

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND MISSIONS (Concluded)

MISSIONARY WORK BY OTHERS THAN PAUL

MOST PEOPLE tend to think of Paul and his companions as the only missionaries in the New Testament. Some have gone so far as to consider Paul the standard, the norm, and to disregard others entirely. This does violence to the truth, regardless of what we may think of the values of Paul's example for us today. Paul may have been the greatest of the early missionaries, but he was far from the only one.

We have an advantage in speaking of the missionary work of Paul. We know more about it. Not only do we have a long section of the Acts devoted to his work, but we also have a collection of his own letters. On the other hand we know comparatively little about the missionary work of the others.

That the twelve apostles were intended to be missionaries, and that most of them did become missionaries, is hardly open to question. Their very title "apostle" is the Greek form of the word "missionary." They did stay around Jerusalem for a long time, perhaps until the council described in Acts 15. In that chapter "**apostles and elders**" are mentioned. But by the time of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, it appears that all the apostles had left the city. Acts 21:18 says only that "**all the elders were present.**" Whether more than one of the apostles may have died by that time we have no way of knowing. Of course James, the brother of John, had long before been executed by Herod (Acts 12:2).

About Peter we do know a little. While Paul calls Peter "**the [apostle] of the circumcision,**" that did not keep him from being a foreign missionary. Paul himself tells us of Peter's being in Antioch (Galatians 2:11). He was even fellowshiping with the Gentile believers in that foreign city. In fact, Paul says he scolded him for withdrawing from the Gentiles when certain Jews came up from Jerusalem.

We can't be sure whether Peter ever visited Corinth, in Greece. It doesn't seem very likely. Yet he did have an influence there. It was such an influence that, when the Church began to split into several factions, one of the parties claimed to be Peter's party (I Corinthians 1:12).

Furthermore, Peter's first Epistle implies that it was written from the foreign city of Babylon (I Peter 5:13). This is not at all strange. Even though Peter ministered chiefly to Jews, we know that there were many Jews in that eastern region who never returned to Palestine after the captivity.

It is true that Roman Catholic writers claim that by Babylon Peter really meant Rome. This is largely because they want to find in Scripture some proof of their claim that he was the first bishop of Rome, the first Pope. However, in either case he would be a foreign missionary. Also, though the tradition is much disputed, there is a story that he was martyred in Rome.

The Scripture gives us little information about the later ministry of John. It seems clear that he and Peter were both in Jerusalem until the time of the Jerusalem council (Galatians 2:9). But after that we are not sure. The almost universal tradition is that he went to Ephesus, a mission field, where he ended his days. It also says that it was from Ephesus that he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he received the Revelation.

If we have little information in the New Testament about the later ministry of Peter and John, we have even less about the rest of the Twelve. The Syrian Christians of South India claim that Thomas went to India and established their Church. The claim has enough basis to be given serious consideration by historians. There is also a tradition that Matthew went to Egypt and Ethiopia. And there are other traditions concerning others of the Twelve. Some of the traditions are plausible; others are later inventions and obviously false.

From all the evidence that we have, the most that we can say is that all of the apostles except James appear to have become foreign missionaries.

But besides the Twelve there are also other missionaries mentioned by name in the New Testament.

We have already said something about Barnabas. He occupies a prominent place and appears to have been the actual leader of the first missionary journey with Paul. It is interesting to notice that he is called an apostle in Acts 14:14. He parted company with Paul after an argument about taking Mark along on a second trip. Barnabas may have been influenced by the fact that Mark was a relative, but later results seem to show that his judgment was sound. Paul himself, toward the end of his life, wrote to Timothy, "**Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry**" (II Timothy 4:11). But of Barnabas' later ministry, all that we know is that he returned to Cyprus.

Silas we know as Paul's second partner on his missionary journeys. Timothy and Titus were younger men whom he associated with himself in his missionary work. The Epistles he wrote to them might be called "letters to younger missionaries." They tell us a little about these men, and also something about the missionary principles and methods in which Paul instructed them.

Luke, a physician, accompanied Paul for a time. Just how often or how long, we don't know. But his greatest service was in his writing. He wrote one of the four Gospel accounts. In addition, he became the first missionary historian in writing the Book of the Acts.

Paul and Luke both tell us of others who did missionary work, such as Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla, Demas and Tychicus. But we get only fragmentary glimpses of them. We wish we knew more.

Of this we are sure. The missionaries whose names we know are only a small portion of the great company of missionaries who, in New Testament times, carried the Gospel to a large part of the Roman world and beyond. Who first preached the Gospel in Rome? We don't know. Who established the Church in Alexandria, metropolis of Egypt? We have no idea. What were the names of those who began the work in Antioch? They are not given. Yet these were three of the principal cities of the empire.

It is clear that there were many Christians engaged in spreading their faith to other lands. A large part were humble witnesses whom circumstances had taken to those lands. But there was a vitality in their faith that made them proclaim it wherever they went. There were others who, whether on their own initiative or under commission from a Church, devoted their lives to this task of missions. And, as in the case of any good work, there were even some false missionaries. Paul found it necessary to warn against them on at least one occasion (II Corinthians 11:13.)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we may state with certainty that the New Testament is a distinctively missionary book. All the authors of its various parts were missionaries, with the possible exception of James and Jude. In fact, almost without exception the books appear to have been written in a foreign language - Greek. In only one or two cases is it seriously suggested that a book may have been written originally in Aramaic, the language of the Jews of that day. As far as our earliest copies are concerned, they are all in Greek.

The Epistles of Paul were all written to missionary churches or to younger missionaries, except the one to Philemon, who was a member of a missionary Church. James and Peter both wrote to Jews, but to the Jews abroad. The Revelation was written for the comfort and encouragement of missionary churches. And of course the Acts is primarily a missionary account. Luke's previous book, the Gospel, was written for Theophilus, whose name is Greek, whether he is a real person or only stands for the Greek-speaking believers.

All in all, we cannot escape the conclusion that New Testament Christianity is essentially and intentionally missionary.

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