

## **Biblical Descriptions of Missions: Where Do the Mission Activities of Our Churches Fit Into the Biblical Models?**

**By Bob Young**

### **Introduction**

Many churches are doing mission work

More and more Christians are involved in some sense (think of the increased popularity of STM) Missions has expanded from a primary focus on evangelism and sharing the gospel to all kinds of activities—medical, childcare, building houses, etc.

All of that is commendable, but it also raises questions.

Looking at the Bible, what biblical models of missions can be identified? Where do the “missions” activities and efforts of the contemporary church fit in?

### **Bible Backgrounds**

First, sometimes workers went and remained for an extended period, Paul to Corinth, Paul to Ephesus, possibly Apollos to Corinth, Titus to Crete, Timothy in Ephesus. Exact timings are not given, but apparently all of these workers remained for at least a year. The longest specific biblical record we have is of Paul’s three years in Ephesus.

- Workers went to establish a new church.
  - When the goal was the establishment of a new church, after a time the worker departed and the church was left to continue on its own
  - Sometimes when a church had problems, there was a need for a visit or another (semi-) permanent worker (see next bullet)
- Workers went to deal with problem areas with the church
  - Such workers also lived in a certain place for an extended period of time.

Lacking an exact biblical description, we can label these “permanent mission workers.”

Second, workers made periodic, shorter visits

Biblically, some of these short visits served to establish infant churches (Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, Philippi, Thessalonica, etc.)

- Such infant churches needed further assistance before they could function without outside help.
  - Short visits were made to already existing mission points and existing churches
  - At the conclusion of the first trip, Paul and his companions returned to the churches they had established.
  - Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica.
- Some established churches had leaders who needed help or encouragement
  - Paul visited with the elders from Ephesus

Lacking an exact biblical description, we can label these “follow up mission workers.”

What other mission models can be identified in the Bible?

## **Application**

How does the modern church do mission work? How should the modern church do mission work?

We send permanent workers who remain for various lengths of time. Tenures of five or seven years are normal with the desire to plant and mature a church capable of functioning.

I am not aware of many efforts to send trouble shooters or problem solvers who would remain for an extended period of time (beyond a 2-3 week visit).

When permanent workers are withdrawn, the result is at times a less than mature church incapable of functioning without external support and periodic help.

There is a great need for visiting mission workers who serve as follow up workers, focused on specific needs of the local church.

[This is distinct from contemporary efforts that send short-term mission teams.]

## **Latin American Leadership Development**

LALD is a follow-up mission ministry. Much of the work is with infant churches or churches that have not developed sufficiently to function on their own. Almost all of the work is with churches where there is no North American missionary presence. If North American workers were previously present, they have left. The result is often a barely functional or non-functional church. By that, I mean that the church is not capable of doing the work God wishes it to do without external support and help.

At times, I visit more mature churches and meet with elders and church leaders. This is usually with the purpose of helping them train leaders in other churches. Paul wrote to Timothy that he should train those who could train others.

**The goal is to establish healthy, functioning churches, with internal (indigenous) leadership, capable of being self-sustaining, self-edifying, missionary churches that are able to send forth workers to establish other new churches.**

The goal is to help churches reach a point where they can do God's work in their location without external help. This usually involves helping the church in spiritual development of the members, developing teachers and leaders, every-member evangelism training, seminars in how to study the Bible and seminars focused in textual studies of the Bible.

Much of the work is done through area or regional seminars where church leaders from various congregations can attend and be trained.