

# Biblical Missions in the Book of Acts

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## BBTS 2013 Spring Lecture Series

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### Introduction

Who has the responsibility and privilege to carry out the greatest task in the world? This greatest task is the spiritual task of evangelizing the world and establishing New Testament (NT) assemblies, or biblically and popularly known as the Great Commission. Some say individual Christians must carry out this Great Commission. Others say it must be carried out corporately, through some Christian denomination, convention, or mission board. In all of the discussion about and practice of the Great Commission, it seems that the NT Scriptures have been ignored, misused, or abused by many devotees, albeit sincere, of different schools of interpretation. This is an effort to establish initially what the Scriptures state about biblical missions, and then to enunciate biblical guidelines for the implementation of the NT Scriptures in the Lord's candlesticks.

### I. What is Biblical Missions?

#### A. Old Testament Precedent

1. *"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"* (Gen. 12:2-3).

a. The LORD blessed the patriarch of the Jewish people through whom the Messiah would come.

b. Those who favorably identify with the Jewish nation and her Messiah will be blessed.

c. The Lord's blessing will extend to all families (i.e., nations) in salvation.

2. *"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious"* (Isa. 11:10).

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a. The greater son of Jesse, the Lord Jesus Christ will be lifted up and will attract the Gentiles.

b. His spiritual rest will satisfy even Gentiles.

3. *“And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth”* (Isa. 49:6).

a. The LORD’s servant, Christ, will restore the divided nation of Israel.

b. The servant of the LORD will also bring salvation to the Gentiles.

## **B. New Testament Precept**

1. *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen”* (Matthew 28:19-20).

a. The *aorist* imperative (“Teach”) is the main verb with three participles (go[ing], baptizing, and teaching).

b. Since baptism is involved this is the commission to start churches (Baptist) and teach the membership to preserve Christ’s words until the end.

c. The only authorized entity to evangelize, baptize or catechize is the baptizing agency in this dispensation, the NT assembly.<sup>1</sup>

2. *“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mk. 16:15-16).

a. The Lord Jesus Christ made it clear that baptism does not save but only belief, since only unbelief damns.

b. He also made it clear that He expects all saved in this dispensation to be baptized.

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<sup>1</sup>The NT teaches the **exclusivity** of the visible church, not merely its **primacy**!

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3. *“And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* (Lk. 24:46-47).

a. The Lord God requires that the Gospel, that is, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, be preached throughout the world.

b. He also expects that His churches preach the doctrines repentance and forgiveness of sins.

4. *“Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained”* (John 20:23).

a. He gave spiritual authority to His new institution, the assembly.

b. He works spiritually with His assemblies as they carry out His “body” work on earth.

5. *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”* (Acts 1:8)

a. The Lord’s assemblies are promised resurrection power to carry out the Great Commission.

b. Their corporate witness of His redemption program is to start at home and go worldwide.

## C. Apostolic Church Practice

1. The Jerusalem Church (Acts 2)

a. On Pentecost Sunday,<sup>2</sup> the church leader Peter preached the gospel from the OT and won 3000 to the Lord.

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<sup>2</sup>On this special fiftieth day in the Jewish calendar, the Lord publicly authenticated His new institution for worship (the assembly of baptized believers) and His new day of worship (Sunday) for the Jews. No longer would He countenance Jewish worship in the Temple on the seventh day (Sabbath).

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b. The church baptized the 3000, adding them to the 120 meeting in the upper room.

c. The church services consisted of apostolic teaching (ultimately the inscripturated four Gospels), fellowship, the breaking of bread,<sup>3</sup> and prayers.

d. Ultimately and reluctantly (because of persecution), the church moved beyond her city to the uttermost parts.

## 2. The Damascus Church (Acts 9)

a. The church baptized repentant sinners like Saul of Tarsus.

b. The church through Ananias revealed the will of God for Saul, and allowed him to preach Christ.

c. The church disciplined and defended Saul in his early conversion days.

## 3. The Antioch Church (Acts 11)

a. The church had some Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene which knew Greek and preached in Greek to Greek-speaking Gentiles.

b. Many Gentiles were saved, prompting the Jerusalem church to send Barnabas to Antioch, who in turn sought Saul in Tarsus.

c. Barnabas and Saul joined the Antioch assembly and taught for one year.

d. The church disciples became known as “*Christians*” emphasizing the Pauline teaching of one new man in Christ (Eph. 2:15-16).

e. The church had a concern for the impoverished Christians in Judaea and sent material support with Barnabas and Saul.

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<sup>3</sup>The expression τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου is a technical term and the verb κλάω quite often refers to this ordinance (cf. Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; Acts 2:46; 20:7, 11; I Cor. 10:16; and 11:24).

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## II. The Pauline Case Study: Acts 13-21

### A. His First Journey (Acts 13-14)

1. The Holy Spirit called missionaries through and sent them out by the assembly at Antioch (Acts 13:1-4).
2. The missionary team preached in key cities initially (Acts 13:5).
3. They went to synagogues where Jews would be gathered to study the Tanak (Acts 13:5).
4. They preached to whomever they came into contact (Acts 13:6 ff.).
5. They ignored opposition and continued preaching the Gospel (Acts 13:42 ff.).
6. When persecution became physical they fled (Acts 13:46 ff.).
7. They organized their converts into Baptist assemblies (Acts 14:23).
8. They returned to their new church plants and ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23 ff.).
9. They reported back to their sending church (Acts 14:26-28).

### B. His Second Journey (Acts 15-18)

1. The missionary team consisted of seasoned veterans recommended by the church at Antioch (Acts 15:36-41).
2. They went westward following the leading of the Spirit once on the field (Acts 16:6-10).
3. They organized the church at Philippi and left Luke to minister in it (Acts 16:11-40).
4. They continued on to Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, evangelizing and attempting to plant churches in every city (Acts 17:1 ff.).
5. They started the Corinthian church and the Ephesian church (Acts 18:1-23).

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6. Aquila and Priscilla were involved in the house church at Ephesus and taught Apollos (Acts 18:24-28).<sup>4</sup>

7. Paul reported back to the Antioch church (Acts 18:21-23).

## **C. His Third Journey (Act 18-21)**

1. Paul retraced his second journey path to strengthen the churches (Acts 18:23).

2. He returned to Ephesus and moved the assembly meeting place to a room in Tyrannus' school (Acts 19:1-10).

3. From this new base of truth, he evangelized much of Asia Minor (Acts 19:10-22).

4. Paul avoided the riot at Ephesus and let it die out (Acts 19:23-41).

5. Paul continued his travels to the churches, eventually heading back to Jerusalem (Acts 20-21).

6. Paul prayed for his journey to Rome, and the Lord answered by having him taken by the Roman army (Rom. 1:10-11; Acts 21-28)

## **III. Who has the responsibility to carry out Biblical Missions?**

A. The Great Commission is the commission to organize, establish, and plant NT Baptist churches.

B. The exclusive privilege to evangelize, baptize, and catechize is with the baptizing agency.

C. This biblical truth eliminates para-church organizations who want to help churches evangelize sinners or catechize saints.

D. This biblical truth is augmented and enhanced with the Apostles' implementation of the Great Commission in Acts by never using a parachurch organization. Christianity in Acts is exclusively local church in nature and practice.

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<sup>4</sup>Most NT churches began in homes (Acts 2:2; Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; I Tim. 3:5, 15; Phile. 1:2). NT Christianity was not focused on separate church buildings and real estate commitment, as is American Christianity.

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E. Mission Boards or Agencies which usurp the sending assembly's autonomy in doctrine, practice, counsel, and/or direction, violate the biblical precept and pattern.

## **IV. The Analysis of Aberrations within Baptist Missions**

A. Baptist churches must recognize that the theology behind the "mission board" is Protestant in origin and nature (i.e., The London Missionary Society, 1795).

B. It is based on the doctrinal perspective of the universal church, that all of the Christian "entities" in the universal church, including para-church mission boards, may "help" churches.

C. The Southern Baptist Convention (1845) developed the "convention mission board" ideal to maintain missionaries within the SBC.

D. Baptist Fundamentalism has historically espoused a Protestant/SBC hybrid mission philosophy that is unbiblical.

1. It perpetuates the tendency to take autonomy from local churches and missionary accountability from the same.

2. It perpetuates the tendency to create man-made hierarchy outside of the biblical parameters (i.e., Board President, Mission Field Representative, Mission Board Counselors, etc.)

3. It perpetuates the tendency to call missionaries, ordain missionaries, send missionaries, and hire and fire missionaries.

4. It perpetuates the tendency for mission boards to own properties on foreign fields and to require missionaries giving part of their support to the mission boards.

## **V. Biblical Steps in setting up Biblical Missions in Baptist churches.**

A. Determine what the Scripture declares as "missions" and implement the biblical pattern.

B. Attempt to have your church involved in missions as much as possible, including challenging young people to missions, training and ordaining missionaries, counseling them, and financing them.

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1. With regard to finances, attempt to support fewer missionaries with greater support when funds are limited.
  2. Don't support missionaries you would not have on church staff because of doctrine or practice.
- C. Avoid the temptation to defer your privilege and responsibility with missionaries to others.
- D. Attempt to work with other churches without forming external hierarchical and organizational structure.
- E. Encourage missionaries to seek prayer and financial support from churches which desire the biblical mission pattern.
- F. Read doctrinal statements of both missionaries and "mission agencies."
- G. Visit your missionaries on their field and examine the stewardship of your financial investment.

## Conclusion

"Missions" is what the NT assembly is all about. The Lord's candlesticks don't have a "Missiology department" or a "mission society," the local church **is the Mission Program**. The mission program is the Great Commission of establishing NT Baptist churches. The Lord's churches don't need man-made programs or societies to do missions. They have the Lord Jesus Christ and His words! Let us be biblical and implement the Scriptures!