again speaks of sending men to Corinth, apparently three of them. Where you have a trouble spot, you need to have competent people come to help. Note how Paul insists upon handling the offering according to sound, accepted business practices. This will then also be an example for the Corinthians to follow in conducting their own financial affairs.

Chapter Nine

Paul sees many facets to this offering for the saints in Judea. Here he expresses his concern for the Corinthians. He doesn't want them to put him and themselves to shame with a poor performance.

I see this offering, which the Gentile Christians were gathering for their Jewish Christian brethren, as being rooted in Paul's doctrine of the Church which says that it functions like the human body. When one member of the body is hurting the other members come to the rescue. The Jewish Christians were in need so the Gentile Christians were striving to fill that need. In our day, things seem to be turned around. In most cases the people of the mother church body seem to be far better off financially than the members of the mission churches. Scripture certainly does not specify the direction in which such help or any help should flow. We dare not press our indigenous church policy to a point where it conflicts with Paul's concept of the Church.

Let me list a few other lessons that we might draw from this Gentile offering for Jewish Christians.

1. We can expect converts to do things that unbelievers would never do. Think of distant Greek people collecting large amounts of money to help Jewish people in Jerusalem.

2. Don't overreact to the Social Gospel. Paul went so far as to put off planned mission expansion in order to complete this work of charity.

3. Consider whether it is more "normal" or desirable for churches to function independently or to compliment and supplement one another on a worldwide basis.

4. Work at making mission churches more aware of one another, aware of one another's needs, aware of one another's blessings and activities.

Chapter Ten

For Paul the time to deal decisively with those who were trying to undermine his apostleship had come. There are times when the well being of our converts requires such action. This applies to dealing with nationals and missionaries as well.

In verses 15 and 16, Paul is expressing the hope that as the Corinthians' faith grows he might be set free to expand his work to other areas. We need to say this to our mission churches. As our converts grow maturer, they will not only come to understand this better, but will also do more about it. They will strive to do as much as they can for themselves to release men and money for mission work elsewhere.

Chapter Eleven

How much can we expect of our missionaries? What degree of hardship can we expect them and their families to endure? What level of creature comfort is necessary for their well being and ability to function on the field? Individuals and families differ. God has not made every missionary capable of enduring what Paul endured.

In this letter, perhaps more than in any other, Paul exposes his innermost thoughts, feelings, concerns for his people. We see that he is missionary who is extremely sensitive to their needs. Can we do anything but strive to follow his example?

Galatians

In this letter Paul is dealing with a threat to the Gospel in a mission congregation.

Chapter One

Strange as this may sound on a mission field Paul insists that there is no other saving Gospel. He measures the threat in terms of what they would be doing to Christ by following these false teachers and also by what it would do to their relationship to Christ. The salvation of his converts is at stake and this has Paul agitated.

Again we see how astounding God's choice for an apostle to the Gentiles is. We need to make use of good judgement in issuing mission calls but also be ready for some surprises.

Chapter Two

Paul's refusal to have Titus circumcised shows that he determined his practice in any given situation according to the issues. He didn't simply have a set of rules as to what he would do or not do. He was ready to risk being criticized for inconsistency. Are we?

Chapter Four

According to verse 26ff, Paul sees the conversion of the Gentiles as the fulfillment of prophecy. Paul was there at that moment in history when the sea wall of the Ceremonial Law broke open and the Gospel began flooding the Gentile world. Paul was at the front of that rush of the waters of life. For Paul the fulfillment of prophecy so long unfulfilled was naturally more impressive than it is for us. Today we need to work at seeing this same fulfillment on our mission fields and telling our people about it.

Ephesians

In this letter I see Paul striving to bring the people of this relatively young congregation to spiritual maturity. Let me simply list some of the things he writes about to further this maturity: 1. Recognize your election from eternity. 2. See the direction in which God is taking the entire universe, namely to bring all things together under one head, even Christ. 3. Learn to appreciate Christ's power and authority. 4. See that your discipleship calls for a radical change in your way of life. 5. Learn to appreciate the unity of the world church. 6. See what a great thing God is doing by permitting people from all nations to become one body in Christ. 7. Recognize that people who serve in the Church are gifts from our ascended Lord. 8. Work at doctrinal stability. 9. Get practical about your day to day godly way of life. 10. Glorify God by your

conduct in the particular station in which he has placed you in this life. 11. Keep your defenses up constantly because you are in spiritual combat with demons.

Certainly Paul and the Holy Spirit are providing us with a pattern for leading our people to spiritual maturity.

Philippians

Paul expresses his heartfelt thanks for a monetary gift from this relatively young congregation without sounding like a materialist.

Chapter One

The mention of overseers and deacons in the address indicates that these mission congregations had some organizational structure. Developing a structure that fits with their culture and suits their needs is the way to go early on already.

Paul, as in so many other letters, speaks of praying for the people of this mission church and thanking God for them. Such prayers must have been a big part of his life. Is the same true of us and our prayers for our people?

Paul sees these people not just as converts, but as his partners in the spreading of the Gospel.

Chapter Two

Paul is united with his people by the web of Christian love. What happens to one affects the other. Epaphroditus is burdened by the Phillipians concern for him. To ease the burden, Paul is sending Epaphroditus back to Phillippi.

Colossians

Paul advises a congregation which he had not founded, apparently upon request from their pastor, Epaphras. Consider a few of the things he has to say to them. He makes them more aware of the fact that the Gospel is growing all over their known world. He urges them to respect their teacher. He helps them center their entire worldview in God's son. He wants them to know that the Church crosses over the sharpest lines of distinction that you can think of. He encourages an exchange of letters with the congregation at Laodicea. It is healthy for mission churches to stay in close touch with each other.

The letters to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Colossians in themselves teach us that we can expect Satan to attack our mission churches from various quarters. In Corinth the evil he caused ranged from factions to a denial of the resurrection to an amoral life style. In Galatia it was an insidious injection of law that obliterated salvation by grace alone. Here in Colosse it appears to have been some nebulous mixture of false doctrine and unchristian practices drawn from philosophy and Jewish tradition. These letters show us that we must encourage our mission congregations to keep up their defenses at all times around the entire perimeter of their teaching and way of life because Satan is sure to attack and he may attack from any quarter.

1 & 2 Thessalonians

Perhaps the most important lessons for missions that we can find in these letters are those we can take from Paul's example. The letters themselves and their timing show us how much these recent converts meant to Paul, how intensely concerned he was about them. He had been forced to leave the Thessalonians much sooner than he had wished. He anguished over the fact that he could not return to them. He sent Timothy to them to provide the best pastoral care possible and also get a report regarding them. He sent these letters to them only a short time after leaving them. These people have already become Paul's hope, his joy, and his crown. He looks forward to glorying with them in the presence of the Lord Jesus when the Savior returns.

The first letter seems to indicate that there were deceptive, self-seeking itinerant preachers working the territory. We see similar things on many of our mission fields. Paul was not hesitant about saying that he and his men were different and he points out that his life style proves it. We need to be ready to swallow our humility and do the same when it is for the benefit of our people.

2 Thessalonians can serve to remind us that the threat of the Antichrist remains pervasive. When Europe began to “discover” the rest of the world, it was the Roman Catholic priests who seized the opportunity to do mission work. It seems that whenever we enter a new field, Rome has already been there, perhaps for centuries. New Christians understandably have more difficulty in recognizing false teaching and appreciating its danger. We dare not be remiss in helping our converts defend themselves against the wiles of any and all false teachers, especially those who represent the Antichrist.

To my knowledge the New Testament letters rarely, if ever, offer direct admonition to do extended mission work. In 2 Th 3:1 Paul asks that the Thessalonians pray for him and his co-workers that the word might spread rapidly (“run” literally). In his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, he asks these people to pray that he be enabled to speak boldly and clearly. Rather than by direct admonition writers like Paul and Peter put the urgency of outreach upon their people by means of their own example.

1 & 2 Timothy

Paul is writing to a fellow mission worker, one who probably was very sensitive and may have tended to be too soft-spoken. He tells Timothy that you simply can not tolerate false teaching. Timothy must command these people to stop.

In chapter two Paul urges prayers for those in authority. Especially when in a foreign country some governments or heads of state such as a military dictator or the emperor of Japan may be hard to pray for, but we are to do so in the interest of the Gospel.

Paul is especially direct and goes into detail as he gives Timothy instructions regarding the selection of nationals for spiritual leadership and public ministry. Candidates are to undergo scrutiny before they are accepted. This scrutiny is to be applied especially to their way of life.

In chapter four Paul advises not being hasty in the selection of such leaders. Time will tell whether they are genuine or not. We can't be too careful about these matters on our mission fields.

In his second letter Paul directs Timothy to seek out capable, reliable men and equip them to in turn teach others. This matter of educating nationals for service among their own people is necessary, difficult, and time consuming. It is something we strive to work at as soon as possible on all of our mission fields.

Both letters to Timothy give evidence of Paul moving his men around the eastern Mediterranean. Paul obviously felt that such personal contact and communication were extremely important. In his second letter to Timothy, we sense Paul's strong desire to see his dear comrade and fellow worker one last time in this life. People who have worked together in the cause of missions can be drawn very close to one another.

Titus

Paul's directives to Titus regarding elders show that Paul wanted these young congregations to have an orderly way of placing responsibility for spiritual leadership upon people. Paul was especially concerned about what happened before such leaders were placed into office. Paul wanted Titus to make sure that these candidates fulfilled the requirements Paul considered necessary for such leadership. The requirements that Paul sets up really apply

anywhere and at any time. We may, of course, add to them as need arises. The important thing is that the church in some way subjects such candidates to the necessary scrutiny before placing responsibility for public service upon them.

Paul plans to send Artemas to Crete to replace Titus so that Titus can come to Paul in Nicopolis. Again we see how Paul doesn't hesitate to move men around to get the most benefit for the Kingdom out of these precious people whom the ascended Savior has provided for his Church.

Philemon

The fact that Paul returned a runaway slave to his master indicates that Paul tried to avoid disrupting society as much as possible. Paul's work all too often did cause disruption, even violence, but this was not because Paul was trying to introduce social change. The disruption was caused by the people's response to the Gospel message itself.

How do you handle this letter in black Africa or in a multi-racial inner city congregation?

Hebrews

For a Jewish Christian to revert back to Old Testament practices certainly is a very different thing from a pagan or a Gentile returning to his former religion. Nevertheless the letter to the Hebrews may serve as a reminder that converts may tend to revert back to their old faith or to distort their new faith so that it does not conflict as much with the old. Like the people addressed in this letter, our converts often are under social and economic pressure to revert back to their old religion.

The writer of this letter counters this temptation by reinforcing his teaching regarding the essence of our salvation. He reminds them emphatically who this Jesus is, how great he is, and what he has accomplished. The writer also does not hesitate to warn these people of the loss they shall incur if they in any way turn away from this Jesus.

In chapter 10 we see that the writer not only reinforces what these people have learned regarding the Savior, he also urges them to encourage one another and spur one another on toward love and good deeds. The Christians on our mission fields often feel isolated and under pressure from their society. For this reason, fellowship with other believers can be especially important for these followers of the Savior. Some of our mission fields at least strive to provide frequent opportunity for such mutual encouragement. It may be such things as a combined Bible class and fellowship hour after every service, or several less formal services during the week, or periodic events such as a Bible camp or the combined observance of a festival when all the congregations on a field try to get together.

James

James certainly shows us that we dare not be afraid to be explicit about good works. Our people need to know that saving faith and good works are inseparable.

We Americans might do well to reflect on the sections describing the rich in chapters two and five. Although we may think of ourselves as middle class or lower middle class many people in the Third World think of most Americans as being extremely rich. By comparison with most of the people in these countries we are. In addition to that our political and economic policies toward other countries often make us appear to be not only extremely wealthy, but ruthless as well. This is a perception that people have of us Americans in some, perhaps many parts of the world. Where this is the case, this perception is part of the environment in which the American missionary is living and striving to do his work.

1 & 2 Peter

It is probably out of loving concern for their suffering people, that many missionaries stress the correction of social injustice rather than repentance and faith in the Savior. This is frequently called Liberation Theology. Understandably it is very appealing to the missionary who has to witness the abject suffering of his people daily. Liberation Theology is obviously also very popular with those who are suffering.

Peter takes a very different tack. He urges the people of these mission congregations to glorify God by what they do no matter what the circumstances, even yes, perhaps especially, when glorifying God means submitting to injustice.

Peter's letters express the same concern for converts that we have seen elsewhere. He feels compelled to keep reminding them of the things they have been taught. He does not, and they dare not, take this matter of keeping the faith for granted. He knows there will be false teachers among them. His people are living in an evil world but Peter is confident that the Lord who was able to rescue Noah and Lot shall also know how to keep these converts from falling. All too often our converts too are trying to find their way, trying to keep the faith in the midst of a godless society. May the Holy Spirit teach us to serve them with the same concern and the same confidence as Peter had.

1 John

In John, we see the same concern for his people as we saw in Paul, the writer to the Hebrews, James, and Peter. John's people are under attack. In his effort to bolster their defenses, he preaches a no-nonsense Christianity. He has a lot to say about love, God's love for us, and our love for him and for one another. He tells his people that false teaching works to displace the real Christ from their minds and hearts. He sums up their present situation by saying, "We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." That is cause to be confident but it is also cause to be careful as we go about our daily life in this world. Concern for our converts will cause us to work to bolster their defenses in a similar way.

2 & 3 John

Mission methods can and should vary according to circumstances. These letters seem to indicate that in the early church there were itinerant evangelists. As they went from one place to another they would find lodging where possible with people who already were Christians. They apparently refrained from receiving material support from people who as yet were not converted, probably because if they did they would appear to be the same as other itinerant speakers who were in it for the money. What we have here, especially when considered together with Paul's practice, shows us that this matter of monetary or material support must be flexible and practice must be determined by local circumstances. Such basic principles as avoiding offence, furthering the Gospel, encouraging good stewardship must be applied in determining the practice on any given field.

There were, as might be expected, also false teachers going around looking for the same hospitality from Christian households. John warns that giving them hospitality would be sharing in their wicked work. John is saying that help in externals that support the work must be given with discretion. Whether or not to do so must be determined, first of all, by whether or not the recipient's teaching is in accord with the apostolic faith. With all the requests our Board for World Missions gets for help from overseas groups this is a principle that needs to be applied again and again and carefully.

Jude

This letter seems to be a bit like a crisis visit to a field. Because of the immediate danger confronting these people, Jude put aside his plans to write to them at length and in good time.

Instead he gets this short letter of warning off to them immediately. He apparently builds on warnings that Peter had already sounded in his second letter.

Again we see the intense concern for those who have already been brought to faith. The New Testament letters throughout demonstrate this concern. They offer us examples of this concern. As was mentioned earlier they really have very little to say directly about outreach. As we struggle to determine priorities, as we make difficult decisions in the midst of tensions between such things as shepherding and outreach, I believe that we dare not look at only a few Gospel passages which mandate world wide missions. We need rather to take the Holy Spirit's entire New Testament into account.

Revelation

By the time Revelation was written, one would most likely no longer consider these seven churches to be mission congregations. In fact the Lord criticizes Ephesus for having forsaken its first love. The visions following the seven letters help us to better understand just what is going on as we carry on our work in the Church, also our work of missions. These visions also enable us to see the Church including the work of missions from the perspective of heaven or eternity.

In chapter 5, we see that the Lamb alone was worthy to open the scroll with the seven seals. Interpretations may vary, but I believe this section is telling us that the Savior's work of atonement alone gives meaning, purpose, direction to all history. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders praise the Lamb for purchasing men for God. This includes men from every tribe, language, people, and nation. Here in the last book of the Bible we have that same motif which appeared already in Genesis and again and again throughout the rest of Scripture. The Spirit is telling us that there is only one genuine religion. The real God prepared only one way of salvation for all mankind. That makes world missions a must.

If you agree with me that the first of the four horsemen of chapter 6 depicts the spread of the Gospel, then this vision gives us the assurance that in spite of many appearances to the contrary, the Gospel message that so many others and we are proclaiming is conquering.

Chapter 7 assures us that when it is all over, all of God's elect, here symbolized by the 144,000 shall be there. We can carry on the often-frustrating work of missions with this confidence. The next scene shows us a multitude too great to be counted. Again they are from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They are wearing white robes. They have palm branches in their hands. They make up an overwhelming chorus of voices praising God and the Lamb. The missionary, struggling to accomplish something on some lonely field far from home, can work and live with this vision before him, this vision which assures him that it is all going to end in unspeakable glory.

In the meantime, world missions will not be easy. There are other powers at work on a worldwide scale. Chapter 13:7 tells us that the beast from the sea was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nations. The Holy Spirit here uses the very same words that he had used to describe the extent of the spread of the Gospel.

In chapter 14, we again have the assurance that all of God's elect, the 144,000 shall be there before the throne singing their song of praise. The elect will be victorious over the beast and his image. Standing beside the sea of glass, they shall sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Chapter 17 speaks of ten kings who shall make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of Lords and King of kings. With him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers. Chapter 19 tells us that no matter how intense the battle, no matter how strong the opposition, we can be sure of final victory. When that great day comes

there will be a great multitude whose voices will sound like loud peals of thunder. They will be praising God for his victory and rejoicing in the wedding of the Lamb. In this same chapter 19, the Savior is also pictured as a rider on a white horse who strikes down the nations with the sword that comes out of his mouth. As the Church sends missionaries to the nations we shall conquer the forces of evil as long as we continue to us that sword that comes out of the Rider's mouth. That sword is the word of our God. During these last days that are pictured as a thousand years in chapter 20, Satan certainly is at work, but his power is limited and his final defeat is certain. Once again when it is all over there will be peace and beauty and happiness. It will be the wedding day of the Lamb.

In this last book of the Bible, the Holy Spirit includes scenes depicting the horror of war, but he also gives us the certainty of final victory followed by an eternity of joy and tenderness and beauty. We need to have these visions before us also on our mission fields so that when the battle grows fierce we carry on in the confidence of certain victory to be followed by perfect happiness together with all of God's elect for all eternity. By means of this book, as well as the rest of Scripture, the Holy Spirit is enabling us to carry on the work of the Church, also the work of missions in this spirit of confidence and joy.

Conclusion

The Old Testament never lets the reader lose sight of the fact that the one true God who revealed himself to the Jews has one plan of salvation for all mankind. We New Testament believers are living in the time of fulfillment in which repentance and forgiveness is being preached in Jesus' name to all nations. We followers of the Savior have a mandate from our Lord not only to carry his word to the ends of the earth but also to encourage one another, to shepherd those who have been brought into the fold and to glorify our Savior's name in everything we do.

It seems that in these last days there will never be enough laborers for the harvest. Nor will there ever be enough money to do all that needs to be done. As we make difficult decisions in our effort to use our limited means, according to our Savior's will, we dare not stress one of his mandates to us and forget about the others. As we try to determine what he wants us to do with our limited means at this moment in the life of our synod or congregation, we need to go back to the Scriptures. We need to try to learn from the experience of the early New Testament Church as that experience is recorded in the book of Acts. We need to learn from that experience as it is reflected in the New Testament letters. We need to find our way by striving to walk in the footsteps of a man like Paul who worked harder than all the rest for the cause of missions but who also walked away from a mission opportunity in Troas because he was concerned about his converts in Corinth, a man who also delayed a trip to Rome and on to Spain because he felt he needed to deliver the offering for the saints in Judea first.

If in practical terms we join with Paul in asking, "What shall I do, Lord?" the answer will, for the most part, not be an easy one to come by. We can, however, carry on with confidence. He has promised to grant us his Holy Spirit and his wisdom if we but ask. Above all we can be sure that in spite of our stupid stumbling, the day is coming when all of his elect from every tribe and language and people and nation shall stand before the throne praising the Lamb who with his blood purchased men for God.