

Reviewing Mission Methods of the New Testament

By Bob Young

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I am studying, contemplating, praying about New Testament mission work. We should never tire of studying and applying what Scripture teaches. We who have focused on the importance of following Bible examples should also be interested in the methods of New Testament missions.

After the Day of Pentecost, the gospel spread among the Jews when those present on Pentecost returned to their home countries. The message went into Judea, Samaria, Galilee (and even to Egypt). The Bible mentions churches in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, and eventually in Antioch and further northward.

When Paul began his missionary work, he founded churches in Galatia. After a brief break in which he attended a meeting in Jerusalem and helped forge an agreement for taking the gospel to the Gentiles, he continued the missionary work. Over a space of about a year, he revisited the churches of Galatia and planted churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. In Corinth he spent a year and a half, founding the church in Corinth and seeing the development of churches in Achaia. When he arrived at Ephesus to begin a three-year stay, he had founded churches in at least ten cities and the gospel had spread into surrounding areas, all in approximately five years. His three years in Ephesus was a short stay in comparison to modern practices in church planting. Establishing multiple churches rapidly with the expectation that they would grow and prosper with periodic visits from the missionary team and with communication is not the most common model today!

Some would say that Paul's model is not possible today. That claim is true unless we recommit to using Paul's methods. The key to Paul's work was in multiplying disciples and quickly establishing leaders who would guide the infant churches. Paul had confidence in the new disciples, Paul had confidence in the Word of God, Paul had confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit. These three truths could revolutionize modern-day missions.

Paul did not develop a years-long process of spiritual maturation for leadership. He did not believe the new Christians could only share their faith with unbelievers after an intense study of the Word so they would be able to answer any possible questions. Paul did not have doubts about the presence of God in his ministry and in the new churches.

When I interact with Venezuelan elders who are planting at least one new church each year,
When I sit in the office of a Peruvian preacher who has a map on his wall marking all of the proposed church plants in the department capitals of his country and I hear reports of the seven plants now underway,
When I talk to an evangelist in Bogotá who is leading an effort to establish churches in the department capitals of Colombia,
When I receive reports of church planting in Chile that is being done by the national churches—
I see evidence that our brothers and sisters in other nations have a better understanding than we do of God's plan for missionary expansion of the kingdom. They are already doing it with mission efforts that produce new Christians, church planting, periodic visits, leadership training, and continual communication. And, they are doing it with minimal funding.

Brothers and sisters, look at what we are doing, how we are doing it, and the rate at which the kingdom is expanding. How long will it take us to reach the world for Jesus? I do not have all of the answers. But if your heart is touched by the plight of millions and billions who are lost, would you join me in prayer for wisdom as we seek effective ways of sounding forth the gospel—unto the ends of the earth!