CHAPTER 1

A History and Introduction to a Missional Reading of the Bible

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This book will probe a missional reading of Scripture and demonstrate the importance and fruitfulness of encountering the text in this way. This kind of missional hermeneutic has been gaining ground in missiological circles for over a half century. But it remains relatively uncommon to see biblical scholarship take seriously the insights of missiology. As one New Testament scholar sympathetic to a missional hermeneutic puts it: "Biblical scholars have yet to be persuaded that mission can and should serve as a fundamental rubric for biblical interpretation."[1] Many biblical scholars go on about their business paying little attention to this insight of their missiological colleagues: that mission is a central category in the Bible that needs to be taken seriously if our interpretation is to be faithful.

Biblical Scholarship and Mission—Not Yet Persuaded

Why are so many biblical scholars not yet persuaded of the importance of mission for interpreting Scripture? The following reasons became evident to me as I participated, often as the token missiologist, in various meetings with biblical scholars.[2] It seems that the first fundamental problem is confusion about what the word "mission" means. For centuries, the word was used to describe the intentional efforts of the church to spread the Christian faith among unbelievers. This might have meant evangelistic efforts at home but more often it referred to cross-cultural activities to establish a witnessing presence in places where there had been none. There was some movement in the mid-twentieth century toward a broader understanding of mission that moved beyond evangelism and cross-cultural missions and included deeds of justice and mercy.[3] But these too were "missional" in the sense of being intentional activities on the part of the church to spread the gospel beyond its walls.

Massive changes in theological reflection on mission developed in the middle part of the twentieth century and culminated in the description of the *missio Dei* as a framework for mission. But these developments seem to be little known among biblical scholars. And as long as "mission" means intentional efforts at spreading the Christian faith by word or deed, certainly it cannot be a central rubric for interpreting Scripture—especially not the Old Testament. "Mission" so defined may be a very important task for the church to engage in, or merely a leftover relic from past colonial times: either way, it can hardly merit serious consideration as a basis for biblical hermeneutics.

A second problem flows from the first: missiology is often not taken seriously as an academic discipline because it is considered limited to the practical issues of outreach, the "how to" of evangelism and cross-cultural mission. In theological institutions enslaved to the *theoria-praxis* dichotomy of the Enlightenment, mission is considered to be divorced from the complex rigors of the more theoretical theological disciplines. "The 'practical' American," laments Harvie Conn, "has placed missions in 'practical theology.' The basic 'four great theological disciplines' remain OT study, NT research, church history, and doctrine. And missions maintains its toolshed appearance behind the 'stately mansions' of theology."[4]

Missiologists, too, have contributed to the caricature—and this is the third problem. It is not uncommon for missiologists simply to accept their relegation to the back benches: to teach the practical side of outreach and to refuse to engage the theological curriculum at a deep level. But more problematically, when missiologists sometimes use Scripture to construct a biblical and theological foundation for mission, their use of the biblical text is often considered naïve. There are at least two ways this happens.

The first concerns the *historical conditioning* of the biblical text, the seeming gulf between the ancient text and the contemporary situation. Biblical scholars oriented to the spirit of the Enlightenment, which separated the subject and object of knowledge, insist on an uncommitted approach to Scripture. This produces a distancing effect by which the text becomes a strange object to be examined and dissected

rather than one to be heard and obeyed. Consequently, many biblical scholars employ a historical-critical method as a bridge to cross over the great gulf fixed between the ancient text and today. Rarely do they make the journey back, and so they are reticent to draw any kind of direct connection between this alien text and the present.

Missiologists rightly react against this distancing, but in seeking the contemporary relevance of biblical texts they frequently fail to respect the cultural distance, and so read their own missional concerns back into the biblical text. They dismiss the rigorous methodological approach of biblical scholars. This can make them vulnerable to simplistic applications of the biblical text to the contemporary missionary setting. This lack of attention to hermeneutical rigor certainly will not impress biblical scholars—especially those who remain uncritically immersed in the Enlightenment worldview.

Further, biblical scholars stress the tremendous literary, theological, and semantic *diversity* of the scriptural record. To get hold of such variety, study of the Bible can become an increasingly specialized set of sciences in which biblical scholarship becomes focused on increasingly narrow fields of competence. Frustrated with this fragmentation and specialization, and lamenting its debilitating impact on the church, missiologists tend to overlook this rich diversity and may reduce their biblical foundation for mission to a single word, idea, or text as the unifying hermeneutical lens through which to see Scripture. A failure on the part of missiologists to respect the diversity of Scripture will not draw biblical scholars to the insights of missiology.

A final problem affects not just biblical scholars but the whole church in Western culture. Our Christendom and Enlightenment heritage has clouded our missional consciousness. Our missional identity has been suppressed, and so nonmissional assumptions inevitably influence biblical scholarship. There is, of course, no such thing as methodological neutrality. We carry our assumptions about the world into our reading and they largely determine what we see. To the degree that biblical scholars have not recognized their missional located situation, as Scripture presents it, they will not have eyes to see the centrality of mission in Scripture. In an article written almost forty years ago, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza diagnoses the problem precisely: “Exegetical inquiry often depends upon the theological and cultural presuppositions with which it approaches its texts. Historical scholarship therefore judges the past from the perspective of its own concepts and values. Since for various reasons religious propaganda, mission, and apologetics are not very fashionable topics in the contemporary religious scene, these issues have also been widely neglected in New Testament scholarship.”[5] For these reasons, mission has not been recognized as a crucial rubric for biblical interpretation.

Hopeful Signs for the Development of a Missional Hermeneutic

The historical neglect of mission in biblical scholarship cannot but have a negative effect on theological education and on the local congregation. Is there any hope that things might change? In fact, there are hopeful signs of late, and I will consider four such signs here.

The Changing Situation of the Church in Western Culture and in the World

Perhaps the most important factor that may help to stimulate a missional reading of Scripture is the changing setting of the church in Western culture. The influence of the gospel and the Christian faith on Western culture continues to decline, and the church is losing its former place of influence. The Western church finds itself increasingly in a situation that can only be characterized as missionary: it has become a culturally disenfranchised church in a neo-pagan culture. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say (since, of course, the church is always situated in a missional setting) that our missional context has changed. It is now more obvious and harder to ignore.

The church in the non-Western part of the world, moreover, has experienced spectacular growth and now dwarfs the church in the West both in terms of numbers and vitality. The church in the southern hemisphere does not have a Christendom heritage and so has always been more aware of its missional situation. So it is much more deeply attuned to the centrality of mission to the Christian faith. The sheer size of the non-Western church means that it is inevitable that their voices will be heard sooner or later. This will bring a growing challenge to the Western church.

Together, then, the expanding awareness of our newly discovered missional setting and the decisive shift of the center of gravity in the church to the global south are leading to a "raised consciousness of mission" in the Western church.[6] This new situation has the potential to reopen our missional categories when reading Scripture. I have witnessed on more than one occasion, in the case of biblical scholars, a missional reading of Scripture arise out of extended contact with the third world church or from a missional engagement with their own culture in a local church setting.

Growing Convergence on a New Understanding of Mission

A second hopeful sign is that the twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of a new biblical and theological framework for mission that has garnered widespread recognition. This new view of mission embraces much more than outreach activities, and it has serious implications for the interpretation of Scripture. As this continues to be the subject of reflection in various theological traditions, its presence will be felt in biblical studies.

A colonial framework shaped the church's view of mission well into the twentieth century, generating an introverted life in the local congregation. The following assumptions were widespread: (1) mission is a task for parachurch organizations while the church has only a pastoral role; (2) the world is divided into the Christian West (home base) and the non-Christian non-West (mission field); (3) mission takes place on the non-Western mission field; and (4) there is no need for mission in the West, since it is already Christian: the only necessary outreach effort is the evangelism of individuals, and there is little need for a prophetic challenge to what is considered to be a Christian culture.

Clearly these assumptions had to fall away if there was to be a fresh understanding of mission. And this is what happened in the early and middle part of the twentieth century in missiological discussion. The church in the non-Western part of the world began to grow and mature. In Western culture, the growth of demonic ideologies, two world wars, and unspeakable atrocities during the twentieth century signaled that the secular West was far from Christian. Colonialism collapsed, and uncertainty pervaded the Western missionary enterprise. The church in the West weakened as its numbers dwindled, and its life was deeply compromised by the powerful idols of Western culture.

The meetings of the global missionary body, the International Missionary Council, tell the story of theological reflection on mission. As one traces the results of these meetings it is clear that all the twentieth-century assumptions about mission were gradually dismantled. The question that faced the church in the early 1950s was: What new framework could replace the obsolete colonial one? The 1952 meeting of the International Missionary Council in Willingen, Germany, was a turning point, because there a new framework for mission emerged that would dominate mission thinking to the present. Lesslie Newbigin observes that "subsequent history has shown that Willingen was in fact one of the most significant in the series of world missionary conferences."[7]

The most important legacy of Willingen was the new concept of God's mission. Mission has its source in the love of the Father who sent his Son to reconcile all things to himself. The Son sent the Spirit to gather his church together and empower it to participate in his mission. This church is sent by Jesus to continue his mission, and this sending defines its very nature.

Our mission thus begins with the mission of the triune God. But this Trinitarian mission must be understood in the narrative context of the biblical story. The Scriptures tell the story of God's work to restore the entire creation, and a people from all nations, from the debilitating impact of human rebellion. God chose a people to play a role in this mission. This means that mission is more than simple activity: it is an identity that comes from the role that God's covenant people are called to play in the biblical story. Mission, then, is not merely a set of outreach activities: *it defines the very being of God's people*. To say that their missional identity comes from the role they are called to play in the biblical story already points to the centrality of mission in reading Scripture.

Changes in the Discipline of Biblical Studies

A further hopeful sign is the changes taking place in the discipline of biblical studies. At least three hold promise for the development of a missional hermeneutic. All three are responses to the atomistic and

naturalistic approaches of much higher critical scholarship that has been the dominant paradigm for the last two centuries.

First, there is growing interest in a theological interpretation of Scripture.[8] At its heart, theological interpretation is concerned to recover a reading of the Bible as the Christian Scriptures, a reading that listens to the Bible as God's address to his people. One of the chief characteristics of biblical scholarship in the last two centuries, as a result of the religious conversion of Western culture to the Enlightenment faith, had been the opening of a chasm between a critical reading of Scripture that was considered religiously neutral and a committed Christian reading. That is, attention to the historical, cultural, literary, and even theological details of the text was separated from hearing God speak to his people in the text. While historical-critical scholarship brings much insight to reading Scripture, it often capitulated to the Enlightenment story as its controlling religious narrative. While it claims to be objective and neutral, in fact much biblical scholarship is "a move from one confessional stance to another, a move from one creed to another."[9] In truth, the "Enlightenment did not (as it is sometimes supposed) simply free the scholar from the influence of 'dogma'; it replaced one dogma by another." The compelling power of the Enlightenment story is such that it is difficult to convince many modern biblical scholars "to recognize the creedal character of their approach."[10] The goal of theological interpretation is to wrest the Bible from an Enlightenment creedal reading and return it to its proper place: a Christian reading of Scripture to nurture the church, one that recognizes God's speech and human interpretation as complementary.

A second trend in reaction to the dominance of a methodology shaped by the Enlightenment dogma is the recognition that all readings are *located* readings that cannot escape their own cultural or historical limitations. In post-Enlightenment hermeneutical approaches there was the belief one could create critical distance ("spectator exegesis") so as to approach the text in a neutral way ("the principle of the empty head").[11] But, of course, this is simply naïve. We are, each of us, woven into a particular historical place, and that context will always shape our interpretation. Our reading of any text will always be affected by what Hans Georg Gadamer refers to as prejudices or anticipatory fore-structures: established categories the interpreter necessarily employs to make sense of the text. These prejudices may be enabling or disabling. They may open our eyes to see what is in the text, but they may also blind us to what is there. The problem is that our missional prejudices were clouded by a nonmissional self-understanding that closed us off to an important element at the heart of the scriptural story. Our increased awareness of mission in a new context puts us in a new location and may open us up to this central theme. Awareness of the importance of our own horizons in interpretation may enable biblical scholars to take stock of the way our nonmissional effective history has led to a blinkered vision of mission.

A final trend in biblical scholarship favorable to a missional reading of Scripture is the development of hermeneutical approaches that take seriously longitudinal themes in Scripture and the message of the entire canon. Richard Bauckham points specifically to canonical and narrative critical approaches that come to Scripture with an awareness of the storied nature of the entire biblical canon. For a missional reading to develop, this kind of awareness is essential, since both the mission of God and the role of God's people develop precisely in the unfolding of the biblical narrative. Even more promising is the recognition by some biblical scholars that the narrative unity of Scripture is not simply a hermeneutical or biblical-theological approach, but is a worldview-story[12] or a metanarrative[13] in which we are called to live the whole of our lives—including our scholarship.

The Growing Contribution of Biblical Scholars to the Conversation

A final hopeful sign is the growing contribution of biblical scholars to the missional hermeneutic conversation. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when mission was generally understood rather narrowly, most of those who treated the topic of mission and Scripture were mission scholars or practitioners. The primary approach was to focus on scriptural texts that would authenticate the enterprise they were already practicing. But toward the middle of the twentieth century a broadening understanding of mission caused mission scholars to return to the Bible afresh. The concept of the *missio Dei* that emerged in the mid-twentieth century as an organizing structure allowed a number of biblical insights from the early part of the century to be gathered together into a new unifying framework for mission.

It was not accidental that this coincided with the biblical theology movement, which shaped the

ecumenical movement during the 1940s and 1950s.[14] Johannes Blauw was commissioned by the World Council of Churches to survey and appraise the current work in biblical scholarship and to harness those insights into the service of this new understanding of mission. Blauw's doctoral work, at the intersection of biblical studies and missiology, was done under J. H. Bavinck. In response to the commission, Blauw produced a fine little book that demonstrates the centrality of mission to the main story line of the Bible.[15] It became the nucleus of a growing consensus in mission studies and served as the major work for Bible and mission until the mid–1970s.[16]

Late developments in biblical studies and significant changes in the world church have rendered Blauw's work somewhat inadequate. During the 1970s and 1980s, many scholars with combined expertise in both mission and biblical studies addressed the issue of the Bible and mission, producing a number of valuable studies; of these, perhaps *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* by Roman Catholic scholars Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller is the most noteworthy.[17] But during this period the name of David Bosch truly stands out.[18]

Bosch was trained as a New Testament scholar, completing his doctoral work under Oscar Cullmann. He was an outstanding scholar in both missiology and biblical studies.[19] The topic of Bible and mission occupied Bosch's attention for over three decades,[20] but the arrival of *Transforming Mission* was a watershed not only in theology of mission, but also in the area of a missional hermeneutic. It gathered up the scattered insights toward a missional hermeneutic already achieved and gave sophisticated expression to a missional reading of Matthew, Luke, and Paul.[21]

Bosch rightly critiques a "foundations of mission" approach that considers isolated texts important for missionary activity; instead, he attends to the missional thrust of Scripture as a canonical whole and of particular books as whole literary units. A number of significant themes in his work advance a consistent missional hermeneutic: mission as a central thrust of Scripture's message, the centrality of the *missio Dei*, the mission theologies of various New Testament books all rooted in the mission of Jesus, the missionary identity of the church, the broad scope of mission centered in the comprehensive salvation of the kingdom of God, the communal dimension of mission, and a hermeneutic of "consonance" or historical logic that enables the ancient missionary paradigms of the New Testament to speak authentically to the present.

Bosch's work was groundbreaking. Yet from where we stand today we can discern in it some of the weaknesses and inconsistencies that inevitably come with trailblazing. Sometimes his work seems to study the theme of mission or various themes relevant to mission rather than *reading the whole text through the lens* of mission. But perhaps the weakest area is his meager treatment of the Old Testament and its importance for the New Testament. Since Bosch's time, work on a missional hermeneutic continued along the path he pioneered, carried on with greater consistency and wider scope. The nature of a missional hermeneutic became more carefully defined and expanded in scope with work done on the Old Testament and more of the New Testament canon.

In this post-Bosch era, once again, one name stands out: Christopher Wright. Wright, like Bosch and Blauw, has one foot in missiology and one in biblical studies. His PhD work at Cambridge was in Old Testament ethics, and so he is by training a biblical scholar. As well, Wright taught in India and later at All Nations Christian College, a training school in the United Kingdom for cross-cultural missionaries. Wright produced a number of essays on a missional hermeneutic[22] and brought it to bear on various Old Testament books in his commentaries.[23] The publication of his (almost 600-page) *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*[24] was another watershed for missional hermeneutics. With this book the conversation was brought to a new level. What is especially important is the way this book demonstrates both the crucial importance of the Old Testament and how central biblical-theological themes relate to a missional hermeneutic.

In the last decade, the conversation around a missional hermeneutic was more visible in the discipline of biblical studies, in many blogs, articles, chapters, and books (see bibliography). A group of biblical scholars and missiologists came together at the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) for over a decade to discuss this theme.[25] In the important eight-volume Scripture and Hermeneutics series, at least three chapters are explicitly devoted to the topic.[26] Participating in the discussion are a good number of first-class biblical scholars who do not have the same connection to cross-cultural missions and missiology that Wright, Bosch, Blauw, and many of the earlier authors had. Biblical scholars like N. T.

Wright,[27] Richard Bauckham,[28] and Joel Green,[29] among many others, advocate a missional reading of Scripture.[30] A comment made by Tom Wright expresses what is true of many: that he was led to pursue a missional hermeneutic not by missionary experience in a foreign country, but by his study of the data of Scripture itself. He says: "When I was planning my big series I thought at the beginning I was writing a 'New Testament Theology' but gradually have realised that, in fact, it is, if anything, a 'New Testament missiology.' "[31]

Contours of a Missional Hermeneutic

In this last section, by way of introduction to the chapters that follow, I am going to give a brief sketch of a missional hermeneutic.[32] To structure this section I employ the threefold description of a missional hermeneutic that Bauckham suggests. He describes a missional hermeneutic as

> a way of reading the Bible for which mission is the hermeneutical key. . . . [It is not] simply a study of the theme of mission in the biblical writings, but a way of reading the whole of Scripture with mission as its central interest and goal. . . . [It] would be a way of reading Scripture which sought to understand what the church's mission really is in the world as Scripture depicts it and thereby to inspire and to inform the church's missionary praxis.[33]

There are three dimensions of a missional hermeneutic in this definition: reading the whole of Scripture with mission as a central theme, reading Scripture to understand what mission really is, and reading Scripture to equip the church for its missional task.

Mission as Central to the Biblical Story

A missional hermeneutic begins with the triune God and his mission to restore the world and a people from all nations. God's mission is disclosed in a historical narrative in which he chooses and covenants with a people to be part of what he is doing. This point is central: at the heart of a missional hermeneutic is the recognition that God chooses and covenants with a *particular people* to fulfill his universal purpose of restoration. Both words, "particular" and "people," are important. The direction of the biblical story is a movement from one people to all nations. The church is caught up in this movement of God's redemptive work from the particular to the universal.

Two crucial texts—Genesis 12:1–3 and Exodus 19:3–6—give us a hermeneutic lens through which to see the role of God's people in the biblical story.[34] Genesis 12 tells us why God chooses and covenants with Abraham and Israel, as well as how he will carry out his redemptive plan. In Exodus 19, God delineates Israel's vocation and place in his redemptive purpose.

The grammatical structure of Genesis 12:1–3 (cf. 18:18–19) shows that God's plan of redemption will unfold in two stages: first God will restore his creational blessing to Abraham and his descendants, and then through that nation God will bless all the nations on the earth. "What is being offered in these few verses is a theological blueprint for the redemptive history of the world."[35]

Exodus 19:3–6 more carefully delineates the narrative trajectory given in Genesis 12. Here we find "the unique identity of the people of God."[36] This text stands at the center of the book of Exodus, preceded by Israel's liberation from Egyptian idolatry, and followed by the giving of the law and God's establishing his presence in their midst. Redemption, covenant, law, divine presence—these are the foundation stones of God's people. And all of them must be interpreted in terms of a missional trajectory in the story of God's work in the world.

God frees Israel from bondage to pagan idolatry and takes them to Sinai. There he tells them that out of all nations he will make them his treasured possession, "because the whole earth is mine" (19:5). The whole earth belongs to God, and through Israel he is going to reclaim it.

The unique identity of Israel is found in two titles: "priestly kingdom" and "holy nation." As a priestly kingdom, Israel is to mediate and embody God's holy presence and blessing to the surrounding nations by being a distinctive people.[37] As a holy nation, "they are to be a people set apart, different from all other people by what they are and are becoming—a display people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people."[38] These words are critical for the subsequent story: "The history

of Israel from this point on is in reality merely a commentary upon the degree of fidelity with which Israel adhered to their Sinai-given vocation."[39] Israel's calling is the means by which the Abrahamic promise will be fulfilled. It sets out a hermeneutical framework by which to understand the rest of the story in the Old Testament.

God gives the law (Exod. 20–23) immediately following his call to Israel, for the law is to shape Israel into a new society so they can fulfill their vocation amidst the nations (cf. Deut. 4:5–8). Exodus ends with the building of the tabernacle and God's coming to dwell among them (Exod. 25–40). God's mission is a matter of "*the presence of the People of God in the midst of mankind and the presence of God in the midst of His people.*"[40]

On the land, Israel is placed at the crossroads of the world to be a display people visible to the nations. The visibility of Israel on the land is integral to their theological identity, to their role as a priestly nation among the nations.

Israel's mission is eschatological: while the promise that Israel will be a blessing to all nations is first set before them as a task, it finds little fulfillment throughout the Old Testament and will ultimately be fulfilled only in the eschatological future. When Israel fails to carry out its vocation faithfully and is exiled from the land, God does not abandon his intention to use Israel to bring blessing to the nations. Rather, through the prophets he promises to gather and renew Israel to fulfill their calling (e.g., Ezek. 36:16–27). Thus, the prophets look forward to "two successive events, first the call to Israel, and subsequently the redemptive incorporation of the Gentiles in the kingdom of God."[41]

This incorporation of the gentiles into a renewed Israel will be carried out when God establishes his universal rule over the whole earth. The associations between the coming of the kingdom and the gathering of Israel became stronger during the centuries leading up to the coming of Christ. However, the additional element of the Abrahamic promise—that *all* nations would be blessed—was lost in the increasingly ethnocentric separatism of the Jewish people during their domination by one repressive foreign regime after another. Election and covenant increasingly became a matter of exclusive Jewish privilege.

Then Jesus steps onto the stage of redemptive history and announces the good news of the kingdom (Mark 1:14–15). It is commonplace to speak of the "already–not yet" era of the kingdom. What is not so commonplace is reflection on *why* God delays the end. What stands out in the Gospels is the central activity of gathering. God keeps the walls of history open so that an eschatological gathering might take place. Three images permeate the Gospels: the gathering of sheep into the fold, the gathering of guests to the banquet table, and the gathering of wheat into the barn. "That God has chosen and sanctified his people in order to make it a contrast-society in the midst of the other nations was for Jesus the self-evident background of all his actions," says Gerhard Lohfink. Jesus's gathering activity is God's "eschatological action" to "restore or even re-establish his people, in order to carry out definitively and irrevocably his plan of having a holy people in the mist of the nations."[42]

This begins to clarify why Jesus restricts his mission to the Jews (Matt. 10:5–6; 15:24). Jesus's "apparent particularism is an expression of his universalism—it is because his mission concerns the whole world that he comes to Israel."[43] But more than gathering is needed. Israel first must be restored to their missional vocation, liberated from their ethnocentric exclusivism, and empowered to live distinctive lives. Jesus's mission in both his ministry and his death and resurrection is to accomplish these things.

A major part of Jesus's mission is to restore Israel to their missional vocation. We get a glimpse of this in the Sermon on the Mount. The whole sermon is a challenge to Israel to take up their eschatological calling to be a light to the nations and to reject the nationalist and separatist way of the other Jewish leaders of the day: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14–16; cf. Isa. 2:2–5).

Yet this newly gathered eschatological Israel, symbolized by the appointment of the twelve,[44] is as weak and sinful as the covenant people of God in the Old Testament. A new mighty work of God is needed. And this is what is accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus. "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in human flesh in order that the

righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3–4). Newly gathered Israel now participates in the two mightiest acts of God that stand at the center of the story: in his death, Jesus conquers the sin and evil of the old age and invites his people to share in that victory; in his resurrection, he inaugurates the age to come and gives his Spirit that his people might enjoy new life.

The story of Israel culminates not only in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:46) but also in mission to all nations (24:47). A redemptive-historical logic runs from the work of Christ to the eschatological mission of God's people. Thus, the Gospels end with a commission that leads to a "great change of direction" in redemptive history (Matt. 28:16–20; Luke 24:45–59; John 20:19–23).[45] According to the Old Testament prophets, the nations would *come* to Israel. But with the words of Jesus, that is now reversed: now eschatological Israel is *sent* to the ends of the earth, beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8).[46]

The book of Acts narrates the way the prophetic promise of the incorporation of the nations into Israel is fulfilled. Eschatological Israel will do for the nations what Jesus has done for Israel: through the witness of their life, word, and deed empowered by the Spirit they will gather sheep into the covenant fold of blessing. The "already–not yet" era of the kingdom will continue for this reason (Acts 1:6–7). As Newbigin writes:

> The meaning of this "overlap of the ages" in which we live, the time between the coming of Christ and His coming again, is that it is a time given for the witness of the apostolic Church to the ends of the earth. . . . The implication of a true eschatological perspective will be missionary obedience, and the eschatology which does not issue in such obedience is a false eschatology.[47]

Four themes in the book of Acts make clear the main lines of the ongoing story of God's mission. The first is that the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation *first to the Jew, then to the gentile*. "The mission to Jews is a necessary stage through which the history of salvation must pass in order that salvation might proceed from the restored Israel to the Gentiles."[48] What unfolds in the narrative of Acts is a division in Israel (cf. Luke 2:34) between those who embrace the Messiah and those who reject him and thus exclude themselves from membership in the people of God. Pauline language in Romans provides imagery for what takes place in Acts: some Jews reject the gospel and are broken off, and gentiles are grafted on (Rom. 11:17–21).[49]

A second theme in Acts is the interplay of the *centripetal and centrifugal* dimensions of mission. On the one hand, the centripetal aspect of mission observed in the Old Testament continues. People in Jerusalem are drawn to the attractive lives of restored Israel (Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–35). On the other hand, a centrifugal dynamic is new. The church in Antioch, inspired by the Holy Spirit, lifts up its eyes and sees many places throughout the Roman Empire where there are not communities to draw people into covenant blessing. They send Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1–3), who "preach the gospel where it is not known" (Rom. 15:20), establishing new missional communities.

A third theme in Acts is *transformation of the people of God* into a new kind of community. The goal of the biblical story from the beginning was that all nations would be drawn into the covenant that God made with Abraham. That goal is realized in the book of Acts, but not without some painful struggle: a controversy develops over whether gentiles have to become Jews to become part of the people of God. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) settles the issue: "Not even the original, divinely sanctioned culture of God's elect nation has the right to universalize its particular expression of Christianity."[50] The people of God are no longer bound to one land and one cultural way of life.

The story of God's mission through his people—and this is the fourth theme—is an *unfinished story* in which we are invited to take our place. The book of Acts draws to a close with Paul in Rome, yet it is a puzzling conclusion. Why does it end so abruptly? It is because Luke invites us into the mission, "to the ends of the earth." Acts portrays the ongoing progress of the gospel, and the sudden ending in Rome invites us into this story to complete the task not yet finished. "In effect," Brian Rosner says, Luke "finishes with the subliminal message, 'to be continued,' "[51] and, I might add, "with you, the reader, as a participant."

The Meaning of Mission

A missional hermeneutic helps us to understand what the church's mission in the world really is. A brief survey of mission in the biblical story enables us to describe it in a number of overlapping ways. In the past two centuries, definitions of mission often began with the concept of mission as the initiative of the church to reach those outside the covenant community. During the twentieth century, fresh exposure to the Scripture led to a new starting point: mission begins not with the task of a people, but with the redemptive activity of God. The Bible narrates the work of the triune God to restore the whole of creation and the whole life of humankind from the corrupting effects of sin. If we are to understand mission properly we must begin with this work of God. Only then may we ask: How does the church participate in this mission?

The mission of God's people is their calling to participate in this story of God's work. They take their place and play their role in this story according to God's elective purpose. So mission is not first of all the activities of individual members of God's people to bring outsiders to the faith—although it involves that at a later stage of God's mission—but the vocation of a whole people who play a part in God's salvation on behalf of the whole world.

The direction of the biblical story makes this clear. The narrative flow of the biblical story is from the particular to the universal: mission is the church finding itself within, and faithfully participating within, this narrative direction. The narrative direction of the biblical story can be discerned in two biblical phrases: "the ends of the earth" and "all nations." Both of these phrases denote the universal goal implicit in the biblical story. The movement of God's mission is from one place (Israel) to the ends of the earth, and from one nation (Israel) to all nations.

Another way to describe mission is in terms of a people chosen by God for the sake of the world. This describes the people of God in terms of their two most significant (and closely connected) relationships: with God first, and also with the world. Their identity is defined by God's election and covenant. What is clear in the biblical story is that neither election nor covenant is an end in itself: they are fundamentally missional in that their purpose is not for the salvation of God's people alone but for the rest of the world also. From the beginning, both election and covenant envisaged a people chosen for the sake of the world. To forget this missional aim of election and the covenant is to misunderstand and misrepresent their very purpose. God's people are blessed so that they may be a blessing. God begins by working *in* a people to save them, but always with a view to work *through* them to draw others into the blessings of his covenant. In much biblical scholarship, it is the first element—of a people blessed by God—that receives attention and the latter element—of God's working through a people that they may be a blessing—is neglected. But the people of God are defined by their relationship to God's elective and covenantal purpose, which means that they exist for the sake of (and are oriented to) the world. The ultimate goal of their existence is the blessing of all nations on earth.

We've not yet considered *how* the people of God are to be a blessing to the nations. In the first instance, the vocation of God's people is to be a distinctive people on display to the nations. God calls Abraham to direct his household to keep the way of the Lord, doing what is right and just (Gen. 18:19), and then God gives Israel his law to enable them to be a holy nation (Exod. 20–23; 19:3–6). Both this calling and this gift focus our attention on how being a distinctive people with changed lives is the key to God's missional work through his people.

The distinctiveness, first of Abraham's clan and then of Israel as a nation, has three facets. First, it looks back to creation, for these people are called to embody God's *creational* design and intention for all humanity. Then it looks forward to the coming kingdom, for they are also called to be a sign or preview of the *restoration* God will accomplish in the new creation. Finally it looks outward to the nations, for this people are called to engage in missionary encounter the idolatrous cultures in the midst of which they are set.

For the people called to this task, mission will be comprehensive in scope. God's people embody his renewing work across the whole spectrum of their lives, private and public. Since God's salvation is as wide as human life, so is the mission of the church. This means, moreover, that being a distinctive people across the breadth of human life will entail a missionary encounter with the surrounding culture. A missionary encounter is a meeting of different and comprehensive visions of life. Thus, the comprehensive claims of the gospel will call for a lifestyle that challenges and calls into question the fundamental

assumptions and totality claims of the ultimate faith commitments of other visions of life. This happened too seldom in the past, since the gospel was too often relegated to the private sphere of life, and the church meekly accepted a place within a wider pluralistic vision of life. A missionary encounter calls the church to recover an alternative, all-encompassing vision of life based on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such a vision will counter and challenge all other visions of life not based on the gospel. But this is to be a *missionary* encounter: not coercive, but compelling attention by an attractiveness of life.

So, on the one hand, the church is called to be a distinctive and attractive people across the breadth of their lives. On the other, they are a distinctive people on display before the nations. They are not to retreat and live their lives in a corner far from the gaze of outsiders. They are to live as a community visible to the world. This is God's design for them. God attaches his name to his people. They live before others, aware that the glory of God is at stake in their lives.

To this point I have defined mission in a way that embraces the old and new covenant peoples of God. However, sensitivity to the progress of the biblical story and especially to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ leads us to recognize a richer view of mission with which the New Testament church is tasked. With the coming of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God breaks into history. What leads to a fuller perspective on mission is the eschatological vision: the kingdom of God as the goal of history is now present. This means four things for mission.

First, the coming of the kingdom means that the biblical story reaches the climactic point where "the nations" are to be incorporated within the covenant people of God. This is the point toward which the whole story has been moving. The time between the first and second comings of Jesus is a time defined precisely by what the biblical story anticipates from the beginning: the gathering in of the nations.

A second implication of the coming of the kingdom for mission is that God's people now have a foretaste of the life of the age to come. They are incorporated into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and they are given the Spirit, so that now they share in the life of the kingdom. This renewing power equips and enables the people of God to embody the good news and to fulfill the task they were given from the beginning: to be a distinctive people embodying God's intention for humanity.

Third, the gathering of the nations means that the form of God's people changed. They are now a multiethnic community scattered throughout the world, and this new form brings fresh challenges. Throughout the Old Testament, God's people were given the Torah to govern and shape their social, economic, political, and cultural lives. They existed as a self-contained cultural unit, and the threat of pagan cultures was external to their community. Paganism posed a grave danger to them, as is clear from the Old Testament story, but that threat came from outside. Now that God's people inhabit every culture of the world, the gospel is lived out in a rich diversity of ways. But as the church lives in the very midst of the cultures of the world—cultures that are shaped by very different visions of life—it forfeits the protection of cultural isolation that ancient Israel experienced, and thus the threat of idolatry is nearer to us than it was to them. Clearly, it is God's intention that his people should *not* be culturally isolated forever, but we do well to note that our new situation means that *missionary encounter will be for us the everyday experience of life*.

Finally, the gathering of the nations in this eschatological time means that the church must engage in intentional evangelistic activities. A couple of distinctions by Newbigin help us at this point.[52] The first is between a missional *dimension* for all of life and a missional *intention* for specific elements of life. There is a missional dimension to the whole of our lives, since every part is being renewed, and therefore every part is a sign of the coming kingdom. However, there are also activities that have an explicit missional intention, words and deeds whose intent is to invite those outside the faith to believe in Jesus Christ. The second distinction is between mission and missions.[53] *Mission* is the vocation to embody God's renewing work before the nations across the breadth of human life. *Missions* is the activity of establishing a witnessing presence in places and among peoples where there is currently no Christian presence. Missions is what dominated the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century church's view: taking the gospel to places in Africa and Asia where there was no Christian presence. Today with a church established in most parts of the world and a Western church embarrassed by its colonial past, this important dimension of mission is in

danger of being neglected. Yet missions remains part of the church's mission. The "ends of the earth" is the horizon, and there are still peoples and places without a witnessing community to make known the gospel.

Reading Scripture to Equip the Church for Missional Praxis

The final dimension of a missional hermeneutic, Bauckham notes, is that the Scriptures are to inspire and inform the church for its missionary praxis. The contemporary testimony of the Christian Reformed Church, "Our World Belongs to God," helpfully speaks of Scripture as a record and a tool of God's redeeming work. Wright makes a similar distinction, commenting that the books of Scripture "were not simply about the coming of God's Kingdom into all the world; they were, and were designed to be, part of the means whereby that happened."[54]

The authority of Scripture thus is a "sub-branch of the mission of the church. . . . God's self-revelation is always to be understood within the category of God's mission to the world, God's saving sovereignty let loose through Jesus and the Spirit and aimed at the healing and renewal of the creation."[55] To rightly understand the nature and authority of Scripture, then, is to understand its formative role, how it powerfully works to shape a faithful people and through them to bring healing to the world.

Darrell Guder, too, wants us to recognize that the Bible is a tool or instrument that shapes God's people for their missionary calling: "The writings that became the canonic New Testament all functioned basically as instruments for the continuing formation of these communities for the faithful fulfilment of their missional vocation." And so this must be a fundamental perspective for reading Scripture: "This biblical formation of the church requires a missional hermeneutic that constantly asks, 'How did this written testimony form and equip God's people for their missional vocation then, and how does it do so today?' " Moreover, this will have a formative influence on the whole nature of biblical scholarship: "All the resources of historical, critical, and literary research on the biblical testimony can and must contribute to the church's formation by illumining all the dimensions of this fundamental question."[56]

Formation for missional calling—that is why the various books of the scriptural canon were written. Again, do not hear the word "mission" in terms of a traditional understanding. What is here meant by "formation for mission" is not an equipping to carry out various evangelistic and outreach activities; rather, the vocation of God's people is to be a distinctive people for the sake of the world. God works first of all *in* his people and only thereafter *through* his people, for the sake of the nations.

The biblical books are products of God's mission: they arise out of various needs, threats, and crises that faced God's people in the course of living out their calling. For example, the Pentateuch is addressed to a people in danger of being engulfed by the pagan religions of the ancient Near East. Thus, Genesis 1 is a polemic against ancient Near Eastern creation myths, enabling Israel to understand the nature of the one true God, what it really means to be human, and what the world is really like. Similarly, the Exodus account of the redemption of Israel from Egypt is portrayed as God's victory over the Egyptian gods. Historical and prophetic books are addressed to a people in a crisis of faith so as to shape their identity and call them to faithfulness in a new setting: 1–2 Kings and Jeremiah address a people in exile who wonder what they're doing there after God's promises about a people, land, king, and temple seem to have been abandoned; Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Haggai are addressed to a postexilic people struggling to understand why the grand fulfillment promised earlier in Scripture has not materialized. The Torah is designed to shape Israel into a people embodying God's creational purposes for human society in a particular cultural and historical context. The prophets are covenant enforcers who call Israel back to their original vocation by warning them of judgment and by nurturing hope with visions of God's marvelous future. The book of Psalms forms a covenant mindset and identity in various ways, giving Israel songs and words for their worship. Wisdom literature forms a people to live in accordance with the wisdom of God's creation order across the whole spectrum of human life. The Gospels craft their narratives to proclaim and witness to the Christ event in a way that equips the church for faithful witness. The Epistles address the church as it exists in various cultural contexts, bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to bear on their experience so that they might be a faithful preview of the kingdom where God has planted them. And so

on. The scriptural books form Israel and the church to be a faithful covenant people. And if we properly understand that covenant and election are always for the sake of the world, then it will be clear that these books are intended to form a people who exist for the sake of the world.

Conclusion

This overview is intended to introduce readers to the history of and ongoing conversation surrounding a missional reading of Scripture, a reading to be developed in the chapters that follow. It is my conviction that this is urgently needed for the health of the church today. The Bible is the vehicle by which God's kingdom comes into the world. If the Bible is to play that role in the church we must read its texts, and this will involve, in part, a missional reading. A nonmissional reading of the Bible is crippling the church in the West, often fostering self-centeredness and thwarting a missional encounter with our culture. Reading the Bible missionally can aid the church in various ways, inspire preaching that shapes congregations, and foster theological education that forms future leaders. This volume is offered to stimulate a missional reading of Scripture for the sake of the church and, through the church, for the sake of the world.

1. Michael Barram, "The Bible, Mission, and Social Location: Toward a Missional Hermeneutic," *Interpretation* (January 2007): 50.

2. See also the reflections on the relationship of biblical scholarship to missiology of David J. Bosch, "Mission in Biblical Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 74 (1985): 531–38; Bosch, "Toward a Hermeneutic for 'Biblical Studies and Mission,' " *Mission Studies* 3.2 (1986): 65–79; and Barram, "Bible, Mission, and Social Location," 42–58.

3. For definitions of mission, missions, evangelism, relation between word and deed, see Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), especially chaps. 6 and 11.

4. Harvie Conn, "The Missionary Task of Theology: A Love/Hate Relationship?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 6.

5. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Miracles, Mission, and Apologetics: An Introduction," in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 1.

6. Lucien LeGrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), xiv.

7. Lesslie Newbigin, "Mission to Six Continents," in *The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, vol. 2: *1948–1968*, ed. Harold Fey (London: SPCK, 1970), 178.

8. Craig G. Bartholomew and Heath Thomas, *A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016).

9. Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 80.

10. Lesslie Newbigin, "The Role of the Bible in Our Church" (remarks given at the URC Forward Policy Group, 17–18 April 1985), 1.

11. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 157.

12. This is the language of N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 135 (see his whole discussion on pp. 121–44). Cf. also this statement found in various forms in many parts of his writing: "The whole point of Christianity is that it offers a story which is the story of the whole world. It is public truth" (41–42).

13. This is the language of Richard Bauckham. A metanarrative is "a story about the meaning of reality as a whole. . . . [It] is an attempt to grasp the meaning and destiny of human history as a whole by telling a single story about it; to encompass, as it were, all the immense diversity of human stories in a single, overall story which integrates them into a single meaning." The Bible is such a metanarrative, for Bauckham, because it "tells a story that in some sense encompasses all other human stories, draws them into the meaning that God's story with the world gives them"; *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 4–5. See also his chapter "Authority and Scripture," in *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 50–77.

14. Michael G. Cartwright, "Hermeneutics," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicholas Lossky et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 454.

15. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).

16. Many other fine works appeared at this time; e.g., Robert Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World*, trans. John Penney Smith (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1962); and Richard De Ridder, *Discipling the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971). But Blauw's book was the "received text" at this time.

17. Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983). In fact,

because of Vatican II, which defined the church as missionary by its very nature, Roman Catholic scholars were well ahead of Protestant scholars in working toward a missional hermeneutic.

18. See Michael W. Goheen, "A Critical Examination of David Bosch's Missional Reading of Luke," in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony Thiselton; Scripture and Hermeneutics 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 229–64.

19. J. G. Du Plessis notes that Bosch's "extensive bibliography leaves the professional exegete somewhat astounded at the range of his biblical scholarship" and that he must be "reckoned as a formidable exegete with a comprehensive and penetrating knowledge of trends in biblical scholarship"; "For Reasons of the Heart: A Critical Appraisal of David J. Bosch's Use of Scripture in the Foundation of Christian Mission," *Missionalia* 18.1 (April 1990): 76.

20. See the following by David Bosch: "The Why and How of a True Biblical Foundation for Mission," in *Zending op Weg Naar de Toekomst*, ed. J. Verkuyl (Kampen: Kok, 1978); "Mission in Biblical Perspective," *International Review of Mission* (1985): 531–38; "Toward a Hermeneutic for 'Biblical Studies and Mission,' " *Mission Studies* 3.2 (1986): 65–79; and "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission," in *Toward the Twenty-First Century in Christian Mission*, ed. James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 175–92.

21. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

22. See the following by Christopher J. H. Wright: "Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, and Robin Parry; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 102–43; "Truth with a Mission: Reading All Scripture Missiologically," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15.2 (2011): 4–15; and "Mission and Old Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 180–203.

23. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 8–17; idem, *The Message of Ezekiel*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 35–38; idem, *The Message of Jeremiah*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 35–39.

24. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

25. George Hunsberger maps the various proposals that are part of that ongoing conversation in "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic: Mapping a Conversation," *Missiology* 39.3 (July 2011): 309–21. Cf. also Hunsberger, "Exploring Missional Hermeneutics: Tracing a Conversation," chap. 3 in this book.

26. Harry Daniel Beeby, "A Missional Approach to Renewed Interpretation," in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 268–83; Wright, "Mission as Matrix"; Goheen, "Bosch's Missional Reading of Luke."

27. See Michael W. Goheen, "The Mission of God's People and Biblical Interpretation: Exploring N. T. Wright's Missional Hermeneutic," paper for "A Dialogue with N. T. Wright. Jesus: A Public Figure Making a Public Announcement. Mission, Worldview, and the People of God," Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar, San Francisco, 18 November 2011; available at 64.64.27.114/~mission/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Missional-Hermeneutic-A-Dialogue-with-NT-Wright.pdf.

28. Richard Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutic for Scriptural Interpretation," *Currents in World Christianity Position Paper* 106 (1999); Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

29. Joel B. Green, "Scripture in the Church: Reconstructing the Authority of Scripture for Christian Formation and Mission," in *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal*, ed. Paul Wesley Chilcote (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 38–51; Green, "Recovering Mission-Church: Reframing Ecclesiology in Luke-Acts," *We Confess* 9.5 (2003): 3–5; and Green, "Neglecting Widows and Serving the Word? Acts 6:1–7 as a Test Case for a Missional Hermeneutic," in *Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior: Essays in Honor of I. Howard Marshall*, ed. Jon Laansma, Grant Osborne, and Ray Van Neste (Carlisle: Paternoster/Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 151–60.

30. Other prominent biblical scholars attending to a missional hermeneutic are Dean Flemming, Michael Gorman, Jim Miller, Brian Russell, Ross Wagner, and Michael Barram.

31. Private email correspondence, 11 April 2012.

32. For a fuller description see Michael W. Goheen and Christopher J. H. Wright, "Theological Interpretation and a Missional Hermeneutic," in *A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation*, ed. Bartholomew and Thomas, 171–96.

33. Bauckham, "Mission as Hermeneutic," 1.

34. Many books see the central significance of these two texts for the rest of the Old Testament narrative; e.g., William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984); and Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*.

35. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 66.

36. Jo Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 34–35.

37. Cf. Wells, *God's Holy People*, 98–129.

38. John Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987), 263.

39. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 80.

40. Martin-Achard, *Light to the Nations*, 79 (emphasis original).

41. Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, trans. S. H. Hooke, Studies in Biblical Theology 24 (London: SCM, 1958), 71.

42. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 123.

43. Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, trans. Frank Clarke (Atlanta: John Knox, 1959), 272.

44. Ben Meier, "Jesus, the Twelve, and Restoration," in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James M. Scott (Boston: Brill, 2001), 404; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 275.

45. Blauw, *Missionary Nature of the Church*, 85.

46. Charles Scobie, "Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.2 (1992): 291–92.

47. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (New York: Friendship, 1953), 153–54.

48. Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 43.

49. David Seccombe, "The New People of God," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 371.

50. Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 52.

51. Brian Rosner, "The Progress of the Word," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 231.

52. Cf. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 82–86.

53. Cf. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 401–35.

54. N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 51.

55. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 27–29.

56. Darrell Guder, "From Mission and Theology to Missional Theology," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 24.1 (2003): 48.

CHAPTER 2

Mission as Hermeneutic for Scriptural Interpretation

Richard Bauckham

The title of this chapter could be read in at least two ways, which are certainly not mutually exclusive. One could take it to mean that the church's practice of mission is a form of scriptural interpretation. The Bible is the sort of text that calls for interpretation not only by means of more text but also by the practice of what it preaches. Could anyone really understand what it means to love enemies without doing it, or at least seeing it done? That the church's mission in and to the world is the *practice* of the biblical text in which the text is constantly being interpreted is important, and I shall return to it at the end of the chapter.[1] But it depends, I think, on the other possible meaning of my title. In this case the title refers to a missionary hermeneutic of Scripture: in other words, a way of reading the Bible for which mission is the hermeneutical key, much as, for example, liberation is the hermeneutical key for the way of reading the Bible that liberation theology advocates. A missionary hermeneutic of this kind would not be simply a study of the theme of mission in the biblical writings, but a way of reading the whole of Scripture with mission as its central interest and goal.[2] Of course, such a missionary hermeneutic could and should be only one way of reading Scripture among others, since mission itself is not the comprehensive subject of the whole Bible. But a missionary hermeneutic would be a way of reading Scripture that sought to understand what the church's mission really is in the world as Scripture depicts that mission, and thereby to inspire and inform the church's missionary praxis. Such a hermeneutic, one that reads the Bible with a view to mission, should properly be developed in reciprocal relationship with the practice of mission as itself a practice of interpreting Scripture. In the preliminary sketch I am offering now of the character of a missionary hermeneutic, it will be possible to indicate only one major aspect of that relationship with praxis, at the end of the chapter.

A Missionary Hermeneutic and Biblical Studies

To situate such a missionary hermeneutic within the academic discipline (or disciplines) of biblical studies as practiced in the Western world today, it is important to stress that its hermeneutical context would not be the academic guild of biblical scholars itself, whose largely self-generated agenda increasingly excludes the church from its context and implied audience. This agenda often reflects the interests and concerns of nonbelieving scholars in the context of the academy, usually adopting the newest items on the agenda of other academic disciplines, and it addresses Christians only insofar as they can be trained or persuaded to limit their interests in the Bible to those that are also of secular interest. The context in the academy has much to offer the believing scholar and a Christian audience, but a missionary hermeneutic must also transcend it. It must address the church in its mission to the world. More specifically, I suggest, its dialogue partners—not simply its audience—should be those who seek to live Christianity as a countercultural movement in our particular post-Christian society. It must share the recognition, now relatively widespread among Western Christians, that the church in the West is now in a missionary situation, in the sense in which Christians in the West once regarded the situation of churches in many other parts of the world as missionary. While it was a mistake to suppose that the church in any situation ever lacks a missionary vocation in that situation, the recent recognition of our current situation as missionary is recognition of a real change, from a society at least aspiring to the description "Christian," to a culture largely indifferent or even positively hostile to the Christian faith. A missionary hermeneutic in the West today must address such a situation without by any means neglecting the global context in which the various churches find themselves situated both similarly and differently.

Two current trends in biblical hermeneutics are especially favorable to a missionary hermeneutic. These are canonical interpretation (the reading of Scripture as a canonical whole) and narrative interpretation (which recognizes the way narrative creates its own world in front of the text and so interprets our world for us, how narrative opens up new possibilities of living that change us and our