

The Bible's Missionary Message

Part II B: The New Testament

Steef van 't Slot, PhD

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**The Bible's Missionary Message,
Part IIB: The New Testament**

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Recruiting for Missions

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Endorsement for 'The Bible's Missionary Message'

'You must meet my Dutch friend,' exclaimed a Belgian friend of mine about a decade ago. 'He has written and teaches some of the best material I have seen on the Biblical foundations of mission'. A short time later I was introduced to Dr. Steef and a bond formed between us around a shared goal of training missionaries throughout the world. Since then I have had the privilege of teaching with Steef in Africa.

The work he has done in these newly revised volumes is priceless. We affirm that it is mandatory that all who serve cross-culturally have a clear grasp of God's view of mission as revealed in Holy Scripture. This is what these volumes contain. Steef has searched scripture verse by verse and line by line. It is a rich resource for both the beginning student and the academic expert who teaches and writes at the highest levels.

I am particularly thankful for this excellent work. I believe it will be an oft-quoted and useful tool for years to come. So whether you are new to mission study, wanting to understand God's heart for the world or are quite familiar and looking for new discoveries with clear analysis and treatment of the entire sweep of scripture, this is a must for you.

I predict that you will find yourself stopping from time to time just to worship, thanking God for His great love for all ethne.

This love moved the Father to make the ultimate sacrifice – allowing His own Son to die – providing a way that each of us can be forgiven and adopted into His family. May these pages inspire you to become a proclaimer of this 'good news' to those who have not yet heard it, wherever they may be on this planet.

Paul Strand, Senior Professor and Training Consultant
Bethany International Ministries
Bloomington, Minnesota USA

Endorsement for 'The Bible's Missionary Message'

The Bible's Missionary Message, Part IIB - New Testament, is the revision of Steef van 't Slot's earlier book *Biblical Foundation for World Missions*. The word 'revision' expresses a lot about the author. Despite, or may-be due to, his mission experience already for many decades, he persists in his search for even better ways to emphasise the missional value of the whole Bible. He does so from the starting point that the foundation of missions is in the Bible. But, based on this axiom, the author's desire clearly is to expand the richness of the Bible's message on missions. He does so by looking for further evidence of missional aspects in the Bible and by looking for ways how to teach even more relevantly about this evidence. Though the author has a PhD himself, he manages to communicate on the level of his target group: Christians who want to be missionaries, but many times lack sufficient education. His experience in working with this target group encourages him to continue searching for relevancy.

The above makes this, the third and last in the series, a valuable one to study the Bible as 'mission book', both theoretically and practically. And not only for the mentioned target group, but also for those who were blessed with better education and want to learn about communicating to Christians from an oral culture.

I sincerely recommend this volume as a study book on missions and as an encouragement for those who experience being called by God into the mission fields.

Kees van der Wilden
Associate Director
WEA Mission Commission

Acknowledgments

I want to express much appreciation for my friend Anton Kemp, who chaired our Dutch support team (that later developed into the foundation ‘Recruiting for Missions’) during our years in Africa. He read the contents of all three volumes in Dutch, and gave many helpful comments regarding understandability of text and footnotes. He also suggested to publish three volumes instead of two.

Thanks also to my friend Kees van der Wilden, who, apart from writing an endorsement paragraph, gave much useful advice on how to best shape this manuscript into a book.

Author's Preface

Most of the contents of this book were originally published (by Hebron Theological College, Rynfield, South Africa, 2005) as a one-volume book, with the title *Biblical Foundation for World Missions*. This book was too voluminous, too costly to produce and too heavy to transport with its 281 pages in A-4 format.

Therefore I re-worked it into 78 short articles, published on our website www.recruiting4missions.org between April 2008 and September 2014. I publish them now in 3 small volumes, trusting that it makes production, use and transport more tenable.

This third volume contains 25 articles on the New Testament; volume one contained 28 articles on the Old Testament and volume two also had 25 articles on the New Testament. They were designed for modular teaching in Bible schools, theological seminaries and missionary training centers: each of them takes about an hour to teach. Depending on how many teaching hours there are in one school week, each volume can be taught in about a week – which makes it a pretty intensive program, though.

Remember the book's target group: Christians in the Developing World who want to become missionaries. Their level and type of education recommends oral teaching, for which this text is at best a sustaining tool, not one that should rather stand alone. It can also be used for Bible studies or sermons and during retreat weeks or mission conferences.

May these studies increase your understanding of the Bible's world missions message and stimulate your journey from initial awareness to enthusiastic, successful and exciting involvement!

Steef van 't Slot, Ede, The Netherlands, Summer 2015

Introduction

The best way to learn the Biblical message about world missions is not to read *a* book about it (such as this) but to read *the* Book, more specifically: to read the Bible *with missionary eyes*. That is also the perspective from which its two forerunners were written: part I on the Old and part II A on the New Testament.

In volume II A you find missiological comments on the gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's epistles.

In volume I you find the first half of a series about eschatology; the second half appears in this volume. The New Testament ends with the book of Revelation and for that reason this volume was more suitable than II A, to host the remainder of my eschatological entries.

Some major themes run through all three volumes. The *first* is the unity between Old and New testaments: both are the Word of God and speak about the same God. Both are of equal importance: call the Old Testament the picture book and the New Testament the text book, if you wish. They tell the same story and complement each other.

A *second* major theme is, that God is the God of the whole world, whose name needs to be preached to the ends of the earth. All people groups in the world need to know that only He is God. There is not a single people group in which He is not interested.

Another is, that God, who could not and would not tolerate sin in Old Testament times does not tolerate it in New Testament times either. He has not changed; He has always offered only one way of salvation out of judgment and He still does: today it is faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Therefore Christianity is unique: there is no other religion whose god comes down to save people. Only Jesus Christ did that.

The *last* one is, that if there is only one way of salvation, there are consequences when you do not choose that way. Man has been created as free moral agent; a relationship between man and God is possible only when man chooses such a relationship voluntarily. Jesus talked a lot about hell as the horrible alternative. He is the only One who knows what He is talking about, and yet we don't like to hear about hell nowadays.

It is time that we take God, Jesus and the entire contents of the Bible serious again. We have become too liberal and tend to think that all roads lead to Rome, as the expression goes. Let's return to the full Biblical message and hear and obey Jesus' words. The era of grace will soon be over. Let's use our time, before night falls.

How to Use this Book

For the student who reads these materials it is very important to do so with an open Bible: look up all Scripture references that are given under the footnotes. That will increase your Bible knowledge significantly. Discussing the study questions at the end of each section will help to improve your understanding and to easier retain the main issues.

Chapter I

Missionary Observations: Other Epistles

Introduction

This chapter speaks about the missionary theologies and practices of Peter, John, James and Jude. Although we know their letters from Bible reading, you will notice that there are still substantial parts hidden in inconspicuous details that we often overlook. These are nevertheless important if we want to style our 21st century missionary practice after the apostolic examples.

Scholars differ in opinion about the order of the non-Pauline epistles. In this volume I have used the order you find in the Chronological Life Application Study Bible in the New Living Translation (2nd edition).

Frank Viola chose a slightly different approach. He argues that Emperor Vespasian, who succeeded Nero in 69 AD, because of his occupation in Alexandria, put his son Domitian temporarily in charge of the empire and his other son Titus in charge of military affairs. Domitian exiled John to Patmos. All agree here, but most scholars thus far dated that act in the 90s when he (again) ruled as Roman Emperor. Viola argues that Domitian exiled John during his *first* temporary reign and as a consequence dates John's gospel, his three letters and Peter's first letter as early as 65 AD, Peter's second letter in 67 AD, followed by Jude's letter in AD 68 and finally John's Revelation in AD 70. His reasoning is, that 'the weight of internal evidence in the book of Revelation suggests that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70'.¹

¹ Viola, *The Untold Story of the New Testament Church*, 2004:164-177. I recommend this book.

1. *James*

James' missiology shows us sad realities in the Majority Church. The observations below are not unilateral accusations from the Minority- to the Majority Church.² Both make mistakes, have to repent³ and repair the damage.

There are many orphans and widows in the Global South⁴ and with its numerous Christians the question is justified, why *Western* missionaries perform ministries, that the Majority Church should do itself. How pure and faultless is Southern Christianity in this regard? Diaconal ministries are the local church's responsibility and *not* meant as occupation for cross-cultural missionaries, except in unreached areas where such ministries may serve to open up the population to receive the gospel.

Paraphrasing one passage,⁵ we might say to some non-Western leaders: 'Brothers ... don't show favoritism. Suppose a [white] man meets you, a Western missionary with much finance at his disposal, and another comes in without that. If you show special attention to the rich missionary and say 'Hey, let's partner', but say to the less advantaged missionary 'yes, yes' – but then ignore him – have you not discriminated and become judges with evil motives? Has not God chosen those who are poor in your eyes to be rich in faith, knowledge, experience and advice? But you insulted His less affluent workers. Is it not the rich missionaries who make you dependent on their funds and dictate you their agendas? Is their version of 'partnership' not in fact an employer-employee relationship? Do they not enslave you with their wealth and degrade you and the name of Who created you? If you show favoritism, you sin.'

Further on we read about faith without deeds.⁶ One of the late leaders of Southern Christianity described it as 'a mile wide but only an inch deep'⁷

² With 'Majority-Church' I mean the Church in the Global South, with 'Minority Church' the Western Church

³ James 4:8-10,17

⁴ 1:27

⁵ 2:1-9

⁶ 2:14,17

⁷ A term of the late Nigerian theologian, Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo

James calls it ‘dead’. Undisciplined converts will not change the world. The world needs no more talkers, but walkers. Take Africa: Christianity did spread widely, yet its impact on society is often small. No place in the world knows so much AIDS, poverty, wars, power abuse and corruption. Therefore, the overseas cross-cultural missionary enterprise in Africa should concentrate on discipleship- and leadership training, and on mobilizing the Church to reach the unreached on its continent. The Western missionary task force should teach *them* to develop and care for *their own* communities and equipping the saints for ministry, rather than performing local ministries *itself*. Such work should be based on self-reliance principles, abandoning dependency on foreign funds and personnel.

James gives an example of social care (food and clothing) as proof of true religion.⁸ It is a great Western ministry: shipping in food and clothes for the poor. Such ministry is an easy fundraiser and it helps to ease the donors’ consciences. But does it help? It relieves, but fails to develop communities. It changes situations, but not structures. In some cases indigenous markets were spoiled because local farmers could not compete with free overseas wheat.

What should be done then? It is wiser to “give somebody a rod and teach him to fish, than just give him a fish”. There should be disaster-relief, but this should not replace community development. Giving things is easier than teaching people to care for themselves – which also redeems their dignity and self-esteem. Is not this what James meant?

Later, he describes earthly, unspiritual and devilish ‘wisdom’.⁹ This reminds us of the envy that exists among poorer church leaders because of a Western-type prosperity gospel, daily broadcast on TV into their regions. Unfortunately many Southerners fell for the glitter of impressive cathedrals with expensive sound systems – and they want it too.

Parallel to this one is confronted with envy on the status of others and the ambitious attempts to jack up one’s reputation by using impressive titles,

⁸ 2:15,16

⁹ 3:14-16

such as apostle and prophet (which sound more prestigious than ‘pastor’), doctor, reverend, bishop, etc. Such unholy self-exaltation can only raise contempt among people that are *not* driven by a ‘chief-mentality’ that seeks to build empires at the cost of God’s Kingdom. Such boasting and bragging¹⁰ has become a widespread satanic disease, causing lots of disorders (think about unreliability,¹¹ waste of time and money and absence of financial accountability, to mention a few) and other evil practices.¹² What on earth have we, Western missionaries, done to grow such fruit? Repentance is badly needed on both ends.

James’ complaint against undesirable church-behavior goes on.¹³ There is quarrelling and fighting in the Majority Church. Much is caused by the above issues, but also we see divisions like separations along tribal, denominational, cultural, social and racial lines. Apart from coveting, killing occurs. How? Even if that were not the case literally, we can think of killing relationships, one another’s reputations or credibility¹⁴ and the unity in Christ’s Body. The fighting does not even yield results: ‘You do not have because you do not ask *God*’.¹⁵ Often unashamed fundraising by Southern Christians in the West replaced asking *God*! By forgetting to ask the highest Authority with regard to financial needs,¹⁶ non-Western leaders fall into the trap of wrong motives and succumb to serving Mammon instead of God.¹⁷ James’ concluding word ‘adulterous’ is in place:¹⁸ there is a lot of ‘washing, purifying, mourning, grieving, wailing and humbling’ to be done¹⁹ before the Majority Church can expect to be lifted out of her numerous predicaments.

His next warning applies to affluent Christians (also in the West) who abused their wealth for selfish ends.²⁰

¹⁰ 4:16

¹¹ 5:12b

¹² 3:16

¹³ 4:1-3

¹⁴ 4:11

¹⁵ 4:2 (italics mine)

¹⁶ Haggai 2:9; Ps. 50:10

¹⁷ Matt. 6:24

¹⁸ James 4:4

¹⁹ 4:8-10

²⁰ 5:2-5

Paraphrasing it into missionary vocabulary: ‘Your wealth missed the eternal benefits it could have reaped. You forfeited the possibility to be clothed with fine linen.²¹ Your gold and silver have missed its true purpose, and that loss will testify against you and consume you, who piled up wealth instead of investing it into Last Days initiatives. The wages you failed to pay the workers of the Kingdom, who went out to evangelize the nations on your behalf are crying out against you. The cries of these harvest-laborers have reached the ears of the Almighty. You lived in luxury and self-indulgence [and] fattened yourselves while Judgment Day approaches.’ James repeats his advice to ‘weep and wail because of the coming misery’²² – in other words: he calls the rich to repentance.

James’ last missions-related remark applies to the brothers who expect a spiritual harvest, encouraging them to be patient until the Lord comes,²³ i.e. when the great commission has been completed.²⁴ He warns that the last stretch of that race will contain much suffering, like that of the prophets who spoke in the Lord’s name; and that perseverance will have a reward, much richer than expected, as was the case with Job.

²¹ Rev. 19:8b

²² James 5:1

²³ 5:7-11

²⁴ Matt. 24:14

Study Questions

1. *What ministries should Western missionaries not perform among churches in the Global South? What should they rather do instead?*
2. *What sort of missionaries is often favored by leaders of churches in the Global South?*
3. *Explain in your own words, what you think Dr. Adeyemo meant with his term ‘a mile wide but only an inch deep’*
4. *What may be the disadvantage of Western disaster-relief for poor countries?*
5. *What bad practices enhance the building of people’s own ‘empires’ instead of God’s Kingdom?*
6. *What sort of divisions in the Church of the Global South should be addressed in order to restore unity?*
7. *Mention some disadvantages of Global Southerners raising funds among Western churches*
8. *What warning does James address to affluent Christians, with regard to the support of missionaries?*

2. *First Peter*

When we compare the geographical areas in which the recipients of Peter's letters lived with those mentioned in Acts we see an overlap.²⁵ Some older people in the congregations that Peter addresses may have heard him preach in Jerusalem 30 years earlier. These churches were well established but apparently had a second-generation problem that Peter seeks to address;²⁶ hence the discipleship-approach in his teaching.

In his first verse Peter addresses the *nations*, speaking about the 'grace that has come to *you*';²⁷ as prophesied throughout the Old Testament. Peter does not talk to his fellow Jews in Jerusalem here, but preaches cross-culturally: no Judaist garment is used to wrap the gospel into.

When Peter tells us to 'live as strangers and aliens in the world'²⁸ we may also feel encouraged to live as missionaries among a people group in the world that is not ours. We *live*, but do not *belong* there. Missions has two sides, *one* is adaptation, contextualization and incarnation with the purpose to remove all perceived foreignness from the gospel message among our target-group. The *other* is what Peter addresses here: as citizens of heaven we are to maintain purity and holy living in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation.²⁹ In missionary terms: not being contaminated by idolatrous cultural practices that dominate our target-peoples; enculturation³⁰ is a step too far.

Peter speaks about 'a people that once was not a people'.³¹ There is a parallel with Old Testament Israel, concerning the 'chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation belonging to God', which stems from God's

²⁵ Compare 1 Pet. 1:1 with Acts 2:8-11

²⁶ 1 Pet. 2:2

²⁷ 1:10-12 (italics mine)

²⁸ 1:1,17; 2:11

²⁹ Filip. 2:15

³⁰ Enculturation can be defined as 'immersing oneself into a culture without a critical Biblical evaluation thereof' (my definition)

³¹ 1 Pet. 2:10. Before Israel was a people, it was a clan of a father (Jacob) and his twelve sons. Before the Church was a people, it was a clan of one Man (Jesus Christ) and His twelve disciples

original plan for Israel when it had just left Egypt.³² The implication is: where Israel failed through sin and conformity to the idolatrous surrounding nations, the worldwide people of God are to succeed through holiness.³³ Should it disregard holiness, it will be exiled into the spiritual Babylon, the false church that will turn anti-Christian in the last days.³⁴ God will not show more tolerance towards a sinning church today than He did towards the sins of Israel 2,600 years ago.

From Peter's way of encouraging the wives of unbelievers³⁵ we learn missionary lessons on how to stand as Christians in a pagan society.³⁶ The common denominator between these passages is that actions speak louder than words. A display of Godly character speaks clearly, even before a local language has been mastered.

Godly character revealed in a missionary is of much greater value than presence of external assets, such as wealth, reputation, prestige or appearance.³⁷ Such externals should rather not be brought into play at all.

Again paraphrasing, we could say: 'Missionaries, be considerate as you live among your target-people and treat them with respect as the spiritually weaker partner in the gospel enterprise, so that nothing will jeopardize your testimony'.³⁸

When Peter says 'Always be prepared'³⁹ he points to an ambassador-attitude that is not a *missionary* privilege – it should be common among *all* God's children – but it does lie at the heart of missionary ministry. The witnessing tone ought to be gently respectful – the opposite of the haughty attitude that places 'me, the Christian' over and against 'you, the sinner'.

³² Compare 2:5,9 with Ex. 19:5,6

³³ 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 2:11,12

³⁴ Rev. 17 & 18

³⁵ 1 Pet. 3:1,2

³⁶ Compare with 2:12,15 & 3:16

³⁷ Paraphrasing 3:3,4

³⁸ 3:7

³⁹ 3:15

God waited patiently in Noah's days.⁴⁰ Christ compared the last days with those of Noah,⁴¹ and again God waits patiently: He wants none to perish.⁴² In Noah's time only few were saved – there was but one preacher. How many missionaries will we send to the unreached hundreds of millions who have not even heard the gospel once?⁴³

The good news for adherents of tribal religions who live in fear of evil spirits is that all angels, authorities and powers are submitted to Christ.⁴⁴ He loved them enough to give His life for them.⁴⁵ He is the highest Authority and to Him has been given all power in heaven and on earth.⁴⁶ Whoever believes in Him has nothing to fear.

The pagans have to account to Him Who comes to judge. Therefore we have to keep warning them.⁴⁷ It is our mission, whether we are missionaries or not.

Offering hospitality is not only a specific duty of missionaries with regard to their travelling colleagues but is also a great privilege for church members.⁴⁸ Missionaries travel a lot and often spend much of their funds on food and accommodation that could have been provided freely by local church members.

⁴⁰ 3:20

⁴¹ Matt. 24:37-39

⁴² 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4

⁴³ Rom. 10:13-15

⁴⁴ 1 Pet. 3:22

⁴⁵ John 3:16

⁴⁶ Matt. 28:18

⁴⁷ 1 Pet. 4:3-5,18

⁴⁸ 4:9

Study Questions

1. *What problem is Peter addressing, apparently, in this letter and what approach did he choose?*
2. *Who is Peter addressing in this letter?*
3. *What two sides do we see in missions and which of the two is Peter addressing and how?*
4. *Explain what enculturation means. What could be a consequence of it?*
5. *What is a serious lesson for today's church, when we compare Ex. 19:5,6 with 1 Pet. 2:5,9?*
6. *How can local church members participate in facilitating missionary ministry?*

3. *Second Peter*

If we describe the main theme of Peter's *first* letter as 'don't be surprised because of persecution from *without*', we can qualify the theme of his *second* epistle as 'beware of deception from *within*'.

The all-sufficiency of faith in Christ is stressed, as is participation in the divine nature.⁴⁹ Nothing else is needed for man's spiritual well being.

In the next paragraph⁵⁰ Peter states that Christ's disciples are responsible for their spiritual growth. They cannot remain dependent on missionaries for that.

Missionaries do well to develop good teaching *structures*.⁵¹ It does *not* mean, that missionaries need to *run* those structures. Delegation of responsibilities to locals is part of indigenous leadership training. Teaching remains necessary, also for the spiritually mature.

The words 'when we told you'⁵² imply a visit by Peter, possibly more than once. He probably travelled through Asia Minor noticing the increased danger of false teaching, against which he warned.⁵³ He also discovered that not everybody understood Paul's letters correctly⁵⁴ and that false teachers had perverted his teaching.

Peter was eyewitness of Christ's ministry;⁵⁵ he had a personal testimony. This is an indispensable asset for every missionary because no unbeliever can argue against it. Our unique experiences with Him form an important part of the presentation with which we make Christ's person and salvation known to people that have not yet come to know Him.

⁴⁹ 2 Pet. 1:3,4

⁵⁰ 1:5-11

⁵¹ 1:12-15

⁵² 1:16

⁵³ Chapter 2

⁵⁴ 3:15,16

⁵⁵ 1:16b-18

Peter stresses the necessity to pay attention to the word of the prophets.⁵⁶ This deals with the opinion in some evangelical churches today, that the Old Testament is of less significance than the New. The Old though is a light shining into the darkness, causing spiritual growth ('the morning star, rising in your hearts'). Missionaries should teach from the Old Testament and instill a love for it among their disciples. Peter reinforces this.⁵⁷

Peter's catalogue on false teachers and their errors in the second chapter confronts us with the non-negotiable of discipleship programs for new converts. If missionaries teach the word of God, illustrated by their godly lives so that their disciples can discern lie from truth, chances that they will accept false teachers decrease dramatically. Discipleship and thorough biblical teaching should be conducted on an ongoing basis.

Peter leaves no misunderstanding when he shares his thoughts about the 'once saved – always saved' theory.⁵⁸

One characteristic of false teachers in the last days is that they ridicule the promise of Christ's return.⁵⁹ Smashing this hope for the future kills the vision⁶⁰ needed to reach the remote unreached.⁶¹ Denying that the era of grace will one day end, they position themselves so that indeed the Day of the Lord will come to them like a thief.⁶² World missions die where eschatology dies.

Our eschatological expectations (and calculations?) do not conform to God's time schedule.⁶³ We interpret His patience as slowness, but He actually wants none to perish.⁶⁴ Our missionary task is to translate God's patience into salvation activities.⁶⁵

⁵⁶ 1:19-21

⁵⁷ 3:2

⁵⁸ 2:20,21; 3:17

⁵⁹ 3:4

⁶⁰ Rev. 7:9

⁶¹ Matt. 24:14

⁶² 2 Pet. 3:10

⁶³ 3:8

⁶⁴ 3:9

⁶⁵ 3:15a

The Lord's coming can be sped up.⁶⁶ Christ said that He will come back after the gospel has reached all the earth.⁶⁷ He will maintain that criterion. The nearness of His return can be measured more or less against progress made in world missions. Progress goes faster when more people are sent out to the ends of the earth. Jesus tells us to pray for laborers⁶⁸ since all nations, tribes, peoples and languages will be represented in the Kingdom.⁶⁹ *Christ will not return as long as there are unreached people groups.* This is a neglected truth in the Church. Is there so little longing in the Bride to meet the Groom? The cry 'Amen, come Lord Jesus'⁷⁰ is hardly heard. How painful and shameful. Are we too lazy to finish the great commission and too indifferent – unloving, maybe – to crave His return? How much persecution is needed to change us?!

Study Questions

1. *Where did persecution come from in Peter's first letter? And from where in his second?*
2. *Explain why having a personal testimony is crucial for every missionary*
3. *Give as many reasons you can think of, why the Old Testament is an indispensable part of Bible teaching*
4. *What is the best remedy against the influence of false teachers?*
5. *Does Peter teach that 'once you are saved, you are always saved'? Motivate your answer from 2 Peter*
6. *What may be the consequences from not actively expecting the Lord's return?*

⁶⁶ 3:12

⁶⁷ Matt. 24:14

⁶⁸ 9:37,38

⁶⁹ Rev. 5:9; 7:9

⁷⁰ 22:20

4. *Speeding up the Lord's Coming*

Many of us have grown up with the notion that ‘the Lord Jesus can come back any minute, maybe tonight or next week. Are you ready...?’ And sure enough, He has told us to always be prepared, because His coming will be, for some at least, ‘as a thief in the night’. Yet, Jesus’ own words force us into some missiological sense of reality, because He has also said that ‘first the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached unto the ends of the earth’ and that ‘*then* the end will come’.⁷¹ So, as long as the great commission has not been finished there will not be such a thing as ‘the end’ (of this age, including His coming). Jesus gave His great commission to (all) His disciples, and these are the ones finishing it. The simple conclusion is then, that Jesus will return only, once the great commission has been finished. The relevant questions become then ‘how far are we with its execution?’ and ‘what can we do to speed up this process?’

This speeding up is possible, according to Peter,⁷² although it remains true that none of us will ever be able to predict or calculate that day of all days. But although the Jesus Film has had over 6 billion accumulative viewings and the gospel can be heard by 99% of the world’s population by radio in a language they can understand, fact is that still 25-40% of the world’s population is unreached or least-reached with the gospel. We have come a long way, but are by no means finished. We need to seriously reality-check the value of day-dreaming about an imminent rapture as some do, while there is still so much mission work to be done. Did our less-than realistic theologies lull us asleep with regard to the execution of the great commission?

If there is such a vast amount of Kingdom preaching still to be done in many (hard, remote) parts of the world, what then do we need to do? The best example we receive from the ‘Vineyard Owner’ (alias the Lord of the harvest), as portrayed by Jesus.⁷³ Every few hours he goes to the market place in the hope to hire more people to work in his vineyard. This is congruent with the prayer Jesus taught His disciples to ‘pray the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers, for the harvest is white, but

⁷¹ Matt. 24:14 (*italics mine*)

⁷² 2 Pet. 3:12

⁷³ Matt. 20:1-16

the laborers are few'.⁷⁴ We looked into that story before.⁷⁵ What matters most apparently, is the addition of workers – and still more workers. Jesus said it, and so does our proverb that 'many hands make light work'. So, what hands are needed? We need 'all hands on deck' – not just white hands, on the contrary.

Let's face it: if the white man had been able to finish the great commission, he would have done so long ago. So, apparently there are parts of the job to be done that seem to be (too?) hard for the traditional missionary task force, in spite of tremendous sacrifices they made in the past century and a half.

If the white man in this period had taught his disciples to do cross-cultural missions themselves, the great commission might have been finished by now – but by and large he did not.

We conclude that there is a huge need to mobilize churches for cross-cultural missions, and to recruit people to execute Christ's commission in countries that we used to consider as mission fields. Some of these are already transforming into missionary taskforces. The Church in the Developing World is huge in numbers and rich in redemptive gifts.⁷⁶ The new generation of missionaries from this Majority Church cannot be missed: they are the vital tools that are needed to finish the great commission, and it is my strong conviction that without them it is not going to be finished any time soon. They are the hands that can reach where white hands until now have not reached. Yet, these white hands have an important role to play in empowering the non-white hands to become their partners on the job. How?

First, they need to know and understand that the great commission has been given to the entire Church, including themselves, and not only to the white part of the Church. *Next*, they need to accept that owning fewer funds than their white brothers, is no reason to *not* do missions; it is all the more a reason to do missions *differently*. *Third*, if we accept the principle of cultural proximity, it becomes obvious that Africans among Africans or

⁷⁴ 9:37,38

⁷⁵ See Part IIA, Chapter I/3

⁷⁶ See Appendix/2

Asians among Asians can do the cross-cultural job much faster than Westerners can, because the latter have bigger cultural barriers to cross.

It is simply not fair that people hear the gospel twice as long as many have not heard it even once. I would like to leave just one example with you to consider. The continent of Africa has still about 990 unreached people groups, and about 50 of them have a population of over 1 million.⁷⁷ That is a huge task. But the Church in Africa can handle such a vast load of work! This Church numbers half a billion believers, about 180 million of them being Evangelicals. If they alone would support and send only 1 missionary for every 1,000 of their members, Africa would be able to raise an additional army of 180,000 new missionaries. Divide those about these 990 unreached people groups and more than 180 missionaries could be sent (on average) to each of them. No doubt, this would mean a major break-through in world missions on that continent. Therefore, let's go to work at just that!

Study Questions

1. *Is the return of the Lord imminent, from a missiological point of view? Explain and include the key-scripture verse*
2. *What percentage of the world's population do we still need to consider as 'unreached' or 'less-reached'?*
3. *Explain how the return of the Lord can be sped up*
4. *What is the main commodity we need to finish the great commission? Give two references from Matthew's gospel*
5. *Why did the white missionaries not yet finish the great commission? Give two reasons*
6. *Traditional mission fields need to be turned into*
7. *Should Africans, participating in world missions, use Western missionary-sending models? Why, or why not?*
8. *Define what 'cultural proximity' means*
9. *Explain the mathematics of the African Church's potential, with regard to missionary-sending*

⁷⁷ According to data found on www.joshuaproject.net

5. *Hebrews*

Hebrews is full of missiology. Historic *missiological significance* we see in the subtle encouragement to break with Judaism.⁷⁸ The road, inaugurated by Stephen, has ended now. This first martyr died after radically rejecting Judaism.⁷⁹ Only *after* his death⁸⁰ the gospel spread to Judea and Samaria⁸¹ and later to the ends of the earth.⁸² Since that time the chasm between Judaism and Christianity became ever deeper, as we also see in Paul's letters. The missiological breach, initiated by Stephen, finds *theological validation* in Hebrews, written about 30-32 years after his death.

Formerly God spoke through sent ones,⁸³ but in the last days through His Son, also called 'apostle'.⁸⁴ He occupies the throne with God,⁸⁵ and keeps sending out missionaries until His plan is accomplished.⁸⁶ But the Hebrews were not ready to be sent:

Hebrews addresses 2nd generation Christians.⁸⁷ It was written about 30 years after Jesus' earthly ministry. This helps us to understand why these 'old' Christians had insufficiently matured.⁸⁸ They were well-acquainted with Judaism and the author keeps reminding them that Christ supersedes everything. Some contemplated leaving Christ for Judaism ('falling away'). Their thinking was syncretistic. They were far from being the teachers they should have been by that time. When they were not able to teach, they were not sending or being sent as missionaries either. Churches with conflicting worldviews will not sacrificially set aside funds and send missionaries.

⁷⁸ Heb. 13:13

⁷⁹ Acts 7:51-53

⁸⁰ 7:54-60

⁸¹ Acts 8 & 10

⁸² From Acts 13 onwards

⁸³ Heb. 1:1 (prophets)

⁸⁴ 1:2; 3:1

⁸⁵ 1:3b; Rev. 3:21

⁸⁶ Heb. 1:13; John 20:21b

⁸⁷ Heb. 2:3b

⁸⁸ 5:11-13

The signs and miracles that accompanied Jesus' ministry,⁸⁹ Paul described as apostolic⁹⁰ – i.e. belonging to missionary work – and based on gifts of the Spirit.⁹¹

If even the greatest Missionary needed 'perfect[ion] through suffering',⁹² then today's missionaries cannot have an easy life either. One is either a true missionary, suffering biblically for the expansion of God's Kingdom, or one is a fake.

We see a beautiful picture of how Jesus crossed over from heavenly to earthly culture,⁹³ taking on humanity with all the suffering that accompanies it. He had to be made like His brothers, just like missionaries have to become like their target people⁹⁴ – in order to remove all foreignness from the gospel they preach. Christ laid down His life for whom He saves; missionaries should do the same for whom they seek to reach.

'Therefore ... brothers who *share in the heavenly calling* fix your thoughts on Jesus, the *apostle ...*'.⁹⁵ Or: because you have the same calling, follow His example, be a sent one like He was, as faithful in fulfilling your call to the nations as He was.⁹⁶

Missionary or evangelistic success is not just bringing people to the *beginning* of faith – making converts – but help them to continue unto the *end* – making disciples.⁹⁷ Converts may fall but disciples will stand. Not the Israelites who *started* the journey reached the Promised Land but the few who *continued*, like Joshua and Caleb who *finished* it. This message is repeated often.⁹⁸

⁸⁹ 2:4

⁹⁰ See 2 Cor. 12:12

⁹¹ See 1 Cor. 12:7-11

⁹² Heb. 2:10; 5:8

⁹³ 2:14-18. This passage is very similar in spirit to the one in Filip. 2:5-11

⁹⁴ In missiology this is called 'incarnational ministry', literally being 'born into the host-culture' – as Jesus was

⁹⁵ Heb. 3:1 (*italics mine*)

⁹⁶ Luke 2:30-32; John 17:4

⁹⁷ Heb. 3:14-19

⁹⁸ 4:2,6; 6:4-6

Disciples need to learn that nothing is hidden from God and that all have to account for what they do in life.⁹⁹ Therefore we should live holy lives.¹⁰⁰ Paul brought ‘the Gentiles to the *obedience* that comes from faith’.¹⁰¹ Discipleship without obedience is worthless.

Hebrews has a great message for all who think that they need to bring animal sacrifices or pray to ancestors to intercede for them. Jesus stood on our side, reconciling us once for all with God. With *Him* we have nothing to fear.¹⁰² *Without* Him we cannot *enter* heaven;¹⁰³ *with* Him we cannot *miss* it. Jesus is God’s Way; with *Him* we need nothing else for salvation. Christ is sufficient; anything we add to Him will draw us away from Him.

Maturity and begetting offspring are linked.¹⁰⁴ Descendants in the physical and spiritual realms were promised to Abraham.¹⁰⁵ He became father of his *own people* and of all believers out of *the nations*. He was old when Isaac was born and also the non-Western church has come of age. Now is *their* time to beget spiritual sons among the nations. Can we paraphrase ‘teachers’ as ‘... by this time you, non-Westerners, ought to be *missionaries* ...’?¹⁰⁶

Chapter six preaches the same message.¹⁰⁷ The non-white church has been ‘rained upon’ and produced a *local* crop. God does not forget that. Yet, it largely failed to produce a crop *among the nations*. In that sense it was mostly barren, which partially explains the poverty on some southern continents.¹⁰⁸ Now is their time to engage in saving the people groups who never heard the gospel.

Formerly, Levites could take tithes from the people. The New Testament rule is: whoever serves the gospel may live of it.

⁹⁹ 5:13; 9:27

¹⁰⁰ 12:14; Matt. 5:8

¹⁰¹ Rom 1:5 (*italics mine*)

¹⁰² Heb. 4:15,16; 6:20; 8:6; 10:19-22

¹⁰³ John 14:6

¹⁰⁴ Compare Heb. 5:14 and 6:1 with 6:14

¹⁰⁵ 6:13; Gen. 12:1-3

¹⁰⁶ Heb. 5:12. Teaching belongs to the world missions mandate, Matt. 28:20a

¹⁰⁷ Heb. 6:7-10

¹⁰⁸ Compare with Ps. 67:6,7

This does not exempt people who work for the gospel from *giving* tithes. They sometimes see themselves only as *receiving* party. Full-time Christian personnel, like the Levites, should also tithe.¹⁰⁹

Old Testament rules, sacrifices and legislation were ordained by God, but after Christ's earthly ministry, the law in its *ritual* application became obsolete and would disappear'.¹¹⁰ The same applies to Tribal Religions, which are *not* God-ordained. None of its rituals or sacrifices can add a thing to serving Christ. On the contrary: these lead people away from Him and cannot take away fear of evil spirits or cleanse guilty consciences. Therefore, in preaching and practice, non-Western Christianity should relinquish syncretism, which is idolatry, because Christ is all-sufficient and nothing besides Him is needed for salvation.¹¹¹

Christ came to do God's will.¹¹² That's why God sent Him. Like for Jesus, He also designed good works for us. Before our birth, He specially designed our life's 'mission'. We need to ask Him what His plans are.¹¹³ He will tell us, if we obey like Jesus did.¹¹⁴

Hebrews contains gems of missionary biography. Missiologically, there are major and minor characters. We call them major because the Bible tells much about them and minor because not much is said about them. The *minors* are Abel, Enoch, Moses' parents, the people of Israel and Rahab.¹¹⁵ The *majors* are Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses.¹¹⁶ All have their basis of faith in common.¹¹⁷ Many lessons and examples can be drawn from their lives for today's missionaries.

The word 'therefore' links chapter 12 to chapter 11. We are encouraged to behave like the people mentioned before,¹¹⁸ all of whom had their *mission*.

¹⁰⁹ Heb. 7:6,9; compare with Numb. 18:26,28,29

¹¹⁰ Heb. 8:13

¹¹¹ 9:8-10,15; 10:9; 12:22-24; 13:8,9

¹¹² 10:7 quoted from Ps. 40

¹¹³ Eph. 2:10; Ps. 139:16,17

¹¹⁴ Heb. 10:9a,35,36

¹¹⁵ 11:4,5; 11:23; 11:29,30 and 11:31 respectively

¹¹⁶ 11:7; 11:8-12; 11:20; 11:21; 11:22 and 11:24-28 respectively

¹¹⁷ 11:1-3,6,13-16,33-40

¹¹⁸ 12:1-3

We must run the race marked out for us,¹¹⁹ fulfill our mission and with perseverance look at Jesus, our example, ready to suffer for our mission's completion as He did.

We learn from Esau¹²⁰ that, when people give in to their carnal cravings, they forfeit their inheritance¹²¹, i.e. their God-given missionary vocation.

To abandon the rituals and cultural habits of Tribal Religions is hard. It may mean: being cast out socially and relationally. It may bring shame and persecution from family-klan and people. Yet, the author argues that there is no other way. One needs to break with the old ways, 'go outside the camp' and 'bear the disgrace He bore'.¹²² Life on earth is not heaven; our heavenly City is yet to come. As missionaries we encourage our disciples to keep this principle, to evangelize families rather than individuals.

Study Questions

1. *What was the direct, positive result of Stephen's death?*
2. *Describe three problems the Hebrew believers had, that made it necessary to write this letter*
3. *What trademarks identify true missionaries?*
4. *Explain which passage in Hebrews best defines Jesus' incarnational ministry*
5. *Describe why converting people is not enough, and what needs to be done after conversion*
6. *Should people who receive tithes also tithe themselves? Explain why, or why not, with Scripture reference(s)*
7. *What may be the consequences of breaking away from Tribal Religions?*

¹¹⁹ Note the similarity with how missionary Paul ran his race, 1 Cor. 9:24-27

¹²⁰ Heb. 12:16,17

¹²¹ In Ps. 2:8 the nations are spoken of as inheritance for those that fulfill their mission to them

¹²² Heb. 13:13,14

6. *Jude*

Jude's letter, the last of the General Epistles, shows much commonality with Peter's 2nd letter. Both address false teachers. Peter warns that they are coming – he speaks in the future tense.¹²³ Jude says that they are already among the people.¹²⁴ This suggests that Jude wrote later than Peter, or that both made use of a tract against false teachers that may have been written by someone else. It is hard to be certain about this but there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of either letter.

Jude combats an early form of gnosticism. Green gives these characteristics:¹²⁵ gnostics denied the lordship of Christ, minimized the law and advertised freedom; they emphasized special knowledge, were arrogant and cynical towards 'unenlightened' church leaders and felt superior to people with less knowledge or revelation; they displayed an unhealthy interest in angelology,¹²⁶ created divisiveness, advocated lasciviousness and perverted God's grace into licentiousness: the true 'pneumatic', they said, could not be affected by what the flesh does, in other words: feel free to continue sinning; they felt no duty to obey civil or ecclesiastical authorities, taught that their salvation was already complete and had no eschatological expectation of ultimate redemption. Similar heresies, like those of the Nicolaitans,¹²⁷ were found in the Asian churches.

Of Jude's 25 verses, 15 run parallel with 2 Peter and only v. 1-3 and 19-25 differ: Jude 4-18 has many similarities with 2 Peter 2:1-19. Peter is more elaborate in his arguments and uses no extra-canonical data, whereas Jude is briefer and allegedly quotes from the Apocrypha.¹²⁸

¹²³ 2 Peter 2:1-3

¹²⁴ Jude:4

¹²⁵ Green, 1970:39

¹²⁶ The teaching about angels

¹²⁷ Rev. 2 & 3

¹²⁸ Green states that Jude :9 quotes from the 'Assumption of Moses' and v. 14 from the 'Book of Enoch' (Green, 1970:48-50). Others dispute this (see e.g. The%20Apocryphal%20Books%20The%20Assumption%20of%20Moses%20and%201%20Enoch_files/The%20Apocryphal%20Books%20The%20Assumption%20of%20Moses%20and%201%20Enoch.htm)

Jude's place in the New Testament, just prior to Revelation, is significant. In the last days there will be an increase of false teaching¹²⁹ as well as deception among and falling away of saints.¹³⁰ Jude warns of events that reach their climax in the book of Revelation and are already of great relevance today.

He had wanted to write about something else¹³¹ but felt he should rather address this false teaching. Sometimes missionaries need to change their approaches, plans, teachings and sermons in order to stay relevant for their people with regard to their felt needs. Teachers who ride theological hobbyhorses do not train disciples appropriately.

Disciples must learn to contend for their faith.¹³² There is a battle in the heavenly places,¹³³ expressing itself also in the presence of false teachers. It takes spiritual warfare to resist their influence. A soft, pie-in-the-sky faith will be overrun by spiritual enemy troops and their human agents. Contending for the faith demands discernment of spirits, prayer, intercession, thorough knowledge of God's word, maintaining a holy life-style and courageously speaking up against sin and evil.

Jude says 'build yourselves up in ... faith',¹³⁴ not 'wait until you are visited to be built up'. He promotes spiritual self-reliance: watch over *your own* spiritual life.

'Snatch others ... and save them',¹³⁵ refers to the desire to reach out and save the lost. This should be a heart attitude of all church members, whether they are involved in local evangelism or cross-cultural missions. Saving others should not be the occupation of *a few* but the habit of *all*.

¹²⁹ 1 Tim. 4:1-3a

¹³⁰ Matt. 24:4,5,10,11; 2 Thess. 2:1-12

¹³¹ Jude :3a

¹³² :3b

¹³³ Eph. 6:10-20

¹³⁴ Jude :20,21

¹³⁵ :23

The salvation of people will culminate in their presence with the Lord 'without fault'.¹³⁶ People who have been brought back into a right relationship with God will joyfully praise Him¹³⁷ because that is what they were created for.¹³⁸ They have 'come home' and were saved in order to respond to God's purpose for them. We see then that the final result of evangelism and missions is the glorification of God, as Jude rightfully concludes.¹³⁹

Study Questions

1. *Do you see gnostic influence in your church? If so, describe its characteristics*
2. *Mention two important characteristics of the end times*
3. *How can missionaries stay relevant for the people group they serve?*
4. *Describe in your own words what 'contending for the faith' means*
5. *What is the final result of evangelism and missions?*

¹³⁶ :24; 1 Thess. 5:23,24

¹³⁷ Jude :25

¹³⁸ Rev. 4:11

¹³⁹ Jude :25

7. *First John*

What God do we preach?¹⁴⁰ Is it Him in Whom there is no darkness at all and Who has our best interests at heart? Or do we mix in thoughts of an angry ruler, a critical schoolmaster, a cynical potentate who considers our wrongs and plans revenge? Many struggle with such polluted God-images. In order to understand Who God is we need to look at Jesus:¹⁴¹ kind, compassionate, patient, willing and powerful to heal, comfort, deliver and teach. He hates hypocrisy,¹⁴² because it masks sin and chooses to pretend what it is not.¹⁴³

The unique salvation power of the gospel is stressed:¹⁴⁴ there is no salvation outside Christ, Who is the only way to the Father¹⁴⁵ and to eternal life.¹⁴⁶

The old apostle understood that he could not go on teaching the churches forever. Therefore he taught his disciples to depend on the anointing of the Holy Spirit, when there are no human teachers.¹⁴⁷ Missionaries need to do the same: teach disciples to read the Bible themselves and apply it to their situations, under the Spirit's direction.

The exhortation to continue in Him¹⁴⁸ urges us, with Christ's return in view, that Christian life is not only about *beginning* well, but also about *ending* well. This makes us confident and unashamed.

Laying down our lives for our brothers like Jesus did¹⁴⁹ does not *only* mean physical death, but also: to *live* our lives, serving our brothers in an attitude of sacrificial love, esteeming them higher than ourselves.

¹⁴⁰ 1 John 1:5

¹⁴¹ John 14:8-10

¹⁴² Hypocrisy was one of the worst characteristics of the spiritual leaders of His time, see e.g. Matt. 23:1-30

¹⁴³ 1 John 1:6; 2:9

¹⁴⁴ 2:23

¹⁴⁵ John 14:6

¹⁴⁶ 1 John 2:25

¹⁴⁷ 2:20,27

¹⁴⁸ 2:28

¹⁴⁹ 3:16

But how far do we go? Will we also sacrifice homes, careers, jobs and salaries to reach unbelievers? Jesus did that: He came as a missionary¹⁵⁰ and died for us when we were still sinners.¹⁵¹ Thus, faith should translate into action.¹⁵²

Testing the spirits¹⁵³ is easy for upright people. The question is not: *can* we discern them, but will we *abandon* them once we know they are false? Jesus said that His Spirit will guide us into all truth.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, as soon as we ask Him we will know.

John writes ‘Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God’.¹⁵⁵ Although love expresses itself through acts of kindness, we cannot consider unbelievers who act kindly as ‘born of God’ merely because of their social concern. There is no ‘way of good works’ that saves people from sin; only faith in Christ can. James also states that true faith expresses itself through acts of love, but the latter cannot replace the former. The real meaning of ‘love’ may best be rendered as ‘everyone who loves [God more than anyone or anything] is born of God’ (my insert). The social concern we call ‘love’ may not be love at all but actions, defiled by selfish motives. John qualifies his statement by attaching love to godly nature.¹⁵⁶

Another way of discerning true love is absence of fear for punishment.¹⁵⁷ Whoever is secure in God’s love does not fear His punishment, whatever way we interpret our suffering. We all need discipline,¹⁵⁸ but our *punishment* God laid on Jesus.¹⁵⁹ If we believe in Him we do not need to fear God’s wrath.

¹⁵⁰ Filip. 2:5-11

¹⁵¹ Rom. 5:8

¹⁵² 1 John 3:17,18

¹⁵³ 4:16

¹⁵⁴ John 16:13

¹⁵⁵ 1 John 4:7

¹⁵⁶ 4:8-10

¹⁵⁷ 4:18

¹⁵⁸ Heb. 12:5-11

¹⁵⁹ Is. 53:4-8

That is the good news that missionaries should present: peace with God¹⁶⁰ through Christ, never to fear anything, ever again.¹⁶¹

Next, John exposes false religions. Many say they serve ‘god’, but ‘god’ can have different faces. The key is how one thinks about God’s Son, Jesus.¹⁶² Although He loved the world enough to give His life for it, it hates Him. Hating Jesus, denying His existence or separating the Man from His deity, means hating God. Some missionaries fear that confrontation with adherents of hostile religions may cost them their lives. Missionaries need a martyr’s spirit to reach the unreached people groups!

A characteristic of genuine Christianity is assurance of salvation.¹⁶³ Nobody has to do with less. God sticks to His *conditions* (‘believe the Lord Jesus’) and His *promises* (‘and you shall be saved’).¹⁶⁴ He keeps His part of the deal, regardless of our doubts, which result from poor Bible knowledge. Missionaries cannot *assume* that their disciples have that assurance; *we* must teach them the Scripture portions that speak about it.

One reason that some lack assurance of salvation is that they think they have committed the unpardonable sin.¹⁶⁵ Jesus mentioned only one such sin, which was committed by the Pharisees when they deliberately ascribed Jesus’ works, done by God’s Spirit, to the devil. It is called ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’,¹⁶⁶ the only sin for which there will be no forgiveness because it is a calculated and repeated rejection of truth, committed not by *believers* but by declared *unbelievers*. They have deliberately sinned against their consciences and ‘loved darkness rather than light’.¹⁶⁷ This is unpardonable because it is an unrepentant hardening.

¹⁶⁰ Rom. 5:1

¹⁶¹ 8:31-39

¹⁶² 1 John 5:1

¹⁶³ 5:10-13,19a

¹⁶⁴ Also: 4:14-17; John 3:16,17; Acts 2:38;16:31; Heb. 10:19-22 etc.

¹⁶⁵ 1 John 5:16b

¹⁶⁶ Matt. 9:34; 12:22-32

¹⁶⁷ John 3:18-20

Study Questions

1. *Who do Christ's disciples have to rely on if they want to properly understand the Scriptures?*
2. *Explain how we can lay our lives down for our brothers, like Jesus did, without thinking about dying*
3. *For whom is it easy to 'test the spirits' and why?*
4. *Explain what John's words 'everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God' means – and does not mean*
5. *Explain why we don't have to fear God's punishment, as if you were explaining the concept to an unbeliever*
6. *Why do missionaries need to have a martyr's spirit?*
7. *How would you explain to a nominal believer that it is possible to have assurance of salvation?*
8. *Explain what Jesus meant when He spoke about the 'unpardonable sin'. Who commits that sin?*

8. *Second & Third John*

John exhorts his readers to approach one another with love and truth, of which he himself is an example.¹⁶⁸ Christ's love is a missionary's quality proof that He has sent him or her.¹⁶⁹

The church that John addressed may have been around for years, yet Christ's deity had to be stressed again¹⁷⁰ and a warning against those denying it.¹⁷¹ With this main theme John wanted to stop false teaching. Even in well-disciplined churches heresy can creep in. As long as missionaries have influence in churches they planted, they should warn against such sowers of weeds.¹⁷²

John was glad about 'some...walking in the truth',¹⁷³ implying that others in that church were not. He warned the straying sheep in general terms.¹⁷⁴ He had no mercy on false teachers, whom he called deceivers and antichrists.¹⁷⁵ His radical language reminds us of the terms Jesus used against the Pharisees.¹⁷⁶

John repeats his call for obedience:¹⁷⁷ you will not be obedient unless you are convinced of its necessity. That only happens if you take responsibility, a characteristic of disciples who do not just 'hire' Christ as Savior, but truly submit to Him as their Lord. Whoever falls short of this falls away when persecution hits.¹⁷⁸

John attacks the 'once-saved-always saved' teaching:¹⁷⁹ 'anyone who does not *continue* in the teaching of Christ does not have God'. It is possible to

¹⁶⁸ 2 John:1

¹⁶⁹ John 13:35 'By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another'

¹⁷⁰ 2 John:3

¹⁷¹ :7-11

¹⁷² Matt. 13:24-30,36-43

¹⁷³ 2 John:4

¹⁷⁴ :8,9a,11

¹⁷⁵ :7

¹⁷⁶ Matt. 12:34; 15:7-9; 22:18;23

¹⁷⁷ 2 John:6, compare with 1 John 2:3-6; 3:22,24; 5:3

¹⁷⁸ Matt. 13:5-7,20-22

¹⁷⁹ 2 John:9 (*italics mine*)

neglect that teaching by indifference or choice and loose your salvation. Early gnosticism taught licentiousness and immorality that there is no reward for holy living because salvation cannot be lost. But salvation is for whoever stands firm to the end.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, we should not conduct evangelism and then leave new believers to their own devices, because they are ‘saved once and for all’. Such people may backslide when discipling lacks, and -thus- no longer believe.

John is not saying that we should abandon normal courtesy towards people who claim to be Christians but who err in doctrine.¹⁸¹ When he says to not ‘take them into your house’ he means ‘do not give them access to your church members’. This is in line with other verses.¹⁸² ‘Welcoming’ a false teacher means: agreeing with his teaching. Leaders who do not take a stand against false teachers become their accomplices.¹⁸³

One of the joys of missionary work is the privilege to travel and meet people.¹⁸⁴ According to John, oral contact is more effective for good relationships, than mere writing is.¹⁸⁵

In his last letter we see some aspects of *missionary partnership*.¹⁸⁶ The brothers John speaks about were sent out from his church in Ephesus and visited Gaius and his church on their way, thus keeping contact between both churches. These missionaries reported positively about Gaius’ spiritual life and how he had helped them. This help seems to have consisted of hospitality and facilitation in travel, whether financial, practical or both.¹⁸⁷

Although these laborers were strangers to Gaius, he didn’t feel they took him for granted. On the contrary, he felt privileged to care for them. John’s words ‘you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers’¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁰ Matt. 10:22; 24:13

¹⁸¹ 2 John:10

¹⁸² :1,13

¹⁸³ :11

¹⁸⁴ :12

¹⁸⁵ See also 3 John:14

¹⁸⁶ :3-8

¹⁸⁷ :3,5,6a,7a,6,8a

¹⁸⁸ :5

indicates a reliable habit. Whether hospitality was Gaius' *gift* we don't know, but it was his *choice*. John encourages him to continue in it.¹⁸⁹

These missionaries were sent to preach Jesus among Gentiles, who did not help them. Therefore they depended on help from God's people.¹⁹⁰ John does not state that missionaries should refuse gifts from unbelievers. There are 'sheep' among them who will want to help missionaries,¹⁹¹ with no strings attached. Such gifts can be received with gratitude and should be refused only when the giver tries to manipulate God's workers by it. Of course certain gifts can be *designated* for specific purposes.

Speaking about partnership development in the wider Body of Christ, he uses the word 'we'. *We* are supposed to work together for the truth.¹⁹² This includes the missionaries, John's church as sender and Gaius' church as local facilitator. If all three contribute what they can, true missionary partnership develops.

Unfortunately some churches have a 'Diotrephes' in their midst: someone who resists missionary work.¹⁹³ Diotrephes' resistance had a very hostile nature. He 'loved to be first, would have nothing to do with us, gossiped maliciously and refused to welcome the brothers'. His enmity and aggression was so big toward those who accommodated missionaries, that he excommunicated them. John decided to visit and not let this ulcer rot, so that further damage to the church could be avoided.

¹⁸⁹ :6b

¹⁹⁰ :7,8

¹⁹¹ Matt. 25:32-40

¹⁹² 3 John:8

¹⁹³ :9,10

Study Questions

1. *What is the missionary's quality-proof?*
2. *What was the main doctrinal error in the church John addresses?*
3. *How does John call false teachers? Do you find that too radical?*
4. *Give your opinion on the 'once-saved-always-saved-theory'*
5. *What did gnosticism teach? Do we see that today also?*
6. *What is the result of evangelism without discipling converts?*
7. *What sort of help did Gaius give to visiting missionaries?*
8. *Are missionaries allowed to receive gifts from unbelievers? If so, under what conditions?*
9. *What three parties does John mention in missionary partnerships?*

9. *Revelation*

Revelation of God's plans to His servants,¹⁹⁴ special as it is – certainly when angels are involved – is not abnormal. What we see in this book is very big, applies to the whole world, including all people and has to do with the end of the world missions era. When God reveals His plan, He includes the end of it. We see that He reveals His plans for *how, when, where* and *by whom* certain missionary actions need to take place. Earlier He revealed missionary plans to Jesus, Paul and Peter,¹⁹⁵ now to John and later still to many others. Without such revelation we would tend to do our own thing, failing to influence the world as we might have, had we worked according to God's revelation. Our prayers for God to reveal His missionary plans to us must be continuous and fervent. Without Him we can do nothing.¹⁹⁶

Another aspect is: did we work in the past according to what was revealed, or did we neglect it? If so, we cannot expect to receive fresh revelation. Revelation increases when obedient response increases. It means: *seeing* and *hearing* God's guidance, *feeling* His heartbeat and *joining* Him. Without revelation one runs wild. True revelation is a conviction, strong enough to die for. Without revelation no missionary survives long in the field. It distinguishes the owner from the mercenary.¹⁹⁷ Every revelation starts with meeting the Revealer and developing a relationship with Him.¹⁹⁸ Without divine revelation no one can be a revealer of God's will to others.¹⁹⁹

Missionaries (apostles) that visit churches must be prepared to submit to testing²⁰⁰ by the leaders of that church, since they are responsible for her well-being.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁴ Rev. 1:1

¹⁹⁵ E.g. John 5:19 (Jesus); Acts 9:16; 13:2; 16:6-10; 27:23-26 (Paul); Acts 10:9-20 (Peter)

¹⁹⁶ John 15:5b

¹⁹⁷ 10:11-13

¹⁹⁸ Rev. 1:4-18

¹⁹⁹ 1:19,20

²⁰⁰ 2:2b

²⁰¹ 6,14-16,20

The Holy Spirit is pictured as ‘seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth’.²⁰² The two-fold mention of seven describes the complete missionary range of the Holy Spirit, expressed by the words ‘sent out’: the seven Spirits overlook nothing. This ministry is being executed by Christ, the Lamb Who has ‘seven horns’ – expressing ‘all authority in heaven and on earth’.²⁰³ This perfect combination results in a representation of all ethnic families on earth before the throne.²⁰⁴ Through His Spirit Christ leads the Church to reach that goal.

Chapter six pictures some aspects of missions history. Christ’s gospel went out to conquer the world after He defeated death.²⁰⁵ Then, the three next horses with their riders start to demolish the conquest of the first.²⁰⁶ The rider on the *first* horse is the Prince of peace.²⁰⁷ After Him the one on the *second* horse comes, taking peace away and initiating wars.²⁰⁸ Similarly, after the message of the first sounded ‘I am the Bread of Life’,²⁰⁹ the *third* causes famine on earth.²¹⁰ Equally, after Jesus defeated death on the Cross, the rider on the *fourth* horse causes death in abnormal proportions.²¹¹ Still, at the end of this book we see His mission accomplished: He now has many followers.²¹²

Throughout missions history we see that, when the gospel advances, Satanic counter attacks try to destroy God’s *work* as well as His *people*.²¹³ Missionaries at the frontlines must count with such attacks. They will conquer when they don’t ‘love their lives ... [unto] death’.²¹⁴ Willingness to pay the ultimate price for the gospel may become the missionary’s most valuable weapon.

²⁰² 5:6

²⁰³ Matt. 28:18

²⁰⁴ Rev. 5:9; 7:9

²⁰⁵ 6:1,2

²⁰⁶ 6:3-8

²⁰⁷ Is. 9:6; John 20:19,20

²⁰⁸ Rev. 6:3,4

²⁰⁹ John 6:35

²¹⁰ Rev. 6:5,6

²¹¹ 6:7,8

²¹² 19:11-16

²¹³ 6:9-11

²¹⁴ 12:11b

Such preparedness should be the common characteristic of all true brothers.²¹⁵ As long as that willingness does not become common among believers, the Church is not yet ready to face last days' challenges.

Many of God's servants will not be harmed because they are sealed,²¹⁶ but at the end more and more will lay down their lives for Christ and the gospel.²¹⁷

When the full harvest of world missions has come in,²¹⁸ the sower and the reaper will rejoice together²¹⁹ but there will be no rejoicing before God's throne (5:9 & 7:9) without warfare (11:7 & 13:7). After all, 'these in white robes' have come out of the great tribulation.²²⁰

The darkest part of the night is still to come. After the woman²²¹ gives birth to the male child,²²² she is protected in a safe place during 3½ years.²²³ Although her active mission seems over ('desert') she has other offspring: people are still being born again,²²⁴ some of them because they leave the apostate church.²²⁵ War rages against them²²⁶ and some will be killed, but spiritually they are safe.²²⁷

The last day saints continue to preach the gospel, to no avail. People have become so hardened that they do no longer repent.²²⁸ The night in which no one can work²²⁹ has come upon the world.

²¹⁵ 12:10

²¹⁶ 9:4; 7:3

²¹⁷ 11:7; 13:7; Dan. 7:21

²¹⁸ Rev. 5:9; 7:9

²¹⁹ John 4:36

²²⁰ Rev. 7:14

²²¹ The woman is an image of the Church

²²² 12:1,5 the male child is an image of them that (possibly after martyrdom) will reign with Christ

²²³ 12:6,14-16

²²⁴ 12:17

²²⁵ 14:6,7,14-16; 18:4

²²⁶ 12:7

²²⁷ 14:13

²²⁸ 9:20,21

²²⁹ John 9:4

Yet, success or not, the Church's worldwide ministry goes on²³⁰ until her voice is being silenced – albeit not for long.²³¹ They all come back with their Lord, raised, raptured and changed, to establish His Kingdom on earth.²³² The first act of the returned King and His new government²³³ will be judgment over their enemies.²³⁴

Just as the missionary church has an interest in every people, tribe, language and nation, so do the devil and the beast out of the sea.²³⁵ This became already clear when Satan tried to tempt Jesus.²³⁶ There will be war between them until the end, when the kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.²³⁷

The last war-scene before the Millennium is the triumphal ride of Christ with His army. We see several pictures of the true Church in Revelation and these have to do with her different missions:

The mission of the *woman*²³⁸ is to bring forth offspring. The first of these is the *male child*, called to rule, which will be his mission during the Millennium.²³⁹

Another function is that of the *bride*: her mission is to develop the love relationship with her Lord.²⁴⁰

The mission of the *army* is to join its supreme Commander,²⁴¹ defeating His enemies.²⁴² A similarity between the bride and the army is their clothing.²⁴³

²³⁰ Rev. 10:17; 11:3-6

²³¹ 11:7,11,12

²³² 11:15-17; 12:5; 19:6-9

²³³ 20:4,6

²³⁴ 11:18,19; 14:17 – 19:2,17-21; 1 Cor. 6:2a

²³⁵ Rev. 13:2,7b

²³⁶ Matt. 4:8,9

²³⁷ Rev. 11:15; 14:17

²³⁸ Rev. 12

²³⁹ Compare 12:5 & 19:15

²⁴⁰ 19:7

²⁴¹ 19:11-14

²⁴² 12:7-12

²⁴³ 19:8,14

With the mission to rule,²⁴⁴ God's plan for man²⁴⁵ is now reality.²⁴⁶ Clearing away the last enemies²⁴⁷ the new era begins.²⁴⁸ At its end there is another short war;²⁴⁹ then we see the very last of the devil. The white throne judgment takes place²⁵⁰ and the New Heaven and Earth appear.²⁵¹

The Church's mission is to be ready and expectant²⁵² to save whoever can be saved.

Study Questions

1. *Describe the need for revelation, especially for missionaries*
2. *What may be the missionaries' most valuable weapon?*
3. *What will be the price of 'sower and reaper rejoicing together'?*
4. *Describe the circumstances of 'the night in which no one can work'*
5. *Describe the end-time Church's functions as 'woman', as 'bride' and as 'army'*

²⁴⁴ 20:4,6

²⁴⁵ Gen. 1:26,28

²⁴⁶ Rev. 22:5

²⁴⁷ 19:17 – 20:3

²⁴⁸ 20:4-6

²⁴⁹ 20:7-10

²⁵⁰ 20:11-15

²⁵¹ Rev. 21 & 22

²⁵² 22:7-21

Chapter II

Theology of Suffering

Introduction

In this chapter we look into the suffering Christ announced, as part of the discipleship of His followers. We will also see that this level of suffering is a preparation for suffering in an apostolic ministry – for the ones called into it. We should not regard this as mere theory for an age past: today's missionaries may well be called to accept that same level of suffering for the sake of spreading the gospel.

Part of that suffering may be imprisonment. Now, before you think 'I live in a free country, here they don't lock you up for your faith', it is good to realize that even inescapable and uncomfortable situations in your life may feel like a prison to you. The question then becomes, how *you* deal with *your* own prison situations.

We will then see how two great apostles behaved during their literal incarcerations – and draw lessons from them for ourselves.

Finally, looking again into Second Corinthians, we look not only at Paul's catalogue of suffering, but discover what philosophy he developed in the midst of it.

You will find that the five entries in this chapter all form powerful biblical teaching against the nowadays so prevalent prosperity-'gospel'. May this chapter help you to not only understand the biblical concept of suffering better, but also encourage you to embrace it, instead of resisting it, as many tend to do.

1. *The Cost of Discipleship*

One way of looking at the way Jesus trained His disciples could be formulated by the three words ‘listening’, ‘watching’ and ... ‘war’! When we look at parts of Matthew’s gospel, we see a listening-part in chapters 5-7, a watching-part in chapters 8 & 9 and the beginning of the war-part in chapter 10. From Jesus’ perspective these same chapters could be summarized as ‘I teach’ (5-7), ‘I do it, you watch’ (8, 9) and ‘you do it, I watch’ (10) followed by a debriefing session.²⁵³

It was a training, unmatched in intensity by any in history. The ‘Bible-school part’ went further than anyone had ever heard of, as pointed out by Jesus’ words ‘You have heard what was said before ... but I tell you ...’.²⁵⁴ The spiritual caliber was more substantial than that of any rabbinistic discipleship school ever.

The ensuing field trip was quite adventurous: Jesus healed, cast out demons and raised the dead, meanwhile teaching Kingdom principles along the way and living through what almost became a ship-wreck. Part of the training consisted of handling conflict with the spiritual elite and recruiting another disciple.²⁵⁵ This part ends with an urgent call to prayer for more workers – and the classic situation where the disciples became the first answer to their own prayers.

Thus far there had been little or no suffering for the disciples, but this was about to change. Jesus already indicated by His prayer request, that the Lord of the harvest would *send* laborers into His harvest (*italics mine*). The Greek text does not sound as kind as the English does: the word used²⁵⁶ indicates rather that workers would be *kicked out* into the fields. Thus, the main problem of missions is *not* money, as many think, but unwilling human hearts. Therefore, *disciples* need to learn to suffer, before they can hope to suffer as *apostles*, or rather: as missionaries.

²⁵³ Luke 9:10

²⁵⁴ Matt. 5:21,22,27,28,33,34,38,39

²⁵⁵ Matthew himself (9:9)

²⁵⁶ ΕΞΒΑΛΛΩ (*EXBALLŌO*)

Discipleship suffering can best be summarized by Jesus' words: 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.'²⁵⁷ Anyone doing less than that 'is not worthy of Me', Jesus said. Anyone not daily taking up his cross may belong to the crowd that from time to time follows Jesus at a distance, but cannot be counted among His disciples, whom He trains intensively. The cross must be planted deeply into every area of a disciple's life.

Disciples need to ask themselves "*What* occupies most of my daily thoughts?" Is it money, status, health, fame, beauty, social life, reputation, education, name, career, time, holidays, success, comfort, sports or other temporal things? They also need to wonder '*Who* means most to me?' Is it my parents, date, family, children, friends, pastor, spouse, colleagues?

If a disciple seeks these things in life he will lose such a life, but if he is willing to let it all go because of Christ, he will find it. The disciple's only way of bearing fruit is by becoming dying grain – not in a physical sense usually (although often it may be easier to die for Christ than to live for Him...).

Dying physically is not asked for, denying ourselves is. Dying means: submitting everything to Christ and accepting the outcome without protest. A mere convert sees Jesus as Savior – and rightly so – but a disciple makes Jesus his Lord. A disciple is prepared to *give up* his rights; a mere convert will do everything to *retain* them. A disciple has learned to *accept pain* because of Jesus; a mere convert will do anything to *flee it*. The old paradigm remains true: 'if Christ is not Lord *of* all, He is not Lord *at* all'.

The 'war' I spoke about earlier begins in the disciple's heart. There he decides on his principles. Jesus' years of ministry were preceded by His encounter with the devil in the desert. Had He not conquered there and then, He would never have entered the ministry. This applies for His disciples too. Resisting the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil, are the disciple's regular challenges.

²⁵⁷ Luke 9:23; Matt. 10:37,38; 16:24

This is not easy for any serious disciple. Sometimes it seems that people need special revelation to understand the necessity of discipleship suffering.

John the Baptist may have heard Jesus' first sermon,²⁵⁸ where He said that He came 'to set the captives free'. Now John suffered in prison. Why did Jesus not free him? Was He really the One, then? Or was someone else coming? We understand John's doubts. Jesus assured him that He is the One and that John would be blessed if he took no offense²⁵⁹ because of his suffering for the Kingdom.

Or take *Peter*. That Jesus is the Son of God, he understood by revelation, but the necessity of Christ's suffering had apparently not yet been revealed to him.²⁶⁰ He still lived with an Old Testament theology in which there was generally no understanding of suffering of righteous people. Joseph, for instance, was one of the few exceptions to this rule. Later, Paul did get such revelation when the Lord told Ananias that He would show Paul how much he had to suffer for His name.²⁶¹

Maybe we should spend some time meditating on whether we are true disciples who accept suffering as 'part of the deal'²⁶², thus being made capable of the higher vocation of apostleship suffering, or that we hide in the crowd of distant believers. Mere converts will never change the world; true disciples will!

²⁵⁸ Luke 4

²⁵⁹ Matt. 11:6

²⁶⁰ 16:15-23

²⁶¹ Acts 9:16

²⁶² John 15:20; 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:12

Study Questions

1. *In what way did Jesus' 'Bibleschool-teaching' go beyond Old Testament theology?*
2. *What important part of the disciples' training came after the 'Bibleschool-part'?*
3. *What did the next phase consist of?*
4. *What is the main problem of world missions?*
5. *What is the core verse with regard to discipleship suffering?*
6. *Describe the differences between converts and disciples*
7. *What erroneous thinking did John the Baptist and Peter have in common?*

2. *The Cost of Apostleship*

Apostleship suffering is heavier than discipleship suffering, of a higher order and based on a higher vocation. Christ has many disciples, but only few of them are called to apostolic ministry, or to say it simply: few are called to be missionaries.

We may have to re-define the word ‘missionary’, because too many people call themselves by that name while they are not. I would like to mention some biblical standards:

Contrary to popular belief, *missionaries* have a *special* vocation²⁶³;

Missionaries work *cross-culturally*, unlike *mono-cultural local evangelists*;

Missionary ministry knows signs, wonders and miracles²⁶⁴;

Missionaries are on the move, they know no static settlement;

A *missionary* gives priority to the unreached²⁶⁵;

(S)he *mobilizes* the church and *recruits* more missionaries²⁶⁶;

Missionaries may be residential among a people group, but *can* be non-residential because their ministry is wider than one people;

Some do secular work to make their ministry happen²⁶⁷.

Many more characteristics could be mentioned, but the above make clear that *missionaries* have a frontline ministry. Below we will see that they receive the beatings for it too!

²⁶³ Not every believer ‘is a missionary’, just like not every believer is a pastor, teacher, prophet or evangelist

²⁶⁴ 2 Cor. 12:12

²⁶⁵ Rom. 15:20

²⁶⁶ Paul reported his mission endeavors in churches he visited and along the way recruited a long list of co-workers

²⁶⁷ Acts 18:3; 1 Thess. 2:9

This does not mean that only missionaries suffer for the gospel; many others do too, often because they live under totalitarian regimes.

So, we distinguish two levels of suffering: the *first* is the non-negotiable self-denial and cross-carrying of the *disciple* (which mere converts will try to escape); the *second* is the suffering by choice, that an *apostle* faces once (s)he has decided to be obedient to the missionary vocation and therefore infiltrates the devil's domain. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish the two, especially since suffering may be meant as preparation for a future task.

The most convincing example of apostolic suffering we see in Paul's life. God revealed to him 'how much he would suffer for Christ's name'²⁶⁸. Apart from the many stories in Acts, we read Paul's summing up in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians²⁶⁹. His great pressures felt like a death sentence and he specifies them, mentioning 'troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, stoning, shipwrecks, all sorts of dangers, cold and nakedness'. Paul coped with suffering because he learned to deny himself: 'I beat my body and make it my slave'²⁷⁰. This was the requirement, in order to see the gospel spread among the nations.

None suffered more than Jesus did, and Paul accepted his share too. None bore more fruit than Jesus did and Paul was a good follower. Maybe it is a spiritual principle: the more suffering, the more fruit – and consequently: less suffering brings less fruit, and who escapes suffering may bear no fruit. Let this help the missionary rejoice and give the disciple an incentive to persevere.

No one wants to suffer, but in a sinful world this is inevitable and reclaiming the world for the rightful Owner will bring even more suffering. World missions cost. Before becoming a missionary one must evaluate whether one is willing to pay the price. Complaining or trying to escape suffering may indicate the opposite.

²⁶⁸ Acts 9:16

²⁶⁹ Especially chapters 1, 6 & 11

²⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 9:27

Joseph learned that there is no throne without suffering. His steps on the way to God's purpose for him included rejection, a murder attempt, being sold as a slave, being falsely accused and imprisoned, to mention just some. But all that 'went wrong' in his life made him look more like Jesus, and like Him, his hardships earned him a place on the throne. He could save many people because he kept his eyes at the end of his suffering: the throne.

Paul said that 'our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us'²⁷¹. Our glory is sharing the throne of God with Him. The book of Revelation teaches us three steps: the *first* is about overcoming ourselves and about our success in self-denial²⁷², the *second* is about suffering for the nations as our missionary responsibility²⁷³ and the *third* speaks about the clear connection with preceding suffering²⁷⁴.

Will we accept persecution and suffering as our (missionary) price to pay for the salvation of all nations? Or are we trying to escape discomfort? C.T. Studd's motto was *If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him*. Yes, missions cost, as he reminds us with his little poem *Some like to live near church and chapel bell; I like to run a rescue shop within a yard from hell*. That's the spirit. Let's go for it!

Study Questions

1. Give as many characteristics of a cross-cultural missionary as you can think of
2. Describe the two levels of suffering and define the key-characteristic of the second
3. Do you agree with the paradigm that the amount of suffering relates to the amount of fruit one bears? Why, or why not?
4. What crucial lessons do we learn from Joseph's life and attitude?
5. Explain the three steps to reach God's throne, as we see them in the book of Revelation

²⁷¹ Rom. 8:18

²⁷² Rev. 3:21

²⁷³ 7:9

²⁷⁴ 20:4,6b

3. *Imprisonment*

Imprisonment is an aspect of suffering that Jesus mentioned: ‘... they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons ...’.²⁷⁵ He says this in the context of ‘the signs of the end of the age’. At that time persecution of Christians will increase to worldwide dimensions. Yet, there are many countries where persecution, including imprisonment for Christ, has been common for a long time.

Without downplaying its seriousness, we must also consider spiritual principles that apply as much to Christ’s disciples in the so-called free world, as they do to our brothers and sisters who have been imprisoned physically. These spiritual principles deal with *non-physical ways of imprisonment*: uncomfortable situations from which one cannot escape, but that nevertheless fit in with God’s plan for a disciple’s life.²⁷⁶ Peter calls it *suffering according to God’s will*.²⁷⁷

We love our life so much that we seek to improve, enrich and enlarge it, and to make it grow in influence, name, reputation and ministry. At the same time we tend to forget that Jesus told us that we will lose our life when we seek it.²⁷⁸ We are naïve enough to believe that when our motives are ‘spiritual’ or ‘pursuing eternal values’, Jesus words do not apply – but by thinking so we deceive ourselves. Often we fail to discern the deep layers of self-centeredness on which our lives and ministries are built. If that happens, the Lord may lead us into situations that we don’t like, that are so thoroughly uncomfortable and disconcerting, that we tend to do all we can to escape them. If however He hits us with His graceful revelation, we discover that we have been led into a situation where we are forced to ‘lose our life’ – because He desperately wants us to find it!

Had *Joseph* not ‘lost his life’ while in prison, he would never have ‘found it’ on the throne of Egypt. Had not *Moses* ‘lost his life’ while tending sheep, he might never have ‘found it’ in the ministry of leading God’s people out of Egypt and through the desert. Had not *David* ‘lost his life’ fleeing from

²⁷⁵ Luke 21:12 (italics mine)

²⁷⁶ It is obvious therefore, that I am not speaking here about addictions or other sinful habits

²⁷⁷ 1 Pet. 4:19

²⁷⁸ John 12:25

Saul, hiding in caves, being betrayed by spies for many years, he might never have ‘found it’ as king of Israel. Many more examples can be mentioned. Similarly none of *us* will attain to the kingdom Jesus promised us, when we fail to accept the ‘prisons’ that have been tailor-made for *our* spiritual formation. These uncomfortable situations are the ‘prisons’ I’m talking about.

Jesus speaks about persecution as common for His disciples.²⁷⁹ Eventually we all have to ask ourselves the question Jesus expressed when He was arrested ‘Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?’²⁸⁰ Often we complain because we feel we ‘were treated unjustly’, that ‘life is not fair’ or that ‘it was not my fault’ – and so on. Jesus however, proves to have understood His way and agreed to it. He did not resist His suffering, but laid down His life voluntarily. No one took it from Him by force.²⁸¹

It may be one of the biggest struggles in our spiritual lives to learn to do just that: move away from the *complaint* about our suffering to the *embrace* of it. Paul said something to that effect to the Corinthians, who resorted to secular court-cases in order to obtain their rights: ‘Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?’²⁸² In fact he states that, by seeking ‘your right’ you have already missed the lessons of self-denial, humility and suffering unjustly, like Christ, which could have given you the spiritual gain the Lord intended for you.

When Jesus restored Peter to his ministry, He said: ‘... when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and *lead you where you do not want to go*’. That was an indication about Peter’s later martyrdom.²⁸³

Often our God-designed suffering happens by means that rob us from the freedom to design our lives or business as we please.

²⁷⁹ 15:20; 16:33

²⁸⁰ 18:11

²⁸¹ 10:17,18

²⁸² 1 Cor. 6:(1-)7

²⁸³ John 21:18,19 (*italics mine*)

We are taken involuntarily to ‘places’ – prisons – where we don’t want to be. This has nothing to do with old age. Jesus refers to the *spiritual maturity* that comes with old(er) age.²⁸⁴ His assignment sounds much simpler than it is: ‘Follow Me!’ When we do, also through the ‘prisons’ of life, we lose our ‘life’ but find it in the Kingdom in which we are destined to rule.²⁸⁵ It is much less painful if we do so voluntarily and with joy! Being thus ‘imprisoned’ means that we are freer than we ever were.

Study Questions

1. *Define in your own words what it means to be ‘imprisoned’ in a non-physical way*
2. *Describe different attitudes in which people may respond to this*
3. *What may be the reasons behind resisting this kind of suffering?*
4. *Give some (not necessarily biblical) examples of people who found their lives by losing it*
5. *‘God guides your life in the smallest possible detailed manner’. Do you agree with that statement? Motivate your answer*

²⁸⁴ The Greek word, used in John 21:18 *γηρασῆς*, (*gerases*) is similar to the Homeric word *εγερπασα*, (*egepara*) that can also be translated as ‘ripening’ or ‘maturing’

²⁸⁵ Luke 22:29

4. *Peter and Paul Incarcerated*

We just looked at the spiritual imprisonment we sometimes face, as God's method for our formation as disciples. Yet, often we do not discern God's hand in such suffering. We are dismayed, try to escape or pray against it. Our non-physical prisons are uncomfortable, threatening, frightening, and usually inescapable situations. They have to do with our health, wealth, relationships and general happiness. We also wonder *why* we have to suffer, since we walk in God's ways and serve Him with all our hearts. But we need to recover from the Old Testament 'blessing-when-you-do-well and curse-when-you-don't-theology'.²⁸⁶ Such a theology does not take into account the *suffering for the sake of righteousness or for the sake of Christ*.²⁸⁷ I described it as 'apostleship-suffering'. This New Testament type of suffering belongs to the Kingdom, i.e. that undeserved, yet formative suffering that defies human logic, but which God allows for our good.²⁸⁸

Now *Peter*:

Over a decade after Jesus indicated that Peter would eventually die for his faith,²⁸⁹ Peter was imprisoned, shortly after James had been beheaded.²⁹⁰ Maybe he wondered whether his own death was around the corner. After all, James had been killed; was he to be the next victim of Herod's favors to the Jews?

How did Peter react to that situation? Frightened? Worried about his family and church? Sending a call to pray for his release? Rattling his chains and making himself a nuisance to the guards? None of it, and although the church prayed fervently, Peter slept. His attitude was one of peace, quiet, faith and surrender to whatever would happen. He had no resistance against this precarious situation at all. When he was liberated supernaturally he was surprised rather than relieved. He was to live for another 24 years, but ready to die within 24 hours! And what about *Paul*?

²⁸⁶ See e.g. Deut. 28

²⁸⁷ See e.g. 1 Pet. 2:20,21; 3:14,17; 4:12-19; 5:10; Filip. 3:10; Col. 1:24

²⁸⁸ Rom. 8:28

²⁸⁹ John 21:18

²⁹⁰ Acts 12:1-12, in AD 44

Some 16 years after Peter, Paul is imprisoned²⁹¹ for the first time in Rome.²⁹² Indeed, he lived in his own rented place and had a great deal of freedom, although guarded by a soldier, and there was no death-threat. Yet, Paul could have been pacing his room like a caged panther. But did he? Was he frustrated because he could not travel, teach, preach and make disciples? Not at all, although that would have been an understandable reaction.

On the contrary, he used his circumstances to the utmost: he prayed, interceded for 'his' churches and wrote letters that still bless millions daily, 2,000 years later.²⁹³ He never asked people to pray for his release, or to comfort *him*, but did his best to comfort *them*.²⁹⁴ He had learned to rejoice in the Lord in all situations and to be content, whatever his circumstances were.²⁹⁵

What was the secret of these apostles? We see in both of them an attitude of deep surrender to God's will in their lives; a profound consciousness of their vocation and the conviction that God led their lives in all details; not concerned whether they would live or die and therefore without the slightest fear of death. Both had been subjected to all sorts of suffering on a regular basis and by experience acquainted themselves with the hard side of apostleship. A bit more or less suffering was of no consequence to them anymore. In addition to this, Paul states that his suffering was also meant to comfort others with the comfort God had given him.²⁹⁶

Paul's conclusion, at the end of his life, when he was locked up in Rome for the second time, was that 'everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted'.²⁹⁷ These were almost his last words.

²⁹¹ After he had already faced long imprisonments in Jerusalem and Ceasarea, Acts 21:33 – Acts 28:16

²⁹² Acts 28:30, his first Roman imprisonment, from about 60-62 AD, after which he was released, Filip. 1:25,26a

²⁹³ During his first Roman imprisonment he wrote 4 letters: Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Filippians

²⁹⁴ Filip. 1:3-24

²⁹⁵ 4:10,11

²⁹⁶ 2 Cor. 1:4

²⁹⁷ 2 Tim. 3:12

The second letter to Timothy was his last epistle and this time he knew that he would not be released, but offer his ultimate sacrifice.²⁹⁸

How can we learn to behave like Peter and Paul under trying circumstances? We already saw that there is no throne without a cross and no birth without pain. Therefore we need to learn how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord, as David did.²⁹⁹ That demands an exercise in self-discipline. Here are eight ideas:

Learn to *look away from your circumstances*: believe and confess that God is greater than these. Worship helps to realize this. Then, *remember how God came to your help in the past* – which He can do again. Thirdly, *apply God's promises* and fight unbelief: He can save you too. The opposite of *worrying* – which Jesus told us *not to do*, is to rejoice – what Paul told us to do.³⁰⁰ When we *express gratitude* for God's blessings, we will see our shortages as smaller than before. By *surrender*, we put God in the right place, saying 'not my will but Yours be done'. We may *ask the Holy Spirit for comfort*, because He knows what we need. After a while, we notice that the sting of our pain has disappeared. Finally, *notice how God saved people in the Bible*. He restored Job,³⁰¹ He can restore you too!

Study Questions

1. Which four items are usually areas in which we can be 'imprisoned'?
2. Explain the difference between Old Testament and New Testament theologies of suffering
3. Doubtlessly, the church prayed when James was incarcerated, but he was killed. Describe how you deal with unanswered prayers
4. Describe how Paul used his two years in prison and how we still benefit of that
5. Describe Paul's attitude that enabled him to face any circumstance and back your answer with a scripture reference
6. What outlook on life did Peter and Paul have in common?
7. Briefly describe how you can strengthen yourself in the Lord, when life gets tough

²⁹⁸ 4:6-8

²⁹⁹ 1 Sam. 30:6

³⁰⁰ Matt. 6:25-34 & Filip. 4:4

³⁰¹ Job 42:10-16

5. *Paul's Apostolic Suffering*

Previously I made a distinction between discipleship suffering and apostolic suffering.³⁰² We now consider the latter, based on how Paul worded it in his second letter to the Corinthians.

After the many controversies which Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians, his references to an earlier letter 'with many tears' and a 'painful visit',³⁰³ we appreciate the many heart-aches he suffered *over that church*. There were also false apostles opposing him and his ministry.³⁰⁴ Therefore, the theme of *apostolic suffering* has an important place in 2 Corinthians: he gives a blueprint of his theology of suffering.³⁰⁵ We see a number of elements:

He emphasizes God's compassion and comfort, *not* the harshness of suffering.³⁰⁶ Paul leaves no room for complaints about his suffering anywhere in his letters. He does not fight, withdraws from, seeks to escape, or rebukes the devil for it. The only thing he did was pray and encourage others to do the same.³⁰⁷ This is the mature way of dealing with suffering: to accept it so that it can form and shape you.

Receiving comfort from God served for Paul the higher purpose of being able to better comfort *others* in *their* suffering.³⁰⁸

The apostolic suffering³⁰⁹ they (Paul and Timothy) underwent in Asia³¹⁰ came to the point of near-death; only God's miracles of grace could still

³⁰² The term 'apostolic suffering' may well be read as 'missionary suffering'

³⁰³ 2 Cor. 2:3,4,1

³⁰⁴ 5:12b; 10:1,2,10-12; 11:4,5,13-15,20

³⁰⁵ 1:3-11

³⁰⁶ 1:3,4

³⁰⁷ 1:11

³⁰⁸ 1:4-7

³⁰⁹ 1:8 Apostolic suffering (sometimes beyond human ability to endure) should not be confused with normal temptation, which is never heavier than one can deal with (1 Cor. 10:13)

³¹⁰ Compare e.g. with Acts 13:50 – 14:22 and 19:23-31

save them.³¹¹ Elsewhere Paul equates apostolic suffering with Christ's suffering.³¹²

The Corinthians themselves faced suffering, which Paul saw as a normal part of the Christian life. He had no affinity whatsoever with a trouble-free health-and-wealth gospel.

In his suffering he maintained an eternity-perspective.³¹³ Later in this letter he elaborates on the contents of his suffering³¹⁴ and also speaks about them in other letters.³¹⁵

Part of Paul's suffering consisted of the necessity to defend himself, his ministry, his apostolic authority and his doctrine. Second Corinthians gives strong examples of this.³¹⁶ His opponents were Jews who tried to force gentile Christians into Jewish legalism and circumcision.³¹⁷ They were the 'certain men who came from James',³¹⁸ although he never sent them nor did they work with his permission. James agreed to the ministry of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles³¹⁹ and felt these should not be required to keep the law of Moses, conform the decree of the Jerusalem Council.³²⁰ This Council even stated that 'some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds with what they said'.³²¹ Such Pharisees opposed Paul and had gone on their own initiative.³²² Paul combatted these, whom he ironically called 'super-apostles'³²³ for what they were: 'false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ and servants of Satan, who also masquerades as an angel of light'.³²⁴

³¹¹ 2 Cor. 1:8-10

³¹² Compare 1:5 e.g. with 4:1 and Col. 1:24

³¹³ 2 Cor. 4:16-18

³¹⁴ 4:8,9; 6:4-10; 11:23-29; 12:10

³¹⁵ Rom. 8:35; 1 Cor. 4:9-13.

³¹⁶ 2 Cor. 4:12; 6:8; 10:1,10-12,18a; 11:4,5,12-15,19,20,22,23a,26b; 12:11b

³¹⁷ Gal. 2; Acts 15

³¹⁸ Gal. 2:12

³¹⁹ 2:9

³²⁰ Acts 15:13-19

³²¹ 15:24

³²² 15:5,1

³²³ 2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11

³²⁴ 11:13-15

The zeal with which Paul opposed them can be compared with how, earlier in the letter, he defended the new covenant at the expense of the old.³²⁵ With that principle the whole Christian faith stands or falls. In fact the line of defense in the final four chapters develops along these arguments, including the boasting and the divine revelation.³²⁶

Paul's suffering is the mark of his apostolic calling,³²⁷ although it was the very thing that, in the eyes of his opponents, disqualified him as an apostle.³²⁸ He was mainly criticized for three reasons: preaching free of charge, his sufferings and his refusal to boast about his spiritual experiences.

The consequence was that his selfless *lifestyle* called the legitimacy of the 'ministry' of the false apostles into question, whose behavior was geared towards material gain. For Paul, weakness – not strength – was the sure sign of true apostolic ministry.³²⁹ An important difference between the problems in both letters is that those of 1 Corinthians were within the church and those in Second Corinthians had to do with the authority and legitimacy of Paul as an apostle.³³⁰

³²⁵ 3:3-18

³²⁶ 12:2-4

³²⁷ Acts 9:16

³²⁸ Hafemann, in Hawthorne, Martin & Reid, 1993:168

³²⁹ 2 Cor. 12:9

³³⁰ Hafemann, in Hawthorne, Martin & Reid, 1993:174

Study Questions

1. *Briefly define the difference between discipleship-suffering and apostleship-suffering*
2. *Briefly describe some major thematic differences between both epistles to the Corinthians*
3. *What was Paul's attitude towards his suffering?*
4. *What is the mature way of dealing with suffering?*
5. *What positive side effect of his sufferings did Paul mention?*
6. *Explain how apostolic suffering can be compared with Christ's suffering and give some scripture references*
7. *How can you maintain an eternity-perspective in your suffering?*
8. *What was the major doctrinal difference between Paul and 'those super-apostles'?*
9. *What were the three main behavioral differences between Paul and them?*

Chapter III

Power encounters as Missionary Method -2-

Introduction

In the first volume of this series, about the Old Testament, I wrote on page 64: ‘A power encounter is a confrontation between God and the gods of the nations. Often the adversary is the initiator in such a conflict, but not always. The outcome, however, is never uncertain. God has never lost once. The reason that these power encounters take place is always twofold: so that people (‘all the earth’) will know that the Lord is God and that besides Him there is no other. In other words: power encounters are one of the tools God put at the disposal of His missionaries, in the Old Testament as well as in the New.’

In chapter III of that volume we looked at several power encounters in five different entries. In this chapter I offer only two entries about this phenomenon in the New Testament, in the books of Acts and Revelation.

In the first paragraph of the next entry I explain why I exclude a description of the power encounters in the gospels.

1. Acts

We continue the series about power encounters in spiritual frontline battles now with two examples of how they occurred during the New Testament period. I exclude a description of them in Jesus' ministry, because there are so many; if only we think of all occasions where He cast out demons, stilled a storm (meant to destroy Him), not to speak of raising the dead and confronting the army that was about to arrest Him.³³¹ That's why we will only consider such encounters in the books of Acts and Revelation.

Old Testament- and New Testament theologies differ: in the former it was 'you will be blessed if you do right, but punished if you sin'.³³² In the latter that is no longer the case. Rather, we see new dimensions, which include all sorts of suffering for the sake of righteousness and the expansion of God's Kingdom. In the Old Testament power encounters, the death of the 'hero' would have been interpreted as his defeat; in the New Testament that is no longer the case. Old Testament power encounters were meant to show God's power on earth only; New Testament power encounters are mainly – but not exclusively – aiming at heavenly, sometimes invisible, yet eternal victories.

Power encounters in words we see e.g. in the apostles' reply to the Sanhedrin: 'should we not rather obey God than you?',³³³ although the words had been accompanied by an act of healing. A similar encounter we see when Peter confronts Ananias & Sapphira – both drop dead after hardening their hearts.³³⁴

Power encounters with releases we see twice: the apostles were incarcerated and liberated overnight by angelic intervention.³³⁵ Years later a similar occurrence happened to Peter.³³⁶

³³¹ John 18:6

³³² Think about e.g. Deut. 28 or the comments Job received from his friends

³³³ Acts 3:1 – 4:22; see also 5:27-32

³³⁴ 5:1-11

³³⁵ 5:19

³³⁶ 12:1-11

A new form of power encounter results in *martyrdom*, when Stephen is being stoned after his verbal attack on the Sanhedrin.³³⁷ This may have looked like defeat to some, but if we consider how the church grew through the spreading of the gospel into Judea and Samaria, we must conclude that through the death of one man, many came to faith and the borders of the kingdom of darkness were pushed back. It was the first instant where the blood of a martyr became the seed of the church.³³⁸ This was not a new principle: a people, growing in spite of persecution, we already saw at the time that Israel was in Egypt.³³⁹

Another form of power encounter resulted in the conversion of a dangerous opponent, Saul of Tarsus, a most notorious church persecutor.³⁴⁰ This was a direct confrontation between Jesus and a man, which resulted in that man's *salvation*.

At another occasion we see such a direct confrontation between God and a man, king Herod, who accepted worship and failed to give glory to God. The result was *judgment*, the very opposite of salvation.³⁴¹ God does not give His glory to another.³⁴² The first man, now called Paul, reacted very differently under similar circumstances; he absolutely refused to be worshipped as a god, during his first missionary journey, some years later.³⁴³

Another new type of power encounter resulted in the *opposite of healing*, when Paul and Barnabas evangelized the isle of Cyprus and witnessed about Christ to the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus. At this man's court the apostles met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet, called Bar-Jesus, who opposed their ministry. At that, Paul pronounced a judgment of temporary blindness. The *result* was that the proconsul came to faith in the Lord Jesus.³⁴⁴

³³⁷ 7:51-60

³³⁸ As Tertullian said

³³⁹ Ex. 1:12

³⁴⁰ Acts 9:1-19

³⁴¹ 12:21-23

³⁴² Is. 42:8

³⁴³ Acts 14:8-18

³⁴⁴ 13:6-12

Later, when Paul and his colleagues had gone to Europe, they engaged in a *power encounter with a demon*, a spirit of divination that had possessed a slave girl in the city of Philippi.³⁴⁵ Although her words were literally correct, Paul did not accept such demonic ‘advertisement’ and reacted like Jesus had done at another occasion.³⁴⁶ So, Paul cast out the evil spirit and after severe suffering saw as a result the beginning of a church at Filippi.

A sort of (attempted) power encounter took place when the sons of a Jewish priest, Sceva, who apparently were not Christians, tried to imitate the casting out of demons as they saw Paul do. But the kingdom of darkness is not divided against itself,³⁴⁷ as they experienced soon enough.³⁴⁸ It is obvious that no one has authority over the powers of darkness, unless he has a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Yet, the Lord used this grotesque situation to instill a sense of awe and an act of cleansing from occult practices among the new believers at Ephesus.³⁴⁹

One of the last miracles in the book of Acts is that Paul does not die after having been bitten by a viper.³⁵⁰ This reminds us of *a power encounter Jesus promised His disciples* when He gave them the great commission: ‘they will pick up snakes with their hands and when they drink deadly poison it will not hurt them at all’.³⁵¹

Power encounters as missionary method have not been abolished after the first century. They are to be accepted and used whenever the Lord leads missionaries into comparable situations. We will also see them during future events in the book of Revelation. Many contemporary missionaries know the use of power encounters as missionary method by experience.

³⁴⁵ 16:16-18

³⁴⁶ Luke 4:34,35

³⁴⁷ 11:14-18

³⁴⁸ Acts 19:13-16

³⁴⁹ 19:17-20

³⁵⁰ 28:3-6

³⁵¹ Mark 16:18

Study Questions

1. *Describe the difference between Old- and New Testament power encounters*
2. *Sum up the nine different types of New Testament power encounters that were mentioned in this section*
3. *Explain the curious paradox, that New Testament power encounters often tie in closely with the suffering of its executive(s)*
4. *Which New Testament person shows by his ministry, that his death was not a defeat but a victory for the Kingdom? How?*
5. *Explain why Sceva's sons had no spiritual authority over demons*
6. *If you ever played a part in a power encounter, tell your story*

2. *Revelation*

From the book of Acts we just learned some differences between Old- and New testament theology and the appearance of new dimensions of power encounters, especially with regard to the issues of suffering for righteousness' sake, the expansion of God's Kingdom and martyrdom.

When we look at Revelation from an eschatological perspective, we see the climax of world-, church- and missions-history. Nothing is small anymore or goes unnoticed; everything has become very big and visible because occurrences have assumed global proportions. Ignorance cannot be feigned any longer; private and collective worlds have become everybody's concern.

The twelve missionary themes we explored in Genesis (see Part I, pp 1-40) will have developed fully.³⁵² Revelation shows the climax of disaster (as expressed in the outcomes of the seven seals, trumpets and bowls); in extremes of holiness and unholiness,³⁵³ in fear,³⁵⁴ missionary accomplishment³⁵⁵ and suffering of saints.³⁵⁶

We saw in Acts that after Stephen's power encounter made him the first martyr³⁵⁷ of the early church, much spreading of the gospel followed. In Revelation we see that *all* power encounters result in the death of saints. After these last birth pangs Babylon is judged and Jesus returns, establishing His Kingdom on earth.³⁵⁸ So, what power encounters do we see in Revelation?

There are the smaller, more personal ones, where the enemy lost because he was unable to have the name of Jesus publicly renounced due to the strength of Christ's witnesses. The first was Antipas,³⁵⁹ then there were

³⁵² See chapter V

³⁵³ Rev. 22:11

³⁵⁴ 6:15-17

³⁵⁵ 5:9; 7:9

³⁵⁶ 6:9; 7:14; 11:7; 13:7,10 (compare with Dan. 11:33-35 & 12:7b); 14:12; 17:6; 18:20,24

³⁵⁷ In Greek, 'witness' and 'martyr' are similar words (*μάρτυς, μάρτυρες* – *martus, martures*; Rev. 2:13; Acts 1:8)

³⁵⁸ Rev. 11:15-18; 19:15; Dan. 2:44,45; Luke 19:12,14,15,27

³⁵⁹ Rev. 2:13

many named and unnamed martyrs throughout the ages, the number of which still is not complete;³⁶⁰ and eventually there will be the “death-without-burial” of the two witnesses that the whole world will watch.³⁶¹ We will not consider their identity, because it is beyond the scope of this book. You can read some more about them though in the next chapter.

A power encounter that the whole world will participate in is the battle of Armageddon;³⁶² all nations combatting God. The outcome will be the same as ever: all nations will know that the Lord alone is God, when the ‘It is done!’ sounds from the throne of God.³⁶³ At that precise moment the Lord Jesus will return³⁶⁴ and do away with Antichrist, as Paul wrote.³⁶⁵ It seems that, what started in biblical history as spiritual power encounters, will become visible in a terrible war of flesh and blood on earth.

The last power encounter, ever to occur is described in Rev. 20:7-10. At the end of Christ’s millennial reign on earth, the devil will be released for a short time, after having been incarcerated since Jesus’ return.³⁶⁶ It seems to be the ultimate test for them who have entered the Millennium of peace as natural people, who survived the horrors of the great tribulation, or those that were born from natural people during the Millennium. They have lived under the absolutely righteous and peaceful rule of Christ and His glorified Church for a very long time, but never had to actively resist the temptations of the devil. But since man has been created as a free moral agent, his loyalty has to be tested – just like Adam and Eve were tested by the presence of that infamous tree in the Garden of Eden. They fell into sin, and a number of people will fall similarly at the end of the Millennium.

After that rebellion and the great white throne judgment that follows, the whole of creation will have been totally cleansed of all sin, its

³⁶⁰ 6:9,11; 7:14

³⁶¹ 11:3-10

³⁶² 16:12-16

³⁶³ 16:17

³⁶⁴ 19:11-21

³⁶⁵ 2 Thess. 2:8

³⁶⁶ Rev. 20:1-3

consequences and even of its memories. Then the New Heaven and the New Earth will come.³⁶⁷

This last power encounter will differ from all others, in the sense that God's people can no longer be its victims. They have been clothed with immortal resurrection bodies. But until that time, at the end of the great tribulation, we will have to persevere, not 'loving our lives unto death',³⁶⁸ because Christ said in advance that we will suffer persecution in the world.³⁶⁹ He did not add 'But don't worry, when things become real hard, before I return, I will snatch you out of the misery'. Let's rather prepare for hard times than being caught by them!

That brings us to the *purpose* of studying spiritual power encounters as missionary method: to be so well prepared to stand our ground as Christ's witnesses (i.e. 'martyrs') when things become really hard, that He can break the enemy's power *because we 'don't love our lives unto death'* (12:11)—just like Daniel, his friends, Esther, Mordechai, Paul, Peter, John and many others.

Study Questions

1. *What different climaxes do we see in the book of Revelation?*
2. *What is the result of all power encounters in Revelation?*
3. *Which people perform the ultimate power encounter in Revelation?*
4. *How do we call the ultimate, worldwide power encounter?*
5. *What is the very last power encounter in Revelation?*
6. *What is the moral reason behind it?*
7. *We should rather prepare for hard times than being*
8. *What is the purpose to study power encounters as missionary method?*

³⁶⁷ 21 & 22

³⁶⁸ 12:11b

³⁶⁹ Luke 21:8-19; John 15:18-21; 16:1-4

Chapter IV

Missions & Eschatology -2-

Introduction

In this series' first volume *The Bible's Missionary Message – Part I – The Old Testament* I wrote five entries about missions & eschatology; in this last volume of the three I finish the series with another six.

Interpretations of the Scripture passages we consider here, that differ from mine, exist. Let this not bother you, as long as you thoroughly study the scriptures yourself – and not just follow what 'you have always heard'. Because what you have always heard or read in Bible-explaining volumes or – worse! – novels, may not be as biblical as you have always assumed.

Don't misunderstand me: nobody has the whole truth and neither have I. Paul states that we only 'know in part'.³⁷⁰ Do not only think in terms of 'is this true or not'; also consider what certain theological interpretations do for your inner convictions. In the context of this study: does your inner theology urge you to complete the great commission of world missions? Or do you just day-dream about the 'big snatch' that will take you away from misery, regardless whether the task Jesus gave His Church is finished or not?

I pray that the Spirit of God, Who leads us into all truth, will enlighten your minds and hearts, especially now that we re-engage in a missiology-driven eschatology.

³⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 13:12

1. *Luke*

We consider the remainder of the series on Missions & Eschatology with observations from six New Testament books, in six entries, the first of which deals with Luke's gospel.

The 'be ready' motive of the end times³⁷¹ is prevalent in the gospels and does not allow for a lack of vision for the future of the coming King and His Kingdom. Whoever lives without this vision and does not expect Him, awaits judgment.³⁷² We cannot afford to only live in the here and now by giving most of our attention to temporary things.

It seems clear from this passage that not 'just all people' – not even 'just all Christians' are meant, but specifically the 'slaves' who have been put in charge of certain responsibilities. These slaves are the ones, sent on a mission, e.g. the apostles (it was Peter who asked the question!) or as it is today: People, appointed by God as leaders, like missionaries, with their stewardship responsibilities, caring for and feeding their Master's people.³⁷³

When Jesus spoke about His second coming³⁷⁴ He referred to the days of Noah and of Lot. These believers were neither ignorant nor surprised when judgment came. They had been alerted in time to be saved. We may assume that in the end times³⁷⁵ most believers will also, by proper knowledge of the word and by revelation, have a collective awareness that the time is near. As in the days before the flood and those of Lot, 'missionaries' (as being sent by God) had a vital role to play in the days of imminent judgment, i.e. Noah by preaching and building the ark, Abraham by interceding for the remaining righteous in Sodom.³⁷⁶

³⁷¹ Luke 12:35-48

³⁷² 12:46,47

³⁷³ 12:41-44

³⁷⁴ 17:20-37

³⁷⁵ 17:24,26,30,31,34

³⁷⁶ Gen. 6 & 18, respectively

In His parable about the minas Jesus compared His going to heaven to be made King³⁷⁷ with ‘going to a distant land’.

His return to earth He calls ‘returning home’.³⁷⁸ He had said before, that where your treasure is, your heart will be also.³⁷⁹ His heart is with us, His Bride on earth, to which He will *return* – not *to depart again*. No, He comes and brings with Him our reward,³⁸⁰ at once also judging His enemies.³⁸¹ There was *one* ascension, there will be *one* return; *not two of each*, as some suggest.

Persecution will come upon *all* those who live *on the face of the whole earth*.³⁸² The only escape Jesus offers is that of watching and praying³⁸³ and *not* by suddenly be taken out of it.

He says to His disciples – not to the crowds³⁸⁴ – that they must not be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, so that that day will close down on them unexpectedly, like a trap.³⁸⁵ It would have been unnecessary to say this *to the disciples* if they had already been raptured *before* such things happen. Jesus speaks alternately about the great distress³⁸⁶ and about the destruction of Jerusalem.³⁸⁷ That last event took place in AD 70. All other events He did not mention in vain, because *we who are still alive will be there as witnesses of this brilliant climax of history!*

³⁷⁷ Luke 19:12

³⁷⁸ 19:15

³⁷⁹ 12:34

³⁸⁰ 1 Cor. 3:14; 2 John:8; Rev. 2:23; 11:18; 22:12; Luke 19:16-19

³⁸¹ 19:27

³⁸² Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:9-28; Luke 21:26,35

³⁸³ 21:36

³⁸⁴ 21:5

³⁸⁵ 21:34

³⁸⁶ 21:8-19,25-36

³⁸⁷ 21:20-24

Study Questions

1. *Why can we not afford to only live in the here and now, giving most of our time to temporary things?*
2. *Who are the slaves Jesus talked about in Luke 12:41-44?*
3. *Will true believers be completely caught unawares at the Lord's return? Motivate your answer by looking at Noah and Lot*
4. *Explain from the parable of the minas where Jesus is heading to, when He returns*
5. *What 'escape' does Jesus offer, once 'persecution comes upon all those who live on the face of the earth'?*
6. *What choice is wiser: prepare for persecution in vain, or not be prepared if it does come?*

2. Acts

Although there is no heavy accent on eschatology in Acts, it is not absent either. It did occupy the thoughts of the disciples, given the fact that they asked Jesus about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel,³⁸⁸ just before He ascended. At that time, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they apparently had not yet a clear understanding of the distinction between the spiritual Kingdom of God, as would become visible in His church on earth and the Messianic Kingdom – which they knew from the Old Testament prophecies – that will be established on earth after the *second* coming of Christ. From later passages in Acts we learn that the apostles had received more revelation about the differences in appearance between the two, and about the time frame in which either would become visible.

There are two passages that I would like to mention. The *first* appears at the end of one of Peter's sermons. In each of these verses we see eschatological terms: 'times of refreshing; that He may send the Christ' (referring to His second coming); 'He remains in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything; anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut off; all the prophets from Samuel on have foretold these days; all peoples on earth will be blessed'³⁸⁹.

Our missionary responsibility comes in with verse 23: balanced preaching must contain warning notes, not only an emphasis on the beauty of the remaining promises. In the Western world it has become very unpopular to include such warnings; people rather hear about heaven, than about the consequences of unbelief and a life in sin.

Dr. Lemmer Du Plessis³⁹⁰ explains this passage, the *Χρονων αποκαταστασεως παντων* (Greek: *Chronoon apokatastaseos pantoon*, the time of the restoration of all things),³⁹¹ as 'relating to the *Edenic conditions* that will prevail on earth after the return of Christ'.³⁹²

³⁸⁸ Acts 1:6

³⁸⁹ 3:19-25

³⁹⁰ 2004:263

³⁹¹ Acts 3:21

³⁹² Is. 51:3; Ez. 36:35; Rom. 8:18-25

The *second* passage contains words of James:³⁹³ ‘Christ will return, rebuild David’s fallen tent, rebuild ruins and bring restoration, so that the remainder of men may seek the Lord; these things that have been known for ages.

Du Plessis comments on this passage, that ‘The restoration of the fallen tent of David forms part of the restoration of all things which Peter predicted.’³⁹⁴ He explains that ‘The fallen tent of David is ... not the Church, but the nation of Israel.’³⁹⁵ This conclusion seems justified, since one can hardly compare the Church (against which the gates of hell will not prevail) with the fallen tent of David.

Study Questions

1. *Why, in your opinion, was there still confusion in the apostles’ minds, with regard to ‘the Kingdom of Israel’?*
2. *What six characteristics of the end times does Peter mention in his sermon in Acts 3?*
3. *What elements does James mention in Acts 15?*
4. *Which verse describes our missionary responsibility well?*
5. *Why is ‘the fallen tent of David’ not the Church?*

³⁹³ Acts 15:16-18 – where he quotes Amos 9:11,12

³⁹⁴ In 2004:266

³⁹⁵ Ibid. :268

3. *First Corinthians*

There are some eschatological elements in this letter that deserve attention. Paul connects the Lord's return with consistent holy living.³⁹⁶ He envisages a life of progressive sanctification in the believers, with as final result a blameless appearance. It is an expression, similar to the one he used when he wrote to the Thessalonians.³⁹⁷ Peter connects living a holy life with the return as well.³⁹⁸ There can be no world missions without holiness; a holy missionary is a mighty tool in God's hand.

At the Lord's return there will be an evaluation of our works. Whether the quality of it can stand the fire of judgment or not, will be seen at that day.³⁹⁹ The question will be whether our works are of eternal value or not; whether we invested our time, money and talents in the furthering of God's Kingdom, or just in our earthly business.

Paul couples the receiving of the reward also with refraining from judgment.⁴⁰⁰ Jesus exhorted His disciples already earlier not to judge.⁴⁰¹ The time for judgment has yet to come. Only then, when all comes out in the open,⁴⁰² when all data are available, will knowledge be complete enough for believers to not only judge the world, but even angels will be subjected to human judgment.⁴⁰³

Because the time is short, Paul says, we should not be tied up with relationships or attach much value to material possessions.⁴⁰⁴ He expresses much urgency because 'this world in its present form is passing away'.⁴⁰⁵ His whole outlook on life is one of 'speeding along and not looking back' – as he would also write to the Philippians later.⁴⁰⁶

³⁹⁶ 1 Cor. 1:7,8

³⁹⁷ 1 Thess. 5:23

³⁹⁸ 2 Pet. 3:11b,12a

³⁹⁹ 1 Cor. 3:12-15

⁴⁰⁰ 4:5

⁴⁰¹ Matt. 7:1,2

⁴⁰² 10:26

⁴⁰³ 1 Cor. 6:2,3

⁴⁰⁴ 7:29-31

⁴⁰⁵ Something else he has in common with Peter, see 2 Pet. 3:7,10b,11a

⁴⁰⁶ Filip. 3:12-14

Another important eschatological characteristic is his thorough treatise of the resurrection, the cornerstone of Christian hope and doctrine,⁴⁰⁷ which takes place just prior to Christ's return, and immediately preceding the rapture, when the saints alive meet Him in the air, all returning to earth where they will rule with Him during the Millennium of peace.⁴⁰⁸

In the same resurrection chapter Paul elaborates on some post-millennial events, when Christ will have destroyed all hostile powers – including death. Then He will turn the Kingdom of Heaven-on-earth over to God the Father and submit Himself again to Him.⁴⁰⁹ By that time Jesus will have exercised 'all authority in heaven and on earth'⁴¹⁰ for thousands of years – after which we still expect the New Heaven and the New Earth.⁴¹¹ How much Paul longed for the Lord's return is obvious from the passionate cry 'Come, o Lord!' at the end of this letter.⁴¹²

Adding eschatological elements to gospel preaching is a proven biblical means to teach the Church vision for the coming Kingdom, the returning Lord and hence the need to reach out for lost souls. As such it is of great missiological value.

Study Questions

1. *Why can missionary ministry not be successful without holiness?*
2. *Describe what happens when born-again believers stand before Christ's judgment seat*
3. *Why did Jesus as well as Paul exhort us 'not to judge'?*
4. *How should our attitude be with regard to relationships and possessions, according to Paul?*
5. *Why should the resurrection play an important part in our missionary preaching?*
6. *What phase of God's plan are we still expecting after the Millennium of peace?*
7. *Why should we add eschatological elements to our gospel preaching?*

⁴⁰⁷ 1 Cor. 15:23,51-55

⁴⁰⁸ 1 Thess. 4:13-17; Rev. 11:15-19; 16:18; 20:4-6

⁴⁰⁹ 1 Cor. 15:24-28

⁴¹⁰ Matt. 28:18

⁴¹¹ Rev. 21:1

⁴¹² 1 Cor. 16:22b

4. *Thessalonians*

Eschatology keeps people divided into different groups. There is the division between Protestants and Evangelicals about whether or not there will be a Millennium of peace under Christ's rule before the appearing of the New Heaven and the New Earth. Among Evangelicals there are differences whether the rapture of the Church will take place before, in the middle or at the end of the great tribulation. There is also confusion about how Christ's return relates to other aspects of eschatology.

Such differences should not cause polemics; mutual respect should be maintained. Theological fights can detract the attention from our focus, namely to motivate the Church to take the gospel to the unreached groups in the shortest possible time.

It is likely that there will grow more unity in understanding the details of the final scenario as time passes. Confusion about the end times is not new. The Thessalonians and later the Corinthians⁴¹³ who had been taught orally by Paul, had no clarity about the return of the Lord, the resurrection, or about events that will precede them. So, why would not *we* have difficulty understanding these issues correctly?

Paul heard from Timothy that not all previous teaching, especially about the second coming of Christ, had been well understood. His letters correct some of these errors; one of them had to do with believers who died⁴¹⁴ before Jesus came back and others thought that the day of the Lord had already taken place.⁴¹⁵ Paul explains *what* will take place *when* Jesus returns⁴¹⁶ and what events will take place *before* that day.⁴¹⁷

Apparently not all questions had been answered: in his 2nd letter he goes into some detail about other aspects of eschatology.

⁴¹³ See how many questions Paul answers in 1 Cor. 15

⁴¹⁴ Paul uses the term 'fall asleep' (1 T. 4:13-15) for them who die in Christ, because they are not actually dead: in Christ they are alive. 'Dead' for Paul means 'died outside Christ, lost forever'

⁴¹⁵ 2 T. 2:2

⁴¹⁶ 1 T. 4:13-17

⁴¹⁷ 2 T. 2:3-12

Both letters have a strong eschatological character, although the difference is ‘one of emphasis, not of principle’.⁴¹⁸ During his first stay in the city, Paul must have emphasized eschatology in his sermons because he referred to certain aspects as known.⁴¹⁹ Eschatology is an important component of mission theology.⁴²⁰

There are a number of passages in both letters that are mainly eschatological in nature.⁴²¹ The *first* letter deals with things that take place *when* Jesus returns; the *second* with the events *preceding* His coming. Below, we see this scenario:

The *law* holds back the *lawless*, until the system of law and order crumbles so far under influence of the secret power of lawlessness,⁴²² that it can no longer stand against him.⁴²³ Jesus said: ‘in the last days *lawlessness* will increase’.⁴²⁴ When the time is ripe, Antichrist reveals himself.⁴²⁵ God also uses angels to hold back demonic forces.⁴²⁶ The Holy Spirit is also powerfully occupied to restrain Antichrist, until at the appointed time He also steps aside.

When Antichrist, also called ‘man of lawlessness’ or ‘son of perdition’⁴²⁷ appears, his coming will be with Satan-inspired counterfeit miracles.⁴²⁸ He will deceive those who do not know God nor obey the gospel.⁴²⁹ He becomes a catalyst of doom, speeding up the process through which the measure of iniquity of unbelievers becomes full.⁴³⁰

⁴¹⁸ Morris, 1976:22

⁴¹⁹ 2 T. 2:5,6

⁴²⁰ Remember that Paul, the *missionary*, taught eschatology to the church at an early stage

⁴²¹ 1 T. 3:13b; 4:13-17; 5:1-4,23; and 2 T. 1:6-10; 2:1-12.

⁴²² 2 T. 2:6,7

⁴²³ Morris, 1976:129

⁴²⁴ ‘Lawlessness’ is a better translation of the Greek *ανωμια* (*anomia*) than ‘wickedness’ (N.I.V.) is, Matt. 24:12

⁴²⁵ 2 T. 2:7,8a

⁴²⁶ Van den Berg, 1975:42,43, referring to Dan. 10:13,20,21 and Eph. 6:11,12; for the future, see Rev. 7:1

⁴²⁷ Morris, 1976:127, argues that all three terms describe the same person

⁴²⁸ Compare 1 T. 2:9 (counterfeit) with 2 Cor. 12:12a (genuine)

⁴²⁹ 2 T. 1:8,9

⁴³⁰ Compare e.g. with the judgment on the Amorites (Gen. 15:16) and similar verses describing this principle, e.g. Dan. 11:36; Matt. 23:32 and 1 T. 2:16

This culminates into a great rebellion; Antichrist opposes anything that is worshipped, including God.⁴³¹

Jesus' return and our rapture is *preceded*,⁴³² not *followed*, by the manifestation of Antichrist and his opposition against God, until Jesus deals with him at His coming.⁴³³ Paul speaks consistently about *the* coming, not about *two comings*.⁴³⁴ When He comes, those who refuse the truth⁴³⁵ will be sentenced, whilst believers will be vindicated.⁴³⁶

The question, whether saints will go through the great tribulation can be answered with yes and no. *Yes*, because they will still be present on earth⁴³⁷ and *no*, because many – but not all⁴³⁸ – will be protected when judgments befall unbelievers.⁴³⁹ The woman, image of the Church, is given protection and shelter during the dragon's fury.⁴⁴⁰

The Lord will come down from heaven: a loud command, the voice of the archangel and a trumpet call will be heard.⁴⁴¹ That appearing will be sudden, like a flash of lightning.⁴⁴²

Paul deemed it unnecessary to say *when* this will take place, because it has not been revealed.⁴⁴³ That day will come unexpectedly like a thief in the

⁴³¹ 2 T. 2:3,4

⁴³² Simpson Jr., in Hawthorne, Martin & Reid, 1993:938

⁴³³ 2 T. 2:1,3,4,7b,8b

⁴³⁴ *One* allegedly in secret, where only believers will be taken away, and *another* in public, to judge Antichrist, 7 years later

⁴³⁵ 2 T. 2:10b-12; 1:6,8,9

⁴³⁶ 1:7a,10

⁴³⁷ Israel was still in Egypt when it was hit by Plagues. God said 'I will deal differently with ... Goshen where My people live' (Ex. 8:22). This 'dealing differently' happened 5 times (also Ex. 9:4,26; 10:21-23 and 11:7). Similarly, Noah and his family lived *through* the Flood, but were protected by the Ark. Daniel was protected *in* the lion's den, *not* taken out of it; his friends were thrown *into* the furnace and protected, *not* taken out of it

⁴³⁸ Dan. 11:33,34; Matt. 24:9; Rev. 6:9; 7:14; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7,10; 14:12

⁴³⁹ Rev. 3:10 'I will keep you from the hour of trial' has been interpreted as 'being taken out before', but the Greek verb *τηρεω* (*tereo*) only means 'to guard', 'keep a (close) eye on', 'taking care that [not]', 'being on guard', 'conserve in a certain condition'

⁴⁴⁰ Rev. 12:13-17

⁴⁴¹ 1 T. 4:16a; 1 Cor. 15:52a; Matt. 24:30,31a; Zech. 9:14b; Rev. 11:15a

⁴⁴² Matt. 24:27; Zech. 9:14a

night for *unbelievers*. It will not come as a surprise for *believers*.⁴⁴⁴ At that time they are prepared, by taking note of the signs of the times and recognizing them from the Word.

After His appearance in the sky, the dead in Christ rise first⁴⁴⁵ and Christians who are alive will be changed, immediately after that (first) resurrection.⁴⁴⁶ Then the resurrected dead and the changed living will be caught up to meet Christ in the air⁴⁴⁷ – which is only a meeting place – from where *all will come back to earth*.⁴⁴⁸ The verse ‘So we will be with the Lord forever’⁴⁴⁹ has often been interpreted as if Christ will take His whole Church, resurrected and changed saints, with Him to heaven.

But Christ comes *back to earth*; not just halfway to go back to heaven again. In that case we could not speak about a *return*! In New Testament times it was the habit that when Caesar (*Kυριος*, Greek ‘*Kurios*’, ‘*Lord*’) visited a city, his arrival was announced by trumpet-blowing heralds; hence the archangel and the trumpet call. The population would go out to meet him, and celebrate his entry into that city.⁴⁵⁰ Caesar did *not* take the population of the city he visited to his palace. Likewise, Christ will establish His millennial Kingdom on earth and rule it with His saints.⁴⁵¹ Then they will be with Him forever: *on earth, not in heaven*.

So, what does all this eschatology have to do with world missions? Your eschatology designs your missiology. We know that the great commission will only be finished *when the end comes*,⁴⁵² so we get to work until the Lord returns.⁴⁵³ If however, you expect a rapture that can take place ‘any time now’ you may relax your efforts, because it does not matter whether you

⁴⁴³ 1 T. 1:5; Acts 1:7; Matt. 24:36

⁴⁴⁴ 1 T. 5:2-4

⁴⁴⁵ 1 T. 4:16b,15b; 1 Cor. 15:52b; this is the first resurrection, Rev. 20:5,6

⁴⁴⁶ 1 Cor. 15:52b; 1 T. 4:17a

⁴⁴⁷ Although the term is extra-biblical, this gathering up is usually referred to as the rapture, 1 T. 4:17a

⁴⁴⁸ 3:13b,14b

⁴⁴⁹ 4:17b

⁴⁵⁰ Morris, 1976:88,89; Van den Berg, 1975:84,85

⁴⁵¹ Rev. 11:15b; 19:1 – 20:6

⁴⁵² Matt. 24:14

⁴⁵³ Hebr. 10:23-25

finish or not. In the first instance missions will increase, in the second they may stagnate.

Study Questions

1. *What should be our attitude towards Christians who interpret eschatological occurrences differently from us?*
2. *What is the main emphasis in the first Thessalonians-letter? And what is it in the second?*
3. *Is it wiser to not teach eschatology to a young and immature church? What did Paul do?*
4. *What are the three reasons that lawlessness is restrained?*
5. *Put the following occurrences in the right order*
 - *Christ's return*
 - *The revelation of Antichrist*
 - *The Millennium*
 - *The great tribulation*
 - *The rapture*
 - *The first resurrection*
6. *Will the Church go through the great tribulation? Motivate your answer from the text*
7. *What will be the physical destination and the purpose of Christ and the Church of all times and places, resurrected and raptured? Motivate your answer*
8. *Explain how your eschatology designs your missiology*

5. *Revelation*

There are too many interpretations of this book to list. One reason may be that we have not progressed far enough into the last days to clearly see where we are heading. We may not yet have passed the ‘beginning of birth pains’.⁴⁵⁴ As time progresses, our understanding of the Revelation, its proper interpretation of events and their sequential order will probably grow. Maybe we will even see an increasing consensus as to its true meaning.

Meanwhile we should question the *consequences* of our view on Revelation. Is our understanding lulling us to sleep because we expect an imminent rapture? Or does it prompt us to action, because we can speed up the Lord’s coming⁴⁵⁵ by holy living and by preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth?⁴⁵⁶ Our eschatological doctrine may either be proven or denied by our involvement in world missions. If we believe that Christ will not return until there are believers from ‘every tribe, language, people and nation’,⁴⁵⁷ we will do all we can to make that happen in our lifetime!

To witness the return of Christ may be a great incentive to motivate us into world missions’ participation. What could bless the world more than His return?

If the Church were going to be raptured in 4:1 there would be little use for her to know what happens on earth during her absence; Revelation would cease to be a Church-book and become one for ‘left-behind’ unbelievers – with nobody to explain it.

⁴⁵⁴ Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8. Birth pangs increase (crime, disease, war) and natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, famines, droughts etc.) hit earth. We may be between Rev. 6:11 and 12, between the 5th and the 6th seal. We may interpret 6:12-14 as natural phenomena or as pictures of spiritual realities, but the world population’s general fear (v. 15-17) is not visible yet; neither did we experience 7th seal phenomena yet

⁴⁵⁵ 2 Pet. 3:12

⁴⁵⁶ Matt. 24:14

⁴⁵⁷ Rev. 5:9; 7:9

Revelation is a prophecy, expressed in images that need interpretation and should be compared with other prophetic scriptures to find a consistent explanation.

It becomes more complicated when we see *new* images in Revelation: ones we have not encountered before. We must be careful not to read into the text what is not there. It must be understood that a Theology of Missions is not the place for an exegesis of the book of Revelation; yet some explanation and interpretation is unavoidable. Here are some examples:

The way Jesus is being described reminds us of what Daniel wrote;⁴⁵⁸ Jesus explains the meaning of the lampstand and the stars Himself;⁴⁵⁹ The sharp double-edged sword that comes out of His mouth is His Word.⁴⁶⁰

There is no doubt about the *presence, use of* and *earlier occurrence* of images that describe spiritual realities as examples for proper interpretation. A danger in explaining this book is to *assume* things for which there is no textual proof. Think for instance about the *consequences* of the rapture. Some believe that cars and planes will crash, killing millions. No text points into that direction. We may not overstep the line between biblical data and human assumption, 'going beyond what was written'.⁴⁶¹

The book was very important to the churches in Asia. They were persecuted heavily.⁴⁶² Many issues, relevant to them, are addressed⁴⁶³ but their significance stretches further. Revelation could be seen as a prophetic preview of Church history with, at the time, most of it still to come. It addresses the *suffering Church of all ages* – including that of the last days. The true Church of Christ will always suffer: in the last days that persecution will be committed mainly by the apostate church, the whore of Babylon.

⁴⁵⁸ Compare Rev. 1:12-20 with Dan. 7:13

⁴⁵⁹ Rev. 1:20

⁴⁶⁰ Eph. 6:17b; Heb. 4:12

⁴⁶¹ 2 Cor. 4:6

⁴⁶² Rev. 1:9; 2:3,9-11,13

⁴⁶³ Chapters 2 & 3

That reality is illustrated well by ‘Foxe’s Book of Martyrs’,⁴⁶⁴ but there are hundreds more, written in the 2nd half of the 20th century⁴⁶⁵ and more recent ones.⁴⁶⁶ One of the often-denied goals of the book of Revelation therefore, is to *prepare the Church to survive in the midst of persecution* to ‘stand firm to the end’⁴⁶⁷ and to ‘not love their lives unto death’.⁴⁶⁸

From a world missions perspective it is clear that ‘the end’ will not come until the gospel has been preached to the ends of the earth.⁴⁶⁹ These areas will only be reached through great suffering of sending churches and big sacrifices of missionaries. A certain number of martyrs is even *required* before the end comes.⁴⁷⁰ Many churches daydream about the rapture without getting involved in reaching the unreached. But Christ’s words are not multi-interpretable: no preaching to the ends of the earth means no ‘end’ (i.e. the completion of the great commission *by Christ’s disciples* – who else?), without whom there can be no rapture, because all great commission Christians will be gone by then.

From a Pastoral perspective, whoever decides on his position regarding a ‘pre-trib, mid-trib or post-trib’ rapture, must answer the question: ‘Is it better to *be* prepared for persecution and *not* have to face it, or to *not* be prepared and *yet* have to face it?’ It is better to *be* prepared and be proven wrong, than to *not* be prepared and fall away because of wrong convictions. Jesus said to His *disciples*: ‘*You* will be handed over to be *persecuted* and *put to death* and *you* will be *hated by all nations* because of Me. At that time *many* will *turn away* from the faith ... the love of *most* will grow cold’.⁴⁷¹ The exegetical question of a ‘pre-, mid- or post-trib’ is not as relevant as the pastoral one. Are we ready to face the worst? It is not a question of right or wrong, but of who will stand firm to the end or fall away!

⁴⁶⁴ Chadwick, 2001

⁴⁶⁵ E.g. titles by Richard Wurmbrand, the brothers Haralan and Ladin Popov, Brother Andrew, Jan Pit, etc.

⁴⁶⁶ E.g. Yun, *The Heavenly Man* (2002) and *Back to Jerusalem* (2003) with Paul Hattaway and probably the most important: *Blood and Sorrow*, 2012

⁴⁶⁷ Matt. 10:22; 24:13

⁴⁶⁸ Rev. 6:9-11; 12:11

⁴⁶⁹ Matt. 24:14

⁴⁷⁰ Rev. 6:11b

⁴⁷¹ Matt. 24:9,10,12 (*italics mine*)

Study Questions

1. *What may well prove to be the best indicator as to the true interpretation of events and sequences in the book of Revelation?*
2. *Explain how your view on eschatology influences your view on world missions*
3. *Explain how certain eschatological assumptions can easily 'go beyond what is written'*
4. *Which purpose of the book of Revelation is often denied?*
5. *If a certain amount of martyrs is 'required' before the end comes, determine whether you yourself would be willing to pay that price*
6. *From the pastoral point of view, are you prepared spiritually when persecution happens to become inescapable?*

6. *Where is the Church in Revelation?*

God's Jewish and gentile servants are sealed⁴⁷² so that they can be distinguished from other people and not be harmed when the 7th seal inaugurates the seven trumpets.⁴⁷³ 'Grass, plant or tree'⁴⁷⁴ are not to be harmed' speak about believers in different stages of spiritual maturity who received God's seal, in contrast to those who do not have His sign on their foreheads.⁴⁷⁵ We see here how picture and reality are interchanged.

The godless did not repent.⁴⁷⁶ This implies that God's people are *still around* to call them to repentance. People will not believe unless the gospel is preached to them.⁴⁷⁷

John had to count the worshippers in the temple and measure it.⁴⁷⁸ The *believer* is the temple of the Holy Spirit as is the *Church*.⁴⁷⁹ He lives in and among them. *Measuring* assesses spiritual maturity and *counting* checks numerical fullness. The servants of God⁴⁸⁰ are *still around* when their greatest leaders, the two witnesses, accomplish their ministry of 3½ years.

How we interpret Revelation, has to do with how we understand its chronology. Although opinions differ, I would like to share the following considerations with you:

The book *cannot* be read as a chronological narrative. 'Earth' and 'heaven chapters' follow one another so rapidly, that deriving chronological or even interpretative consequences from them seems illogical. John 'commuted' continually.

⁴⁷² Rev. 7

⁴⁷³ Rev. 7, 8 & 11

⁴⁷⁴ 9:4a

⁴⁷⁵ 9:4b

⁴⁷⁶ 9:20,21

⁴⁷⁷ Rom. 10:13-15

⁴⁷⁸ Rev. 11:1

⁴⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 3:16,17; 6:19

⁴⁸⁰ Rev. 7:3

Chapter 1 is *time-bound*, in that the revelation took place at a specific time and place⁴⁸¹ and *time-less*, in that the glorified Lord is the same today as He was then.⁴⁸²

Chapters 2 and 3, written for seven churches in Asia, are *time-bound*. Yet they carry relevant messages for today's Church and may also represent eras of church history. After three 'earth-chapters' two 'heaven-chapters' follow, but what is described in chapters 6-11, whether seen in heaven or on earth, has consequences on earth: God's plan, written on the scroll and opened in heaven, expresses itself on earth in seals, trumpets and bowls.

Chapters 4 and 5 are *time-bound*: John saw what happened in heaven *at that time*,⁴⁸³ but also some events *at the end of time*.⁴⁸⁴ These portray the accomplishment of God's salvation plan: we now see people from all tribes, tongues, peoples and nations' before God's throne. Finally, John sees some *eternal* realities.⁴⁸⁵

We see church history from beginning to end⁴⁸⁶ and then the Millennium of peace.⁴⁸⁷ These chapters do not form an uninterrupted chronological train of events; we see history twice, from different perspectives. The *first* description speaks about the entire church history,⁴⁸⁸ the *second* mainly about the last days:⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸¹ AD 95, at the isle of Patmos

⁴⁸² Heb. 13:8

⁴⁸³ Rev. 4:1; 5:1-5

⁴⁸⁴ 5:9,10; 7:9

⁴⁸⁵ E.g. 4:2-11; 5:6,11-14

⁴⁸⁶ Chapters 6-19

⁴⁸⁷ 20:4

⁴⁸⁸ 6:1 – 12:3

⁴⁸⁹ 12:4 – 19:21

First Description	Second Description	Similarity
6:1-11	12:1-3	Complete church history
6:12-11:19	12:4-19:21	Last days of church history
6:1,2 One white horse	19:11-16 Many white horses	Jesus Christ
7:1-9	14:1-5	The 144,000 ‘multitude’
11:15-17	19:4-9	God’s Kingdom on earth
11:18-19	14:17-18:24; 19:2,3, 17–20:3	Judgment of the nations and Babylon; Satan locked up
Church History Parallels in Revelation		

John describes the 7th trumpet as ‘loud’, ‘last’ and as ‘trumpet call’,⁴⁹⁰ all related to the resurrection,⁴⁹¹ immediately after the death of the last martyrs,⁴⁹² just before Christ’s return.⁴⁹³

Much happens in a few verses, almost at the same time: the last martyrs are killed and their bodies lie in Jerusalem’s streets for 3½ days⁴⁹⁴ like Jesus was killed and lay in the tomb for three days; they are raised from the dead like Jesus was⁴⁹⁵ and are commanded to ‘come up here’, like Jesus ascended into heaven.⁴⁹⁶ This is the rapture: it includes the two witnesses and all who are still alive and in Christ. After the resurrection the living in Christ will be changed⁴⁹⁷ and an earthquake follows, like when Jesus rose.⁴⁹⁸ After meeting Jesus in the air,⁴⁹⁹ they come back to earth where the

⁴⁹⁰ Compare Rev. 11:15 with Matt. 24:31 (loud), 1 Cor. 15:52 (last) and with 1 Thess. 4:16 (trumpet call)

⁴⁹¹ I.e. the 1st resurrection. Only those who died in Christ are raised (1 Thess. 4:14; Rev. 20:6a). At the 2nd resurrection (end of the Millennium), all others will be judged at the great white throne (20:5,11-15)

⁴⁹² 11:7,11,12

⁴⁹³ 1 Thess. 4:15; see also Zech. 9:14

⁴⁹⁴ Rev. 11:7-9

⁴⁹⁵ 11:11; Matt. 28:6

⁴⁹⁶ Acts 1:9

⁴⁹⁷ 1 Cor. 15:51-53

⁴⁹⁸ Rev. 11:13; Matt. 28:2

⁴⁹⁹ 1 Thess. 4:17

millennial Kingdom will be established⁵⁰⁰ during which the wedding supper of the Lamb occurs,⁵⁰¹ probably after finishing the judgments.⁵⁰²

By implication there is no ‘secret coming’ of the Lord for believers only and a later ‘public coming’ for the rest, who had been left behind. The Bible speaks about *the* second coming, not one that is divided into two; otherwise there would be two second comings. Christ comes back to stay, not to ‘snatch us up’ then to return to heaven and let the rest cook. Why would He come, if He were not intending to stay? Did not the ‘man of noble birth go ... to be appointed king and *then to return*’?⁵⁰³

We cannot conclude anything else than that the Church is around during the whole book of Revelation. The ‘end’ is told twice,⁵⁰⁴ including martyrdom of saints, resurrection, rapture, return, victory over Antichrist, judgments, wedding supper and the consummation of the Kingdom. After all, what would be the use of giving this revelation to the Church, if the Church has almost nothing to do with its execution?

Study Questions

1. *What are the author’s two main arguments, that the Church is present during the whole period the book of Revelation describes?*
2. *Describe the many things that happen according to the description of Rev. 11:7-19 in the correct order*
3. *Explain why and how we are still expecting one return of Christ*

⁵⁰⁰ Rev. 20:4-6

⁵⁰¹ 19:1-7. The Bible is silent about venue or time of this Supper. Assumptions lack theological foundation

⁵⁰² 11:18,19

⁵⁰³ Luke 19:12 (italics mine)

⁵⁰⁴ In Rev. 11 & 19

Chapter V

Apotheosis

We have come to the end, to the grand climax: in this chapter we see all twelve missionary themes, of which we saw the beginning in the book of Genesis, come to full fruition. The Genesis embryo has reached full maturity. For us this is still future.

Let me ask the question again: which religion can compare with biblical faith? Which book, besides the Bible, tells us exactly what that future holds? Which other book, containing prophecy, can claim 100% accuracy for about 80% of all its prophecies that have already come to pass? Who is bold enough to doubt that the remaining 20% that have not yet come to pass, will also be fulfilled with flawless exactness?

From where we are it will become a lot worse in the whole world, but that doesn't mean the end of it. The end will be unequalled glory, beauty, health, justice, comfort, righteousness, plenty of everything, excellent for all who put their trust in Jesus Christ and have thus been reconciled to God.

Let's continue to go into the entire world as Christ commanded us, as long as there is a day to work, to save as many as possible with this magnificent message. To make them participate in the new paradise, under the rule of Jesus Christ.

Twelve Missionary Themes in Revelation Fulfilled

All twelve themes we identified in Genesis find their climax in Revelation: they have been fully developed and all that needed to be said and done, has now taken place, which reflects John's final words in the book of Revelation.

The *Missio Dei* (theme 1) has come to an end. Humanity has been saved and once more the fellowship between God and man has become unhindered. God can again reveal Himself to people, as He did at the time that Adam & Eve walked the Garden of Eden before they fell into sin.⁵⁰⁵ Divine and human image, as well as walks and talks have again merged and integrated, taking place at the throne of God, as He originally intended.⁵⁰⁶ Full divine and human partnership is now realized.⁵⁰⁷

The Church's work of world missions (theme 2), the *Missiones Ecclesiae* is also finished. The Church partnered with God in His mission to the world. When God has finished, there is no more work for the Church to do with regard to the salvation of people. The new task of the Church's members will now be to rule with Christ forever and ever. The Bible remains silent about what that rule will be like, but it can be expected to be exciting beyond fantasy.⁵⁰⁸

Man's sin problem (theme 3) no longer exists.⁵⁰⁹ The very existence of sin may become a forgotten issue, or at least an issue that is without influence on the eternal life believers enjoy. If there still is a memory of sin, it will be one that has no emotion attached anymore, like guilt or pain. As sin has been defined as 'missing the mark', the 'mark' can now no longer be missed, as all of God's children have become like Christ, since His return.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁵ Gen. 1 & 2 are mirrored by Rev. 21 & 22: the only 4 'sinless chapters' in the Bible

⁵⁰⁶ Gen. 1:26,28

⁵⁰⁷ Verses that illustrate theme 1: Rev. 1:1b; 5:6c; 11:3a & 22:6a,16a

⁵⁰⁸ Verses that illustrate theme 2: Rev. 1:11,19; 10:8b,9b,11; 11:1b,3b; 22:6b,16b.

⁵⁰⁹ Verses that illustrate theme 3: Rev. 2:4,5a,9b,20,21b; 3:1c,15a,16a,17; 6:4; 9:20,21; 11:2b;13:3b,4,8a,12b; 14:8b,9,11b; 16:2b,6a,9,11,21b; 17:2,4b-6a,13,14a; 18:3,5,7b,9a,24; 19:2b,19,20b; 20:9a; 21:8a; 22:11a,18a,19a

⁵¹⁰ 1 John 3:2

The origin of sin, the devil (theme 4) has been done away with. After Christ's return, at the beginning of the Millennium of peace, he has been locked up for that period, only to be released for a short time at the end of it. By the time the New Jerusalem descends from heaven, no devil or demon will be found anywhere else but in the lake of fire, never to return.⁵¹¹

God's solution for the sin problem (theme 5) has been made complete. All who wanted to be saved have been saved, by conforming to His solution. God has always offered only one way of salvation and the climax of that one way is found in the blood that Christ shed at Calvary. This blood was shed to 'take away the sins of the world'.⁵¹² And indeed: no more sin is found anywhere.⁵¹³

Man-made solutions for the sin problem (theme 6) have proven not to work and we see almost no verses in Revelation that illustrate this theme.⁵¹⁴

The Son of Promise (theme 7) has accomplished all that the Father did promise.⁵¹⁵ We don't have to be surprised that the Christology in Revelation is very strong.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹¹ Verses that illustrate theme 4: Rev. 2:9b,10a,13,24b; 3:9a; 8:11; 9:1b,2a,3-5,7-11,15-19; 11:7b; 12:3,4,7b-9,10b,12b,13,14b-17a; 13:1-3a,4-7,11-17,18b;16:13,14; 17:3b,7b-14,16; 18:2b; 19:19a,20a; 20:2,3,4c,7,8a,10a. In the book of Revelation Satan is exposed more than ever before

⁵¹² John 1:29

⁵¹³ Verses that illustrate theme 5: Rev. 1:2,3,5,6; 2:5b,7,10b,11,16a,17,21a,22b,25,26a,29; 3:2,3a,4-6,10-13,18-22; 5:9b; 7:10,14b; 12:10a,11; 13:8b,9,10b; 14:1b,3b-7,12,13; 15:2b; 18:4; 19:1b; 20:4d,6; 22:11b,14,17b

⁵¹⁴ There are only a few for theme 6: namely 2:6,15

⁵¹⁵ As early as Gen. 3:15 and hundreds of times ever since

⁵¹⁶ Verses that illustrate theme 7: Rev. 1:1,2,5-7,9,13-18; 2:1b,8b,12b,18b; 3:1b,7b,14b; 5:5-7,9,12,13; 6:1-3a,5a,7a,9a; 7:9b,10,17a; 11:15; 13:8b; 14:1,4,13a,14; 15:3a; 17:14; 19:11-16,19b; 20:4b; 21:14b,22b,23b,27b; 22:3b,7,12,13,16,20,21

See also the table below:⁵¹⁷

The Person of Jesus Christ in the Book of Revelation	
In His humanity	1:13; 5:5; 22:16
In His deity	1:8,17; 2:8,18; 3:7,14; 4:8; 11:15; 12:10; 19:11
In His redemptive ministry	1:5; 5
In His resurrection	1:5,18; 2:8
In His return	1:4,7,8; 4:8; 19:6; 22:7,16
In His judgment	1:16,18; 2:18,23; 19:2,12; 20:12; 22:7,12,14
In His relationship to the Church	1:16; 2:1; 3:14; 17:14; 22:16
In His relationship to the world	1:5; 17:14; 19:16

God's universalistic purpose (theme 8) has been finalized. The gospel has been made available to all the families of the earth, as God originally promised to Abram.⁵¹⁸ This is not a very dominant theme in the book of Revelation.⁵¹⁹

What these families of the earth consist of, we see very clearly in the concept of the nations (theme 9). Not one lacks representatives before the throne of the Lamb. All 16,700 people groups, according to the calculation of the Joshua Project, are there. The concept of 'unreached- or least-reached people groups' exists no more. Even the remotest among them have been reached.⁵²⁰

The city of Babylon, as well as the worldwide religious and political superstructure into which it gradually developed (theme 10) has been utterly destroyed. No more persecution, oppression, fornication, occultism, greed or cursing, ever.⁵²¹ All people have been judged according to their works

⁵¹⁷ Aebi, 1978:198,199, shortened version, not necessarily reflecting the views of this author

⁵¹⁸ Gen. 12:3

⁵¹⁹ There are only a few for theme 8: namely Rev. 4:11; 5:9b,10; 7:12,17

⁵²⁰ Verses that illustrate theme 9: Rev. 1:7b; 2:26b,27; 5:9b,10; 7:4-10; 10:11; 11:2b,9,10a; 11:18a; 12:5a; 13:7b; 14:1-5,6b,8,15b,16,18b; 15:4b; 16:14b,16,19a; 17:2,12,15-17,18b; 18:3,9a,10a,11a,14a,15a,17b,23b; 19:15,18,19a; 20:3b,8b; 21:24,26; 22:2b

⁵²¹ Verses that illustrate theme 10: Rev. 2:6,14,15,20; 9:20b,21; 13:13-17; 14:8; 16:19b; 17:1b-7,16,18a; 18:2-24

and the choice of those who rejected salvation has ultimately been honored (theme 11).

It could be no other way: as man was created a free moral agent with freedom of choice, God chose to honor the consequences of man's choices, even if that meant that he turned against God. For the last time, the book of Revelation strongly emphasizes this principle that forfeited salvation means judgment.⁵²²

The last theme (12), starting as simple pairs of physical brothers in Genesis, has ultimately developed into a glorified, all-encompassing Body of Christ of believing, eternally living people, having come out of all nations, tribes, peoples and languages, who will be God's co-rulers forever and ever.⁵²³ Whoever takes time to study the reference texts below will notice that some verses and themes converge.⁵²⁴ Just one example: in 14:1,4 themes 5, 6, 9 and 12 are found simultaneously.

With this we have come to the end of our exploration of twelve missionary themes, of which we already saw the origin in the book of Genesis.

It is possible to obtain all references to the other occurrences of these twelve themes in the remaining Bible books. If you so desire, contact the author at recruiting4missions@gmail.com

⁵²² Verses that illustrate theme 11: Rev. 2:5c,16b,22a,23a; 3:3b,16b; 6:5b,6b,8,10b, 12-14,16b,17; 8:5-9:19; 11:5,6,10b,13,14,18a,c,19b; 14:8,10,11a,18-20; 15:1,2a,6a, 7-17:1,16b; 18:6-10,14-17a,18,19,20b-24; 19:2a,3b,15,17-21; 20:2-4a,9c,10,15; 21:8b; 22:18b,19b

⁵²³ 22:5b

⁵²⁴ Verses that illustrate theme 12: Rev. 1:4,9a,11,20; 2:1-3:21; 5:9b; 6:11b; 7:4-10,14-17; 11:3-7a,8-12,18b; 12:5,10b,11,17b; 13:10a; 14:1,3-5; 19:1a,3a,6-9,10b; 20:9b; 21:9b,10b-27; 22:9,15,17a,21

Appendix

Introduction

Two different topics are treated as an appendix for the simple reason that neither of them fits any of the categories of the preceding chapters.

The first one, about women in (missions) ministry is an essay that belongs to the realm where Bible and culture meet. This becomes obvious, every time I discuss it with missionary students, e.g. in Africa, where opinions about male/female and husband/wife relationships differ considerably from those we usually see in Western countries. What counts, is not how we think in the West or reason in Africa, but what our supra-cultural Bible has to teach both of us. Now that more and more Developing World Christians, male and female, engage in world missions, these issues must be re-visited.

The second is an essay of a more missiological nature, in which I compare the background of most Africans with an average profile of the remaining unreached people-groups in the world. The conclusion will not come as a surprise to most observers of missional trends in the Developing World.

1. *Women in (Missions) Ministry*

The topic of women in (missions) ministry has caused much debate. Before World War II it was assumed – even in the West – that women should not minister the word in church and were hardly seen in leadership roles. At first glance there seemed to be a biblical legitimacy to this. Since about 1960 these discussions have sharpened, especially in Western countries, and a biblical evaluation of traditional assumptions versus newer counter-arguments seems necessary.

I propose to approach this topic with three ‘keys of understanding’. The *first* is *culture*, a negotiable, because it differs, depending on era and area. The *second* is *Godly creation-order*, a non-negotiable, independent of external circumstances. *Finally*, the *spirit of the biblical text* should be discovered, the deep underlying intentions, instead of superficially reading the text without such deliberation. When these keys are handled properly, it is hoped that there will be little left to fight over.

The *cultural key* could be called ‘*Flexibility in Changeable Secondary Issues*’. First we must assess what Paul’s and Peter’s words⁵²⁵ meant to their *original readers* in the 1st century Roman Empire. Then we should check in what ways that culture differs from our own and what its message is for *our* time and culture. In this way we don’t discard their words, but try to understand them in the *context of our era and area*. This is necessary, lest we sink into interpretational irrelevancies that obscure the message for today.

When we read 1 Cor. 11 *we* would answer Paul’s questions different from how *he* does. E.g. in our time it cannot be considered improper for a woman to have short hair (especially in Africa!) or to go to church without a hat. And although long hair for a man would be considered disputable in some circles, most would agree that calling it ‘dishonorable’ is a bit far-fetched.

In Jewish-orthodox culture long hair for men was and is commonly accepted.

⁵²⁵ 1 Cor. 11:3-7,11-15; 14:26,33,34,35,39,40; Ef. 5:21-24,32,33; 1 Tim. 2:8-12; 1 Pet. 3:1a,3-7

This shows that Paul in his letters had 1st century *Roman and Greek* culture in mind, rather than 1st century *Jewish* culture. Therefore, hairstyle belongs to the category of *external cultural issues*.

Next comes the issue that women have to remain silent in church. Paul cannot have meant that in an absolute sense, because he allows men *and* women to pray, to prophesy and to speak in tongues. Since women were usually less educated, there were relatively more things they did not understand. That was fine, as long as they did not interrupt the service by asking questions aloud. Paul advises to rather ask questions at home. The disgrace he mentions is found more in the interruption of events than in the speaking itself. Paul may also have been considerate with the women that they would not disgrace themselves by asking ‘dumb’ questions. Meetings should be orderly and everyone, also women, were allowed to participate vocally.

Also the passage in Timothy⁵²⁶ has cultural aspects: the lifting up of hands, coiffure, clothing, wearing of jewels and teaching. It seems that Paul had no problem with women who were teaching, as long as they qualified in the biblical sense of the word, similarly to how elders and deacons should qualify in the sense of Christian character and behavior.

What is generally seen as respectable and decent apparel in one's culture, does not become disrespectable or indecent at the moment one steps into church.

The passage in Timothy where Paul says that he won't allow women to teach must be considered in the context of time, place and circumstances. Whoever does not know about these aspects may easily come to wrong conclusions. In Ephesus where Timothy was pastoring, there was already gnostic influence: people who claimed superior, secret knowledge, often going hand in hand with either ascetic or licentious living.⁵²⁷ Women who taught this false, syncretistic doctrine also used sexual charms to lure men into their thinking. Needless to say that this was not only false teaching, its side effects were immoral behavior and attitudes.

⁵²⁶ 1 Tim. 2:8-12

⁵²⁷ Paul combats this teaching explicitly in his letter to the Colossians

So, when Paul said that he did not want ‘women to teach’, he referred to *this type of women*, in *that time and area*; *not* to women in general. After all, this is the only occasion where he says so, which makes it pretty thin ground to base a doctrine on this, which shuts up more than half of Christianity. The devil would love it!

The *second* key⁵²⁸ is about *Godly Creation-order and Moral Immutabilities*: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of the Church (with man as first responsible); man is the head of woman. *Because of this context* there is no threat to the value or position of a woman. This order offers her protection and security. Female attempts at breaking this order is as ridiculous as a man trying to usurp Christ’s position as head of the Church. There has to be one who carries the final responsibility and has the authority to take decisions when no consensus can be reached. That person however, is accountable to Him Who is over him by His own creation-order.

The issue is to not offend Christians with different opinions, especially those whose lack of insight in these things would be classified by Paul as ‘weak’.

Peter’s passage⁵²⁹ shows the norm of *inner beauty*, our *third* key. It is about how we behave, men *and* women, and about showing the fruit of Christ’s love in our lives. In such an attitude there is no place for dominance of one over another. Do we desire a meek, gentle spirit in our wives? Christ expects the same of us, men.

Rather than criticizing women because of certain roles, we should treat them with love, respect and appreciation. When we do, the differences we used to fight about will grow dim. Besides, what Christian woman would not love to submit to the leadership of a man who really acts in the Spirit of Christ?

Now back to missions. When apostles travel they ‘have the right to take a believing wife with them’.⁵³⁰ Is it likely that these women left their families and spent travel money, just to keep their husbands company? Or would

⁵²⁸ Ef. 5:21-24,32,33

⁵²⁹ 1 Pet. 3:1a,3-7

⁵³⁰ 1 Cor. 9:5

they have come to minister? How would they minister by ‘remaining silent in church’?

When Paul calls his relatives Andronicus & Junia (not Junias, the male form of the name) ‘outstanding among the apostles’ and ‘having been in prison’ with them⁵³¹, how likely is it then that this female apostle was in prison for ‘remaining silent’? And what about his other female co-workers Apphia, Euodia, Syntyche, Mary, Persis, Phoebe, Tryphena and Tryphosa? Not to mention Priscilla, Aquila’s wife. Together they taught Apollos and Paul honors them as ‘fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life’.⁵³²

Let’s think twice before we tell women to remain silent. They minister more on the mission fields than men do. And do we object to that?

Study Questions

1. *Describe the three keys used to interpret cultural issues in the Bible*
2. *Explain the male ‘hair’-issue in Greek versus Jewish culture in the 1st century*
3. *Explain how the phrase ‘women should be silent in church’ can be understood more correctly than is assumed traditionally*
4. *Explain why Paul wrote to Timothy that ‘women should not teach’, using your knowledge of the 1st century church in Ephesus*
5. *Explain the principle of ‘inner beauty’ in men as well as women*
6. *Would you object to women who desire to preach in your church? What biblical arguments do you have to support your opinion?*

⁵³¹ Rom. 16:7

⁵³² 16:3,4

2. Redemptive Gifts of the Church in the Developing World

It is my conviction that the Church in the Developing World is huge in numbers and rich in redemptive gifts. When we use Patrick Johnstone's 2001 stats⁵³³ we see that the Church in Latin America & The Caribbean, Asia and Africa combined number about 1,174 million (all Christians) and 304 million of those are Evangelicals. If only every 1,000 Evangelicals would send and support just one missionary, the Church in that part of the world alone could send over 300,000 missionaries. At present the real number is about 92,000 (excluding the Pacific Islands) and the total number of missionaries in all the world is just over 200,000. This last number includes the entire Western world⁵³⁴.

It would be simple with such good material as Johnstone's at hand, to toy around with missionary statistics for a long time, but then we could easily miss the point. The non-Western Church has important redemptive gifts and abundantly so. Paradoxically, some of those originate in the human suffering we perceive from media reports, if not from first-hand experience. Interestingly, there is a parallel between these redemptive gifts and the average 'unreached-people-profile' – if such a thing exists at all – that we find when we look at many of the people groups where the gospel is still unavailable.

An important issue is, that we realize that unreached people groups are in that state for five good reasons:

Firstly, there is the physical aspect (remoteness, lack of roads and unavailable means of transport).

Secondly, we see the issues of culture (isolated from other cultures, and relatively closed communities).

In the *third* place we face different social strata (higher/lower status: economic positions and education).

⁵³³ Johnstone, 2001:19,29,39

⁵³⁴ Ibid, p. 21,34,41,747

Then, generational components play a role (e.g. will non-Christian youth and children find Christ when most Christians are found in older age groups?)

Finally, there are the religious reasons: a non-Christian people group may remain so because the minority Christian group is fearful to reach out, or because a nominal majority Christian group is slow to reach out.

Even if such a thing as an ‘average unreached people-profile’ does not exist, there are still a number of commonalities that are at least interesting to look at. Seven of those draw our attention:

The *first* is the tribal, rural background (as contrasting to a national, urban background) that many share.

Next there is the oral tradition (as in contrast to literacy).

Thirdly, unemployment and the resulting poverty seem to have been the rule, rather than the exception.

As *fourth* aspect there is the frequent occurrence of natural disasters, such as droughts, famines, earthquakes, floods and mudslides.

Then there is the problem of physical disease and the absence of adequate medical care.

Sixthly, there is a lot of war-related pain, like fleeing, fear, material loss, emotional trauma, physical disablement, rape and the death of loved ones.

Finally, they share a traditional ethnic religious belief system, where demonic bondage and the fear of evil spirits dominate entire societies.

When we look at the background of many believers in the non-Western Church, we see that many of them come from similar and comparable origins. When these Christians have discovered Christ as their source of salvation and their relief and comfort *in the midst* of such suffering, they qualify much better to reach out to those remaining unreached and least-reached people-groups than their Western brethren are.

The latter come from an almost diametrically opposed direction, culturally speaking, which often includes the lack of toughness, required to reach those that are – in Western eyes – hard to reach.

Yet, our non-Western brothers and sisters have many arguments why *not* to engage in world missions, some of which are founded on a perception of inferiority and others on false comparisons with Western Christians. They say ‘we were not trained ... therefore we are unemployed ... and have no income ... and are poor ... and have no food ... and cannot afford medical care ... nor schooling for our children’. And although there is truth in these arguments, they may never be used as reasons why world missions should be left in the hands of their Western siblings. Fortunately the taskforce of non-Western missionaries grows rapidly – just not rapidly enough.

It is time to shake off this perpetual doom-attitude of slavery, oppression, mismanagement and war, political turmoil, coups, corruption and economic regression. There is a better, positive and more mature response. Non-Western Christians may ask themselves: Can we turn weaknesses into strengths? Suffering into redemptive gifts? Lethargy and self-pity into faith? Can we believe the word of God in spite of prevailing circumstances? Can we choose to become givers rather than receivers? It has been said that ‘*a beggar never gives, but a giver never begs*’. Would that not be a good new paradigm to live from?

The conclusion is: *Nobody is more suitable to reach the remaining unreached people groups, than non-Western Christians are.* There are big differences among them, but they have much in common too. There are tremendous needs on the continents of the southern hemisphere, but there is also a huge potential of manpower, enthusiasm and faith. World missions is NOT ‘the white man’s job’, ‘the hobby of the few’ or ‘the task of the rich’. The great commission was given to *all* disciples, regardless of race or color.

Christ commissioned the *whole* Church to take the *whole* gospel to the *whole* world to *every* person. Are you not called to be a missionary yourself? Then what can *you* do for world missions? You can pray, you can give and you can go. *Why not pray once a day, give once a month and go once a year?*

Study Questions

1. *What is the missionary-sending potential of the Church in the southern hemisphere if 1,000 Evangelicals support 1 missionary?*
2. *What parallels did you learn about, between the typical properties of Developing World Christians and unreached people groups?*
3. *What conclusion needs to be drawn from this?*
4. *Give five reasons why unreached people groups are unreached*
5. *Which seven aspects were given as description of 'the average profile of an unreached people group'?*
6. *Explain how Developing World Christians can turn their suffering into redemptive gifts*
7. *Which vicious circle of thought often hinders Developing World Christians?*
8. *Which three interesting slogans did you learn in the last three paragraphs? Do you, or don't you agree? Motivate your answer*
9. *What should be the role of the Western Church with regard to the unreached and least reached people groups?*

Other Books by Steef van 't Slot

World Evangelisation – That All May Hear, Hebron Press, Benoni, South Africa, 1999/2005, re-published by Recruiting for Missions and printed by Seismos Press in 2012.

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The present four books *World Evangelisation & The Bible's Missionary Message, Part I – The Old Testament*, and *Parts IIA & IIB – The New Testament* can be ordered online as Print on Demand at one of the following sites: www.biblekiosk.co.uk or www.bijbelkiosk.nl or www.smr.global

Books are printed on demand through the Print Location Network of Snowfall4POD at several locations worldwide

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Recruiting for Missions

The Foundation 'Recruiting for Missions' was established in 2010 in The Netherlands, as a legal entity to a ministry that started in 1998 by Dutch missionaries Steef & Tineke van 't Slot, until 2006 working in and from South Africa.

The ministry seeks to mobilize churches, mainly in the Global South, to participate in the execution of Christ's great commission. It helps them recruit and train cross-cultural missionaries to people groups in their countries and on their continents that are unreached or least-reached with the gospel; and with the training of Christian workers for children's ministry.

This is done through development of theological and missiological materials, that can be taught in the form of weekly modules (20-30 hours), suitable for churches, Bible schools, theological seminaries, retreats, missionary training centers, etc.

Available modules: Introduction to Missions (*World Evangelisation – That All May Hear*) and *The Bible's Missionary Message* (three volumes, one on the OT and two on the NT), as well as a course for children's workers. Teaching takes place upon invitation, to be sent to recruiting4missions@gmail.com

The Foundation operates on unsolicited gifts. It pays no salaries; funds are spent on development and production of teaching materials. It does include travel costs of itinerant faculty.

If you desire to donate gifts to the ministry, you can deposit your gift in the name of Recruiting for Missions, 6717 PP Ede, The Netherlands. IBAN code: NL97INGB0004329130; BIC code: INGBNL2A.

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