

ETHIOPIAN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

The Acts of the Apostles as the Mission of God

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Handout and slides available at:

<http://stevewalton.info>

Five 'strategic initiatives'

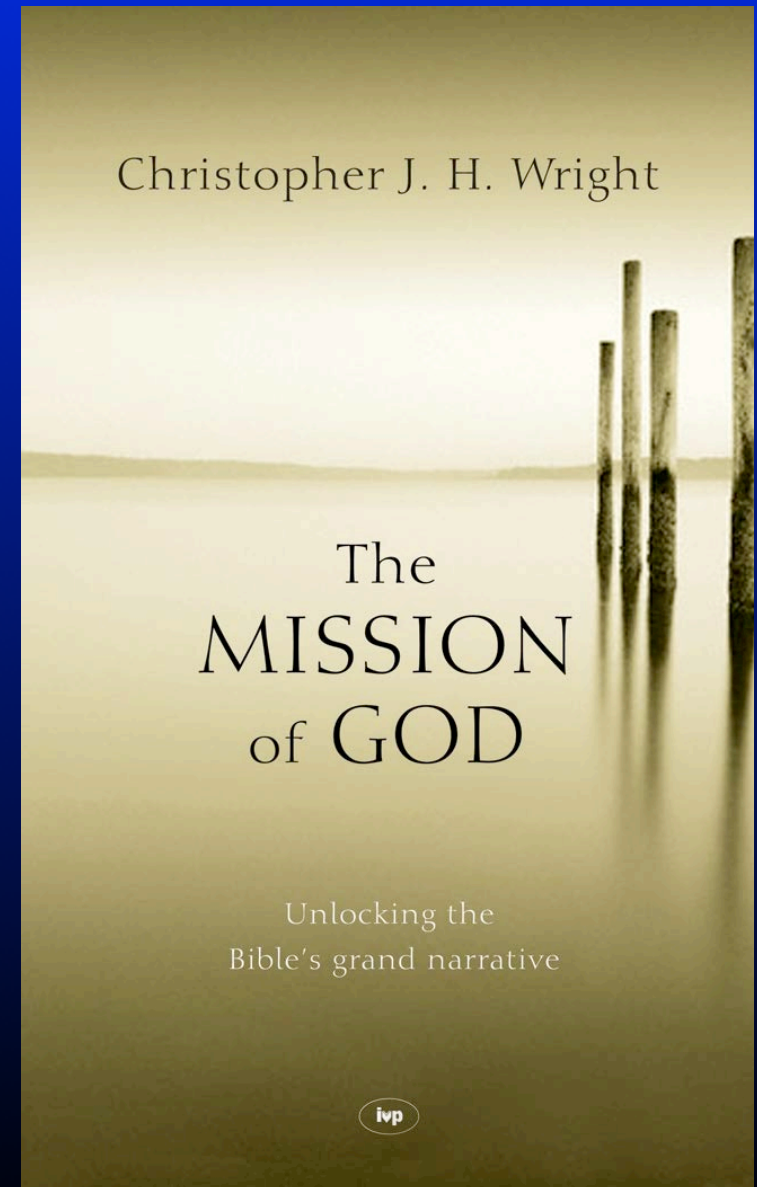
- We will get behind a new wave of young and emerging leaders to move us into the future.
- We will renew, innovate, and multiply expressions of church locally and across [our country].
- We will foster a creative leadership culture that inspires faith-based risks.
- We will cultivate mutual, compassionate relationships with those most in need locally and globally.
- We will embrace the communication revolution use new ways to connect, communicate, and relate.

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Missio Dei

- Willingen 1952
- Chris(topher) Wright



Missio Dei

- A sketch of *missio Dei*
- Acts and mission
 - God's involvement in mission
- Acts and *missio Dei*
- Three illustrative implications

Missio Dei

- Two key factors in its origins
 - intertwining of colonialism and mission
 - Karl Barth's theocentric theology
- 1938 Tambaram meeting of International Missionary Council (IMC)
- 1952 Willingen meeting of IMC

Missio Dei

...mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God...Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission...there is church because there is mission, not vice versa.

David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390

Division

- God's mission located in the world, not the church
- Johannes Hoekendijk, Harvey Cox
 - radically restructure church to serve the 'secular' sphere
 - urban renewal, civil rights, community work, etc.
 - WCC Programme to Combat Racism

Three constitutive elements (John Flett)

- the theme of sending
 - ambassadors for Christ 2 Cor 5:20
- orientation to the kingdom of God
 - God's concern for the whole of creation
- the church in its very nature is missionary
 - 'The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit' (*Ad Gentes*, Vatican II)

Reading Acts on mission

- Acts as a book about God
 - people partnering with God
- Luke's framing of Acts
- Pentecost
- the inclusion of gentiles
- other evidence
- the role of people

Framing the narrative

- Acts I
 - ‘what Jesus **began** to do and teach’ v 1
 - kingdom of God v 3
 - the Spirit vv 5, 8

Framing the narrative

- ‘...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ 1:8

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- ‘...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ 1:8
 - echo of Isaiah 43:10-12
 - ¹⁰ ‘**You are my witnesses**, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. ¹¹ I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour. ¹² I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and **you are my witnesses**, says the LORD.’

Framing the narrative

- ‘...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and **to the end of the earth**’ 1:8
 - echo of Isaiah 43:10-12
 - echo of Isaiah 49:6
 - ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation my reach **to the end of the earth.**’

Framing the narrative

- Acts 28
 - Paul teaches about Jesus v 31
 - Paul reads Isaiah v 25; vv 26-27 = Isa 6:9
 - the salvation of God for gentiles v 28
 - boldness (from the Spirit) v 31
 - durative verbs vv 30-31
 - ‘without hindrance’ ἀκωλύτως v 31

Pentecost Acts 2

- the Spirit is missional vv 4-11
- Jesus is the key vv 22, 24, 32-33, 36
- the purpose of God v 23
- the Spirit is now available to all v 38

The incorporation of gentiles

- the man with a disability at the Beautiful Gate 3:1-10
 - excluded from the temple
2 Sam 5:8 LXX; Deut 23:2
 - dependent on others
- the lame man leaps up...
3:8a cf. Isa 35:6; Luke 7:22
- ...and enters the temple praising God
3:8b at the time for prayer 3:1

The incorporation of gentiles

- Peter and John before the Sanhedrin
4:5-22
 - testimony about Jesus 4:8-12
- the believers pray
 - ‘Sovereign Lord’ Δέσποτα 4:24, 28
 - God needs to act 4:29-30
- deliverance from prison
5:17-21a

The incorporation of gentiles

- Again before the Sanhedrin Acts 5
 - Peter focuses on God 5:29, 30, 32
 - contrast the Sanhedrin 4:15-18
 - Gamaliel focuses on God 5:34-39

The incorporation of gentiles

- Stephen among the hellenists
 - signs and wonders 6:8
 - divine persuasiveness 6:10
 - empowered for martyrdom 7:55a
 - vision of Jesus 7:55b-56
 - prayer to Jesus 7:59

The incorporation of gentiles

- Persecution leads to expansion 8:1b, 4
 - Philip in Samaria 8:4-24
 - Philip and the Ethiopian 8:25-40
 - the church in Syrian Antioch 11:29-36

The incorporation of gentiles

- Persecution leads to expansion 8:1b, 4
 - Philip in Samaria 8:4-24
 - Jews and Samaritans
 - signs 8:6-7, 13b
 - Simon the (ex-)magician 8:11, 13
 - the Spirit comes 8:14-17, 18-19

The incorporation of gentiles

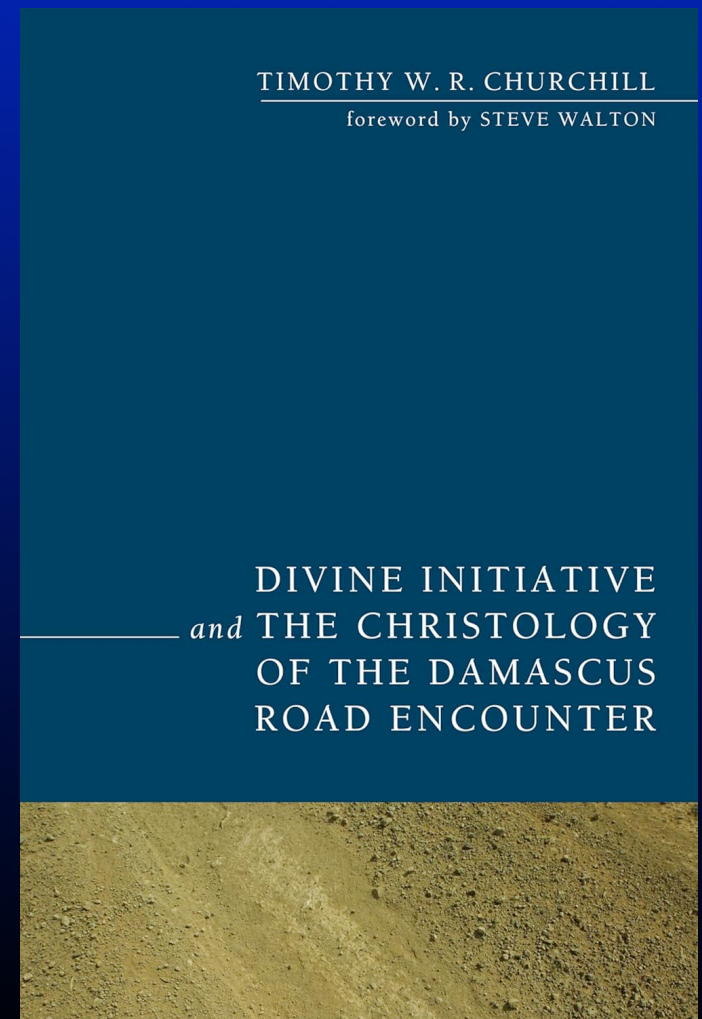
- Persecution leads to expansion 8:1b, 4
 - Philip and the Ethiopian 8:26-40
 - ambiguous status 8:27
 - ‘the eunuch’ 8:34, 36, 38, 39
 - excluded from worship 8:27; Deut 23:1
 - God’s initiative 8:26, 29, 30, 32-33, 34-39

The incorporation of gentiles

- Persecution leads to expansion 8:1b, 4
 - the church in Syrian Antioch 11:29-36
 - Diaspora believers 11:20
 - spoke to 'hellenists' 11:20
 - God is with them 11:21, 23
 - gentiles not circumcised or required to keep Torah 15:1; Gal 2:11-14

The incorporation of gentiles

- Saul's Damascus Road experience
 - three times in Acts
9:1-20; 22:1-21; 26:2-23
 - Tim Churchill's analysis of epiphanies
 - divine initiative
 - human initiative
 - Jesus more than human
9:20, 5, 4



The incorporation of gentiles

- Cornelius 10:1–11:18
 - divine appointment
 - Cornelius 10:1-8, 29-33
 - Peter 10:9-16
 - Peter and the messengers 10:17-23
 - God the Spirit 10:19-20
 - Peter and Cornelius 10:24-26
 - conclusions drawn
 - gentiles not profane 10:28
 - all people acceptable to God in Jesus 10:34-35

The incorporation of gentiles

- Cornelius 10:1–11:18
 - Jesus as ‘Lord of all’ 10:36
 - Augustus had subjected ‘the whole world’
 - Ovid: ‘The land of other nations has a fixed boundary: the circuit of Rome is the circuit of the world’
 - God the Spirit intervenes 10:44
 - ‘even on the gentiles...’ 10:45
 - the same Spirit as Pentecost 10:47b
 - accepting gentile hospitality 10:48b

The incorporation of gentiles

- Cornelius 10:1–11:18
 - Peter responding to criticism 11:1-18
 - tells the story of what God has done
 - the gift of the Spirit—God’s action—is decisive 11:17
 - ‘...even to the gentiles...’ 11:18

The incorporation of gentiles

- Barnabas and Saul sent by the Spirit 13:1-4
- Sergius Paulus impressed 'by the teaching of the Lord' 13:12 with vv 6-11
- Problems in Lystra 14:8-20
 - divine action misunderstood 14:8-11
 - Paul stoned 14:19

The incorporation of gentiles

- The Jerusalem meeting 15:6-29
 - Peter's evidence 15:7-11

Acts 15:7-11

⁷ My brothers, you know that in the early days **God made a choice** among you, that I should be the one through whom the gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. ⁸ And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; ⁹ and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. ¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.

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The incorporation of gentiles

- The Jerusalem meeting 15:6-29
 - Peter's evidence 15:7-11
 - Paul and Barnabas' testimony 15:12
 - James' conclusion 15:13-21

Acts 15:16-18/Amos 9:11-12

After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the dwelling of David,
which has fallen;
from its ruins I will rebuild it,
and I will set it up,
¹⁷ so that all other peoples may seek the Lord
—even all the gentiles
over whom my name has been called.
Thus says the Lord,
who has been making these things
¹⁸ known from long ago.

Acts 15:16-18/Amos 9:11-12

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The incorporation of gentiles

- The Jerusalem meeting 15:6-29
 - Peter's evidence 15:7-11
 - Paul and Barnabas' testimony 15:12
 - James' conclusion 15:13-21
 - God will restore Israel... 15:16
 - ...in order that gentiles may seek God 15:17
 - the Spirit's role 15:28

Other evidence

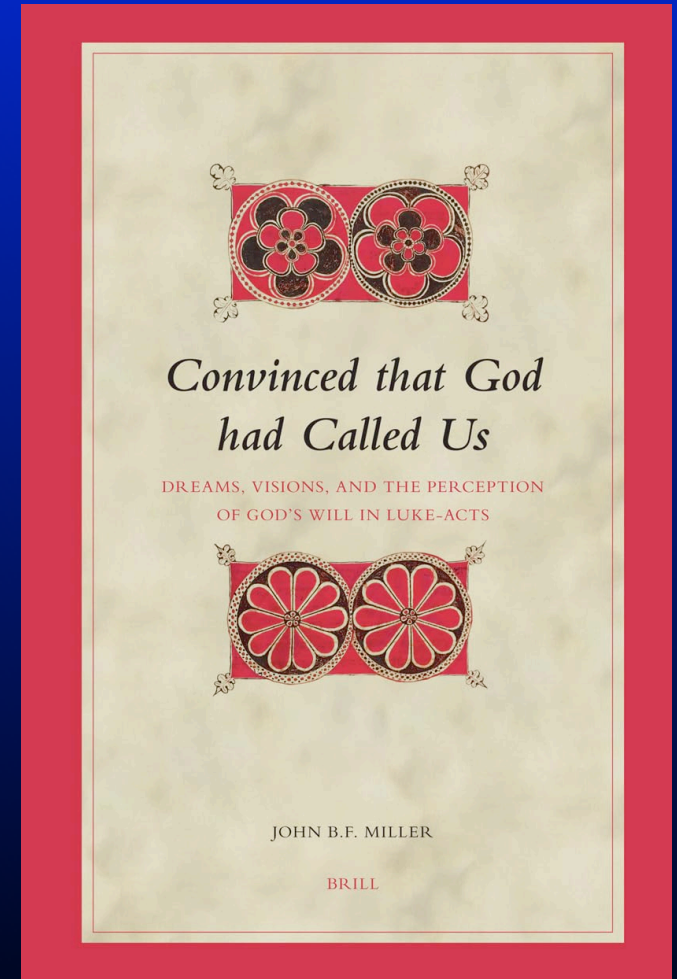
- Paul's journey to Rome
 - God's protection
18:9-10; 23:11; 27:23-24
 - God's help 26:22
- The speeches of Acts focus on God
 - kingdom of God
1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:5; 28:23, 31
 - fulfilment of Scripture e.g. 13:16-41

'Twitching puppets' (Ernst Haenchen)?

- the church slow to recognise God's work 11:2; 15:2-3, 5

'Twitching puppets' (Ernst Haenchen)?

- John B. F. Miller
 - character 'filtration'
 - Acts 16:6-10
 - v 6 'When **he** saw the vision, **we** immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to evangelise them'
 - meagre results in Macedonia 16:22-24



‘Twitching puppets’ (Ernst Haenchen)?

Although Luke certainly wants to show God’s role in the shaping of the early church and dramatic impact of early evangelism, he also shows human decisions, interpretations and lackluster missionary success. When one focuses too much on the divine side [of] Luke’s story, one misses the fullness of Luke’s message.

John Miller, *Convinced that God Had Called Us*, 107

'Twitching puppets' (Ernst Haenchen)?

- Peter
 - has to interpret the vision 10:10-16
 - initially confused 10:17
 - no **person** is unclean 10:28
 - sheet lowered **from heaven** 11:5; cf. 10:11
 - voice **from heaven** 11:9; cf. 10:15
 - report to Jerusalem meeting 15:6-10

‘Twitching puppets’ (Ernst Haenchen)?

If it is important to notice that Luke-Acts is about God and the plan of God, it is equally important to notice that the story is also about God’s people and their attempt, their struggle, to understand God’s will.

John Miller, *Convinced that God Had Called Us*, 242

Acts and *missio Dei*

- Is mission 'sending'?
 - Yes
 - Jesus sent by God 3:26
 - the Spirit sent by Jesus 2:1-4
 - Ananias sent by God to Saul 9:17
 - Barnabas and Saul sent by the Spirit 13:1-4
 - No
 - no call to mission
 - no 'sending' scene Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8

Acts and *missio Dei*

- Is mission sending?
- kingdom orientation
 - kingdom at key places, esp. 1:3; 28:31
 - focus on God and what God does
- church as missionary
 - ‘to the end of the earth’ 1:8
 - **but** every believer is not a missionary

Chris Wright

All human culture, language, literature, art, music, science, business, sport, technological achievement—actual and potential—all [will be] available to us. **All of it with the poison of evil and sin sucked out of it forever.** All of it glorifying God. All of it under his loving and approving smile. All of it for us to enjoy with God and indeed being enjoyed by God. And all eternity for us to explore it, understand it, appreciate it, and expand it.

The God I Don't Understand, 202 (his emphasis)

Acts and *missio Dei*

- Is mission sending?
- kingdom orientation
 - kingdom at key places, esp. 1:3; 28:31
 - focus on God and what God does
- church as missionary
 - ‘to the end of the earth’ 1:8
 - **but** every believer is not a missionary
- eschatology
 - ‘the restoration of all things’ 3:21

Three illustrative implications

- recognise the breadth of what God does

The only possible answer is, 'Yes'. If we are not clear about that, then our social service has no future. It only achieves its real purpose if it leads men *[sic]* to change their attitudes, to turn round and face the other way, to believe in the reality of God's rule and to become committed to his service, to be not mere recipients of charity but agents of change.

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd*, 66

Three illustrative implications

- recognise the breadth of what God does
- focus on seeking God and his ways

We knew that in any church there are always 101 good things one can do. But what was God wanting us to do in our church at that time? We kept up those days of prayer for the best part of a year; and during that year, most of the significant developments in the church came from those days. Through them we gained a sense of God's direction for his work.

David Watson, *You are My God*, 80.

Three illustrative implications

- recognise the breadth of what God does
- focus on seeking God and his ways
- be open to the surprises of God

Thank you!

Slides and handouts available:

<http://steve walton.info>