

Is the command in Matthew 28, “Make Disciples of all Nations” still for Today?

Or, God wants you to expand your 10/40 Zone.

Jeff Brown (Central Baptist Theological Seminary)

Abstract: One of the primary ideas guiding missionary choices today is the concept that the missionary task given by Jesus Christ needs to be finished, through a shift in strategy. To do so, two things need to be done: 1) Evangelical missionaries, their churches, and their agencies need to reinterpret *panta ta ethne* in Matthew 28:19, namely, as people groups, not as geographic areas or political nations; 2) The same group of Christians needs to shift their energies and finances away from mission ministry to already evangelized territories of the world to the unevangelized territories of the world, essentially what is designated as the 10/40 Zone. In this geographical area, containing the poorest nations of the world, only a small percentage of the inhabitants have heard the Gospel. This paper will present the concept (now, well-known), and examine its validity: scripturally, theologically, and logically.

Since the day of Pentecost (as recorded in Acts 2), the followers of Jesus Christ have taken the words of Christ’s missionary commission as a command to make disciples in the whole world, until He returns. The missionary commission is given in four places in the New Testament: Matthew 28:18–20; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8.¹ Of these, Matthew 28:18–20 makes the clearest reference to disciple-making. Both the Matthew passage and Luke 24:49 use the term “all nations”. In Acts 1:8, Christ makes His commission to include “the ends of the earth” (ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς).

We encounter missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ² in the book of Acts, being a mixture of full-time ministers, tent-maker missionaries, and Christians who were not officially sent by churches. As one passes beyond the time of Scripture, to the time of Constantine the Great, missionary records reveal the following:

The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession or a major part of their occupation, but men and women who earned their

¹ The author does not use Mark 16:15–16 here, following the UBS text.

² This paper will not take up whether the term “missionary” is a proper biblical concept, but simply accept that it is. For a defense of the term as biblical, from the Latin, *mitto*, the author would be happy to send this section of his notes for *Introduction to Personal and World Evangelism* for Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion.³

We proceed with a jump of centuries in time, and find that in the Middle Ages, the peoples of Europe were evangelized primarily by Christian monks (Catholic, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox), who also Romanized the peoples of Europe. Still later, beginning in the 1500s, as merchants, explorers, and armies travelled to the far regions and New World, Roman Catholic missionaries travelled with them, spreading the Roman Catholic faith among the Native peoples. Finally, Protestant missionaries also followed colonizers. They even went ahead of them, to places and peoples where Europeans and North Americans had never visited (e.g. David Livingstone).

In all of these missionary efforts (of which this paper only mentions a fraction), the missionaries were both official and unofficial representatives of churches. They used various methods to further the Gospel. They felt called to both countries and peoples around the globe. Indeed, as missionary teams proceeded with evangelistic and church-planting ministry, some of their members moved to a separate ministry to concentrate on a particular city or people group. In particular, since the time of William Carey, Protestant missionaries have been specially moved by passages like Matthew 28:18–20 to travel to foreign nations, learn foreign languages, evangelize, and develop national churches, as a matter of obedience to Christ.

A Shift in Protestant Mission Strategy

In 1974, Billy Graham called together the first Lausanne Conference for World Evangelization. At that gathering, “They were challenged by men like Donald McGavran and Ralph Winter to adopt a church-planting focus on *people groups* rather than on geographic or national entities and to think afresh about closure, actually finishing the task committed to them

³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, I (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), 116.

by Christ . . .”⁴ The Greek word *ethne* in Jesus’ missionary challenge, says Winter, “points to the ethnicities, the languages and extended families which constitute the peoples of the earth.”⁵ In addition, Winter urged Evangelicals to shift their missionary energies to what he denoted as the majority of the world that is not being evangelized. The people of this part of the world need cross-cultural evangelism (mission work). The western world, he argued, needs renewal, led by people already on site, but not missionary work.⁶

Since 1974, the Frontier Mission Fellowship, founded by Winter, along with other mission organizations, has followed the conclusions of ethnologists to help it define who the unreached people groups are. Winter accepted these defined groups as Major Cultural Blocks, Ethnolinguistic Peoples, Sociopeoples, and Unimax Peoples (networks of families).⁷

In 1989, at the second Lausanne Conference in Manila, Luis Bush described the neediest area of the world as the 10/40 Zone:

Fifteen years ago, there were an estimated seventeen thousand unreached people groups. . . Today, that number has been reduced to some twelve thousand. Most of these people groups live in a belt that extends from West Africa across Asia, between ten degrees north of the equator to forty degrees north of the equator. This includes the great Muslim block, the Hindu block, the Buddhist block. And today only seven of every one hundred missionaries are working among these peoples.⁸

This zone of people also contains about 80% of the people that are living in poverty. Estimates range to 85% of the people in this Zone as being “unreached.” To clarify:

An unreached people group is "a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this people group." In the middle 1990’s mission strategists sought to quantify this definition. They settled on the criteria for unreached as less than 2% true Christ-followers and less than 5% Professing Christian (this includes all forms of Christianity i.e. anyone that would call themselves a "Christian.") While these percentage figures are somewhat

⁴ Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The changing Face of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 9–10.

⁵ Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task,” (2008) [efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://files.frontierventures.org/pdf/FinishingTheTask.pdf](http://files.frontierventures.org/pdf/FinishingTheTask.pdf), 533.

⁶ Ralph Winter, “The Highest Priority: Cross-cultural Evangelism,” <https://lausanne.org/content/the-highest-priority-cross-cultural-evangelism>, July 20, 1974

⁷ Winter and Koch, “Finishing the Task”, 534.

⁸ Luis Bush, “The Challenge Before Us,” <https://lausanne.org/content/the-challenge-before-us>

arbitrary, "we should not underestimate the significance of the small group of people who have a vision of a just and gentle world. The quality of a whole culture may be changed when two percent of its people have a new vision."⁹

The Joshua Project estimates that there are 4,480 unreached people groups in the 10/40 Zone.¹⁰

To accomplish the task of reaching the 10/40 Zone with the Gospel, Christians need to "build a bridge to unite the rapidly growing charismatic movement with the more traditional forms of Christianity."¹¹ The fulfillment of the task will become the fourth wave of Pentecostal/charismatic renewal in this century.¹² Since the introduction of the 10/40 Zone, some have expanded its territory to 10 degrees south of the equator, to include equally unevangelized and suffering populations.¹³

As a part of the new missionary strategy among Evangelicals, the biblical motivation has shifted to passages like Matthew 24:14 and Revelation 5:9. For instance, Luis Bush says that in Matthew 24:14, Jesus defined the (missionary) task for his disciples.¹⁴ Ralph Winter and Bruce Koch argue "Matthew 24:14 makes it clear that we must make it our first priority to see that every people has a living testimony of the gospel of the kingdom."¹⁵ Other statements, like the following, are typical of the appeal to go to the 10/40 window. Mark Silvers states, "If the church is going to not simply participate in the Great Commission but seek to finish the task, then we must commit to sending messengers to the 10/40 Window."¹⁶ J.J. Weller argues that we must send

⁹ https://m.joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/has_everyone_heard. The quote is from Robert Bellah, Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, originally quoted in Psychology Today, also quoted in Christianity Today, October, 2011, 42.

¹⁰ Joshuaproject.net

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ This inclusion may be seen on websites of various missionary organizations. Some only include a certain number of areas below the 10-degree north latitude, not all of it to the 10-degree south latitude.

¹⁴ www.asiamissions.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/AMA79_LuisBush.pdf

¹⁵ Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, "Finishing the Task," 534.

¹⁶ <https://crossworld.org/blog/details/what-is-the-10-40-window-and-how-can-we-reach-it>

missionaries to the 10/40 Window before we send them anywhere else. Since there are still so many unevangelized, “we must begin to question our obedience.”¹⁷

In response to the appeal of Ralph Winter and others, many missionary organizations have been founded, which guide missionaries exclusively to areas of the 10/40 Zone. Other missionary organizations have changed their target areas for missionary work significantly. The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, for instance, reports that 91% of their missionary teams work among the unreached peoples of the world.¹⁸

The change in mission strategy to the “unreached” of the 10/40 Zone is now more than a half-century old. It is well developed and multi-faceted. Therefore, the evaluation in this paper will focus on three aspects: 1) the meaning of ἔθνος in the New Testament, 2) the validity of Matthew 24:14 as the primary motivating Scripture for global Christian missions. 3) the validity of prioritizing according to “reached” and “unreached” (including its application to the 10/40 Zone),

An Evaluation of the Meaning of ἔθνος

1. The meaning of ἔθνος in the New Testament

Since the contention of Ralph Winter and those after him has been that ἔθνη in Matthew 28:19 means “people groups” and not “nations”, one should look first to lexical data for evaluation. The entry of ἔθνος in BDAG¹⁹ defines the word as 1) “a body of persons united by kinship, culture, and common traditions, nation, people”: with examples of “the Samaritan people” (Acts 8:9) and “one nation against another” (Matthew 24:7); 2) “people groups

¹⁷ J.J. Weller, <https://messagemissions.com/4-reasons-to-evangelize-the-10-40-window-before-anywhere-else/>

¹⁸ Paul Chitwood, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/first-person-southern-baptists-sending-very-best-to-the-nations/> 2021.

¹⁹ Frederick Danker, Kurt Aland, Barbara Aland, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Ed., based on Walter Bauer's *Griechisches-Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 276–277. Hereafter, BDAG.

foreign to a specific people group”, with examples of Matthew 10:18, Acts 14:5, Romans 3:29, etc. (“Gentiles”, as opposed to “Jews”). The Jewish people were not the only ones in Jesus’ day who used *ἐθνος* in this way. BDAG gives the meaning of “nations” in Matthew 28:19.

LSJ²⁰ lists a variety of meanings for *ἐθνος*, including 1) a number of people living together (as well as animals), 2) nation or people, 3) class of men. Other definitions are not significant for this study. Among other uses, in Jesus’ day it was frequently used to mean a Roman province. Athenagoras, one of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, is one of many writers who used it in this way (*Legatio*, 34.2). Deioces formed the nation of the Medes, over which he ruled, from five different people groups (Herodotus, 1.101). In another example, *ἐθνος* seems to overlap the meanings of “people” and “nation” in Strabo (1.2.34), as he talks of three people groups along with their geographical boundaries.

In the LXX, *ἐθνος* is used for at least 15 different Hebrew words, but primarily *גוי* and *עם*, meaning “people, tribe, nation”, or “non-Israelite”. It should be obvious, following this brief presentation of definitions, that in Jesus’ day (and before and after), the Greek word *ἐθνος* had a fluidity to it, meaning, for our purposes, people groups, nations, non-Israelites, and politically-governed areas.

2. The Theological Background for *pa,nta ta. ἔθνη* in Matthew 28:19

In this section, at the outset, one needs to remember that the expression “to all nations”

²⁰ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Rev. by Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 480. The 1996 supplement does not make any significant change in the 1968 entry.

also occurs in Luke 24:49, and as a part of the same missionary instruction, carries the same meaning. One cannot study various passages about the missionary teaching of Jesus Christ without noticing that it is closely related to Old Testament promises, e.g.

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised, on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, Therefore I will give praise to you among the Gentiles, and I will sing your Name. (Romans 15:8–9, NASB)

Other similar passages include Acts 13:44–47; 15:16–17; Romans 4:13–25; Galatians 3:14–15; etc. Therefore, one would expect that New Testament teaching on the object of missionary work would be in line with Old Testament promises. One of the more extensive presentations of this phenomenon has been done by John Piper.²¹ Piper accepts the contention of Winter that Christ commanded His followers to evangelize “people groups”, though Piper prefers the biblical word “peoples” instead: “Winter’s message was a powerful call for the church of Christ to reorient its thinking so that missions would be seen as the task of evangelizing unreached peoples, not the task of merely evangelizing more territories.”²²

Piper has done all Bible students a great service by showing repeatedly how the Old Testament promises form a background for the missionary command of Christ. Though he is very helpful in showing the usage of *ethnos*, singular and plural, in the New Testament, he does not prove that it always means “peoples”. There are passages where ἔθνος clearly has a meaning of “political nation”, e.g. “Why do the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed.” (Acts 4:25–26) The Christians on that day interpreted this passage as fulfilled (perhaps in one of many instances), by Pilate, Herod, and the people of Israel. Jesus said in Matthew 24:7 that nation (ἔθνος) shall rise against nation and kingdom (basilei,a) against

²¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 167–218.

²² *Ibid.*, 171.

kingdom. Military campaigns are done by political entities, not mere ethnic groups. Other instances of a political meaning for ἔθνος include Mark 24:2; Luke 21:10; John 12:48; 18:35; Romans 15:12; Revelation 12:5; 21:24-26. There are still more passages where the meaning may be political, but that is beside the point here (e.g., Revelation 11:18).

Darren Carlson and Elliot Clark give the following analysis of interpreting ἔθνος as “people groups” in Matthew 28:19 and other related passages:

While the authors of Scripture could conceive of nations in geographic, cultural, or linguistic categories, we believe they weren’t first and foremost thinking of *ethne* in terms of a 20th-century designation of either nation-states or people groups. . . . But to a Jew, the *ethne* were first a religious category. They were most basically the non-Jewish peoples of the world, separated from God and strangers to his promise (Eph. 2:11-12) When Jesus said his gospel was for the *ethne*, he wasn’t primarily addressing linguistic or socio-scientific demographics. The phrase was deeply biblical; it hearkened back to Old Testament categories and expectations for the Gentiles (see Isa. 66:18-19).²³

That Carlson and Clark are correct may be seen repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments (there is simply not space to follow that through here).

At this point, we can summarize that the theological background to the use of ἔθνος in Matthew 28:19 and related missional passages is determinative for its meaning, and not ethnological categories. The New Testament Writers repeatedly made reference to Old Testament promises as they explained the missionary task. The meaning of ἔθνος in these instances is “Gentiles” (i.e., non-Jews, and outside of the Covenant of Moses). But even this meaning is incomplete. Jesus gave His missionary commission on at least three instances: 1) in Jerusalem, in the upper room (Luke 24:44-49), 2) in Galilee (Matthew 28:18-20), and 3) on the Mount of Olives, before His ascension to heaven (Acts 1:8). Jesus’ missionary command at the Mount of Olives *is specifically geographic in scope*. The first part of the command is Jerusalem, namely

²³ Darren Carlson and Elliot Clark, *The 3 Words That Changed Missions Strategy – and Why We Might Be Wrong* (the gospelcoalition.org).

the people of Israel. Even more specifically, the missionary commission recorded in Luke 24:44-49 specifies that the carrying of the Gospel to the ἔθνη begins at Jerusalem. Thus, in the Great Commission in Matthew 28, Israel has to be included among those nations/peoples.

3. The Apostolic Interpretation of Jesus' Missionary Command

Perhaps the best way to understand how Matthew 28:19 should be interpreted is to look at how the early Church applied it. In the first seven chapters of Acts, the work of evangelism and church building took place in Jerusalem and its near environs (Curiously, although there were many believers in Galilee, nothing is said about the Christian development there until later).²⁴ After the martyrdom of Stephen, “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” (Acts 8:4, NIV) We next read that missionary work was done in Samaria. According to Acts chapter 9 there were already Jewish followers of Christ in Damascus. In chapters 10 and 11, the focus of the spread of the Gospel turns to the Gentiles (τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, 11:18).

As Paul (Saul) and Barnabas were called by the Holy Spirit to missionary work (Acts 13:1–3), they practiced a method of “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). This then, is how Paul and Barnabas understood the meaning of Matthew 28:19 and Acts 1:8. Afterward, Paul and Silas (and Timothy, Luke, and other missionary team members with Paul) followed this same pattern. They evangelized among Jewish people (primarily in synagogues), and afterward, when the Jewish people as a whole, rejected the Gospel, they made their focus the Gentiles. For the early missionaries, there were *two important people groups*: the Jews and the non-Jews. As people received Christ and were baptized, Christian churches were formed. The Church was the third entity, in addition to the Jews and the Gentiles. Only once does Paul describe the makeup of Churches as anything different than Jews and non-Jews. In Colossians 3:11 he adds Barbarians

²⁴ For various explanations for why Galilee was not included in the early record of Acts, see C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 80–81.

and Scythians (Scythians, perhaps because they were looked at by Greek peoples as less civilized).²⁵ Paul and Barnabas preached to Lycaonians (Acts 14:8–28). But the Lycaonians are not mentioned as a specific group in the Letter to the Galatians.

The strategy of Paul and Barnabas, as well as Paul and Silas, appears to be primarily geographical. This would follow from Acts 1:8. Their first mission area was Cyprus. Traversing that island with the Gospel, their next goal was Antioch in Pisidia (where the Roman governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, evidently had family).²⁶ The steps of their strategy afterward, were various population centers. The people groups in these areas included Phrygians, Celts, Lycaonians, Greeks, Romans, and others. People groups, however, do not appear to have been a strategy for the missionaries, except two: Jews, and Gentiles.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy aimed for specific geographical areas (Asia, Bithynia, Mysia, 16:5–8). They were ultimately called by God, to go to Macedonia (16:9–10). As they started their work for this phase, they went to Philippi. The ethnic composition of the area was Roman, Greek, Macedonian, and Thracian (and no doubt other people groups). Even the Romans from Italy were a mixture of various people groups. The first person who received the Gospel was Lydia, a proselyte from the province of Asia. Again, the focus of the missionaries appears not to have been aimed at ethnic groups. And again, there were only two people groups that were important for Gospel purposes: Jews and non-Jews. This pattern of a primarily geographic strategy, to the Jew first, and then the Greek, was Paul's strategy throughout his ministry.²⁷

²⁵ James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 225–226; Clinton Arnold, ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary III* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 395.

²⁶ Alanna Nobbs, “Cyprus,” *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, David W.J. Gill and Conrad Gempf, eds. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1994), 282–289.

²⁷ For Christian missionaries, the change in the strategy of “to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” came, at the latest, after the Bar Kochba rebellion, when many Christian leaders began to look at Jews as completely hardened.

An Evaluation of the Urgency of the Missionary Command

As noted above, since 1974, many missiologists have made Matthew 24:14 the primary missionary command and instruction of Christ: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” To correctly evaluate this verse in Matthew, one must note that it comes in the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus tells about the coming events in the world and the time and manner of His return. It is prompted by a question of the disciples, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (24:3).

Jesus’ prophecy is an explanation of eschatological events. Verse 14 is quite different from any commission passages in the Gospels and Acts. These begin with the present. Second, the passage is not a command, but a description of future events. Part of the description includes the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to all nations. It has already been shown that ἔθνος in the commission passages does not mean only, specifically all people groups, but rather the Gentiles (as well as the Jews). Thus, Jesus is saying that it will be spread abroad in all the world to all nations. He does not, in this instance, command His disciples to begin evangelizing at an eschatological point in the future. In fact, there would be no such command until after His death and resurrection.

In much the same way, Jesus foretold that his anointing by Mary, during the passion week, would be proclaimed throughout the whole world (Matthew 26:13; Mark 14:9). The disciples were not commanded to preach about Mary’s act. The communication of this truth would come as a matter of course, particularly after it was recorded in the Gospels. Matthew 24:14 is the same kind of foretelling. Jesus is making a promise that all of the world will hear the Gospel before He

returns to earth. He does not, in Matthew 24:14 command His disciples to reach all peoples so that He can finally return.

The urgency of doing service for Christ, including the spreading of the Gospel, was a part of Jesus' teaching, from the time of the commissioning of the Twelve onward (Matthew 10). The apostles urged that the coming of Christ was near, even in their generation (Romans 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 3:10–12; 1 John 3:1–3; Jude 20–24; et. al.). As Jesus told of His going away and coming again, he spoke a parable which made it plain to His disciples that they were to be occupied with His ministry until He returned, at a time not expected (Luke 19:11–27). The work of spreading the Gospel, we can conclude, has always been urgent, always been in expectation of Jesus' return in every generation, and always until God's appointed time, known only to Him.

The Priority of Reaching the 10/40 Zone

There are not only exegetical problems for the shift in Protestant missionary strategy since 1974, there are also practical ones. Carlson and Clark argue,

With all the emphasis on people groups over the last 50 years, we have made a course correction at the expense of our mission. The focus has not been on making disciples of all nations but instead on finishing the task. And the results? Material and personnel resources have been redirected out of areas no longer deemed strategic. "Reached" nations have been abandoned, along with their seminaries. The hard and messy work of raising up competent leaders has fallen to the wayside. Missions research now centers around identifying and categorizing groups of people. Missions reporting now emphasizes evangelism, and our methods focus on speed. An approach of rapid church multiplication has advanced, dominating Western mission practice and diluting the global church.²⁸

Carlson and Clark also point out that the objective of reaching every people group is impossible, as many ethnolinguistic groups have already gone extinct, many before the spread of the Gospel.

²⁸ Carlson and Clark, *The 3 Words that Changed Missions Strategy*".

“In other words, under the current prevailing definition of *panta ta ethne*, fulfilling Matthew 24:14 is literally impossible.”²⁹

Archbishop Joseph D’Souza (India) is even more critical, saying,

When high-profile, Western-led ministries announce goals like “reaching every person on earth” by 2033 . . . it sounds bold and visionary in conference halls throughout America . . . But for our Christian brothers and sisters who are already a tiny minority in their nations, and who often face tremendous persecution, these public declarations are a recipe for trouble. Every time a slogan like this goes viral, local churches face a new wave of attacks, from negative press and harassment to police raids and even dubious anti-conversion laws.³⁰

A.J. Gibson points out that the Apostle Paul was burdened to preach where Christ had not “already been named.” But Paul also understood that not all Gospel workers shared his call. Some plant. Others water (1 Corinthians 3:5–9).³¹ “Today in the world of missions,” he says, “we tend to think of people groups in two categories: “reached” and “unreached.” The actual situation is much more complex than that. There are also the “misreached,” where the Gospel has arrived in an impure form; the “once-reached,” e.g., the Middle East, now one of the most unreached areas of the world. He also adds Europe to this, “among the most secular, atheistic places on the planet”; the “underreached,” i.e., places where Christians have the Gospel, but lack the health to grow, make disciples, and fend off false teaching.”³²

For the continent of Europe, the writer has personal experience as a church-planting missionary. In 1963 Robert Evans wrote, “More Europeans than the whole population of the United States have yet to see a copy of the Bible. Most of Europe’s 73 million children between the ages of five and fourteen have never heard the gospel.”³³ In those days, like today, Europe was regarded as Christian, and only in need of help from its own Christians or occasional visits

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Joseph D’Souza, “Why we shouldn’t set a date to finish the Great Commission,” www.Christianpost.com, December 10, 2025. D’Souza had the Joshua Project specifically in view.

³¹ A.J. Gibson, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/who-needs-missionaries-unreached/>

³² Ibid.

³³ Robert P. Evans, *Let Europe Hear* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 17.

from missionaries.³⁴ Today, if school children are taught Protestant religion, they are taught the Bible from a perspective of Bible-criticism and biological evolution. Thus, before one can present the Gospel, the false teachings stemming from school have to first be untaught. All of these people, says Gibson, need Great Commission workers. “Given the realities of the misreached, once-reached, and underreached, I believe we should move beyond “unreached” and “reached” as the only labels for the peoples of the world.”³⁵

Finally, the writer knows missionaries who have either had significant amounts of support ended by churches or been redirected to other mission fields by their denomination. This has happened, not because of little success in their ministry, but in spite of much success. The deciding factor was that they were not ministering in a zone of “unreached people.” Strangely, these missionaries were usually effective in reaching those from “unreached people groups,” living in their area. Usually, those individuals were discipled as well, and even have become church leaders. It is somewhat difficult to understand the logic or spiritual direction, or Scriptural basis for the decisions to end support of those effective missionaries.

Conclusion

There are many vital truths brought forth in the writings and meetings of the Lausanne Conference on Mission, Frontier Mission Fellowship, The Joshua Project, and others of the same view. Those involved in missions now find themselves resonating with many of their impassioned statements. Furthermore, they have done Evangelical Christians a service in laying open the great needs for the Gospel in the 10/40 Zone. Many more need to be involved as doors become open, to perform a ministry of making disciples and building strong churches. This should, however,

³⁴ Ibid. 18.

³⁵ Ibid. 18

not come at the expense of pulling missionaries or support from areas where they are having a vital impact for Christ.

The appeal to Matthew 24:14 as the primary text for the commission to evangelize the world, is wrongly placed. It is, rather, a prophetic promise by Jesus. The Church will not successfully accelerate God's planning or time for world evangelization. Only He knows when we will have (with Him) "finished the task." In addition, defining *panta ta ethne* as "all people groups" is not correct. Interpreting Matthew 28:19 with the help of a composite of commission passages, one comes to the conclusion that Jesus meant "the Gentiles" (non-Jews) and the Jews, as well. Fulfilling the missionary commission included, and will include cities, territories, people groups, language groups, families, and individuals. Jesus expects the people of His Church to spread the Gospel, make disciples, and co-operate in the building of His Church in all of the world until He returns. That would include every part of it, even where one lives, until He comes.