

Back to Jerusalem

Chinese Revival

And

The Final Mission Field

Introduction

The *Back to Jerusalem* vision is not complicated to understand. It is a simple vision of the Chinese underground House Church to complete the Great Commission and see the return of Jesus Christ.

That is it.

However, what is happening with this simple vision is changing the world of missions forever. Currently, the *Back to Jerusalem* vision of the underground church of China is responsible for more missionaries deployed to unreached areas than all of the other nations in the world combined and those numbers are only growing.

Just to be clear, by 'missionaries' I mean Chinese missionaries. Not the traditional missionary from the Christian nations of America, Canada, or western Europe that the world has seen for the last three hundred years, but a new breed of missionaries that are being sent out from churches suffering extreme persecution in Communist China.

At first glance, Chinese missionaries might seem completely different from those from the west, but they are not. They are not super Christians. They are Christians just like you and me. They have doubts, fears, failures, and sins, but after more than twenty years working and serving together with the Chinese believers in the underground house church, I have discovered something

extremely unique about their mission focus - something that we can all learn from.

I have obsessively studied the Back to Jerusalem vision to see what makes it different than any other vision that we have seen in the last hundred years. I have spent thousands of hours with hundreds of Chinese pastors to find out where the vision comes from, what the Biblical roots are, and what are the practical ways that it can be applied to missions today. I share all of that in this book. Most importantly, I have learned the secret to why the Back to Jerusalem vision is important for seeing the return of Jesus Christ as it relates to the Temple of Jerusalem.

The Chinese church has invested everything into the Back to Jerusalem vision. They are currently investing their most valuable non-renewable asset – their youth. China is giving their first fruits, and with a one-child policy – their only fruits to see the completion of the Great Commission. Their investments are showing positive returns.

What is happening is remarkable! The Chinese underground church is currently focused on the largest missionary movement in the world and they are doing it without hosting mission conferences, posting on social media, doing TV specials, or running email campaigns. Most of the top leaders in China do not even use email or carry a mobile phone!

It might seem absolutely absurd to even insinuate that it could be possible to organize the world's largest mission movement in the 21st century without running everything from a computer – but trust me – it is not only possible, it is happening.

Take one of my good friends Pastor Enoch for example (not his real name). Together with four other leaders, he runs an underground house church of more than four million believers. Pastor Enoch is completely off of the grid. He doesn't have email, a website, Facebook or Twitter account, private office, or secretary and yet he disciples hundreds of leaders every day, hosts daily illegal church services with thousands of believers all over China every week, and sends out an average of 10 new missionaries per month to the most unreached areas of the world.

Pastor Enoch lives a very low tech, labor intensive lifestyle that involves going to people's homes and fellowshiping face-to-face. Pastor Enoch does not own a car, doesn't own a home,

doesn't have a passport, and never leaves for holiday. You will not find Pastor Enoch doing live-stream seminars from his laptop during a world pandemic. He adheres to a very simple methodology that is repeated throughout the house church and is based on a very simple theology. More importantly, all of those that he has discipled learn to do it the same way.

I am not saying that Christians need to throw away their phones, social media accounts, cars, houses, or on-line discipleship programs to complete the Great Commission, but there is something we can all learn from Back to Jerusalem pastors like Enoch who has stripped down ministry and missions to the first principles of the very basic fundamentals.

The Back to Jerusalem vision is carried out by pastors like Pastor Enoch who do not busy themselves with all of the low yielding tasks found in western ministry, but focus on *people*. To understand the Back to Jerusalem vision and those that are living it, it is important to go to the roots of ministry.

At first glance, the vision of Back to Jerusalem seems uncontroversially biblical, simple to understand, and exciting, but the the experience of those that truly embrace it find themselves facing unexplainable hardship and opposition. Oddly, the hardship and opposition tends to come from other Christians. This special vision of the Chinese house church has been rejected, ridiculed, and scoffed at by western mission 'experts' around the world.

Why? Why would other Christians attack their fellow brothers and sisters in China? For the first time in this book, I tell the story of why.

In the early days, the attacks simply did not make any sense to me, but now I understand.

I remember when Paul Hattaway's book *Back to Jerusalem* came out in 2005. It was the first time that many Christians ever heard the idea of Chinese Christians having a vision called *Back to Jerusalem* to send Chinese missionaries to unreached nations.

The idea of Chinese Christians sending out missionaries seemed so absurd in 2005. Of course it seemed clear that China was a missionary receiving nation – *not a missionary sending nation*.

I remember talking with Paul about all of the disbelief and skepticism regarding his book and the idea of *Back to Jerusalem*, not from the Chinese but from the mission experts in the west. So many western mission experts said the Chinese church was not ready for such a task and that they would need many years to build up and prepare.

Suddenly, after the idea began to spread around the world, attacks started to come from everywhere. We were getting hate mail and angry phone calls. Churches were cancelling *Back to Jerusalem* fund-raising meetings. Bible school deans were warning their students to avoid *Back to Jerusalem* events. Critics said that the Chinese believers were not prepared, educated, structured or trained.

Some of the attacks were more personal – falsely attacking my team and those that I work with for lying, embezzling money, tricking Chinese believers, and hijacking the vision of the Great Commission for the Chinese church.

In 2005, when we traveled around the world sharing about the Back to Jerusalem vision, we spoke in faith, believing that God had given us the vision for end-time missions. Today however, it is no longer a vision – IT IS REALITY! In only a few years, the church in China went from having no missionaries outside of China to sending more missionaries to the 10/40 Window than the rest of the world combined!

In this book I investigate the biblical prophecies of end times, not just as a mission movement springing forth from Chinese underground house church revival, but as an eschatological event in history that is rooted in the Old Testament, reiterated by Jesus in the New Testament, proved by the directional path of Christian history, and even shadowed in the natural elements that God created.

The Back to Jerusalem vision is based on the idea that the completion of the Great Commission is inevitable and the return of Christ is unstoppable. Contrary to common belief, Back to Jerusalem is a vision that believes that persecution and resistance to the Gospel message is carefully calculated and crafted into God's end-time plans, even if He is not the author of the

persecution. By learning about Back to Jerusalem you will discover that things that have taken the Christian world by surprise and seemed disastrous to the church were not born out of haphazard riots, tyrannical upsets, or unplanned events. God anticipated the chess moves of the enemy thousands of years ago and set history on its rightful path.

The ideological, political, or economical state of the world cannot stop the promised return of Jesus Christ, delay the Armageddon, or postpone Judgement Day. World events only support the time line that Jesus foretold.

In this book, I follow the intricate dialectics of prophecy and history with the notion that prophecy proceeds from God's Word, God's words have the power to create, and with the power to create, history is formed. History is recorded prophecy; therefore, the Back to Jerusalem movement of the underground house church is not merely a spontaneous revival, but is the manifestation of God's words spoken through His prophets thousands of years ago and the culmination of historical events that act as building blocks to bring completion to prophecy.

Today's Back to Jerusalem movement was birthed in textual, verbal, and spiritual manifestos of the Jewish people and has been present since the beginning of God's redemptive plan for man, though it has been referred to by many different names.

The current Christian revival in China is the biggest in history, and the mission vision of Back to Jerusalem is the largest in history. What does that mean for the end times and the Second Coming?

I will present evidence for Back to Jerusalem as it pertains to end-time prophecy in four parts:

Part 1:

Old Testament Foundation of the Back to Jerusalem Vision

Part 2:

New Testament Foundation of the Back to Jerusalem Vision

Part 3:

Part 4:

China's Vision of Back to Jerusalem and Eschatological Prophetic Writings

Part I

Old Testament Foundation of the

Back to Jerusalem Vision

Chapter 1

Introduction to End-Time Prophecy Relating to China

An eschatological study of mission efforts like Back to Jerusalem is nothing new, but an ethnocentric evaluation of end-time prophecy in the twenty-first century is. Common or not, this is the road of inquiry the current revivals in China seem to have put us on.

Seeing millions of Chinese Christians come to Christ during China's last four decades of revival¹ has perplexed the Chinese communist regime, confounded leaders of other nations, and excited the global Christian Body. Theologians who have even an elementary understanding of eschatological writings are observing the conversion of an unheard-of numbers of new believers and are compelled to ask the obvious question, "What role, if any, will China play in the last days?"

Something is definitely taking place on a grand scale in China, but how will it play out and how do these massive revivals impact end times? Can understanding the revivals in China help us understand something more about the age we are living in and the return of Jesus Christ?

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Eleanor Albert, "Christianity in China," Council on Foreign Relations, October 11, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/background/christianity-china>.

Perhaps China can tell us more than initially thought.

For years, China's population size, economic growth, and thirst for military power have taken center stage by those who study biblical prophecy, but the view of China has mainly been a negative one, with most end-time experts seeing China as an aggressor to Israel.

Today, conditions in China definitely seem to be pointing to the end of the age and remind us of the mark of the Beast and end-time economy prophecies (Rev. 13:16–18). Their electronic ID system, social media scoring, commerce control, social-engineered peer review programs, war against the church, persecution of Christians, reeducation camps, and facial recognition technology, coupled with its multimillion man army, aggressive military campaigns, permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and financial influence over most of the world all seem to indicate China will be a prime candidate for a very menacing role in end-time prophecy.

Revelation 16 describes the final battle that marks the end of the world, and John's description of one of the armies could definitely be used to describe China today.

When the apostle John wrote about the battle he witnessed in his revelation, it would have seemed inconceivable that there would ever be an army of 200 million soldiers (Rev. 9:16), especially since the population of the entire world in the first-century AD was only 255 million people.²

John shed more light on the army of 200 million by adding a few descriptive details, saying that the 200-million man army would come from the East and from the mouth of the "dragon": "The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet" (Rev. 16:12–13 NIV).

This battle that John observed is known as the Battle of Armageddon (v. 16).

The term *Armageddon* is used in the Bible to describe a military battle over Jerusalem that

² United States Census Bureau, "Historical Estimates of World Population, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/international-programs/historical-est-worldpop.html>.

takes place in northern Israel between rebellious nations, led by the Antichrist, and Christ Himself as He returns to the earth.

Many have argued that references to the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet give us clues that China might be a member of this unholy trinity that declares war on Christ for a final showdown.

For generations, the armies of China have been feared and have been the subject of many theories regarding the end of the age. The great conqueror Napoleon once said, “China is a sleeping giant. Let her sleep, for when she wakes she will shake the world.”

After years of watching China persecute Christians and war against the Church, it is easy to connect China to the dragon with an army of the East providing a 200 million-man army to fight beside the Antichrist.³ However, in recent years, there seems to be another army in China on the rise that is different from the one described in Revelation 9 and 13. It is a Christian army in the land of the dragon, which is quickly approaching 200 million strong.⁴ It is an army of believers that is experiencing the persecution Jesus spoke of when He said, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake” (Matt. 24:9 NIV).

The rise of this new army in China is one that would not be against Christ, but for Him. It is fighting a battle “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12 KJV).

With this new surge of believers in China, we are forced to reevaluate our view of the role China will play in the last days.

Perhaps we have been looking for the wrong signs from China as it pertains to the end of time. What if Christian theologians should have been spending more time preparing for the Second Coming than anticipating the arrival of the Antichrist?

³ “Does China Have a Role in the End Times?,” Got Questions, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.gotquestions.org/China-end-times.html>.

⁴ “Remarks by Vice President Pence at the 2nd Annual Religious Freedom Ministerial,” whitehouse.gov, July 18, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-2nd-annual-religious-freedom-ministerial/>.

If we take our eyes off of the doom of the end of the age and focus on the promises of Christ, maybe we can see things a bit differently. When we look at the growing church in the East, we find many biblical signs that point us to the return of Christ.

I pause for a moment here to investigate the biblical prophesies of end times as it directly relates to the revivals in China and the mission movement that is born out of it.

If we follow the historical movements of Jesus Christ over the last two thousand years, we will find that it started in Jerusalem and had a prevailing westward direction that is cutting right through China until it finally returns to Jerusalem.

Chapter 2

China's Underground House Church

Before diving into the Old Testament, there are many elements regarding the church in China, including information I will share, that is controversial. It is controversial because so little data is openly available, but two things are generally agreed upon.

First, China has been experiencing the world's largest revival,⁵ and second, the underground house church makes up the bulk of new believers.⁶

There are few who would debate these two facts about China's Christian growth.

However, there is a lot of confusion about the underground house church in China, so it would be good to define what the underground church is and how it is related to the house church.

The underground house church in China, sometimes referred to simply as the House Church of China (中国家庭教会), is the name given to a body of Christian believers that have chosen not to associate with the official church, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) church or, as it is sometimes called, the Three-Self Church. "Three-Self Church" represents the philosophy of the

⁵ Eleanor Albert, "Christianity in China," Council on Foreign Relations, October 11, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/background/christianity-china>.

⁶ Bob Davey, "China's Revival," *Evangelical Times*, August 2011, <https://www.evangelical-times.org/23455/chinas-revival/>.

Chinese Communist Party of “self-administration, self-support and self-propagation.”⁷

The Communist Party did not invent this idea of the “Three-Self Church.” It is loosely based on early Chinese missionaries like pioneer missionary Hudson Taylor.⁸

This ideology of “three-self” was intended by the Communist government to remove foreign connection from Chinese Protestant Christians. The effects of this theory can even be witnessed today in the relationship between the official church of China and foreign missionaries, almost seventy years later after the idea was conceived.⁹

The history of the TSPM causes pain for many older Christians in China today because during the formation of the TSPM, well-known Chinese pastors were asked—and then coerced into—joining the movement. Those who refused were usually beaten, killed, or imprisoned. Many died in Chinese prison labor camps for refusing to join the TSPM.

The government’s extreme crackdown on all who refused to register their churches with the Three-Self continues to this day. Although there are regions of China where Three-Self churches and house churches work together, in most areas there is a clear divide. That extreme divide is for two primary reasons.

First, an atheist is head of the official church in China. The TSPM and the China Christian Counsel are both under the authority of the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (中共中央统一战线工作部). The leadership is a member of the Communist Party. To be a member of the Communist Party you must be a sworn atheist, so the leadership of the largest official protestant church in China is an atheist.

This leadership dictates who is baptized, who receives theological training, and how many Bibles are printed every year. The leadership of the underground house church in China refuses to trust their spiritual leadership to the hands of a group of men who have taken a sworn oath to not

⁷ “Introduction of Lianghui,” China Christian Counsel National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, accessed January 8, 2020, <http://en.ccctspm.org/departement>.

⁸ Mike Barnett and Robin Martin, eds., *Discovering the Mission of God: Best Missional Practices for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.), 291.

⁹ Nectar Gan, “Official Head of China’s Protestant Churches Says Religions Must Be Purged of ‘Western Influence,’” *South China Morning Post*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3001240/official-head-chinas-protestant-churches-says-religions-must-be>.

believe in God.

Second, the official church of China has rules that oppose the essential teachings of the Bible.

According to *China News and Church Report*, there are seven very strict rules to be followed in Three-Self churches:

1. Christian believers must fervently love the People's Republic of China, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government, uphold the unification of the motherland and harmony among ethnic groups, and work steadfastly on the road of socialism.
2. Christian believers must strictly abide by all the laws, regulations, and policies of the Communist Party and the State and strive to be patriotic and law-abiding citizens.
3. Christian believers must actively work to increase the material wealth and cultivate the spiritual morals of the socialist civilization. They must comply with the government's labor codes and strive to contribute to the development of the "Four Modernizations" established by the Communist Party. When scheduled religious activities are in conflict with production and work schedules, the economic activities must take priority.
4. A permit must be obtained from the county State Administration for Religious Affairs in order to establish religious meeting points. No unauthorized meeting points are allowed.
5. Christian believers must actively cooperate with the government to thoroughly carry out the party's religious policies to the letter. They shall not persuade or force others to believe in Christianity. They shall not brainwash teenagers under eighteen with religious beliefs. They shall not bring children under eighteen to religious activities.
6. One should see a doctor for medication when sick. Christian believers must not resort to prayer alone for healing so as not to endanger people's health and lives.
7. Christian believers shall not preach their religion outside the church building and specific

places that have been designated for religious activities. They shall not preach itinerantly. They shall not receive self-proclaimed evangelists into their homes, churches, or meeting points.¹⁰

In addition to these seven rules are codes that are enforced but not necessarily written in legislation, which is a common practice in China. These codes prevent evangelism, children's ministry, preaching by visiting pastors, unauthorized baptism, unauthorized independent Bible training, multinational cooperation, printing teaching materials, handing out Bibles, and teaching about the virgin birth, the Resurrection, and the Second Coming.

There are Christians in China who feel strongly that they cannot follow the teachings of the government and the teachings of the Bible at the same time, so they are forced to practice their religion illegally. This group of believers that practice their religion illegally are called the *underground house church in China* or simply the *house church*.

It is from this illegal group that most of the information I will provide originates from.

DRAFT

¹⁰ "Report from China," *China News and Church Report*, September 15, 1997.

Chapter 3

Revival in China

Regarding my research as it pertains to China, it should be acknowledged that everything said or written regarding the church in China can be challenged by those claiming to be experts. This challenge needs to be anticipated.

I do not claim to be an expert on China, but I have been working and living in China for more than twenty years and have written more on the subject of the underground house church in China than almost any other Chinese historian. While I am not Chinese and was not born in China, I have had the unique opportunity to spend more than two decades walking beside and learning from the most influential underground house church pastors, who lead churches of tens of thousands of believers.

I have written their stories and personal biographies, and many can be found in my book *The Underground Church*, where several leaders who were previously unknown were interviewed for the very first time. In the books *I Stand with Christ* and *Kidnapped by a Cult* I wrote the biographies of two of the most well-known underground house church pastors who together, arguably, have more than twenty million believers.

I have spent most of my life serving with overseas Chinese missionaries who have been sent out by their churches in China to places like Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Iraq, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, and I have written books, articles, and reports documenting their work. In most of these instances, I have had exclusive access. Since 1999, I have worked intimately with a man who is one of the most well-known underground house church evangelists, Brother Yun, also known as the Heavenly Man, and have spent hours interviewing him and documenting his views, his experiences, and his family's life story.

It is generally agreed on that the revival in China is one of the largest in the world, but the exact number of new Christians is a matter of serious debate.

Tony Lambert, a former British diplomat to China and Chinese Christian historian, lays out the dilemma well when he writes,

There are two major problems for anyone attempting to make realistic estimates of religious believers in China today. The first is that the government has for a long time downplayed the role of religion in Chinese society, and with it, generally underestimated, in the view of most serious researchers, the numbers of religious believers, especially Christians. Political and ideological factors play a major role in this. The official ideology of China is still “Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought” although this is often forgotten. It is the Party’s “statement of faith,” codified in Document 19 of 1982 as the post-Mao, milder, religious policy, that religion will ultimately wither and die at some point in the future. This flies in the face of all the current evidence that religion is flourishing in China. . . .

The second problem is . . . researchers and believers overseas, in strong reaction to the very partial and biased statistics which have emanated from Mainland official sources, until recently (and still do so, in some cases) have seized on every scrap of information coming from other sources, especially Chinese religious believers themselves, and proceeded to extrapolate, build models and estimate numbers. The result has been, especially in the case of Protestant Christianity, wildly varying figures ranging from 23 million (the present TSPM/CCC figure) to over 100 or even 200 million.¹¹

As Tony Lambert, and many like him, rightly point out, obtaining accurate numbers in China is difficult because of the government’s opposition to Christianity and the lack of methodology available on the ground to calculate the growth of an illegal activity.

The situation has been made worse because now the top pastors in China refuse to give out numbers. They have stopped calculating the size of their church because of the discord they have seen that it causes in the West.

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Fangcheng Fellowship and China Gospel Fellowship, for instance, are considered to be two of the largest underground house church networks in China, with an estimated 20 million believers between the two of them, but their pastors have both stopped providing information about their fellowships because they have seen Western mission leaders fight each other over the data.

But when we talk about the revival in China, what are we really talking about?

To understand the revival taking place in China today, let's look at the most basic information. In 1934, there were roughly 700,000 Christians in China.¹² In many ways this is the last official number of Christians inside of China that can be somewhat relied on, because in 1949, when Mao Zedong came to power, most Christian activity had to go underground.

This number grew to 14 million believers by 1997.¹³

That means that during the harshest forty-eight years in Chinese history, the Chinese church grew by more than 750 new believers per day. From my own exposure to the Chinese church, I believe the majority of those numbers did not come over the span of the entire forty-eight years between 1949 and 1997, but rather the bulk of growth occurred between 1981 and 1997. If my assessment is correct, that would mean that the church actually grew at a rate of roughly 2,300 new believers per day during those sixteen years.

According to Pew Research Center, that number increased in 2011 to 67,070,000 Christians in China, including Catholic believers.¹⁴ Though the Pew Research Center admitted the challenge when they wrote, "Because there are no truly nationally representative surveys of the religious affiliation of the Chinese public, only a rough estimate of the country's Christian population is possible,"

If their numbers are correct, more than 10,000 people came to Christ per day between 1997 and 2011.

After the Pew Research in 2011, there has not been an updated census, but according to

¹² S. H. Steinberg, ed., *The Statesman's Year-Book: Statistical and Historical Annual of the States of the World for the Year 1959*, edition 96 (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1958), 890.

¹³ Jacqueline E. Wenger, "Official vs. Underground Protestant Churches in China: Challenges for Recognition and Social Influences," *Review of Religious Research* 2004 45(2): 169.

¹⁴ Pew Research, "Appendix C: Methodology for China," accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2011/12/ChristianityAppendixC.pdf>.

research conducted at Purdue University, the number of Chinese Christians continues to rise, and by 2019 there are estimated to be as many as 115 million believers.¹⁵

That means that in the last eight years, China has seen an increase of more than 16,600 people coming to Christ every twenty-four hours!

Professor Fenggang Yang, a sociologist of religion at Purdue University, believes by 2030 more Protestant Christians will live in China than any other country in the world.¹⁶

All of these numbers are likely very conservative. Some world leaders have seen data that has convinced them there could be as many as 130 million believers in China.¹⁷

At BTJ we estimate the number of believers in China today to be more than 150 million.

Regardless of the specific numbers, the argument can be convincingly established that China is experiencing a massive revival and has been for the last four decades, and this revival could be an indicator, one of many other indicators, pointing to the Second Coming of Christ.

Part I

Old Testament Foundation of the Back to Jerusalem Vision

Chapter 4

Back to Jerusalem From the Beginning

The Chinese underground church has been experiencing massive growth, and out of the flames of revival they are answering the call of Christ to reach the lost. This Chinese effort to reach the most unreached is referred to as *Back to Jerusalem*.

Many mistakenly think Back to Jerusalem is a movement of the Chinese church to

¹⁵ Eleanor Albert, "Christianity in China," Council on Foreign Relations, October 11, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/christianity-china>.

¹⁶ Joseph Paul, "One Year After Chinese Pastor Was First Detained, Christianity Still Growing," Purdue.edu, April 1, 2019, <https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/releases/2019/Q2/one-year-after-chinese-pastor-was-first-detained,-christianity-still-growing.html>.

¹⁷ Tsukasa Hadano, "China's Christians Keeping the Faith, Rattling the Country's Leaders," Nikkei Asian Review, September 10, 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/China-s-Christians-keep-the-faith-rattling-the-country-s-leaders>.

evangelize Jerusalem. However, Back to Jerusalem is the goal of the Chinese church to evangelize the unreached peoples from eastern provinces of China, westward toward Jerusalem. The vision was birthed among the Chinese in the 1920s, and since that time, the churches of China have striven and even suffered persecution to participate in what they believe is their integral role in fulfilling the Great Commission.

When defining the vision of Back to Jerusalem, it is important to understand that the underground house church is not traditionally trained, meaning most pastors have not been through seminary. In fact, the majority of Chinese leaders have not been to secondary school. Because of the persecution in China, there has also not been a lot of exposure to Western biblical theory; instead, leaders have relied on their own understanding of the Bible and Jesus' teachings.

As a result of the singular exposure to the Bible and a lack of exposure to other books *about* the Bible, there is a great emphasis on a literal biblical understanding and deciphering the Bible as the inerrant Word of God.

This literal translation is important when defining the Back to Jerusalem vision because it has a huge impact on how the Chinese see the final words of Christ. In Acts 1:6–8, Jesus' disciples “gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’” (NIV).

The Chinese see these last words of Jesus as a literal instruction to prepare for the Second Coming.

The Chinese believe the Back to Jerusalem vision is more than a movement; they see it as a preparation for the end times. They believe the revival they are seeing is a continuation of a revival that started two thousand years ago in Jerusalem and is part of the movement of the Gospel that will continue all around the world back to Jerusalem until every nation has heard the Good News.

The revival in China does not stand alone, but is connected in a series of revivals that have

traveled around the world starting in Jerusalem and ending in Jerusalem.

To put it even more simply, the Back to Jerusalem vision is the Chinese version of the Great Commission. We often call the Back to Jerusalem vision the “Great Commission with Kung Pao flavor.”

In China it is believed that Jesus had China, as well as all nations, in mind when He commanded His disciples, “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 always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:19–20 KJV). Not only did He have China in mind, but He had all of the nations in mind.

It is this verse in Matthew that we commonly call the Great Commission, but the term *‘Great Commission’* is not found anywhere in the Bible. Like the word “Trinity,” it is a common part of Christian theology not found in Scripture. Back to Jerusalem is derived from this same idea and relates to the church of the last days.

The historical roots of Back to Jerusalem were sparked at the beginning of the twentieth century with the Boxer Rebellion, but uncovering the meaning of the Chinese vision Back to Jerusalem goes back several thousand years to the beginning of time.

When most people think of religion in China, they often think of ancient practices of Eastern religions and old temples. Images of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and animism come to mind, but few realize how small of an influence these religions had during the early development of China. It is also not widely known—even among the Chinese people—how much of the Old Testament is found in Chinese history, culture, and language. Pastor Kong Hee, the senior pastor of City Harvest Church in Singapore, shared with his congregation, “To most of us Chinese, when we become Christian, somehow we are made to feel that we have forsaken our Chinese roots. That we have abandoned our Chinese heritage and culture and have embraced a foreign, Western religion—a religion of the white people.”¹⁸

¹⁸ “God in Ancient China,” October 2, 2011, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA-AkJzpKmg&t=2305s>

“We can see that China is the land that worships God,” Pastor Zhang Rongliang said while introducing the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, speaking of the God found in the Old Testament.¹⁹ Pastor Zhang was referencing the history of the Chinese people as they prayed to the One True God of Yahweh. In an interview I conducted with Pastor Zhang in 2016 at the Temple of Heaven, Zhang shared how China has its religious roots, not in Buddhism, Taoism, or Confucianism, but in a monotheistic God who created all things.

Pastor Zhang looks to the 4,500-year history and culture of the Chinese people as evidence that the God of the Bible is the same God of ancient China.

At first glance, it seems absurd that China originally followed the God of the Bible, but with only elementary exposure to Chinese culture, language, and history, one can see how many elements of the Old Testament are riddled throughout Chinese history.

China has roughly five thousand years of unbroken cultural history,²⁰ but Taoism and Confucianism did not start until around 500 BC. Buddhism came much later to China, around the first century, so that begs the question, what religion did the ancient Chinese practice for more than two thousand years before these religions were even founded?

To know what religion the ancient Chinese followed, one only needs to look to the first emperor of China, Huang Di, to whom so much of China’s culture and language is attributed.

According to China’s most famous historian, Sima Qian, Huang Di is the ancestor to all Chinese people and would have lived around 2,700 BC.²¹ These dates are not completely agreed on, but the dates of his life were roughly around the same time as the children of Noah.

The Yellow Emperor taught the Chinese people to worship the God who created all things, known as Shangdi (上帝). Shangdi is the same name Christians today use to refer to God. Shangdi is the highest deity. Shangdi is also referred to as Tian (天) or sky, meaning that Shangdi is high above all things and ruler of all men below.

¹⁹ Back to Jerusalem, “The Temple of Heaven and El Shangdi,” July 24, 2019, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOxuo1cfzWQ>.

²⁰ Ong Siew Chey, *China Condensed: 5000 Years of History and Culture* (Cavendish Square Publishing, 2009), 3.

²¹ Alvin P. Cohen, “Brief Note: The Origin of the Yellow Emperor Era Chronology,” accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www2.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/file/1097kaBVwNb.pdf>.

The Chinese worshiped other gods, but Shangdi was the ruler of them all. Compare this to the idea of Yahweh found in the Old Testament. Shangdi is also a close Chinese phonetic sound of Shaddai.

The early Chinese emperors followed the teaching and practices of the Yellow Emperor by sacrificing to Shangdi with the prayer,

Of old in the beginning, there was the great chaos, without form and dark. The five elements had not begun to revolve, nor the sun and the moon to shine. In the midst thereof there existed neither form nor sound. Thou, O spiritual Sovereign, camest forth in Thy presidency, and first didst divide the grosser parts from the purer. Thou madest heaven; Thou madest earth; Thou madest man. All things with their reproducing power, got their being.²²

Compare this ancient Chinese prayer to Shangdi to text found in Genesis,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. (Gen. 1:1–4 NIV)

Pastor Zhang Rongliang was referencing this when he was at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. The Temple of Heaven is the world’s largest existing sacrificial altar. When many people think of Chinese religions, they often think of the many evil demon faces and representative icons they see on temples common throughout China, and there is not one picture of Shangdi. This is odd in Chinese cultural religions, but Shangdi’s representation cannot be found anywhere in the Temple. Think of this in light of Exodus 20:4: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any

²² James Legge, *Eastern Religions: Origins, Beliefs, Practices, Holy Texts, Sacred Places* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1852), 28.

likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (KJV).

In addition to China’s history, the language points to the God of the Old Testament.

Chinese is made up of thousands of different characters, and each character tells a story. These Chinese characters go back to the beginning of Chinese history, to a time when the children and grandchildren of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, were still alive, so it would make sense if Chinese characters tell the beginning story found in Genesis.

It turns out the entire creation story in the Bible can be found in the Chinese language! For instance, the word *zao* (造) in Chinese means to “create”: the character for mouth (口) speaks (告) to clay (土) and gives life for movement (动). Compare this to Genesis 2:7: “Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (NIV).

The word for garden in Chinese is *yuan* (园). The story for this word is that there is a mouth (口) speaking to clay (土) to make a man (人) and from the side of man came woman (this is represented by the character 人 turned sideways, indicating coming from the side of man [侧]), and they were placed in a garden with a border (口).

The word for good—好—is made up of only two characters, a man (子) and a woman (女). The story here is that man together with a woman is good. Compare this to Genesis 1:27, 31: “In the image of God he created them; male and female. . . . God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (NIV).

It might seem like mere coincidence, but a closer examination reveals that there is a extraordinarily long list of characters that tell the Genesis creation story over and over again in the Chinese language. An accumulation of coincidences start to point to patterns. For instance, the word for “boat” is eight people in a vessel, like the story of Noah, his wife, his sons, and their wives in the ark.

Not only can the God of the Bible be found in Chinese history and language, He can also be found in Chinese culture.

The largest holiday of the Chinese calendar is Chinese New Year.

The Chinese celebrate by putting red banners around the sides and tops of their doorways to protect their homes and keep evil spirits away. No one knows exactly where this practice came from, but compare it to what is recorded in Exodus 12:7: “Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs” (NIV).

Suddenly, with only a glimpse at China’s long, rich history, the God of the Old Testament no longer looks foreign to China. In fact, it can be argued that the Chinese people were following the God of the Bible long before many modern-day Christian nations.

Chapter 5

Back to Jerusalem in the Old Testament

A missionary vision from China is quite possibly the last thing a person is likely to think about when studying through the Old Testament, but it is there on every page. It is there not because the vision gave birth to the Old Testament but because the Old Testament gave life to the vision.

Starting from the fall of man, there is evidence that history is a testimony that God created a plan for salvation for all mankind, and if we know enough about history, we will see the story of salvation unfold for the entire earth and all of those in it. In essence, this is the Back to Jerusalem vision. Back to Jerusalem is a vision to reach the remaining nations on earth that have yet to be reached.

To understand the power of the Back to Jerusalem vision, one must see the Bible and the history of man as one single story. The canonization process is different for the Bible and history, but the two are inseparable. In our minds, we must merge the thirty-nine books in the Old

Testament, twenty-seven books in the New Testament, and five thousand years of human history.

The only time the history of man and the Bible tell a different story is when men are deceived, lie in the telling of historical events, misunderstand the events, or are missing information.

This section walks us through the chronological development of the vision that God eternally expressed for reaching the nations in the Old Testament.

In the Beginning . . .

From the start of both the Bible and human history we find that “God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1 NIV) and all that is found in them. God’s love for the nations is derived from the very simple fact that He created them. He is the Father of the nations. We are His children, and He has never stopped reaching out to bring us closer to Him.

His vision for the nations is proclaimed in His first words to man: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28 NIV). This is the first commandment given, and it is never rescinded, changed, or altered. It echoes in eternity.

God’s heart for man is captured in the very moment Adam and Eve sinned. When they hid from Him in the garden, God called out, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9). He knew where they were geographically. He was not calling to them to find where they were located in the garden. His question was more of a statement that recognized their absence. He immediately felt the loss of intimacy and called out to them. His Father’s heart calls out to us still.

The words He spoke to Adam after the fall were prophetic: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15 NIV).

Immediately we see that God had a plan to send His Son to bring salvation for the nations. This foretelling of a Savior is evidence of the love that drives the mission call.

2200 BC: The Tower of Babel

In the plain of Shinar (Gen. 11:1) the people disobeyed God by congregating and building towers that would reach to the heavens. God had commanded man to “be fruitful and increase in number; *fill the earth* and subdue it” (emphasis added). But the men disobeyed and said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we make a name for ourselves; *otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth*” (Gen. 11:4 NIV, emphasis added).

The Lord responded by confusing their language and “*scattered them over the face of the whole earth*” (Gen. 11:9 NIV, emphasis added).

In this way we can see the will of the Lord carried out for the nations even when the men of earth did not want to go. The confusion of language forever solidified the actions of man to increase in number and fill the whole earth.

2100 BC: Father Abraham

God’s desire to reach the nations is clearly revealed through His servant Abraham. This was a pivotal time in history. God proclaimed to Abraham, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3 NIV), and He reaffirmed His word when He changed Abraham’s name: “No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5).

1550 BC: Moses

The life of Moses provides us with a story of slavery and deliverance. During the days of Moses, Jews were born into slavery just as there are those who are born into the slavery of darkness today. Muslims are born in the Middle East. Buddhists are born in Tibet. Hindus are born in India.

Like the Pharaoh, the enemies over the dark nations of today have strict control over the slaves born in their land, and like the Pharaoh they will protect their power with the threat of force and violence.

But God called His people out of slavery by name (Gen. 6:14–25) just as He is calling them out today.

1400 BC–470 BC: Joshua to Esther

This portion of biblical history is a cry for Jerusalem. From discovery, to conquering, to the diaspora, Jerusalem takes center stage. God’s people were foreigners even before they arrived in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was always their home even before it was their home.

God prepared Jerusalem for His people since the beginning: “But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end” (Deut. 11:11–12 NIV).

The temple of God was nomadic and without a home until it found a permanent residence in Jerusalem. Prior to the temple in Jerusalem, the presence of God moved with His people through enemy territory. This is an extremely strong element that Christians in closed nations can relate to today. God’s presence is carried in the temple of His people, but they are nomads in a foreign land.

The historical writings in the Bible paint a picture of the people of God yearning for nothing more than to return to Jerusalem and a God who clearly desires to see them return. The city is waxed poetic by the psalmist:

Jerusalem is built like a city
that is closely compacted together.
That is where the tribes go up—
the tribes of the LORD—
to praise the name of the LORD. (Ps. 122:3–4 NIV)

The temple in Jerusalem was built to be a light to the nations, “for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, *so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you*, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name” (1 Kings 8:42–3 NIV, emphasis added).

It is extremely important to understand that it is not the city of Jerusalem that is to be

praised, but it is the God over Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city that God chooses so that “the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together” (Isa. 40:5 NIV). God uses the city as the command and control center to fulfil His purpose of reaching the nations, like a kind of spiritual Pentagon.

The prophet Habakkuk reiterated this when he declared, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14 NIV).

The Back to Jerusalem vision of the Chinese church echoes this theme of reaching the nations, which can be seen from the beginning of creation in Genesis to the final book of the Old Testament, where the prophet Malachi circled back around to the first command given to man and wrote, “‘My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations,’ says the LORD Almighty” (Mal. 1:11 NIV).

Chapter 6

Zionism at the Center of Prophecy

Today, those who offer support for Israel and cling to the promises of God regarding Jerusalem are demonized by an ever-growing coalition of world leaders who masterfully collaborate with modern media. This aggression is born out of the enemy’s desire to stop the ancient prophecies God made regarding the land of Israel. Prophecies about Jerusalem have been God’s way of giving hope to His people, but the enemy sees them as a source of intelligence to help him devise a plan to stop the return of the Messiah.

The enemy knows it is impossible for God to lie (Num. 23:19), so if God has promised to make Jerusalem a centerpiece of His return, then it stands to reason that if Satan can stop the prophecy, then he can stop, or at least delay, the coming of the Messiah.

The enemy’s strategies of attempting to stop the Messiah by disrupting prophecy are

revealed again and again in Scripture—from the unthinkable act of killing babies in Egypt (Ex. 1:15) to the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:9–21) to the threat of genocide against the entire Jewish race (Est. 3:13). The most preferred strategy Satan used throughout the Old Testament, though, was separating the Jewish people from the land of promise. This strategy does not need to rely only on outside armies, as we saw in the Old Testament; today it also comes in the dangerous form of anti-Semitic Christian theologies.

Over the years, some mainstream Christian leaders have led the assault of separating the teachings of the Old Testament from the New Testament and history in attempt to separate the promised seed of Abraham from the promised land.

As the former vicar of the Anglican parish of Christ Church in Surrey, England, Dr. Stephen Sizer wrote, “Christian Zionism errs most profoundly because it fails to appreciate the relationship between the Old and New Covenants and the ways in which the latter completes, fulfils, and *annuls the former*. It is fundamental that Christians read the Scriptures with Christian eyes, and that they interpret the Old Covenant in the light of the New Covenant, not the other way round.”²³

Dr. Sizer’s argument is that there is a fulfilment of the Old Testament in the New Testament, and therefore there is no longer a God-given mandate for God’s people to be in Israel.

In November 2018, Anglican priest Father Dave Smith further echoed this sentiment when he spoke to a crowd of Christian leaders, saying, “It is my contention that not only have Christian Zionists misread their particular texts, they’ve misunderstood their sacred scriptures at a deeper level and have failed to understand how prophecy even works in both the Christian and the Jewish Scriptures.”²⁴

Another theology often used to attack the return to Israel is Replacement Theology, the belief that the Jewish nation has been replaced in the New Testament by the church or the “true Israel.” This teaching is prominent among many evangelical leaders like Pastor Gregg Boyd, who

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Stephen R. Sizer, “An Alternative Theology of the Holy Land: A Critique of Christian Zionism,” *Churchman* 113:2, http://archive.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/Cman_113_2_Sizer.pdf, emphasis added.

²⁴ “Zionism and Biblical Prophecy,” May 9, 2018, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQct0q6g0rk>.

was named one of the top twenty most influential Christian scholars of 2010²⁵ and teaches that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and all that follow Him are the true children of Israel. “If all the promises that apply to Israel are fulfilled in Jesus folks there’s nothing more to be said about it,” Pastor Greg said during a sermon shared at his church of several thousand members. “When we say keep your eyes on Israel . . . I submit to you that we should be saying keep your eyes on Jesus.”²⁶

Some enemies of Israel embrace a unique Palestinian version of Liberation Theology, which combines Marxism with a socialist Christian faith. This is very similar to the political philosophy of communists who wanted to diminish the influence of the Catholic church in South America.

Those who embrace these theologies simply cannot accept that the return to Jerusalem is a promise God has made. According to Psalm 105, it is a promise and covenant that cannot be broken and will last forever.

He remembers his covenant forever,
the promise he made, for a thousand generations,
the covenant he made with Abraham,
the oath he swore to Isaac.
He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant. (vv. 8–10 NIV, emphasis added)

This fact cannot be made clearer and is exactly why the Chinese underground house church strongly supports Israel. This fact is not just taught in the underground sermons in China, but can also be seen in its manifestation of the number of Chinese Christians traveling to Israel. In April 2019, the tourism ministry of Israel reported that “Chinese tourism to Israel grew 1,600 per cent from 2009 to 2017, and many are believed to be Christians.”²⁷

²⁵ “The 20 Most Influential Christian Scholars,” SuperScholar, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://superscholar.org/features/20-most-influential-christian-scholars/>.

²⁶ “Twisted Scripture: Joshua 14:9,” The Narrow Gate, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxTGE6FpjOg>.

²⁷ Financial Times, <https://www.ft.com/content/e1b58738-61ed-11e9-b285-3acd5d43599e>.

For the overwhelming majority of Chinese underground house church believers, the divine covenant is weaved into every period of biblical history and shapes modern history.

The Bible is clear that the covenant of God is a legally binding agreement where God firmly commits Himself to fulfil His promise to His people, and it does not matter whether two minutes have passed or ten thousand years—His words will not pass away.

At first, it might seem that God has made many different promises to many different people, when in fact God's promise to Adam and Eve is the same promise given to Abraham, Noah, Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, and Malachi, and there are two aspects to the covenant that God made in the Old Testament that are inseparable: people and land. The covenant God made with His people about the land of Israel is eternal, unchangeable, unconditional, and non-negotiable.

God promises He will bless the nations through the seed of Abraham and that He will do so through the land called Canaan, the "Land of Israel." To avoid confusion, God laid out the specific borders of the land to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, and others. The location of the real estate God is speaking of is unmistakable, but just in case, He also named the inhabitants of the land. He then made a promise that the land would eternally belong to His natural seed as He did in Genesis 13:15.

In Deuteronomy 30 and elsewhere, the conditions for Israel's occupation of the land are given. If they obey God's commands they can fully enjoy residency, but disobedience will bring exile. However, at no time would they ever lose the title to the land God promised them (Ps. 105:8–15).

This is not an ethnocentric theology that teaches the Jewish people are elite or more valuable than all the other nations, but God's covenant with the seed of Abraham carries with it both a blessing and a burden.

By establishing this covenant, God declared the natural seed of Abraham to be servants to all and stewards over the land that would be the launching pad for salvation to the nations. They painstakingly passed on the truth of God's Word from generation to generation so that the promise

of the Messiah could be seen in all the world.

The Jewish people were appointed a servant's role for the purpose of bringing redemption to the entire world through the birth of Jesus Christ.

All of the covenants of God with His people are a reflection of God's undying commitment to redeem the entire world from sin. The redemption of Israel is the bedrock on which the rest of world will be reached.

A return to Zion is not about the glorification of a city, but rather the awareness of an unbroken covenant that starts in Jerusalem and reaches around the globe until it returns back to Jerusalem. This is God's divine plan that was devised before the beginning of time to rescue the nations (Mic. 5:2). This plan of salvation for the nations is the backbone of those who wish to see God's people return to Jerusalem (Amos 9:11–15).

The vision of the Chinese Christians today is not a redesign of the covenant God gave to the Jewish people. It is not a sino-centric replacement theology, but rather it is a fulfilment of God's eternal promise to His people. God's covenant with Abraham to use him to bless the nations is being fulfilled in China. Their vision of Back to Jerusalem is not to return to Jerusalem as inhabitants; that holy occupancy is reserved for the seed of Jacob. The vision of Back to Jerusalem is to continue on the course set by God's people in the Old Testament and to take the grace and blessing of the one true God to all the nations of the world.

Back to Jerusalem is an eschatological vision that believes all nations must have an opportunity to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, and this vision coincides with ingathering of Israel from all the four corners of the world as they take possession of the land (Isa. 11:11–12).

Chapter 7

The Dragon Well of Jerusalem

Satan uses many different ways to prevent the return of the Messiah. One of those ways has

been blocking the route that Ezekiel promised He would take (Ezek. 44:1–3).

The Eastern Gate of Jerusalem has been blocked to prevent the return of the Messiah, but the Back to Jerusalem vision finds hope in this. There is an Old Testament scripture that might give hope to the current situation where Satan has attempted to block the return of the Messiah.

An obscure passage in the book of Nehemiah records an evening when Nehemiah went out from the walls of Jerusalem: “And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire” (2:13 KJV).

This scripture jumps out to anyone with exposure to China, because China is considered to be the land of the dragon. Sometimes other Bible translations, like the New International Version, refer to this well as the Jackal Well, but the original Jewish word for this well is pronounced “tanniyn,” which means dragon, so King James Version is the closest translation to the original language.

Today, Jerusalem does not have a well known as the Dragon Well. It is never referred to again in the Bible, and there are few indicators telling us what Nehemiah was talking about when he mentioned it.

What we do know is that the Dragon Well must have been in the valley on the slope west of the city walls of Jerusalem, about five hundred meters northwest of the Dung Gate (Neh. 3:13). The Dung Gate, which is still there today, is located near the southeast corner. It is the closest gate to the Western Wall Plaza.

This would mean that the Dragon Well was most likely to the west of the city.

Interestingly enough, though, it is not hard to trace water sources in Jerusalem, because there is only one. Few things have plagued Jerusalem more than a lack of water. Today the only source of water for the city of Jerusalem is the Gihon Spring.²⁸

The Gihon Spring is mentioned many times in the Bible, as well as the location of it. Today,

²⁸ “Jerusalem—Water Systems of Biblical Times,” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 26, 2003, <http://www.israel.org/MFA/IsraelExperience/History/Pages/Jerusalem%20-%20Water%20Systems%20of%20Biblical%20Times.aspx>.

the Gihon Spring is located in the valley east of Jerusalem, but the Dragon Well was in the valley west of Jerusalem, so were there two water sources during the days of Nehemiah?

Not necessarily. Second Chronicles 32:30 records, “It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook” (NIV). So here, the Gihon Spring was channeled to the west side of the city, and this is where the Dragon Well was located. This means the water source there was either connected to the Gihon Spring or was once connected to the Gihon Spring and later dried out after Hezekiah redirected it west of the city in the east valley, where it can be found today (2 Chron. 33:14).

To best protect it, Jerusalem was built on a hill. Unfortunately, the water source was in the valley away from the secure walls of Jerusalem. This means that when Jerusalem was attacked, the only water source for the city was vulnerable.

Water springs are important because access to water is essential for the building of any major city. They are the source of life in desert communities, and without them the people will die of dehydration.

The Gihon Spring is in the valley between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives, in a valley and outside the protection of Jerusalem’s city walls. This is not a safe place during an attack. The walls of Jerusalem do not defend the water spring because the water spring is in the valley. If the walls of Jerusalem had extended to include the water source, the walls would have had to descend down into the valley and would have been vulnerable to attack from the elevated points in the east.

This was a major problem. If Jerusalem was ever attacked, the enemy could close off the water source outside of the city walls and wait for the people to die of thirst.

Hezekiah’s Tunnel was built to prevent this from happening. The Gihon Spring was hidden underground and then channeled into the city of Jerusalem so that the city could keep getting water even when the city was under siege (Hez. 20:20).

Today the city of Jerusalem is under siege spiritually. Every nation around the nation of Israel wants her destroyed and wiped off the planet.

The city of Jerusalem was physically attacked over and over again until the Muslim armies finally took control of it. Jerusalem has been controlled by Muslim conquests off and on for more than one thousand years.

After the Islamic armies took over the holy city of Jerusalem, they noticed Christians and Jews had the same prophecy: they both believed the coming Messiah would return through the Eastern Gate of Jerusalem.

The commander of the Islamic armies was nervous about these prophecies, so he immediately set about closing up the gate in an attempt to prevent the Christian and Jewish prophecies from being fulfilled.²⁹

Anyone traveling to Jerusalem can easily see the Eastern Gate is still closed. A wall has been built in its place.

The closing of the gate happened according to prophecy. The prophet Ezekiel wrote, “Then the man brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one facing east, and it was shut. The LORD said to me, ‘This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered through it. The prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the LORD. He is to enter by way of the portico of the gateway and go out the same way’” (44:1–3).

As one walks near the Eastern Gate, it is clear no one is permitted to get too close because not only has the Eastern Gate been sealed up by the Muslims, but an Islamic graveyard has been constructed at the foot of the gate.

The Muslims who sealed up the East Gate knew the Jews believed that a person is made unclean by touching a dead body (Num. 19:11), so if a person is made unclean, surely a Messiah would be made unclean. They put the graveyard directly in front of the holiest of gates to desecrate

²⁹ Lambert Dolphin, “Visiting the Temple Mount,” June 17, 2013, accessed January 20, 2020, <http://www.templemount.org/visitemp.html>.

the area, make it off-limits to visitors, and prevent the return of the Messiah.

If one walks from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives and gazes westward at the Eastern Gate it is quickly understood that the Muslims did not just seal up the Eastern Gate to prevent the return of the Messiah; they built a graveyard on one side and a temple on the other. On the Mount of Olives, if you turn around with your back to the East Gate you will not be looking eastward towards China. From the Eastern Gate of Jerusalem to the Ningxia Province of China, Muslims have sealed off the way to Jerusalem and have tried to block the way for the return of the Messiah.

And they did not just try to block the Eastern Gate; they have taken over the entire eastern front, all to prevent the return of the Messiah!

This region between the Eastern Gate and China's Xinjiang Province is the corridor for the House of Islam. To the north and east are seats of atheism. To the south is the house of Buddha and Hinduism, but the primary window between Jerusalem and China belongs to the house of Islam. This is the area where we see the most resistance to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

If Chinese Christians face west, toward the Eastern Gate, they will find the most violent and unrelenting areas with the most resistance against the Gospel. Perhaps this is by design.

The Islamic armies are putting up a fight. They are trying to delay the return of the promised Messiah for as long as they can by enslaving as many people in darkness as possible. Satan has spent generations entrenching himself on the eastern front of Jerusalem, trying to prevent any penetration of the Gospel message. The core has been Islam, insulated by Buddhism, Hinduism, Animism, and most recently atheism. The entire eastern front from Jerusalem to China has largely remained a spiritual wasteland.

However, could there be a secret weapon in the last days, and could that secret weapon be understood by looking closer at the Dragon Well? Could Nehemiah have given us a hint about the prophetic battle that is yet to come in the last days? Could there still be water in the Dragon Well outside of the walled city of Jerusalem?

What if the source of Life is still flowing from the Dragon Well to provide Living Water to

God's people during the final attack?

Remember the very first conquest of the city of Jerusalem by King David? How did David's army take the city? They did not come over the walls or through the city's walls, but under them! Perhaps this is what will occur again.

When the tunnels of Hezekiah were built, the purpose was to bring water from the spring outside of the walls to God's people inside. When attackers stood outside of the walled city, they were completely unaware they were standing on the source of life for God's people. The water flowed underground, right under their feet.

Today, the underground house church of China is operating under the feet of the enemy and making their way all the way back to Jerusalem.

The underground church is flowing through the land of Muhammad like water through Hezekiah's Tunnel, and they are bringing the glory of the Lord. This image paints a picture similar to what is described in Ezekiel: "Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory" (43:1-2 NIV).

Today, the land east of Jerusalem sits in darkness, and its inhabitants are blind to the Truth. The Eastern Gate has been sealed. Muslims have built the iconic Dome of the Rock on top of the ancient Jewish temple and block any study of the area for fear of the truth being revealed. The land east of Jerusalem is closed to those carrying out the Great Commission and has been locked up for generations. It remains the last frontier for westward movement of the Gospel, but it was prophesied through Zechariah, "Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two *from east to west*, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south" (14:3-4 NIV, emphasis added).

Satan has held the people who live in this area between China and Jerusalem blind, but the Word of the Lord that is marching westward from the east brings Life and Truth. The Living Water

that is carried in the vessels of the underground Chinese church can make the blind see. The Dragon Well can once again bring Living Water to God's people.

Part II

New Testament Foundation of the Back to Jerusalem Vision

Chapter 8

Jerusalem and Missions

The vision of Back to Jerusalem begins with one Man, Jesus Christ, and in one city, Jerusalem. This is the same cornerstone for all the letters of the New Testament. Jesus did not come as an earthly king or a religious ruler. He did not come as a spirit hovering above an altar that only the high priests could approach. He came as fully God and fully man, to earth, to a city, on a mission. This mission of Jesus Christ is the foundation of Back to Jerusalem.

Ed Stetzer, a former pastor, said during an interview with *Tabletalk Magazine* in January 2014, "Mission is rooted in the identity of God Himself. God is on a mission, and Jesus is the embodiment of that mission. Jesus identifies Himself as being sent more than forty times in the gospel of John. Then, near the end of the gospel of John, He says, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you'" (John 20:21 NIV).³⁰

Ed went on to say, "The church is sent on mission by Jesus. It's not that the church has a mission, but rather that the mission has a church. We join Jesus on His mission."

This concept could be one of the most explosive and damning for many Christians today.

³⁰ Ed Stetzer, "God's Mission Has a Church: My Interview with Tabletalk Magazine," *Christianity Today*, January 29, 2014, "<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/january/my-interview-with-tabletalk-magazine.html>."

Instead of the church being about the church, an inwardly focused concept that only circulates nutrients from one believer to another, the church is about missions and should be outwardly focused. This is a radical change of current mainstream ideology about the role of the church.

The church, or the Body of Christ, is, by design, outward focused: focused on God, focused on the Word, focused on reaching others, focused on training and sending others; and if there is any focus on self, it should only be to improve the ability to aid an outward cause.

The egocentric church does not represent the Body of Jesus Christ; it is an impostor. If the church builds up wealth, the wealth build-up should be for outward impact. If a church builds up members, the increase in membership must contribute to more outreach. If the church trains up leaders, the impartation of knowledge should primarily be for outreach to others. This is the mission and vision given to us by Jesus.

Understanding Jesus' teachings in the New Testament is vital to understanding the vision of the underground house church in China. The vision is the mission Jesus gave to us all!

Jesus said to Simon Peter in John 21:15, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs" (KJV).

You do not prove that you love God by feeding His sheep. You feed His sheep because you love Him. It is a cause and effect relationship. We do not work to obtain Jesus' love; instead, Jesus' love produces works. Just as the manifestation of God's love for us came through His Son, our love for the Father will be manifest in our actions.

Mission is rooted in the very heart of following Jesus Christ. One could even go so far as to say that mission is so deep in the core of the Christian experience that it can be used as the indicator of the condition of the soul. Your mission may be in, through, or outside of the church, but the experience of your salvation and following after Christ have to have an outlet of expression. This is the Gospel sausage factory of what goes in must come out. A messianic Gospel produces a heart of missions. An egocentric Gospel message only requires an outlet of self-service.

Imagine what the story of Jesus would be if instead of focusing on serving others we were all to think of our own needs first. What would the Gospel message of self be? A Gospel message of self, regardless of its teachings, would produce self-serving evangelists and eventually die out because of the lack of sacrifice required by its adherents to share with others less fortunate.

God, in His infinite and boundless love for man, chose to come to earth, take on the cloak of man, taste of the bitter suffering of His creation, and sacrifice Himself for our sake. He was not just on a mission—He embodied the mission. He became the mission. He experienced the world of man from the perspective of man.

The family members of Jesus, the local rabbis at His synagogue, and later His disciples realized Jesus was no ordinary man. He was the Word made flesh and was on a mission, and He gave His mission to His disciples, and His disciples passed that mission on to others. Before long, the mission of Jesus had a body of believers and then, just like that, the mission had a church. The story of mission begins with God.

Jerusalem is ground zero for that mission. In many ways it is the city above all cities. Jerusalem is the single most important city in the Old Testament, and its spiritual significance continues on into the New Testament. Three of the world's major religions that trace their roots to the Old Testament teachings —Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—put an enormous amount of spiritual significance on this city.

It is important to understand that this Jerusalem focus does not mean that one has to be in Jerusalem to receive salvation. That would be a misunderstanding of the vision of missions that Jesus gave to His church and would be a misunderstanding of the Back to Jerusalem vision.

Jesus was the fulfilment of Scripture, and His temple where He resides now is in the hearts of His people, not in a structure in Jerusalem. He was the final sacrifice for all mankind, removing the need for continued sacrifice at the temple. If His people in China call out His name, He will abide in them, regardless of geographical location. The Chinese Christians do not have to travel to Jerusalem to find His presence.

For the Christian, Jerusalem holds grand significance, but salvation is not hinged on it. Though a pilgrimage to Jerusalem can have deep meaning for a Christian, it is not required. Christians can spend their entire lives experiencing the power of God and not visit Jerusalem even once, and inversely, people can spend their entire lives in Jerusalem and never taste the power of God.

Jerusalem is, however, the land promised by God and holds untold spiritual and historical significance. In the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, Jerusalem holds the keys to understanding the return of the Messiah.

At first glance, there is nothing remarkable about Jerusalem. It is not located on a body of water, doesn't have very fertile land, and has no natural resources to speak of. The city center was not that large during the days of Jesus; in fact, for much of its history, it has only been about a square mile. Even today, the population is smaller than that of Indianapolis, Indiana.

It would seem to any rational thinker that the great Jehovah who created the high, reaching peaks of the Alps, the fertile soil of Illinois, the life-giving water of the Nile River, or the oil-rich sands of Saudi Arabia could surely find a better "promised land" than the remote, isolated, arid city of Jerusalem. It would also seem that the world's most grand armies of antiquity could have found better real estate to fight over than Jerusalem.

The significance of Jerusalem, however, cannot be found in logical observation of resources and location. The significance is a spiritual one. It is the beginning and end of world missions. It has been a city that man has been fighting over for four thousand years because Satan is keenly aware of its end-time importance. It is the city where God chose to have the temple built that would be used to honor Him, it is the location where He was crucified so that salvation could be possible for all mankind, is the location of the final battle, is the place where the Messiah will return again, and is the city that God will rebuild to reign forever.

To tell the story of Jerusalem is to tell the story of a living God. Time, as we know it today, is split between BC and AD, divided right at the point where Jesus was born and the city's purpose

was revealed. Jerusalem's history is His-story, so everything about the city has significance, and by studying the city, it might be possible to understand the purpose of missions and end-time prophecy better.

Chapter 9

Back to Jerusalem and Western Direction of the Great Commission

The single most important verse in the Bible that defines the Back to Jerusalem vision for the Chinese underground house church leaders is Acts 1:8, which captures the final words Jesus spoke before He ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives.

The words Jesus uttered on the Mount of Olives in those final moments are inseparable from the vision of the Chinese church. They give the underground house church purpose and a reason for being.

In 2014, in order to get a better understanding of the significance of this area, I boarded a plane and flew to Israel. On this particular journey I was held up for six hours at immigration because of my frequent travels to Iran. The Jewish authorities were not fond of my passport stamps from many different Middle Eastern nations.

When I was finally allowed through, I traveled with the Chinese evangelist Brother Yun (also known as the Heavenly Man) to the Mount of Olives to read Acts 1 together. Brother Yun is the most famous Chinese underground house church leader in the world, and he is one of the main spokesmen for the Back to Jerusalem vision.

I was amazed by the panoramic view of the majestic city of Jerusalem. Anyone standing on the Mount of Olives facing Jerusalem is facing the Eastern Gate in a westward direction, which would indicate that Jesus was facing west at the time He delivered His final words in Acts 1:8.

“This is where Jesus gave the Great Commission,” I said to Brother Yun.

“Yes, Acts 1:8,” he said, “but not Matthew 28.”

His response shocked me. Not Matthew 28? I thought to myself, *Were they not a record of the same event, both taking place on the Mount of Olives?* Both of these chapters contain the verses that are known as the Great Commission.

Almost as if he anticipated my silent question, Brother Yun immediately followed up, saying, “No, in fact, Jesus tells the women who were worshipping Him in verse 10 of Matthew 28 to go and ‘tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me,’ then later it says in verse 16, ‘Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them’” (ESV).

Though this was the same message, it was delivered on two different occasions, meaning that Acts 1:7-8 is the sole record of the last words of Jesus.

The book of Acts records the very last moments of Jesus on the earth, His final words, and what happened after the ascension. Because of that, it is the section of the Bible that I focus on the most when sharing the vision of the Back to Jerusalem vision.

Jesus did not tell His disciples when He will return, but He did tell them, and us, what to do before He returns. “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 1:7–8 NIV).

This powerful command from Jesus (which He also gave in Matthew 28:16–20) is known as the Great Commission.

The Great Commission was not merely a suggestion to the disciples; it was a command, and if we are not obeying Jesus, can we honestly call ourselves followers of Christ?

Most people living on the planet today were born in nations where it is illegal to share the Good News. The Great Commission is not a merit-earning activity. It is an emergency effort to save lives. Paul reminded us, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone

preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14 NIV).

Though the term the *Great Commission* is important, the term is not found in the Bible. It was a moniker developed by missionaries in the late eighteenth century.³¹ They coined the term to infuse passion and focus in the hearts of the church. It is a term that compels us to ponder the final command of Jesus and to join together with Him and His disciples in the greatest mission of all time to tell the greatest story ever told.

The idea of the Great Commission once burned red hot in the churches in the West, but not today. Barna conducted a study with the Seed Company to study “the US Church’s ideas about missions, social justice, Bible translation and other aspects of spreading the gospel around the world.” The results were tragic.

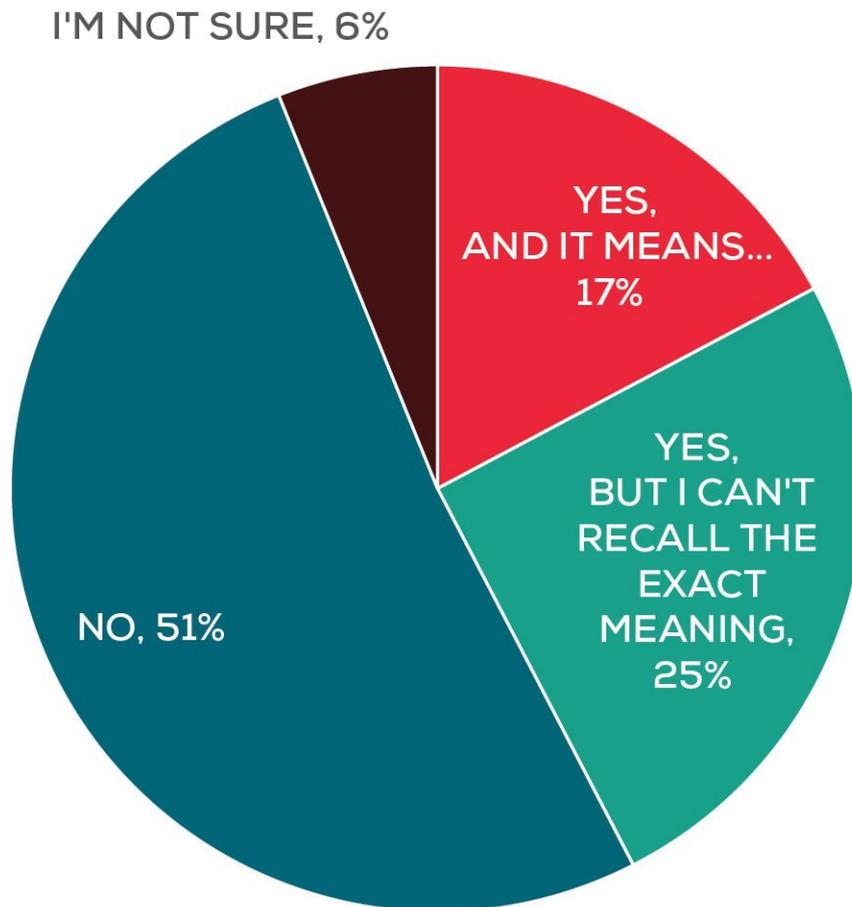
When asked if they had previously “heard of the Great Commission,” half of US churchgoers (51%) say they do not know this term. It would be reassuring to assume that the other half who know the term are also actually familiar with the passage known by this name, but that proportion is low (17%). Meanwhile, “the Great Commission” does ring a bell for one in four (25%), though they can’t remember what it is. Six percent of churchgoers are simply not sure whether they have heard this term “the Great Commission” before.”³²

³¹ Greg Stier, “Rebranding the Great Commission,” *Christian Post*, September 21, 2009, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/rebranding-the-great-commission.html>.

³² “5% of Churchgoers Don’t Know of the Great Commission,” Barna, March 27, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/>.

CHURCHGOERS: HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE GREAT COMMISSION?

Barna



October 2017, $n=1,004$ U.S. churchgoers.

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With this sudden loss of the vision that Jesus gave to the church, Christians in the West stand to miss out on the final harvest.

Canadian pastor Oswald J. Smith once said, “Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist.”³³

That vision, however, is burning hot for the Chinese church. That day I stood with Brother Yun on the Mount of Olives, he shared with me the Chinese view on the situation, “Before Jesus

³³ Marvin J. Newell, *Mission Quotes* (City: Publisher, Year), 257.

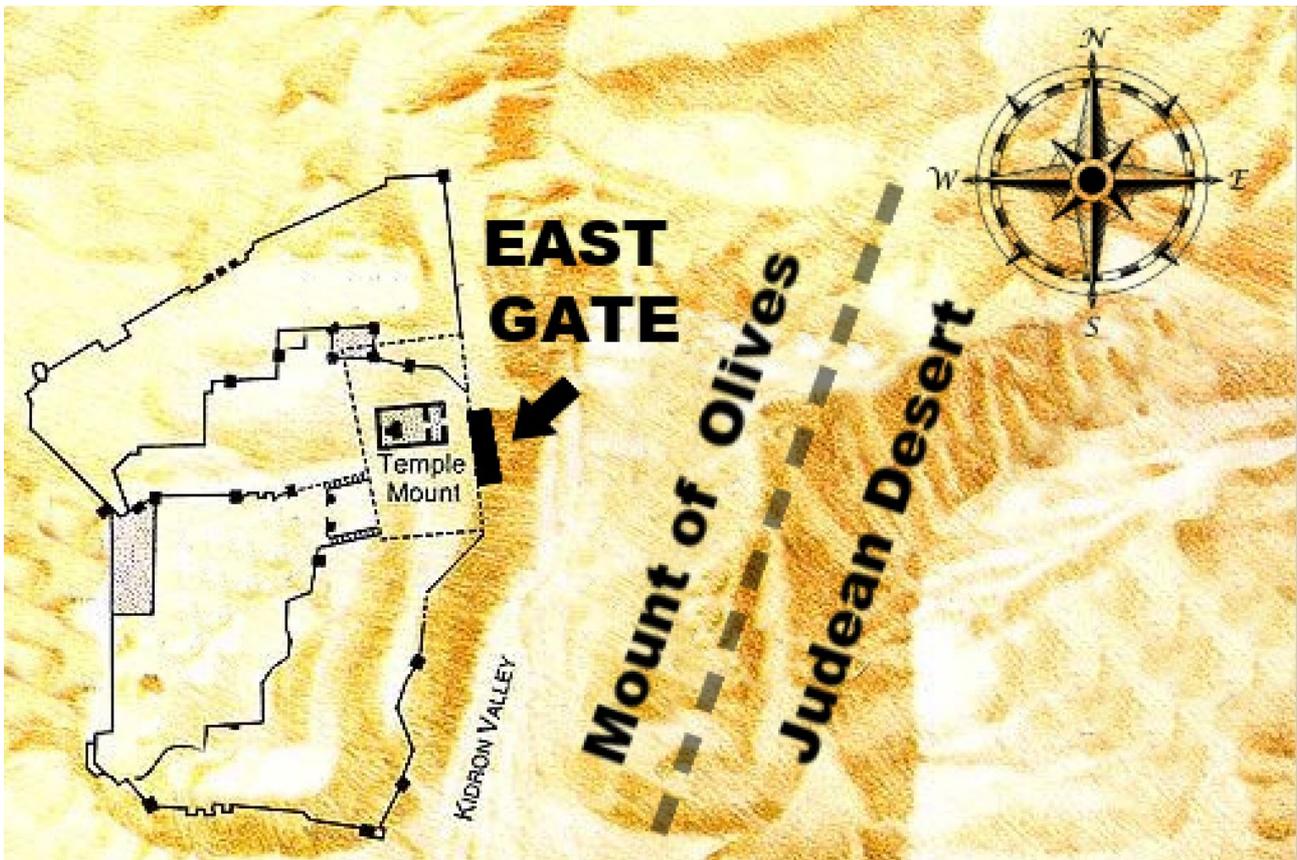
was crucified, He promised, ‘The shepherd will be struck and the sheep scattered, but after I rise again we will meet at the place I have appointed.’ That place was this very mountain.” He pointed down at the ground in front of him. “So when the disciples gathered here, Jesus said to His disciples ‘In heaven and on earth all authority is here with Me. Therefore go! Let all the nations hear. Baptize all who have been saved.’ Therefore go! Go to do what? To preach the Gospel. To preach what? Don’t just teach them to believe, but make disciples of the nations. When the disciples were filled with the Spirit, then they feared nothing. ‘If I die, I die.’ They didn’t lose their courageous spirit. So when you receive this Spirit, you must go. You must go! ‘And the nations will become My disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.’”³⁴

“The church in the West is sleeping,” Brother Yun continued on off camera in Mandarin Chinese as we stood together on the Mount of Olives, “but Jesus is calling the church in China to wake up and complete the Great Commission! This is the Back to Jerusalem vision.”

After Jesus delivered His final words and ascended into heaven, two men dressed in white said something that is absolutely pivotable for the final days and pointed to another piece of prophecy: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, *will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven*” (Acts 1:11 NIV).

These men in white were standing on the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley, facing the East Gate. This confirms what Ezekiel prophesied about regarding the final days in Ezekiel 43:1–5.

³⁴ Interview with Brother Yun, Chasing Revival video, Episode 1, 23:00 minutes.



This location of Jesus' final words is of supreme importance because it sets the stage for everything that happens for the next two thousand years.

The Mount of Olives has a ridge that runs north and south. The olive tree grove is on the western slope directly facing the East Gate of Jerusalem. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, we know for certain that they would have been facing the East Gate because the Bible tells us the disciples were a Sabbath's day walk from Jerusalem (Acts 1:12), which would be the distance of about two thousand cubits or about one kilometer. Only the west side of the Mount of Olives would allow for that restriction of travel. The back side of the Mount of Olives is over the ridge line and at the beginning of the Judean Desert, far beyond a Sabbath's day walk.

Jesus giving the Great Commission from the Mount of Olives, facing the East Gate, created the cardinal direction for the Gospel message to travel, which was immediately confirmed by the very next movement and direction of the disciples. "Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city" (Acts 1:12).

Jerusalem is west of the Mount of Olives. Immediately after Jesus spoke His last words to the disciples, they went west.

Did they plan it? There is no indication that they did. Did they realize it or share it in their writings? There is nothing that we can find, but the words of Jesus are so powerful that even the direction that He is facing when He gives a command sets the stage for everything in nature.

Chapter 10

Back to Jerusalem and Pentecost

Go west, young man!

The city of Jerusalem is west of the Mount of Olives, so the disciples walk westward. These first steps the disciples took will be the primary direction throughout the book of Acts and will set the stage for the first-century church and the twenty-first-century Chinese Christians.

The disciples moved westward to Jerusalem and waited for the day of Pentecost—the Jewish holiday of Pentecost, not the Christian Pentecost, because, remember, the Holy Spirit had not yet come.

As they were waiting for the festival of Pentecost in Jerusalem, they could not have known they were waiting for what would be seen as the first Christian revival, one that would soon spread all over the world and one day return back to Jerusalem.

To understand the importance of Pentecost for the Back to Jerusalem vision, it is first important to understand the significance of Pentecost in Jewish culture.

When I was eighteen, I joined the military and was asked to write down my religion so that it could be recorded on my dog tags, a metal identification tag that would be placed around my neck and inside the boot strings of my right boot. I didn't grow up in a Christian home and was not

familiar with all of the denominations. I wanted to simply mark Christian as my religion, but there was no such box to tick. Instead, I was given a list of denominations I had to choose from.

I did not belong to any denomination, but the military said I had to choose one and they did not give me a lot of time to think it over. I looked at the list and saw Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, etc., and did not recognize any of them.

On the list I did see the word *Pentecostal* and remembered that I had visited a small, rural Pentecostal church once or twice. I quickly chose the Pentecostal box, and for the remaining time in the military I was labeled as a Pentecostal in all of my records. I didn't know what that really meant until years later.

As I grew older and more familiar with American Christianity, I slowly began to associate the denomination of Pentecostals with the charismatic expression of Christianity as recorded in the book of Acts. In this way, I became a charismatic Christian by accident. I suspect many Americans associate the term *Pentecost* with the American idea of a charismatic Christian. However, when I traveled to Jerusalem and began to look more deeply at the words of the apostle Luke in the book of Acts, I was blown away at what I found.

What is clearly written in the Bible is that the day of Pentecost was a Jewish holiday before it was a American Christian denomination. I know this should not have been a revelation, but it was for me. Long before the Holy Spirit ever fell upon the disciples, Pentecost marked the end of the Jewish Passover, a period of mourning and bitter sadness. The grain harvest that followed seven weeks after Passover was traditionally a festival of gladness, celebration, and dancing. This holiday drew Jews from all over the known world to celebrate in Jerusalem, which we see in the book of Acts.

Pentecost was a free-will offering festival where grains were brought to the temple and everyone was invited: the fatherless, the widowed, foreigners—everyone. Everyone was to be included in the final harvest festival.

And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill

offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee:

And thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place his name there. (Deut. 16:10–11 KJV, emphasis added)

This day set the stage for the entire world to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ. The day of Pentecost was a sign that the final harvest would be available for every foreigner, stranger, and Gentile in the world. The eschaton of Back to Jerusalem is symbolized here on the day of Pentecost, not just in the book of Acts, but from the beginning as it is celebrated in Deuteronomy.

Old Testament Pentecost, or Shavuot as it is called, was unlike any other celebration on the Jewish calendar. In the Torah, a date is prescribed for all of the festivals, except for one: Shavuot. The Torah (Lev. 23:15) commands God's people to count forty-nine days—seven weeks—beginning the second day of Passover. On the fiftieth day, they are to observe Pentecost, but no date is ascribed to it. That means that the day of Pentecost could take place at any time over a three day period falling within 50 days following the Passover.

Pentecost is not connected to a date, but rather a countdown of days. When Pentecost was first celebrated, the exact date or hour for the celebration was not known, but what was known was the season of the harvest.

For the Jew, this was likened to a bridegroom courting a bride, who was eagerly waiting for the day when the bridegroom would come for her. She knew the season, but not the exact hour he would come.

Pentecost is considered to be the time of celebration when God entered into a covenant with the Jewish people. This covenant is revealed in the imagery of a groom entering into a covenant with his bride, which is why Pentecost is considered to be a wedding day, when the Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Song of Songs 4:11 is recited as the groom calls out to his bride, “Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue” (NIV). Because of this verse, the Jewish people have cheesecake to celebrate the day of Pentecost.

The festival of Pentecost is a treasure chest of information about the return of Jesus Christ, if we only know what we are looking at.

The Passover festival is celebrated in remembrance of the dark bitter days of slavery in Egypt. The blood of the lamb was placed on the door posts above the threshold of the home to keep death outside of the house. This was a sad and fearful time, but the day of Pentecost is when the tears are wiped away and the bride and Groom rejoice. The threshold of the home is open.

The threshold is a very holy and solemn place in ancient times. It was both the entrance to the temple and the alter of one’s home.

The primitive altar of the family would seem to have been the threshold, or door-sill, or entrance-way, of the home dwelling-place. This is indicated by surviving customs, in the East and elsewhere among primitive peoples, and by the earliest historic records of the human race. It is obvious that houses preceded temples, and that the house-father was the earliest priest. Sacrifices for the family were, therefore, within or at the entrance of the family domicile.³⁵

We see this threshold covenant in the Jewish prayer “Shema Yisrael” from Deuteronomy 6:4–9, beginning with the phrase, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One” (NIV). This scripture is permanently affixed to the doorpost of the threshold leading into every Jewish home to fulfill the mitzvah or commandment of God.

The bride comes under the authority of the groom as he carries her over the threshold, symbolizing his protection over her. This is known as the *Threshold Covenant* between a man and his wife. This is a deep cultural practice that goes back thousands of years. “At the threshold most marriage ceremonies take place among primitive people, and the bride often steps over the blood of

³⁵ H. Clay Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant, or the Beginning of Religious Rites* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1896), 335.

the sacrificed lamb which flows upon the threshold, as she enters the bridegroom's house."³⁶

From the first Pentecost, we have this view of the Messiah, returning for His Bride, crossing victoriously over the threshold of the East Gate and keeping His covenant.

The story of Pentecost does not stop there. It is only starting.

Something amazing happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost that mimics the first Jewish Pentecost, and it is something that separates Christianity from all of the other religions of the world.

A violent wind came down from heaven above and filled the entire house where the disciples were. "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:3–4 NIV).

The Holy Spirit came down and spoke to His people in different languages.

These two verses are among two of the most important verses in the whole Bible and clearly connect with the first Pentecost in important ways. Pentecost, both in the Old and New Testament, is what makes Christianity and Judaism completely different from any other religion in the world.

You see, Buddhism is based on the teachings that were experienced by a single man—the founder, Siddhartha Gautama. The birth of Mormonism relies on the revelation of one single individual—Joseph Smith. The entire religion of Islam is established solely on the visions and experiences of Muhammad. No one else was there to witness what these men claimed to have seen. Each one of them shared revelations from their lonely experiences, but this is not true for Christians and Jews on the day of Pentecost. God spoke, and multitudes were there to witness it. Not only did they witness it, but they heard the words in their own language.

In Acts 2, everyone present was experiencing the Holy Spirit speaking directly to them "tongues like as of fire" (v. 3) in many different languages.

This amazing gift of tongues was given to the Jews during the Old Testament Pentecost. The Jewish people at Mount Sinai experienced the voice of God speaking directly to them and giving

³⁶ Ibid.

the Law at Sinai (Ex. 19:16–20:1; Deut. 5:1), also in many different languages (Deut. 4:11– 15; Heb. 12:18–19).

According to Jewish teachings on the Torah, God spoke to the Israelites in seventy different languages represented by fire (Shemot Rabbah 5:9).

It was no mistake that the power of the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and all those present on the day of Pentecost, making a display in all languages present to reach all nations. The disciples did not abandon their Jewish faith on the day of Pentecost when they heard languages other than Hebrew. They were in fact embracing it, directly connecting themselves to the covenant of God.

Pentecost was God showing Himself to thousands of people at one time and revealing His Word to them in their own language.

But not all of the witnesses were excited about this. The witnesses in Jerusalem thought that those speaking in tongues were drunk on wine early in the morning (Acts 2:13), and the people with Moses freaked out and hid, saying, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (Ex. 20:19 NIV).

The day of Pentecost was the launching pad of the Gospel message to travel around the world. This is the foundation of the church, bringing the nations together into one body. People find salvation today in a corporate setting just as they did on the day of Pentecost. Revival is a group experience, not an isolated one. Revival is not a selfish endeavor to be experienced alone. That is why Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam can never experience a true revival. Their experiences are individual revelations with a false god instead of a group experience with the living Lord.

Basically, if you want salvation, you can find it as an individual, but if you crave to see others receive the Gospel, then it must be shared with others as it was on the day of Pentecost.

Chapter 11

Moving West

The Back to Jerusalem vision of the Chinese church is repeatedly confirmed by the New Testament. The vision that God has given to the Chinese Christians did not just spontaneously appear, but instead sprouted from seeds that were planted at the beginning of time. The vision that exists today was put into motion more than two thousand years ago.

The vision of Back to Jerusalem to carry the Gospel westward is laid out in the Acts of the Apostles. The Holy Spirit fell on the festival devoted to harvest during Pentecost, and a harvest of three thousand were saved in the blink of an eye as a result.

The author of Acts, Luke, did something very interesting that very few people catch on to. He seemed to have a wide focus on many players who were involved in the ministry of Jesus but then narrowed his focus to the path of one man, Peter. In the first chapter, Luke wrote about Jesus appearing to many people over a period of forty days (v. 13). Then Luke focused in a little more and specifically mentioned the eleven disciples by name in the Upper Room (v. 13). Luke then zoomed in a little further on Peter (v. 15), and for the next ten chapters, his primary focus is on Peter.

Peter, either knowingly or unknowingly, made a prophesy on the day of Pentecost that would challenge his beliefs in Judaism to the core and propel the trajectory of Christianity forever. I am not sure if Peter recognized it at first, but if he did, he could not have fully understand the implications of what it truly meant.

He stood up before the crowds and quoted from the prophet Joel:

In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

*And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

(Acts 2:17–21 NIV, emphasis added)

Once Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, something amazing happened—he began to prophecy about reaching the nations and fulfilling the Great Commission. This prophecy from Peter reflected the mandate given by Christ: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NIV).

Just as Jesus said they would, those who were filled with the Holy Spirit became witnesses for Him. But remember, Jesus not only told them to go and preach to the nations, but He also laid out a road map for them that was very much like a ripple in a pond: first Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and then the rest of the world.

Luke follows the road map, first with the disciples, and now with Peter alone.

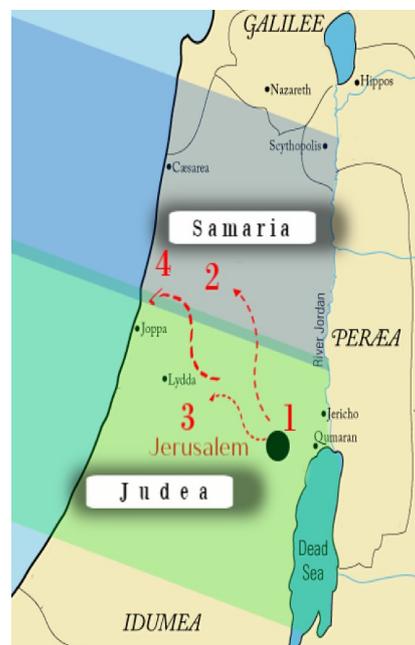
The book of Acts details the many miracles that began to follow the disciples, but Peter is a central focus. Peter healed the lame beggar (Acts 3); Peter preached to onlookers (Acts 3); Peter preached to the leaders, declaring, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21 NIV); Peter preached to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4); Peter led the new Christians into a community of common sharing (Acts 4–5); and even Peter’s shadow had miraculous powers (Acts

5)!

Next, Peter found himself in Samaria ministering to the Samaritans (Acts 8), the very people many Jews had considered to be unclean.

At first Peter and the disciples stayed in Jerusalem and preached to all that would hear there. It did not seem that the disciples, including Peter, had any real plans to leave the holy city. Who knows, maybe the disciples never would have left Jerusalem to fulfill the mission God had given to them to be His “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” But then persecution broke out in an extreme way (Acts 8:1), which led to the dispersion of the new Christians and “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (v. 4 NIV).

Where did the new believers scatter to? Luke does not really tell us; instead, he continued to stay focused on Peter, who went west. Acts 8:14 marks the moment that Peter began his journey on the road map from Jerusalem, to travel to Judea and Samaria, and then to the rest of the world.



First Peter goes to Samaria (Acts 8:14). This is a north-west direction from Jerusalem, passing through the area of Judea.

Peter was on a roll, like a wild cowboy with pistols that shoot laser beams of supernatural healing in the wild west of Judea. As we read, we see the character and power of Christ all over Peter.

Not only is the power of Christ all over Peter, but what happens next is almost a carbon copy of what Peter witnessed in Mark 5:35–43 when Jesus took Peter with him to see a young girl who had died. Like Jesus had, Peter asked everyone to leave the room. Then Peter, using almost the same words Jesus had used when He spoke to the girl, said to Tabitha, “Tabitha, get up” (Acts 9:40 NIV; see Mark 5:41 NIV).

The imagery here of Peter walking in the footsteps of Jesus is crystal clear, but there is another storyline at play: Peter is fulfilling the Great Commission. Wherever Peter went there were miracles, healings, and salvations, but they were not for the sake of proving the skeptics wrong or astonishing the curious crowds. The skeptics did not even seem to be present in the story to prove the apostleship of Peter, because that seemed to have been firmly established already.

The miracles and healings continued to follow Peter, it seems, for a much bigger purpose. That purpose was to reach the nations.

And as he spread the Gospel, people continued to repent of their sins, turn from their wicked ways, and give their lives to Christ.

Next Peter traveled to Lydda (Acts 9:32). Luke was not offering trivial details when he mentions specific locations. He was clearly marking the path that Peter was taking westward.

Peter then traveled to Joppa. Joppa is on the western most border of Israel. The only way to go farther west was to board a boat and sail to another nation. Today Joppa is the oldest active seaport in the world.

Like a virus, the Gospel message was growing and reaching more people in more areas, and now it was about to make a major leap. The farther the Gospel message spread, the more difficult it became to destroy. But for now, there was no great need for the enemy to panic, because the revival flame was only growing among a small Jewish sect, and they were surrounded by the conquering

Gentiles, who were far too superior to listen to the simpleminded religious ramblings of a nomadic Jewish slave culture. The Jews were not evangelistic to those outside of their race. They did not (and still do not) put any effort into converting non-Jews to Judaism. Why would they? In their mind, they were the chosen people, which would kind of make everyone else—well . . . not chosen people.

So if the Gentiles had no desire to convert and the Jews had zero desire to convert the Gentiles, then it was a guaranteed recipe for the revival to not move past the Jewish communities.

However, what is impossible for man is possible for God.

Acts 10 might very well be the single most important chapter in the entire Bible if you are not Jewish by birth.

According to Luke, the Gospel message had only spread to the Jewish population, but in chapter 10, it was about to spill over into the Gentile world.

It might not seem noticeable at first, but there is a very strong parallel here between what was about to happen to Peter and what happened to Jonah in the Old Testament. It seems fitting that this next stage of stretching Peter would take place in Joppa, because this was the same port that Jonah fled to when he was running from the calling of the Lord to go and preach a message of repentance to the Gentiles.

Like Jonah, Peter was called to the Gentiles by God. Like Jonah, Peter was given a command that he was reluctant to accept (Jonah 1:3; Acts 10:14). Like Jonah, Peter protested and was unwilling to accept the task that God was giving him. God kept Jonah in the belly of the fish for three days and nights (Jonah 1:17), and Peter saw the same vision and heard the same command three times over (Acts 10:10–16).

In chapter 3 of the book of Jonah, the Word of God came again to Jonah and said, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you” (v. 2 NIV), which is like the command that was given to Peter (Acts 10:20).

So Peter could be referred to as “Simon bar Jonah” or “Simon son of Jonah” in a cheeky

way that had a double meaning, since Simon Peter was walking in the footsteps of Jonah.

Peter had a revelation in Acts 10. In verse 28, he realized that salvation for all mankind was a story woven throughout the Word of God and was the reason for the covenant with Israel. God chose Israel as a people to share with the entire world the Good News of salvation; salvation was not for the Jews alone. Calling the Jewish people and making a covenant with them was not a racist act to bring about an ethnically homogenized salvation, but instead was a grand honor and a vessel to reach every nation.

Peter's vision was a sign that this message of the Good News was for all people. This was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and lines up with the Back to Jerusalem vision.

At the same time that Peter was experiencing the vision, God was also working in the heart of a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Cornelius was a Roman Gentile, considered to be religiously unclean by the Jews, but he was clean when he was washed with the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7).

Gentiles could now find hope in a Jewish Savior, receive the Holy Spirit, and join the Body of Christ. From this point on, God was no longer viewed as just the Savior of the Jewish people. He was now the Savior for all mankind.

This was the beginning of something horribly amazing. It was horrible in the sense that persecution of Christians from this point on came not only from the religious Jewish community but from the entire Western hemisphere, but amazing in the way that God was now the Savior for all, including the Chinese.

Chapter 12

Ethnocentric Judaism as It Relates to China

When looking at the foundation of Back to Jerusalem in the New Testament, it is interesting to note that many of the scriptures that pertain to and are quoted by those who promote the Chinese vision

are found in Acts. Before the book of Acts, the word *Gentile* in the Bible was treated as a dirty word, and there is little or no direct command to the common Jew to preach to the Gentile or non-Jew.

The Old Testament makes it clear that the Lord is the Creator of all the earth (Isa. 40:28) and calls all nations to Him (1 Chron. 16:4), but the Jewish people were not told to take an active role in evangelizing the nations. In fact, a very strong argument could be made that the Old Testament demands that the Jewish people stay as far away from non-Jews as humanly possible.

In all the commands and laws that God gave to His people Israel, He did not tell them to preach the Word He gave to them to the other nations. They were not compelled to sacrifice their life to share His name in unreached nations. All of the examples we have of Jewish believers proselytizing unbelievers are more private endeavors rather than from a religious obligation.

The Old Testament speaks of the nations coming to Jerusalem, but the Jewish people are not compelled to participate in facilitating that prophecy. Dr. S .G. Wilson, in his book *The Gentiles and the Gentile mission in Luke–Acts*, said it this way:

First, one must distinguish in the Old Testament between universalism and mission. The former notion asserts that God is Lord of all the earth, including all the nations other than Israel, but it does not imply that Israel has any responsibility for evangelizing other peoples. The idea that God is Lord of all creation may be an essential presupposition for universal mission, but the idea of mission is not, at least for the Old Testament, a logical implicate of universalism.³⁷

Although it might be clear to us today that Jesus' command of the Great Commission changed all of that, it did not seem clear to the disciples, who continued ministering to the Jews long after the ascension of Jesus.

The revelation from Peter's vision in Joppa is a key event in Christian history that non-Jews

³⁷ Stephen G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke–Acts* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, i-vi) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 1–2.

cannot take from granted. God had to literally stop Peter and supernaturally intervene in his life to show him that Gentiles were part of the final plan. For a Jew like Peter, the return of the Messiah was closely related to the idea of national identity and the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. In fact, the very last words the disciples said to Jesus were, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6 NIV).

After all of their time with Jesus, after all of the miracles they witnessed and sermons they listened to, it was still anchored deep in their soul that the true mission of the Messiah was to restore the earthly kingdom of Israel.

The understanding of world missions and universal salvation for all mankind did not compute. This is further proven by their lack of engagement with non-Jews after Jesus’ command to spread His teachings. All of the new believers on the day of Pentecost were Jews who were part of the Diaspora and who had retained their identity and had traveled to Jerusalem for the religious festivals.

The Chinese can identify with this Jewish ethnocentric identity more than most cultures. Very few nations truly realize the strong ethnic bond and ethnocentric identity of the Chinese people, but it is evident in almost every large city. Any extensive visit to New York, London, Paris, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai, or Johannesburg is bound to reveal a Chinatown where the Chinese residents live their daily life in a Chinese setting complete with Chinese language, rules, customs, clothing, and food.

There are multiple connections to made between Jewish and Chinese ethnocentricity. Like the Jewish belief that Jerusalem is the center of the world, the Chinese refer to China as *Jonggwuo* (中国), which means “the center kingdom.” The Chinese believe so much in the fact that they are the center of the world that they literally named their country the Middle Kingdom.

Like the Jewish culture, language, and history, Chinese culture, language, and history go back several thousand years.

And the Chinese, like the Jews, work hard to keep their culture, language, and history alive.

In fact, a term has been created called *sinicization* or *sinocentrism*. *Sinicization* means to “modify by Chinese influence.”³⁸ Sinicization is dominant in Chinese areas where assimilation to another culture or integration of another culture is discouraged.

The Jews believe they have a mandate from heaven to keep their culture and practices pure. The Chinese have the same religious belief, and it is called *Tian Ming* (天命), or as translated in English, the “Mandate from Heaven.”

So when Chinese Christians read about Peter grappling with the idea of reaching outside of his race and culture, they can relate.

As biblical readers, it is easy for us to forget the racism that Jesus was born into. The world of Jesus’ day was racially, ethnically, and religiously divided into the Jew and Gentile, free and slave, the Greek speaking and non-Greek speaking, and the Roman citizen and non-Roman citizen. The world prior to the Gospel was extremely racist and divided.

Consider the final command of Jesus to His disciples to preach the Good News to the entire world (Acts 1:8), yet only after persecutions were the Christians forced to flee Jerusalem, and even then the focus of preaching was still aimed at the Jew.

Perhaps it is no mistake that Peter’s life-changing vision was captured solely in the writings of the apostle Luke. Luke has been thought of by many theologians as a Gentile. As Dr. Thomas S. McCall with Messianic Jewish ministry Zola Levitt Ministries has written,

It may not seem important whether or not Luke was a Gentile, but when you think about the magnitude of his work, the issue becomes truly significant. By counting the pages written by Luke in both his Gospel and Acts, it is clear that Luke wrote more pages of the New Testament than any other writer, including Paul and John. If Luke was a Gentile, then the Lord entrusted more pages of New Testament revelation to a Gentile than to any other writer. This would be remarkable, to say the least.³⁹

³⁸ *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “sinicize,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sinicize>.

³⁹ Thomas S. McCall, “Was Luke a Gentile,” Zola Levitt Ministries, March 1996, accessed February 23, 2020, <https://www.levitt.com/essays/luke>.

Although there is no conclusive proof that Luke was a Gentile, his writings identify so strongly with the Gentile cause that it is easy to understand why he was and is thought of as a Gentile.

Given the way the apostle Luke wrote about Peter, it seems Luke was privy to some of the more private moments and thoughts of the apostle and was acutely aware of Peter's reluctance to reach out to the Gentiles.

Luke wanted to make sure his audience was aware of the significance of what was happening in Joppa; that is why he slowed down the time line and shared in detail about the events that eventually led to the first Gentile conversion.

Joppa is not only one of the oldest ports in the world, but since it is located on the Mediterranean, it would have been a bit like home for Peter the fisherman. The old seaport of Joppa had more historical significance than the Sea of Galilee where Peter lived, and it was a bustling place for fishermen and tradesmen.

Peter's vision, according to Luke, led to an encounter with a man named Cornelius, who was not only a Gentile but also was a Roman military commander. This too relates deeply to the Chinese Christian, because a scrappy, full-blooded Jew like Peter would have had nothing in common with a man like Cornelius. Peter would have detested Cornelius because the Romans were seen as occupiers of Israel. Let's not forget that Peter was a disciple of Jesus, the very man the Roman soldiers, like those commanded by Cornelius, crucified and nailed to a wooden cross.

Chinese Christians could relate to this if they put themselves in the shoes of Peter and imagined that Cornelius was not a Roman commander but was instead a Japanese commander. The Japanese occupied China like the Romans occupied Israel, and the lack of love the Chinese have for the Japanese Imperial soldier is perhaps similar to what the Jew would have felt toward the Roman soldier.

Peter, a Jew, forbidden to socialize with Gentiles, said to Cornelius, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is

acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34–35 ESV).

On the day that Cornelius met with Peter, he became a follow of Jesus, but Cornelius was not alone in his conversion. Everyone present, including Peter, also changed. The message of Christ was not just for the Jew, but it was for all the ethnicities of the world.

While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who were hearing his words. The Jewish followers who had come along with Peter were surprised and wondered because the gift of *the Holy Spirit was also given to the people who were not Jews*. They heard them speak in special sounds and give thanks to God. Then Peter said, “Will anyone say that these people may not be baptized? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” (Acts 10:44–47 NLV, emphasis added)

Cornelius’s conversion was only the beginning of a massive flood of Gentiles who were about to be grafted into the vine of Christ. This was a major shift in how man saw God. God did not change. He has always remained the same, but now the gap that divided man from his Creator was bridged by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is not possible to know how the book of Acts would have been interpreted without the telling of this story between Peter and Cornelius. Peter did not recall it in his writings. The writers of the Gospel did not include it in their writings. Paul, an advocate of reaching the Gentiles, did not point to this event. It is Luke and Luke alone who recorded these events and it is Peter who sees the fulfillment of what Jesus prophesied over him in Caesarea Philippi.

Chapter 13

Back to Jerusalem and the Gates of Hell

The book of Acts can be referred to as “The Fifth Gospel,” “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit,” or “The

Gospel of the Body of Christ,” and it gives an amazing chronological history of the movement of the Gospel and the founding of the church in a way that no other document on earth does.

Many overlook the significance of the book of Acts, but it is priceless and irreplaceable because it details the earliest years of the founding of the church and the spread of Gospel message immediately following the ascension of Jesus.

Before the crucifixion, Jesus spent time training His disciples, and it was not always easy (Matt. 17:17). After the ascension, however, the training wheels came off. The disciples were going to need to remember everything Jesus said, taught, and did, Peter perhaps most of all. But before Peter became the focus of Luke’s writings in the book of Acts, Luke wrote a bit of background about Peter’s discernment of Jesus as the Messiah (Luke 9:18–20).

Matthew actually contains one of the most detailed accounts of this event. This conversation between Peter and Jesus sets the stage for Back to Jerusalem. This portion of the Bible might actually explain the heart of the vision of Back to Jerusalem more than any other portion of the Bible.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. (Matt. 16:13–20 NIV)

Two things happened here for the first time.

First, Jesus was recognized by His disciples as the Messiah, the Son of God. Second, this is the first time we see the word *church* in the Bible.

Peter was not a scholar or a theologian. He was a fisherman, so his confession to the true nature of Jesus was a revelation that must have sent shockwaves through the other disciples.

The location of Peter's revelation could not have been by mistake either.

This is actually one of the most foundational scriptures in the entire Bible for the existence of the Catholic Church. According to their interpretation of this event, it was here that Peter was anointed as the head of the church and became the forerunner for every pope who would follow in his footsteps.

Even the standard for the Vatican, where the pope is seated, is marked with two keys, gold and silver—one for binding and the other for loosening—based on these verses.

Protestants believe the original language here is important, so they point out that Jesus used two different words in this section of Scripture. One is the name for Peter—*Petros*, in Greek—which can mean small rock or small pebble. The other is *petra*, which means a big rock.

So, in essence, Jesus said, “And I say also unto thee, that thou art Petros, and upon this *petra* I will build my church.”

According to most Protestant Christians, the *petra*—the big rock—is actually Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. It would be this confession that would be uttered on the lips of everyone who would eventually enter into the eternal kingdom of God.

The Catholic Church has a very strong argument for their interpretation of this scripture, as do Protestants, but their conclusions have led them down completely different paths to fulfill the call of God on their lives.

For the Chinese, there is still yet another massive piece of this event that relates to the Back to Jerusalem vision. There is still deeper symbolism that can easily be missed if one does not pay attention to what Matthew was saying when he pointed out the specific location of this event.

First, regardless of the debate, the meaning is clear that Peter was being prophesied over in the shadow of Caesarea. Second, the location of this conversation sheds some light on what was really going on here.

During the days of Jesus, Caesarea was still within the area of Judea, but it had a much larger Gentile influence than Jerusalem and was dedicated to false gods.

The primary landmark in Caesarea Philippi is a large mount known as the “Rock of the Gods.” It is an imposing site that still stands today. It is called the Rock of the Gods because the Greeks had built numerous shrines to the gods into the rock face. This large rock formation would have loomed large in the minds of the disciples when Jesus claimed that He would build His church upon “this” rock.

It is important to know that during the days of Christ, Caesarea Philippi was arguably the darkest region in all of Judea. No respectable Jew would have been caught dead there. Polytheism was the primary focus for the many temples, massive orgies took place for the worship of the nymphs, and it is possible that human sacrifices were made there.

Reverend Max Lynn, from St. John's St. John's Presbyterian church in Berkley, described it this way,

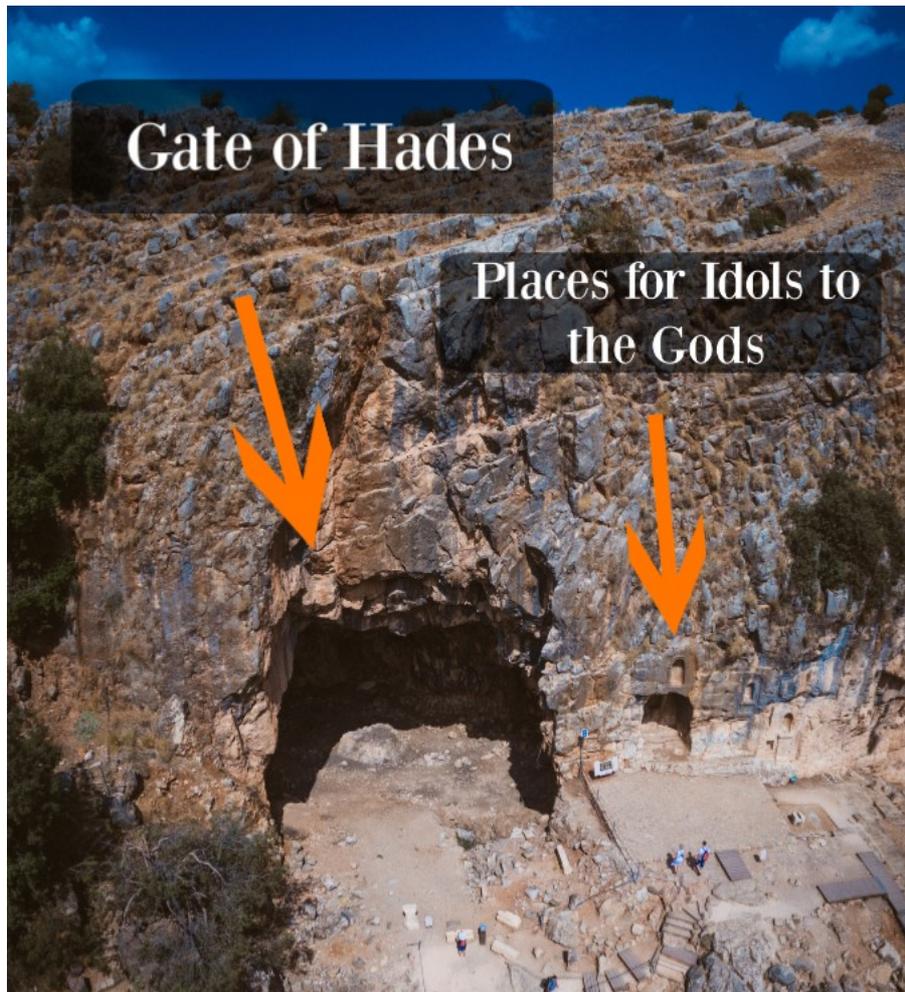
In the 3rd century BCE the Greeks built a temple in dedication for the god Pan. Pan was a Greek god of shepherds, hunters, music and desolate places. Half goat half man, Pan would lure nymphs and capture and violate virgins in the wilderness. Thus Pan’s noises in mountains and grottos would inspire panic. In worship of Pan they would sacrifice animals and throw them into the deep pit from which the spring came. No doubt people were thrown in there too. Also, there would have been many temple prostitutes and bestiality. So you can imagine orgies of sex and rivers of blood at the deep cave that must have seemed like the gates of hell.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Max Lynn, “Standing on the Rocks Above the Gates of Hell,” sermon preached on August 24, 2014, St. John’s Presbyterian Church of Berkley, accessed February 23, 2020, <http://www.stjohnsberkeley.org/sunday/sermons/2014-sermons/standing-on-a-rock-above-the-gates-of-hell>

There is no doubt about it, Caesarea Philippi was a spiritually dark pit and was an odd place for the Messiah to reveal who He really was. This was the equivalent of Jesus taking His disciples to the red-light district in Amsterdam today. After traveling there and learning about the geographical history firsthand, I thought it seemed odd that this place was one Jesus would take His disciples to. It was not convenient to travel to and would not have been on the way to any place where Jesus or His disciples were going. It would have been inconvenient to travel there. It was as far north in Israel as one could travel and would have taken a lot of effort to get there. In my simple mind, I would think that a place like Jerusalem—the city of the kings—would be a much more appropriate location for such a huge revelation.

But Jesus spoke with imagery in His words to Peter, and the Rock of the Gods provided a backdrop to the imagery Jesus used when He said that He would build His church on this rock.

In the center of the Rock of the Gods is a cave that was believed to be the gateway to Hades. Inside the cave is a water spring that was considered to be bottomless because it was the barrier between earth and hell. So when Jesus said that the “gates of hell” will not prevail against His church, the disciples would have connected His words with the image of this spring.



As I mentioned above, Jesus used the term *church* for the first time in this passage. This is pivotable for the Back to Jerusalem vision. He did not use the more familiar terms of *temple* or *synagogue* but instead used the Greek term *ekklesia*, which is not a term necessarily linked to a structural building at all, like temple and synagogue would be, but instead is connected to the idea of people or a flock of followers.

Jesus had often used sheep in His illustrations to convey heavenly ideas, and that imagery is also connected to Caesarea Philippi. In ancient times, as well as today, the area is referred to as Paneas, named for the primary god that was worshipped there—the god of Pan.

Pan was a half-man and half-goat Greek god that was the lord of the shepherds. So there was even more imagery here, as Jesus was revealed as the Messiah in the presence of the god of the shepherds.

As I stood there in the shadow of the Rock of the Gods, a place that was dedicated to the

gods of the world and represented every dark and hideous thing that repelled me, I couldn't help but see another side of Matthew 16.

What if the church of Jesus Christ was not meant to be announced behind the safety of the walls of Jerusalem? What if the message of the Messiah was really to be revealed in the darkest locations on earth where other gods are praised and worshipped?

What if Jesus had chosen to plant His church, not in the cathedrals of holy sites, but instead in the strongholds of dark oppression? In other words, could it be possible that the Gospel message was never meant to dwell forever in the safety of those who agree with the light, but it was to be boldly proclaimed instead in the darkest locations on earth?

It seemed to me that Jesus was saying that the Gentiles had foolishly put their trust in the gods of the rock of Caesarea, but He was planting His church into the living stones of the disciples, namely Peter, who bore the name Simon Petros—whose name meant rock, and even the most ferocious adversaries of hell would not overcome it.

“You are Peter [Petros], and on this rock [Petra] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” The primary temple for the stone god of the shepherds was now overshadowed by the living stone of Peter, who vocally acknowledged the deity of Jesus and was then later prophesied to be a shepherd in the church of Jesus Christ.

Today the Chinese church is following the message of this passage by taking the Gospel message not to the nice and safe places on earth but to the darkest regions. The revelation of Jesus being the Messiah is still being announced not just in the temples and fancy churches of the world but in the face of the world's religious icons. The name of Jesus is being announced in all the desolate places on earth, but the gates of Hades will not prevail to stop it.

Luke wrote about this event in his gospel, and in the early chapters of the book of Acts he followed Peter as he fulfilled his role as a leading shepherd of the church of Jesus Christ that was being built by the Holy Spirit. Today, like Peter, the underground house church is announcing the deity of Jesus Christ, and try as they might, the gates of hell are not prevailing against it.

Chapter 14

The Westward Direction Orchestrated by God

Few things set the stage for the Back to Jerusalem vision of taking the Gospel westward from China more than the events that unfold in Acts chapter 16. It is here we see that the westward direction of the Great Commission was ordained by God.

From the very beginning of Acts, there is general movement of the Gospel westward, but the direction does not seem significant until chapter 16. The westward direction could merely be a coincidence until we see what happened to Paul.

Up until chapter 11, the apostle Luke specifically followed Peter as he traveled west from Jerusalem to Samaria to Judea, to Lydda, to Joppa, and then to Caesarea. But in chapter 11, ever reason, the Apostle Luke begins to transition, like a handoff, from following the apostle Peter to following the apostle Paul. Peter completed his journey westward in Caesarea before heading back to the council in Jerusalem, and then directly north of Caesarea, in Antioch, the apostle Luke picked up the story with Paul ministering with Barnabas.

In many respects, not long after the ascension of Jesus, Peter and the disciples had theoretically covered, and in some ways completed, the task Jesus had given to His disciples to take the Gospel from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.

Peter's interaction with Cornelius provided a link to the "rest of the world," as Jesus had commanded, but it would be through the ministry of the apostle Paul that Luke would tell that story, which begins in Antioch.

Antioch was a city just north of Caesarea on one of the most important routes of the Back to the Jerusalem vision known as the Silk Road.⁴¹ Antioch was a very rare city, as it was only one of two cities on the Silk Road that was accessible by both land and sea from China.

⁴¹ "Did You Know? The Anatolian Silk Roads," Silk Roads: Dialogue, Diversity & Development, accessed February 23, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/did-you-know-anatolian-silk-roads>.

The Silk Road was an ancient network of trade routes between China and the rest of the ancient world between 130 BCE–1453 CE.⁴²

Immediately after Luke shifted focus from Peter to Paul, we see that the westward movement of the Gospel efforts by Paul was not just a random choice but was predestined for him by the Holy Spirit.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, *the Holy Spirit said*, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The two of them, *sent on their way by the Holy Spirit*, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. (Acts 13:2–4 NIV, emphasis added)

The two, Paul and Barnabas, headed out westward by sea to the island of Cyprus. They arrived on the eastern side of the island at Salamis (v. 5) and traveled the entire island westward until they came to Paphos (v. 6). This western movement seems to be a continuing theme as they went northwest to Perga in Pamphylia (v. 13), Pisidian Antioch (v. 14), and Iconium (v. 51) before eventually heading back home, completing their first missionary journey.

After council with the disciples, Paul left out on his second missionary journey in chapter 16, and it is here that we see that the tendency to go westward was more than just coincidence, but was a direction imposed by God Himself.

Paul picked up right where he left off in Derbe and Lystra (v. 1), and we are immediately introduced to a new character: Timothy.

The apostle Luke gave us the interesting detail that Timothy was as a person “whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek” (v. 1 NIV).

Who cares about Timothy’s mother and father? What does that have to do with anything?

Any Jew reading this letter from the apostle Luke would have known right away that Timothy would not be welcomed by the Jewish community because he was of mixed blood. His mother was Jewish, but his father was Greek. This interracial marriage between a Jew and a European was

⁴² Joshua J. Mark, “Silk Road,” Ancient History Encyclopedia, May 1, 2018, https://www.ancient.eu/Silk_Road/.

forbidden in the writings of Moses (Deut. 7:3).

Paul was involving someone who would have been specifically banned from any position of authority in ministry.

This mixed marriage of Timothy's parents cannot be emphasized enough. This is one of the things that made the Samaritans so despised by the Jews. Second Kings 17 tells the story of the northern kingdom of Israel being conquered by the Assyrians (v. 6). The Assyrian king deported the Israelites to Assyria (v. 6) and replaced in Samaria them with foreigners (v. 24). A Jewish priest was eventually sent by the king to teach the new residents of Samaria about the Lord (v. 27), and soon Samaria was a city of mixed marriages and religions between Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish people, even those who returned back after Babylonian captivity, found this mixture unacceptable. Even in exile and slavery, the Jews were to keep themselves separated from the Gentiles.

We see the extreme measures taken to maintain this separation in the writings of Nehemiah. Before Nehemiah completed the construction of the wall of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple, he separated the pure Jews from the mixed Jews to keep the project pure (Neh. 13:28–29).

If Paul hoped to have any legitimacy among the Jewish population, he would have needed to first cut Timothy from their outreach efforts, but Luke was clearly showing that this was a new day and a new mission.

This first verse of Luke 16 about Timothy's lack of pedigree sets the stage for what is about to come. Paul was choosing to take with him a man who was the child of a mixed marriage between a Jew and a Greek, and now the Gospel message of the Jews was about to provide salvation to the Greeks!

This is right in line with the map Jesus had laid out when He said, "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NIV).

The path Jesus ordained was significant. Jerusalem was the heart of the Jewish faith. These were the pure Jews in every way—ethnically, culturally, religiously, etc.

Next was Judea, which is outside of Jerusalem. These Jews were still pretty Jewish in their

ethnicity, culture, and religion, but did not live near the temple in Jerusalem.

Samaria was the mix between the two—Jews and . . . the “rest of the world.” Samaria is where there is a marriage between the Jew and gentile. This is where the Jews start to pull back because the Samaritans’ bloodline had been polluted and they were rejected by the religious Jew, but they were not by Jesus.

Samaria is the geographical, religious, and cultural link between salvation for the Jews and salvation for the rest of the world.

God chose Timothy long before Paul did, and that is why Luke wrote about his background, because it will set the stage for what is about to happen next.

After introducing Timothy, Luke wrote the following:

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, *having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia*. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, *but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to*. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:6–10 NIV, emphasis added)

Luke was using a megaphone and highlighting the fact that Jesus and the Holy Spirit kept Paul and his ministry companions from going in any direction but to the west! This passage of the Bible solidifies the Back to Jerusalem vision.

Paul was traveling throughout Phrygia and Galatia (v. 6). These were the largest provinces of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Bithynia was to the north, Cappadocia to the east, and Mysia was to the west.

The east and the north were off limits to Paul and his team. Why? Because Jesus said so.

But Jesus also commanded His followers to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth, so why

stop Paul from doing exactly what Jesus commanded?

Paul was not left in the dark for long. He tried to go to Asia, but was not allowed. He tried to go north to Bithynia, but was stopped. We do not know how long Paul was in Traos waiting for the Lord to allow him to move, but it did not seem to be a very long time—or at least not long enough for Paul to start a fellowship in Traos.

I traveled to the ancient seaside village of Traos in 2016. Today the city it is not marked on a map, and the entire area sits in complete ruins in the middle of a wheat field. It is an abandoned ancient city. If you are lucky enough to find it, you can climb on top of the high stone arches that lead into the city or walk down the ancient streets. From the highest point you can actually see glimpses of a land mass across the ocean leading toward Europe. Traos is on the far west coast of modern-day Turkey and is on the edge of the Asian continent before crossing over the ocean to the European continent.

This was where Paul was given a vision of a man from Europe calling out to him and inviting him to Macedonia.

When Paul tried to go east, he was stopped by the Holy Spirit. When Paul tried to go north, he was stopped by the spirit of Jesus. This vision led Paul and his team westward to the European continent.

Not only was Paul being stopped from going any other direction, but he was continuing to be led in one direction, and that is the direction, according to the Chinese underground house church leaders, we see the Gospel message continue on for more than two thousand years until it circled back around and reached the shores of China.

Chapter 15

To the Ends of the World

Throughout the two-thousand-year history of the church, Christians have anticipated the immediate

return of the Messiah. Christians have found both teaching and inspiration regarding the return of the Messiah from the writings of the apostles. The quick return of Jesus Christ has been the hope of every Christian generation that has found themselves suffering for the Gospel message.

On any given day in China, I can hear pastors preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2 ESV). The church in China, like the disciples before them, have experienced extreme persecution and warmly welcome the return of Jesus.

They believe that Jesus will return as He said He would in His Word, but the official churches in China do not believe this. Officially, the government-sanctioned churches in China ban the teaching of a Second Coming of Christ.⁴³

The Chinese officials who have banned this teaching often point out the obvious: after two thousand years, Christ has not returned. The return of Christ did not happen during the first, second, or third century after the crucifixion. The return of Christ has not happened even though the church has been believing for more than two thousand years. So to many in China, it seems irrational to believe in the return of Jesus. Paul addressed this doubt directly when he wrote, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:17–19 NIV).

However, the miracles that Chinese Christians have experienced during one of the largest revivals on earth have led them to believe that the words of Jesus Christ are true. They believe that Jesus is returning again, though they do not know the day or the hour (Luke 12:40).

They are looking for the return of the Messiah “as the *lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24:27 NKJV, emphasis added).

Like Paul, Chinese Christians are persevering through their persecution to share the Gospel with as many people as possible before either Jesus returns or they pass away. Like Paul, many

⁴³ Eugene Bach, Interview from Underground House Church, Eugene Bach, The Underground Church, Whitaker House, September 1, 2014, 61.

Chinese pastors suffer in anguish and persecution and might find death a kind release from the misery, but they continue to push on for the sake of sharing the Good News with others.

Paul wrote about the hard choice between the desire for death and suffering to share the faith with others in his letter to the Philippians:

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith. (1:22–25 NIV)

Paul also wrote a letter to the church in Rome. He had not been to this church before, but if he was to continue on in a westerly direction, it would be an obvious choice. First he started off by pointing out that his journeys had been completely dictated by the Holy Spirit:

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (*but have been prevented from doing so until now*) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

I am *obligated* both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. (Rom. 1:13–15 NIV)

In Romans 15:20, Paul wrote something that is on the heart of every Back to Jerusalem missionary who is sent out from China: “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (NIV).

A few verses later in chapter 15, Paul revealed his ultimate goal: “Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my

way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company” (v. 24 KJV).

Paul reiterates his plans to go to Spain, “When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain” (v. 28 KJV).

Clearly Paul had a vision to go to Spain, and the fact that he wrote about it to the church in Rome was not arbitrary.

But why did he want to go to Spain?

In the days of Paul, most believed that the world was flat and that Spain was the end of the known world in the west.

Joseph Renan wrote in his book *History of the Origins of Christianity*,

Spain was considered as the western boundary of the world, so that as Paul believed himself authorized to conclude that since he had been in Achaia and in Macedonia, and that he had reached Illyria in the same way, when he will have been into Spain he would be able to say with truth that the name of Jesus has been preached in all the ends of the earth, and that the preaching of the Gospel was full accomplished.⁴⁴

If Paul was to complete the Great Commission in his lifetime, he would have to make it all the way to Spain. He wanted to see the Gospel preached in the entire earth, and Spain was thought to be the finish line.

He fought hard to make it to Spain, but there is no confirmed evidence that he ever made it. But it was not for a lack of trying. Just before his death he wrote, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7 ESV).

What Jesus knew and the disciples did not was that the world is round. And the farthest the Gospel can travel away from Jerusalem is to go around the globe in a full circle. Jerusalem would be the beginning and the end of the Gospel message. This is how it will go to the ends of the earth.

⁴⁴ Joseph Ernst Renan, *The History of the Origins of Christianity: Book III Saint Paul* (Ingersoll, Ontario: Devoted Publishing, 2017), 109.

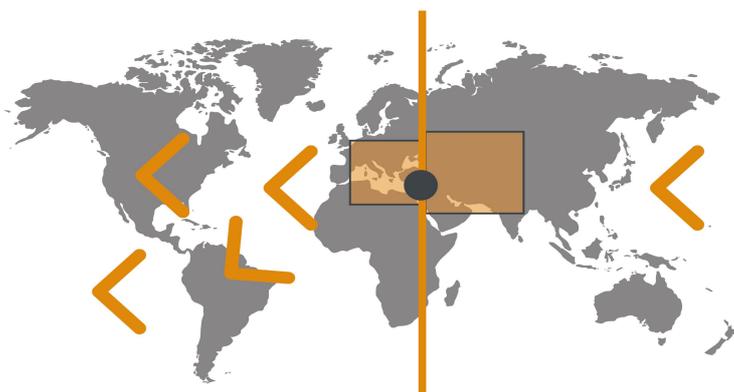
The end is the beginning.

This is the Back to Jerusalem vision.

Chapter 16

Back to Jerusalem and Eastward Movements

It would be absurd to say that all evangelical efforts went westward. The Gospel clearly went in multiple directions—to the north, south, east, and west. Though most of the disciples like Peter, Philip, Matthew, Bartholomew, and John did go west to Europe and Africa, there were several who also went east and planted churches that still exist today.



Above is a map of the general direction of the Gospel message. The center line represents the year 0 AD, the black dot in the center of the line represents Jerusalem and the orange shaded boxes roughly indicates the areas that the disciples covered immediately following the ascension of Jesus.

On my first trip to Chennai in India, I found myself on St. Thomas Mount, where I heard folk stories that have been passed down from generation to generation from the local priests about the martyrdom of the apostle Thomas, who was said to have been killed by the locals when he tried to preach the Gospel to them.

There are many Christians in India today who trace their roots directly to the apostle Thomas, giving more evidence that the Gospel did go eastward as well as westward.

There are few places on earth where Christianity is as old as it is in Iraq, which is east of Jerusalem, not west, though after seeing what the Gospel has done to transform Europe, it might be difficult to believe that the same Gospel message arrived in Iraq at the same time or even earlier. However, Syria and Iraq are arguably the first places revival ever took hold outside of Jerusalem.

What happened in that region has almost completely been erased from memory. I learned about this eastward spreading of the Gospel message when I traveled to Iraq in 2014, shortly after the invasion of ISIS.

“If you want to know how Christianity first came to Iraq, then you should talk to the priest,” Jacob said. Jacob was a member of one of the few Christian families who lived in the Yazidi area of the Sinjar Mountains when ISIS invaded in 2014.

Jacob took me to the home of the elderly Christian priest who had to flee from the Sinjar Mountains when ISIS attacked his home village. “He knows everything about Christianity in Iraq,” Jacob said. “I am sure he can tell you the whole story.”

When we entered the home of the priest, he was sitting on a wraparound sofa that doubled as a bed at night. More than one refugee family from the Sinjar Mountains was living with him. The priest was frail, but excited to have visitors. He was happy, but it was apparent that running from ISIS and living as a refugee for the last several months had taken a toll on the ninety-one-year-old man. He sat nervously twirling his brown wooden prayer beads and adjusting his dirty white prayer cap as he tried to remember how the Gospel message first came to his people.

“Adda the teacher was the first to bring the Gospel message to Iraq,” the priest said with confidence, but then he looked down at the ground with sadness because he was not able to remember much more than that.

“He would like to share more about the history of Christianity in Iraq, but he had to leave all of his books behind in Sinjar when we fled from ISIS,” one of the family members sitting in the

same room explained. “He has all of the history of Christianity in Iraq written in piles and piles of books that he has studied his entire life, but sadly, they were all lost in the attack.”

The old priest’s memory may have been vague, but he remembered one thing—the teacher Adda brought the Gospel to Iraq. I later learned that Adda is another name for Addai or Thaddeus or Judas Thaddeus.⁴⁵

Thaddeus was named by Matthew and Mark as one of the twelve disciples (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:19) and was called Judas by Luke (Luke 6:16). Thaddeus and Jude, the brother of Jesus, are identified in Scripture as the same disciple and as the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3).

According to early church records by the fourth-century pioneer historian Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, “For after his resurrection from the dead and his ascent into heaven, Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, under divine impulse sent Thaddeus, who was also numbered among the seventy disciples of Christ, to Edessa, as a preacher and evangelist of the teaching of Christ.”⁴⁶

Thaddeus was sent east to Edessa, an ancient kingdom in modern-day Iraq, not because of the guiding of the Holy Spirit, but in response to a letter that was sent by the king to Jesus. The contents of the letter were written down by Eusebius:

Abgarus, ruler Of Edessa, to Jesus the excellent Saviour who has appeared in the country of Jerusalem, greeting. I have heard the reports of thee and of thy cures as performed by thee without medicines or herbs. For it is said that thou makest the blind to see and the lame to walk, that thou cleansest lepers and castest out impure spirits and demons, and that thou healest those afflicted with lingering disease, and raisest the dead.

And having heard all these things concerning thee, I have concluded that one of two things must be true: either thou art God, and having come down from heaven thou doest these things, or else thou, who doest these things, art the Son of God.

⁴⁵ https://www.academia.edu/9074269/Judas_Thaddeus_Addai_possible_connections_with_the_vicissitudes_of_the_Edessan_and_Constantinopolitan_Mandylion_and_any_research_perspectives; see also Charles George Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1913, 136

⁴⁶ Eusebius Caesariensis, *Church History*, accessed February 25, 2020, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0265-0339,_Eusebius_Caesariensis,_Church_History,_EN.pdf, 61.

I have therefore written to thee to ask thee that thou wouldest take the trouble to come to me and heal the disease which I have. For I have heard that the Jews are murmuring against thee and are plotting to injure thee. But I have a very small yet noble city which is great enough for us both.⁴⁷

In the Acts of Andrew, according to the Vatican code gr. 807 of the ninth and tenth centuries, the apostles, after the ascension of Jesus, sent Thaddeus to the king of Edessa, known as King Abgar, with both this letter and the cloth Jesus was buried in,⁴⁸ which had an image of Him on it not made by the hands of man.⁴⁹

This event is recorded on the back of the \$100,000 bill that is currently used in Armenia today and depicts the apostle approaching the king's entourage. This is seen as an historical event that brought the first king and kingdom to Christ.



According to tradition, King Abgar was deathly ill with a disease that had no known cure. He had heard about the healing power of a Jewish teacher named Jesus and desired for Him to come and see him. Jesus did not go, but after His resurrection, Thaddeus arrived with the cloth with the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁸ L. Moraldi, *Apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento*, vol. I. (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1994,) 865.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 432, 484.

image of Jesus on it.

After receiving the cloth, King Abgar was healed and became a believer in Jesus Christ and declared his kingdom a Christian kingdom.

History is clear that Thaddeus played a major part in bringing Christianity to northern Iraq, but it might go even further than that. Astoundingly, it could be that this was the same cloth that is known today as the Shroud of Turin, or the burial cloth of Jesus, which is one of the most studied relics in history and has its own study called Sindonology.

Thaddeus served as the leader of the church in northern Iraq and is remembered by both Assyrian and Chaldean Christians.

Peter specifically gave his blessings to this church in Iraq when he wrote, “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark” (1 Peter 5:13 NIV).

Adda the Teacher, as Thaddeus was known by to the Iraqi priest I met, was also known by other names, which seems confusing at first, but it must be remembered that no one wanted to confuse their name with Judas of Iscariot, who had betrayed Jesus. Scholars believe

this is why Matthew and Mark dropped the name Judas and used the name Thaddeus instead when listing the twelve apostles.

The apostle Jude wrote the book of Jude, the next to last book of the Bible. Notice how the English translation of the book of Jude isn't called the book of Judas so as not to confuse the reader. Considering the time the book of Jude was written, it is likely it was written while he was in Iraq.

After I met with the Iraqi priest who prayed in Aramaic, the same language as the disciples whom he believed planted his church two thousand years ago, it was extremely clear to me that the Gospel message did go to the east as well to the west.

But the churches that were started in the east, for whatever reason, were not recorded in the canonical Bible we read today. There was a specific biblical focus on the Gospel that went westward that cannot be denied.

Could it be that the churches that were planted to the east were not ready yet? When the

Chinese arrive at the churches in the 10/40 Window, will they be saying the same as Paul when he wrote, “I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (*but have been prevented from doing so until now*)” (Rom. 1:13 NIV, emphasis added).

For the most part the churches that were planted east of Jerusalem did not take root in the same way as they did in the west, but now the Gospel is circling back around and they are now in for a brand-new day.

Part III

China's History and End-Time Prophecy

Chapter 17

The Gospel Continues East to China

Before looking at the history of the church that spread westward to China, it is important to acknowledge that the Gospel first arrived in China from the east, not the west.

Any conversation about the first missionary to China will eventually lead to long conversations about Robert Morrison, who arrived in 1807, or Hudson Taylor, who came in 1853, but these British missionaries were not the first to bring the message of Christ to China.

Instead, the first missionary on record bringing the Gospel message to China was from the east.

The oldest church in China, Daquin Temple, is just outside of Xi'an, an ancient imperial capital of Chian. There is not much written about this church, so in 2014, I traveled there to study it in person.

“Where is the road?” I asked the camera guy as our taxi driver drove over a small ditch, trying to go from one dirt path to another. We were not the first people to drive to the Da Qin

Pagoda, but it was starting to feel like it. Da Qin Pagoda is the name of the Buddhist monastery that now operates in the structure of the 1,400-year-old church.

“Dude, where are we?” I said as the taxi driver was yelling in Chinese.

“I don’t know.” The cameraman laughed as we desperately tried to find a sign of historical reference.

Xi’an is a city of about eight to ten million people today. It is not a small town, and we were not that far from the city center, but it felt as if we had just entered one of the most remote areas of China.

Xi’an is at the very beginning of the Silk Road route,⁵⁰ which is the key strategy route for the Back to Jerusalem vision. But before Chinese started sending missionaries westward to the unreached areas of the world along the Silk Road, Nestorian churches in the East were using the route to send Christian missionaries eastward to China.

The pope wrote about these missionaries who came to China 1,400 years ago in an official letter from 1999 entitled “Message of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Catholic Church in China”:

Obedient to the Lord and under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, the disciples carried out Jesus’ command, bringing the Good News to East and West, North and South.

The Jubilee not only recalls Jesus’ entry into history, but also his expanding presence among the peoples of the earth.

As you well know, dear brothers and sisters, in accordance with the mysterious plans of divine Providence the Gospel of salvation soon reached your own country: as early as the fifth and sixth centuries groups of Syrian monks crossed Central Asia and brought the name of Jesus to your forebears. Even today, a famous stele in the capital Chang’an (Xi’an) powerfully evokes that moment in history, from 635 onwards, which saw the official

⁵⁰ “Xi’an,” Silk Roads: Dialogue, Diversity & Development, accessed February 26, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/xian>.

entrance into China of “the Religion of light.”⁵¹

Some centuries later, that proclamation waned.

The Nestorian church, which is a common phrase used to slur the Church of the East,⁵² existed during the Persian Empire and sent out more missionaries than almost any other church. These ambitious missionaries planted churches everywhere between the ancient empires of Babylon and China.

Even though Paul went west and Luke shared Paul’s mission westward in the book of Acts, one of the twelve disciples, Simon the Zealot, is said to have been sawed in half in Suanir, Iran.⁵³

This blood of the disciples planted the seeds that eventually made their way eastward, all the way to China.

So the Gospel did indeed spread eastward, and as will be shown in a minute, had an amazing impact that today effects the Back to Jerusalem vision.

Even today, when anyone researches the westward movement of the Gospel, an endless plethora of materials is readily available. There are many authors, writers, preachers, historians with confirmed historical events, and well-documented references, but research related to the eastward movement—east of Jerusalem—is lighter, unreliable, and more folklore-ish.

However, along the way God planted something from the early mission efforts eastward that prepared the path for today’s westward movement, and it is found at the Daqin Temple.

When we finally arrived at the Daqin Temple, I could see a Buddhist monk working outside in a small communal garden.

The Daqin Temple does not look any different from the many Buddhist temples I have seen throughout China, but a closer look reveals that it was definitely not built as a Buddhist temple.

First, the name Daqin (大秦), translated as “big China” or the “greater” China area, is the

⁵¹ http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/pont_messages/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19991210_china.html.

⁵² Martin Palmer, “The Da Qin Project: Early Christianity in China,” speech given about the terms and definitions of the Eastern Church at the Alliance of Religions and Conservation in Hong Kong, hosted by the Secretary General, February 23, 2001, <https://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/Reln270/Palmer-DaQin.htm>.

⁵³ John Pasquini, *True Christianity: The Catholic Way*, iUniverse, December 16, 2003, 396.

name China used to describe all things Western, from as far west as the Roman Empire.

Second, the Chinese-style pagoda had a ten-foot-high and five-foot-wide picture of a mountain scene with a clear portrayal of the nativity of Jesus Christ in a way that is consistent with what I have seen in the past with the Eastern Church.

On the next floor up there is a large scene of a tree with a man underneath it, which is not Buddha under a banyan tree but is instead a pictorial version of the story of Jonah.

Third, unlike Buddhist temples that face north and south, Daqin Temple was built facing east and west.

But nothing really proves that Daqin was an early church like the large stone stele outside the entrance written both in ancient Syriac and Chinese, which tells the history of Christian missionaries in Daqin. The stone tablet stands about eight feet high and is over three feet wide. The writing is dated February 4, 781, and was written to commemorate the work of Iranian Christians in China. Much of the Christian work was done by a missionary named Adam.

When I left the temple, there was one more thing that identified the Daqin Temple as a church, and that is that there were acres of vineyards surrounding the foothills of the temple entrance. Fields of grapes are not a common sight in China.

The fact that there were vineyards all around the pagoda and that Chinese villagers knew how to make wine was evidence enough for me to prove that the pagoda was planted by missionaries. Wine was needed for the Lord's Supper and is one of the few things the Roman Church and the Eastern Church shared a passion for.

Looking down on the villages from the pagoda, I could see an elaborate memorial center being built at the base of the mountain. A large Persian area had been constructed with an entrance lined with Iranian pillars that were topped with Zoroastrian bulls, which reflected the religion of the empire where the Nestorian missionaries were sent from.

The Christians from the Church in the East built the Daqin Temple in the same style as common Chinese architecture. Unlike their Roman Catholic Church counterparts, they learned the

language, adopted the culture, and blended in. The Chinese missionaries of today are adopting the same strategy of contextualizing the Gospel message for the nations they are sent to. They are also sending missionaries along the same route that so many before them used.

The vision of the Chinese church to send missionaries along the Silk Road is not new. In fact, a closer look at the history of the Silk Road shows that God has ordained this path all along. God has been moving on the hearts of believers for more than 1,400 years to send missionaries along the same road.

The Silk Road that started from Xi'an, China, connected with the trade center city of Antioch, which is where the term *Christian* was first used (Acts 11:26). It was along the Silk Road that this term was used to identify those who followed Jesus.

Interestingly, the Silk Road was used for international trade and missionary transport until the year 1453, when the Muslim Armies shut it down.⁵⁴ The Silk Route was closed just before the Ottoman Empire closed up the East Gate of Jerusalem.⁵⁵

After the rise of Islam, the nations east of Jerusalem were conquered and the Church in the East slowly started to disappear and their mission activities stopped. From Jerusalem to Xi'an, the ruthless armies of Islam dominated the political and religious landscape of the entire route of the Silk Road.

The Gospel message did go eastward from Jerusalem, but the Gospel message for China would not take root from the east. Instead, it would be more than one thousand years before China would see another group of missionaries that would truly make a difference.

Chapter 18

China's Christian Emperor

⁵⁴ "Silk Road," history.com, November 3, 2017, updated September 26, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/silk-road>.

⁵⁵ "Muslims Still Trying to Keep Messiah Out of Jerusalem," *Israel Today*, February 24, 2019, <https://www.israeltoday.co.il/read/muslims-still-trying-to-keep-messiah-out-of-jerusalem/>.

The name the Chinese call their nation is Zhongguo (中国), which does not sound anything close to the word *China*.

So how did the English name China come about?

We get the name China from the Qing Dynasty. In the sixteenth century, Portuguese traders were the first Westerners to refer to China as “Chini.” They learned this term from the Chinese, who used this word in reference to the Great Qing Nation (大清国), because China was ruled by the Qing Dynasty.⁵⁶

The Qing Dynasty was the wealthiest and most powerful dynasty of all time, and their prominence is largely due to one emperor: Kangxi. Kangxi is the most famous emperor in the history of China. His sixty-one-year rule is the longest in China’s 2,700 year history, and during that time he was able to crush feudal wars and unify the country, bring peace and prosperity, turn debt into surplus, compile the first most complete Chinese dictionary, create a Chinese calendar, institute the study for math and astronomy, and build relations with European nations.⁵⁷

Every child in China has to study about Emperor Kangxi, but few ever learn the secret that the Communist Party keeps from being taught in school, and that is that Kangxi was a Christian.

In 1582, a young Italian missionary monk named Matteo Ricci arrived in Macao. He had an odd approach to missions. Instead of wearing European clergy wear, he could often be found wearing the robes of Buddhist monks or Confucius teachers. After mastering the Chinese language and teaching astronomy, mathematics, mechanics, philosophy, literature, and rhetoric, he became highly sought after as an educator and soon earned a place in the royal court of Beijing, where he was able to share the Gospel message with thousands of royal court members, including the emperor.

Even to this day, on May 11th, the day Mateo Ricci died in Beijing, many places in China and Macau will hold special events in memory of him.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Nicolas Yum, “Why Is China Named China,” *Daily China*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.thedailychina.org/why-is-china-named-china/>.

⁵⁷ “Qing Dynasty: Kangxi,” World History Civilization II, Lumen, accessed February 26, 2020, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/atd-tcc-worldciv2/chapter/qing-dynasty-kangxi/>.

⁵⁸ *New York Times*, September 28, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/28/arts/28iht-melvin.html>.

Jean-Francois Gerbillon and Thomas Pereira were two Jesuit missionaries who walked in his path, lived in the Forbidden City, and had direct access to Emperor Kangxi.

Working at the Kangxi court for more than thirty years (1673–1708), Tomas Pereira not only forged a unique and privileged personal relationship with the Emperor but also served as an innovative musician and a skillful mediator in Sino-Russian affairs. He built the new Nantang church in Beijing, and was joint acting head of the Directorate of Astronomy as well as an effective representative and protector of the Christians missions in China.⁵⁹

After exposure to talented and eager missionaries from the West, the imperial court was transformed. It was not long before Kangxi, according to his own handwriting, accepted the Lord as his own personal Savior. In a poem called “The Treasure of Life,” Kangxi wrote,

The treasure of heaven is comprised of Sun, Moon and Stars;

The treasure of earth consists of crops, gold and silver.

The treasure of a kingdom is to have righteous officials;

The treasure of a family is to have descendants with piety.

Yet, Gold, silver and jade are not as precious as one's life.

Hundred years of age is nothing compared to eternity.

Coming and going in life is like a dream.

The best food and clothing don't mean a thing.

It's no exception for someone born in a royal family.

The most important thing in the world is life.

Something that white jade, gold and silver can't buy.

Even plain porridge can be satisfying;

⁵⁹ S. J. Wardega, *In the Light and Shadow of an Emperor: Tomas Pereira, the Kangxi Emperor and the Jesuit Mission in China* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012)

No cloth is fit to wear for a thousand years.
The heaven's gate was closed due to the first man's sin;
The path to salvation is through the Son only.
I would like to accept God, the Son and the Holy Spirit;
And receive from thee my free gift of eternity.

By the hand of KANGXI of Qing Dynasty

Another poem he wrote is called the “Poem of the Cross”:

THE POEM OF THE CROSS

功成十架血成溪，百丈恩流分自西。

身列四衙半夜路，徒方三背两番鸣。

五千鞭挞寸肤裂，六尺悬垂二盗齐。

惨动八垓惊九品，七言一毕万灵啼。

When the work was accomplished, blood formed a creek

Grace from the west was thousand feet deep.

He who lowered himself for us stepped on the midnight trip.

Before the rooster crowed twice, betrayed thrice was He.

Five hundred slashes torn every inch of his skin.

Two thieves at six feet high hanged besides him.

The sadness was greater than anything seen by anyone.

This poem is for You, the Holy one.

On March 22, 1692, Emperor Kangxi issued an edict throughout the land of China to recognize Christianity as a religion in China, allowing churches and Christians to operate freely.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Anthony E. Clark, *China's Christianity: From Missionary to Indigenous Church (Studies in Christian Mission)* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 113.

Unfortunately, the Christian freedom did not last long. As soon as information made it back to the pope in Rome that the emperor was a believer and gave absolute freedom to Christians in China, a play for power began to emerge. The pope wanted the emperor of China to submit to him.

Books for teaching the Chinese about Jesus were desperately needed, but the church did not allow Christian materials to be translated into any language outside of Latin. In 1681, Rome sent Charles Maigrot to carry a message to the emperor that the pope would have religious authority over China. This ended the positive relationship between Christian missionaries and the emperor.⁶¹

China might have been one of the most influential Christian nations had things gone differently between the pope in Rome and Kangxi, but the time for China had not yet arrived. It would still be a couple of hundred years before China started to see the huge rivals that God had been planning for the nation.

Chapter 19

The Bloody Roots of Back to Jerusalem

The roots of the Back to Jerusalem vision in many ways actually started with a tragedy involving the largest slaughter of missionaries ever to take place in the history of Christianity: the Boxer Rebellion.

In the year 1900, a crisis known as the Boxer Rebellion erupted in China that pitted Chinese national fighters against foreign occupying armies.⁶² I was a US Marine and remember learning about the details of the battle during my initial training because it was such a significant event. A small group of US Marines had fought off a much larger group of Chinese fighters, who were superior in number. The Boxer Rebellion was such a pivotal battle for the US Marines that three officers from that battle went on to eventually become the commandant of the Marine Corps—the highest position one can obtain in the Marines.

⁶¹ Ibid., 114.

⁶² Trevor K. Plante, “U.S. Marines in the Boxer Rebellion,” *Prologue Magazine* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1999), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1999/winter/boxer-rebellion-1.html>.

Any official telling of the Boxer Rebellion will focus primarily on the anti-colonial mindset of Chinese resistance fighters. A common explanation told by China and foreign history books alike is that

the Boxer outbreak in North China in the summer of 1900 can be attributed directly to Chinese hatred of foreigners and foreign interference in their country. While there were other reasons for the revolt such as economic hardships brought on by poor harvests, floods and drought, they were all blamed on the “foreign devils” who were encroaching on China in increasing numbers. In short the Boxer Rebellion was a last grasp attempt to throw off the foreign yoke and preserve the Chinese culture, religion, and way of life once and for all.⁶³

Unfortunately, the common story of the poor indigenous Chinese peasants trying to beat back the greedy colonial occupation is not the entire story—not even close.

The real story is a lot more sinister and spiritual than that, and paved the way for the Back to Jerusalem vision in China.

The Boxer Rebellion had its roots in Shandong Province, which is the origin of where the one true God, Shangdi, was worshipped at Tai Shan Mountain in Chinese history. “Before all else, it is essential to look at the geography, the political economy and the social formations of this region—and in particular at Shandong, where it all began.”⁶⁴

The Chinese Boxers were called Boxers because of their fighting style, as Westerners were not familiar with martial arts at the time. The Boxers, though, were actually more religious shamans than they were fighters. They exercised evil spirits and prayed for demons to possess them to give them supernatural powers during battle.⁶⁵

Before the rebellion, Christian missionaries were already on edge because they were hearing rumors of religious Chinese shamans saying they were going to kill missionaries.

Rowena Bird, an American missionary to China, wrote in her personal journal only a few

⁶³ Peter Harrington, *Peking 1900: The Boxer Rebellion* (Oxford, England: Osprey Publishing, 2001), 7.

⁶⁴ J. W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, reprint ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 1.

⁶⁵ Xisha Ma, *Popular Religion and Shamanism* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 289–90.

weeks before her death about the uneasy feeling she was getting. On June 25, she wrote, “These are most trying times—famine threatens the people with starvation—the dry, hot weather makes all ill, and the Boxers are threatening destruction of the country by robbing and killing missionaries and Christians.”⁶⁶

Rowena had reason to be worried. Missionaries were easy prey for those who spiritually opposed their teachings. Only a little earlier, missionary women and children were slaughtered in their beds when a religious Chinese sect known as the Vegetarians, because of their special vegetarian diet and vow to only eat vegetables, raided their village and speared them to death.⁶⁷

Many Chinese believed that the gods were not happy with them and were punishing them with droughts and bad crops and blamed this on the Christians. The shamans would need to provide sacrifices in order to appease the gods.⁶⁸

After the killing of fifteen missionaries in Baoding on June 30 and July 1, the much-needed rains came, giving credence to the Boxers belief that their gods were listening.

The Boxers began to launch a full cleansing of all Christians from the land of China. The Boxers wrote their prayers to the demons on paper, burned the paper, and drank water with ashes of their prayers so the prayers would be inside of them. Once they were possessed by the demons, the demons would tell them to kill the Christians. Missionaries reported hearing them yell, “Your God cannot save you. Jesus is dead; He is not in the world; He cannot give real help. Our god of war is much stronger; he protects us and he has sent the Boxers to pull down your house and to kill you.”⁶⁹

In June, July, and August of 1900, the Boxers killed several hundred foreign missionaries and as many as thirty thousand Chinese Christians.⁷⁰ This was the largest killing of missionaries ever to take place at one time in a single country.

When Muslims in western China heard that the Boxers had started to kill Christians, they

⁶⁶ Paul Cohen, *China Unbound: Evolving Perspectives on the Chinese Past* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2003), 106.

⁶⁷ <http://ebook.lib.hku.hk/CADAL/B31512161/index.html>, 8–9.

⁶⁸ Alvin P. Cohen, “Current Perspectives in the Study of Chinese Religions,” *History of Religions Coercing the Rain Deities in Ancient China*, Vol. 17 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 244–65.

⁶⁹ Paul Cohen, *China Unbound: Evolving Perspectives on the Chinese Past* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2003), 121.

⁷⁰ “Martyrs of the 1900 Boxer Rebellion,” Asia Harvest, September 2000, <https://asiaharvest.org/martyrs-of-the-1900-boxer-rebellion/>.

wanted to be a part of the slaughter. Dong Fuxiang, commander of a unit known as the Kangsu Braves, quickly assigned his ten thousand Muslim fighters to join in.⁷¹

These events were undoubtedly meant to destroy Christianity in China forever, but then something amazing happened.

When the Boxers were defeated in August of 1900, several thousand miles away, on the American continent, in the small town of Topeka, Kansas, a Bible school called Bethel Bible School had just started.⁷² A small band of believers led by Pastor Charles Parham sold everything to study, pray, and fast together. Using no other book except their Bible, the group trusted God for everything—food, rent, clothing—everything.

In December 1900, the same year as the Boxer Rebellion, the group began to study the book of Acts together and came to the section about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. During an all-night prayer service in the upper room of the old school on December 31, the Holy Spirit came down in a remarkable way.

That night a young lady named Agnes N. Ozman asked the other students to lay hands on her so she could receive the Holy Spirit since she desired to go to foreign lands as a missionary. According to Pastor Parham, after midnight on January 1, 1901, he laid hands upon her and said, “I had scarcely repeated three dozen sentences when a glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face, and she began speaking in the Chinese language, and was unable to speak English for three days. When she tried to write in English to tell us of her experience she wrote the Chinese, copies of which we still have in newspapers printed at that time.”⁷³

This single event, with seemingly no connection to China, changed American Christian history and would eventually change Chinese history, leading to the Back to Jerusalem vision.

The years 1901 and 1902 saw massive revivals in Topeka, Kansas.

⁷¹ Omar Diaz Bahena, “Boxer Rebellion Character List,” Old Dominion Model United Nations, accessed February 26, 2020, <https://www.odu.edu/content/dam/odu/offices/mun/2017/ib-2017-boxer-rebellion-characters.pdf>.

⁷² Gordon Robertson, “The Roots of Azusa: Pentecost in Topeka,” [cbn.com, https://www1.cbn.com/churchandministry/the-roots-of-azusa-pentecost-in-topeka](https://www1.cbn.com/churchandministry/the-roots-of-azusa-pentecost-in-topeka).

⁷³ Gordon Robertson, “The Roots of Azusa: Pentecost in Topeka,” [cbn.com, https://www1.cbn.com/churchandministry/the-roots-of-azusa-pentecost-in-topeka](https://www1.cbn.com/churchandministry/the-roots-of-azusa-pentecost-in-topeka).

Two years later, the revival flames hit Wales in the Welsh Revivals of 1904–1905.

Two years after that, Pastor Parham ministered to a young black preacher from Los Angeles who took the revival flames back to Los Angeles with him, which led to the Azusa Street Revivals of 1906–1907.

These three charismatic revivals led to what is collectively known as the “Golden Age of Missions.”⁷⁴

Over the next few years thousands of missionaries flocked to China and were passionate to share the Gospel in the place where so many Christians had been slain. Shandong was of particular focus. “The Church in Shandong suffered a setback at the hands of the Boxers, but within a few years it had recovered and grown larger than before 1900. The missionary enterprise in China also expanded, as many Christians around the world volunteered to replace those who had been slain for the Gospel.”⁷⁵

One of the young men to be influenced by the new missionaries was Jing Dianying. In 1911, in the same province the Boxers came from, Jing became a Christian. In the 1920s, he founded a group known as the Jesus Family in the foothills of Tai Shan Mountain—the same holy mountain where Shangdi, the God of all creation, was first worshipped by the first Chinese emperor.

The Jesus Family had a vision to complete the Great Commission, and they called it the “Back to Jerusalem vision.”

The Gospel was truly coming full circle in Shandong Province.

⁷⁴ Noel Loos, *White Christ, Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church* (Canberra, Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007), <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/79aa/c0181634151e2f95f175701e60b9b5bcd102.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Paul Hattway, *Shandong: The Revival Province* (SPCK, 2018).

Chapter 20

The Birth of the Back to Jerusalem Vision

I heard about the Back to Jerusalem vision after going to China in 1999 from missionaries who had been working with the underground house church, but I did not really start to understand the history of it until one evening in 2004, when I was in a little small town in Guizhou Province called Liupanshui.

I was leading humanitarian efforts in the area and working with the government officials of Guizhou Province. During those days, it was not possible for foreigners to live in hotels that were not authorized by the government, so I had to stay with medical staff from the local hospitable.

That night I started to share with a group of eager officials about the Christian vision called Back to Jerusalem. In the room that evening was an elderly woman who went by the name Mrs. Jing.

“You don’t know who I am,” Mrs. Jing said to me, “but I am the granddaughter of Jing Dianying, the founder of the Jesus Family. I can remember when I was a little girl. I saw my father and grandfather arrested for preaching the Gospel. I saw my family members sent to concentration camps by the Communists. They may have killed my father and grandfather, but they could not kill the vision.”

Pastor Jing Dianying founded an indigenous Chinese church movement in Shandong, at the foothill of Taishan Mountain, the same place where Shangdi, the one God who created all things, was worshipped. It came to be known as the “Jesus Family.”

Before I left Liupanshui the next morning, Mrs. Jing handed me a very special hymnal book that her father and grandfather used during their worship service. The Jesus Family relied a lot on hymns as a way to connect with the idea of heaven during their daily worship services.

Most Christian historical writers focus on the Chinese groups Back to Jerusalem

Evangelistic Band (遍传福音团, 福音传回耶路撒冷使团) and the Northwest Spiritual Movement (西北灵工团) as the first fellowships to have the Back to Jerusalem vision in the 1940s, but it is arguable that it was actually in the 1920s with Pastor Jing where Back to Jerusalem, as we know it today in China, had its genesis.

Pastor Jing was born in 1890 in Shandong Province and given the name Tian Yin. As a young boy he studied Chinese medicine under his father. Both he and his father were devout Confucianists and lived only fifty miles north of where Confucius had been born. Jing's father taught him about Confucianism, but also taught him about the God Shangdi of the mountain by their village in Tai'an, at the base of the Mountain of Tai Shan. Jing did not know much about Shangdi, but when he was eight or nine years old, he made a vow to Shangdi that he would devote his life to knowing Him better.⁷⁶

In 1910, when he was twenty years old, Jing attended a Methodist school in his hometown of Tai-An. Both he and his father opposed Christianity but acknowledged that Christians had the best schools in China.

An American Methodist missionary named Nora Dillenbeck worked at the school. Dillenbeck wanted to learn Chinese, so Jing became her teacher. He taught her Chinese and she taught him about Jesus.⁷⁷

Much later, in his confession to the Communist Party, he admitted that while reading the Bible he saw that Jesus was much greater than Confucius because Jesus died for his sins.⁷⁸

Around the same time, in 1910, something big was happening in the missionary community. Because of the news from the Boxer Rebellion and the revivals in Topeka, Kansas, Wales, and Azusa Street, missionaries began coming to China.

In 1907, Thomas J. McIntosh became the first Pentecostal missionary to China from the

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D. Vaughan Reese, *Jesus Family in Communist China* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster Press, 1959, 30–31.

⁷⁷ Jehu J., Hanciles, *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume IV: The Twentieth Century: Traditions in a Global Context* (Oxford Scholarship Online, April 2019), 132.

⁷⁸ Reese, 31.

outflow of these charismatic Christian revivals. He was soon followed by many others.⁷⁹ These new passionate Pentecostal believers did not think their experience was just for the Chinese; it was also for the all the other missionaries to China.

At first, they were not taken seriously by the Chinese because they could not speak the local language. The new arrivals thought that their gift of tongues was a real language, but they quickly discovered that no one understood it. They then shared their experiences with the missionaries who had been sent to China.⁸⁰

The impact of the Azusa Street revivals reached Germany at the same time and caused a revival in the town of Velbert, leading to the formation of an independent free church—Freie evangelische Gemeinde—which then split to the Christian Fellowship (Christliche Gemeinschaft Velbert), a separate Pentecostal church, in 1908. In the same year, this brand-new church sent Adolf Wieneke and his wife, Maria Kreuzer, to Jing's hometown of Tai'an as missionaries. Adolf and his wife briefly stayed at a small American Baptist Gospel Mission.

The message of revival was hitting everyone in Tai'an.

Another missionary by the name of Leslie M. Anglin, who would soon become a good friend of Jing's, arrived to work at the same small American Baptist Mission on November 8, 1910, around the same time that Jing started attending the Methodist school.

Leslie and his wife were joined by missionary Perrin Rushin, his wife, Jennie Brinson-Rushin, and their two children. The Rushins, like Leslie, were Baptists. They had been filled with the Holy Spirit during the revivals in America and came to help with the mission work in Tai'an.

It was not long before the Baptist Church heard about the radical spiritual changes happening with their missionaries in Shandong, so support stopped for the Holy Ghost-filled Baptist missionaries and they were forced to leave the mission in Tai'an.

The Baptists were not alone in their actions against their newly Holy Ghost-filled members.

⁷⁹ J. Gordon Melton, "Chinese Pentecostalism: The Birth and Growth of a Uniquely Chinese Version of Christianity," accessed February 27, 2020, <https://www.globethics.net/pdfs/CNKI/CPFD/BJLT201211007027.pdf>.

⁸⁰ R. G. Tiedemann, "The Origins and Organizational Developments of the Pentecostal Missionary Enterprise in China," accessed February 27, 2020, https://www.aptspress.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/11-1_R._G._Tiedemann.pdf.

In April of the same year, China Inland Mission issued a statement condemning Pentecostalism. Shortly after, the Presbyterians followed suit. In an even stronger statement, they suggested that Pentecostalism could lead to insanity and even suicide.⁸¹

This opposition did not stop the work. Leslie and his wife stayed in Tai'an, and in 1916, they started an orphanage for abandoned children and elderly called "The Home of Onesiphorus."⁸²

Jing became a volunteer at the orphanage and worked with Leslie, but his first recorded experience with the Holy Spirit would be unique and would not be at the orphanage.

Jing was married at an early age but did not love his wife, so he divorced her and sent her back home to live with her family. One day while reading the Bible he received from the Methodist school, he saw Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (NIV).

He felt extremely guilty. He expected the passage to say, "Husbands, love your wives . . . 'if they are pretty or clever or good.'" But the Bible did not say that. Jing dropped to his knees and repented. He went running out of the room to win his wife back and bring her home, but because she had bound feet, she was not able to walk the fifteen miles back home. He looked for a wheelbarrow, but when he was not able to find one, he put her on his back and carried her the entire way.⁸³

As soon as he walked into the door of their home carrying his wife, the Holy Spirit fell on both of them. This was 1920.

Like the new missionaries serving in Tai'an, Jing and his wife's life were completely transformed by the Holy Spirit. They both had the feeling that they should sell all of their belongings and give their lives to the Lord.

In 1921, they sold all they owned and gave the money to the poor. Living with no possessions, they started a silk-weaving company and built a chapel. The chapel was open to

⁸¹ Fenggang Yang, *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies*, English and Chinese edition (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 53.

⁸² Tiedemann.

⁸³ Reese, 33.

anyone willing to sell all of their belongings and live together serving Jesus. They began a small group of believers who lived together and called themselves the Jesus Family (耶稣家庭).

The land where they lived and built the chapel on was supernaturally arranged at the bottom of the ancient sacred mountain of Tai Shan, where Shangdi had been worshipped by the earliest emperors of China. Pastor Jing inherited this land from his family, which is the strangest of stories.

Pastor Jing's great-great grandfather was very poor. One evening, when he was returning home he saw a stick in the field. He picked it up and took it home with him. During those days, if someone wanted to sell a piece of land, they would simply put a stick in the ground and anyone who took the stick home would be the buyer.

The next day, the owner of the field traced his piece of wood to Mr. Ching's [Pastor Jing] great-great grandfather, who was much perturbed to find himself liable for the piece of land. Chinese custom held him fast and he had to scrape together enough money to pay that bill. That piece of land passed down through four generations and is now the headquarters of the Ye-su Chia-Ting [Jesus Family].⁸⁴

Soon, the Jesus Family became a church, a training center, and a living compound for many families who had the same vision as Pastor Jing. Before long, the Jesus Family had their own church, bakery, school, and kindergarten. They had a massive farm that everyone worked on together. They raised cattle, pigs, geese, fowl, donkeys, ducks, and rabbits, and they had a small medical clinic where they provided medical care and prayer for patients. They had their own finance department and printing press. They had their own masonry department and shops for carpentry, shoemaking, and smithing.

Everyone who lived on the Jesus Family compound sold everything and served the Lord.

Everything they did was wrapped in prayer. Prayer started at five in the morning and would only break for testimonies. They prayed together for about thirty minutes at eight before they ate

⁸⁴ Ibid., 39–40.

breakfast.

At nine, everyone would go to work, but work started with at least thirty minutes of prayer. Church service would start around five and would last late into the evening with preaching, prayer, and singing.⁸⁵

There was not a special leader who would lead the prayer. Everyone would pray together aloud as he or she felt led in their heart. Usually someone would wrap up the prayer at the end as they felt led.⁸⁶

The Jesus Family was a completely indigenous Chinese church, but it was clear that the missions from Azusa Street were their fellowship. Revival meetings were breaking out from the work of Leslie Anglin and his colleagues from the newly established Assemblies of God. Ma Honggang, a friend of Pastor Jing, remembers being in local meetings when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit:

Jing was around thirty-five years old at that time. He sought very hard to have union with God in love and to apply Chinese mysticism into western theology. Together with the author of the book, they received the baptism of the Spirit in an Assemblies of God meeting in 1925. Henceforth he sought after speaking in tongues, prophecy, singing and dancing in spirit, seeking inspirations from the Holy Spirit and living a Spirit-filled lifestyle.⁸⁷

To the Jesus Family, speaking in tongues, moving in spiritual gifts, praying in the Spirit, and prophesying became daily activities, but it would be a mistake to say they were copying the church in the West.

“With Mr. Ching (Pastor Jing), everything Chinese was the best. Their food was the best, their history was the longest, and their women made the best wives. It followed therefore that there

⁸⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁷ Timothy Yeung, “The Chinese Expression of Pentecostalism,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*, no. 16, accessed February 27, 2020, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj16/yeung.html>.

was no foreign flavour in their Christianity.”⁸⁸

In the late 1920s, Tai’an was hit hard by a severe famine caused by drought, similar to an event that had happened before the Boxer Rebellion. This time, though, money from abroad came pouring in, especially from the United States, and conditions returned to normal quickly. The Jesus Family, though, did not touch any of the foreign aid. The Jesus Family did not get any support from the foreign church.⁸⁹

Dr. Rees lived on the Jesus Family Compound in the 1940s and he wrote,

The communists have the impression that the church is something foreign in nature.

“Restrict preaching and this exotic thing will soon die out,” they say. To their astonishment they find something in their midst that is not in the least foreign. It is in its essence Chinese, and they cannot deny it. It is so essentially so in all its “flavors and colors” that they cannot but recognize it as their own.⁹⁰

The Jesus Family began to have visions and dreams about taking the Gospel to the most unreached areas on earth. They strongly believed that the return of Jesus was near and that the apocalypse was coming. They had visions and prophecies about the Second Coming tied to their evangelism. They were “anticipating the imminent return of Christ and it was very Pentecostal, basing its worship and behavior on the gifts of the holy spirit, including tongues and also on the believers receiving divine revelations through messages obtained while in a trance.”⁹¹

The Jesus Family was the first Christian group in China to have a vision to take the Gospel from China all the way back to Jerusalem. Their workers carried baskets of food and essentials as they walked across the country. The movement grew rapidly, and by 1941, there were 141 different Jesus Family communities in eight provinces, with approximately 6,000 members in Shandong

⁸⁸ Reese, 28.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 97.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁹¹ Daniel H. Bayes, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 312.

alone.⁹²

Unfortunately, “after 1949 the Jesus Family enthusiastically backed the new Three Self Patriotic Movement, naively believing that their unique Christian brand of Communism would be warmly welcomed by the authorities. In fact, they were rigorously suppressed as their profound Christian ethic based on love was in stark contrast to Marxist class warfare.”⁹³

⁹² Paul Hattaway, “Shandong: ‘The Revival Province,’” Asia Harvest, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://asiaharvest.org/shandong-the-revival-province-by-paul-hattaway/>.

⁹³ Refugee Review Tribunal, February 15, 2007, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4b6fe1730.pdf>.

Chapter 21

Back to Jerusalem and the Holy Mountain of China

Everything about the Jesus Family in Shandong Province seems to have been ordained and not just the result of a series of coincidences.

There are three things that stand out about the Jesus Family that point to divine providence:

Timing

First, the timing of the Jesus Family forming right after the largest slaughter of missionaries to ever take place is more than interesting.

Demon-possessed killers originating from Shandong Province targeted thousands of Christians during the Boxer Rebellion in an attempt to keep Christianity from ever taking root in China. Only a few months later, a revival broke out, and the outflow of those revivals brought the Gospel to the same people in Shandong Province who had supported the killers.

The rise of Pentecostalism might be one of the most important events in religious history since the Reformation. “By the end of 1980’s, Pentecostalism was called the Third Force, being the third largest in number of believers after Catholicism and Protestantism. A decade later, it became second to Catholicism. In East Asia, Southeast Asia, especially in rural areas of mainland China, the growth is unsurpassable.”⁹⁴

Pentecostalism, the form of Christianity that is the main engine of growth in China, is today the fastest-growing religion in the world, with thirty-five thousand new believers per day.⁹⁵

Pentecostalism was birthed out of the revivals in Topeka, Wales, and the Azuza Street that pointed to missions to unreached people groups.

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Timothy Yeung, “The Chinese Expression of Pentecostalism,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*, no. 16, accessed February 28, 2020, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj16/yeung.html>.

⁹⁵ “Atlas of Pentecostalism,” Pulitzer Center, <https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/africa-nigeria-pentecostal-christians-holy-spirit-global-religion-iconography-cartography-data-visualization>.

Spirit-Filled

It seems more than ironic that the enemy used spirit-filled fighters to attack Christians during the Boxer Rebellion and God used Spirit-filled warriors to bring the Gospel to China.

The Chinese had a strange connection to the Pentecostal message. It was as if there was an extreme demonic activity hovered around the area of Mount Tai Shan. Many cult sects, like the ones the Boxers branched out from, relied on demon possession, revelations, visions, and future-telling.

When the Christians arrived with the power of the Holy Spirit, they had an immediate understanding and connection with the Chinese. What was once used by the enemy for evil was now being used by God for His glory.

The connection between the Chinese ancient religions and the Pentecostal message went even further, as David Overmeyer pointed out: “Chinese local religion also shares a common set of theoretical assumptions, its own ‘theology,’ which is based on the belief that the living and the dead, gods, humans and ghosts are all connected by bonds of mutual influence and response.”⁹⁶

The Jesus Family taught that Jesus was more than an idol you worshipped on Sunday mornings; He was someone you could have a relationship with and dwelt with you in your home. Christians were not just people you met in a building once a week, but were disciples who trained in your home every day. This was the idea of the home church, which was also connected with the Chinese in Tai’an. “The major Taoist influence on local community religion has been from married priests living at home, called *huojudaoshi* (火居道士), who are not affiliated with Quanzhen. These priests are trained as disciples in the homes of masters. Here they live for several years learning the texts and rituals until they are ready to practice on their own.”⁹⁷

The enemy tried to use spirits to destroy the Chinese church, but God used the Holy Spirit to save it.

Location

⁹⁶ David Overmeyer, “Protestant Christianity in China: Perspectives from the History of Chinese Religions and Early Christianity in the Roman World,” *China Review*, vol. 9 Special Issue, Chinese University Press, 2009, 44.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

The location of the Jesus Family, in Tai'an at the foothill of the most sacred mountain, Tai-Shan, was also, without a doubt, divine.

From the beginning of history in China, the God of all, the Creator of heaven and earth, was praised at the top of the mountain of Tai Shan.

Without a doubt, this location was fiercely protected by the enemy because of its history and its future. The Taoists, Confucianists, and folk religions made a stronghold here. The Boxers launched their slaughter on Christians from here.

Every year people from all over China make a cultural pilgrimage and visit Tai Shan. They climb up 7,200 stairs to make it to the top. I, along with many Chinese tourists, have made the journey, and it was a glorious one.

Tai Shan is considered to be the holiest mountain in China and is often associated with three things that visitors reflect on when they hike to the top.

First, Tai Shan is associated with the sunrise. This is powerful symbolism in China as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west—a movement in line with the Back to Jerusalem vision.

Second, Tai Shan is associated with new birth. God has given new birth to the Christian vision of Back to Jerusalem to complete the Great Commission.

Third, Tai Shan is associated with renewal. Paul wrote to the Romans, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (12:2 NIV, emphasis added).

A renewing of the mind is taking place in China and around the world. The nation that was once seen as a missionary-receiving nation is now a missionary-sending nation. The birth of the Jesus Family at the foot of Tai Shan Mountain is no coincidence. Its location is strong symbolism to the entire Chinese church about their part to play in the Great Commission.

The Back to Jerusalem vision might have been first conceived, in part, by the Jesus Family, but there were other groups in China that were seeing the same things in their visions from God.

Chapter 22

The Back to Jerusalem Vision Begins

There are four common basic traits of movements like the Jesus Family that are inspired of God.

First, they seem to be led by the most unlikely and unqualified of individuals. Second, they are up against incredible odds. Third, supernatural miracles are needed on a regular basis to survive. Last, the group at the forefront of the movement does not often grow to a mega-size group with astronomical membership numbers, but instead inspires hundreds, if not thousands, of individual groups around the world to follow and create their own ministries.

The Jesus Family's main contribution to the Back to Jerusalem vision was not writing an outline or defining what the Back to Jerusalem vision was. Instead, their commitment, ethos, and vision became a model that gave birth to the Back to Jerusalem vision.

The Jesus Family had their own printing press and writers, but not much is left documenting their history, ministry, vision, focus, or lifestyle. The best document that I can find is a precious hymnal given to me by Pastor Jing's granddaughter.

However, the legacy the Jesus Family left behind was not necessarily the details they wrote down or the artifacts they left behind but rather the people they inspired.

Pastor Jing and the Jesus Family were the vanguard of a large number of groups in China, both known and unknown, that felt the power of the Holy Ghost moving in their lives and inspiring them to complete the Great Commission, both in China and abroad.

General Feng Yuxiang, for instance, was widely known as one of the most powerful military commanders in China, and together with missionary Jonathon Goforth converted tens of thousands of Chinese. It is even said that General Feng baptized so many thousands of soldiers at the same time that he had to use a firehose.⁹⁸

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General Feng spent his downtime at Tai Shan Mountain and served at the same place as Pastor Jing did: at the orphanage with Leslie Anglin.

A Pentecostal fire spread throughout the entire province of Shandong, and there were several missionaries who were impacted by it. Marie Monsen, the famous house church leader from Henan Province, traveled to Yantai and was so blown away by what she saw that she wrote a book about it called *The Awakening: Revival in China: 1927–1937*.

Another group that formed at that time was called the Spiritual Gifts Society (*Ling'enhui*). This movement was started by Ma Zahaorui, who ran an orphanage named the Independent Assemblies of God in Nationalist capital Nanjing but traveled to Shandong because of the revival he was seeing there.

Still another group was the Bethel Band, who traveled all around China sharing the Good News. Their lead member, John Sung, experienced the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Shandong.

In the early summer of 1931, the Bethel Band visited Shandong Province just as the peninsula was experiencing an outbreak of the Spiritual Gifts Movement. Sung was impressed with Pentecostalism, having recently experienced what he believed was a miraculous cure of his heart ailment through the laying on of hands by a faith healer. . . . After such encounters, Sung found himself on a number of occasions “losing control over my lips and uttering tongues.”⁹⁹

Watchman Nee, considered to be one of the most famous theologians to ever come out of China, was also hit by the power of the Holy Spirit in Shandong. He spoke in tongues and laughed with holy laughter. After his encounter with the Holy Spirit, Nee wrote back to his church in Shanghai, announcing, “I have met the Lord.”¹⁰⁰

After his experience in Shandong Province, Watchman Nee began to teach *jiaochulai*, or

⁹⁹ Xi Lian, *Redeemed by Fire: The rise of popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), Kindle Edition, location 2817 of 7912.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, location 3347 of 7912.

what became known as the “Jerusalem principle.” The Jerusalem Principle was a concept that closely matched up with what would later be associated with the Back to Jerusalem vision and was practiced by the Jesus Family. The Jerusalem Principle was the teaching that compelled saints to sell all of their worldly possessions and use them for the spreading of the Gospel. Nee himself gave over his pharmaceutical practice as a part of the Jerusalem Principle. The Jerusalem Principle also entailed the submission of previously autonomous churches to larger structures.

Nee, though never really associated with the Back to Jerusalem vision by most historians, was very active in the same activities and used the same systematic methodology that the Back to Jerusalem visionaries did. Watchman Nee coined the term *Evangelistic Migration*, which called for the evangelization of all of China. Like those carrying the Back to Jerusalem vision, his movement was without denomination labels and did not embrace clerical titles.¹⁰¹

There are some who argue that the Pentecostal movement in China had no connection to the Western Pentecostal movement of the early 1900s. Lian Xi, a history professor of history at Hanover College, said it this way:

While revivals in China during the 1930’s manifested some of the most prominent features of the modern Pentecostal movement that arose in America at the turn of the century, there is no indication that Western Pentecostal missions, which had reached China by 1907, were directly connected to or played any significant role in the eruption of those revivals.¹⁰²

This analysis fails to see the changing winds that the Pentecostal fire brought to the mission field. Traditional Western missionary operations, based on the models of the early Roman church, were efforts led by clerical members, documented by church laity, funded by Western treasuries, and controlled by Western administrators. Their involvement cannot be denied. They get the credit.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., location 3832 of 7912.

¹⁰² Ibid., location 1731 of 7912.

However, their efforts were expensive, time consuming, and produced very little that would continue on in their absence. God was using the new missionaries from the Pentecostal movement that was sweeping through Shandong Province to remove the importance of the foreigner, giving the leadership over to the indigenous church of China and transforming the entire process of church planting. The connection between the Pentecostal movement in China and in the West is undeniable, but the Pentecostal missionaries were not as well supported, did not attempt to control the new believers, and left the work in the hands of capable local leaders. Pentecostal missionaries were like scaffolding at a construction site. They are there to help build the main structure, but when the job was done, they tore down their scaffolding and left, revealing the real beauty of the building they had helped to construct.

Among those who came out of Shandong Province and were inspired by the Jesus Family to complete the Great Commission was Rev. Zhang Guquang “of the North China Theological Seminary, who, in the early 1940s, formed the Northwest Spiritual Ministry Band with a few colleagues and some theological students.”¹⁰³

Inspired by the Jesus Family, the Band was a faith mission group where members shared everything in common and had no personal possessions. Their mission objective was to spread the gospel in the northwestern part of China, which was considered the frontier area at that time. They would fast and pray for days for direction and deliberately avoid administrative structures and planning.¹⁰⁴

Reverend Zhang had a heart to reach the lost, and he knew that would entail doing what few Chinese from eastern China did during those days: travel inland to the unreached areas. Reverend Zhang, while at the North China Theological Seminary in Tengxian in Shandong, knew several fellow students who were studying theology and wanted to share the message of Christ with those

¹⁰³ Kim-Kwong Chan, *Understanding World Christianity: China* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019), 81.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

who had never heard it. They were eager to go with him and travel into the western interior of China and preach in the untamed frontier.

The Northwest Spiritual Ministry Band did not have any financial supporters. They only had a few members. They did not have a plan, a budget, or a strategy. They believed the Lord would lead them where they needed to go.

All of the members sold everything and relied on the Lord to supply their daily needs. They left Shandong Province wandering from town to town, preaching person to person. They kept heading westward until they ended up in Xinjiang Province.

Although Xinjiang Province is a part of China, there is nothing Chinese about it. The people do not look like the typical Han Chinese. They have rounder eyes, darker skin, and much more body hair. They look more like the typical person you would find in Pakistan or Iran. The local people of Xinjiang speak a different language, with a different alphabet system. The culture and food are completely different. While the Han Chinese enjoyed seafood, pork, and fresh vegetables, the landlocked desert people of Xinjiang lived off of a diet of rice and lamb. The people in Xinjiang Province had a completely different culture, clothing, and even history than the Chinese from the east. The overwhelming majority of the people in Xinjiang were also Muslim.

Even though the Northwest Spiritual Ministry Band did not technically leave China, going into Xinjiang Province was like going to a different country.

They suffered greatly in Xinjiang. They did not learn the language and soon found all of their efforts stopped by the new Chinese Communist Party that had taken over China in 1949.

However, their efforts were legendary. Small groups all over China heard about the bands expedition to preach the Gospel in the west and they too were inspired to do the same.

Reverend Zhang was arrested and put in prison. He died in Xinjiang and was buried there. Many of those who traveled with him and shared his vision to complete the Great Commission also died in Xinjiang.

Chapter 23

God Speaks and Creates Back to Jerusalem

In October 2004, I traveled to Xinjiang Province to provide aid to areas that had been hit by a 4.2 magnitude earthquake. While I was working out of a city called Kashgar, I got a call from a pastor friend of mine who told me about an elderly lady in the area I should meet by the name of Grace Ho.

Grace Ho became a Christian as a little girl. She told me in a filmed interview I did with her in her home, “When I was much younger God put a burden on my heart to preach the Gospel. Since I have been blessed, I felt the burden to also share it. I committed myself at the age of sixteen and said, ‘Lord, no matter where I go or what I do, I believe that You will lead me.’ I was to preach the Gospel. I was full of peace and joy.”

Grace made history in China in the 1940s when she helped put together a new ministry known as the Back to Jerusalem Evangelical Band.

The vision for this ministry came while she was at the Northwest Bible Institute in Baoji City, Shaanxi Province to a handful of other staff and students. This newly founded Bible school was located only a few miles west of the ancient capital Xi’an, which is along the Silk Road.

When I met Grace, she could not speak for long periods of time. She would quickly tire and needed to rest often. It was a miracle I had the opportunity to speak with her. In her older age she refused to meet with visitors unless she was told to by the Lord. If someone arrived without her spirit confirming it, they would be turned away. She was also always under surveillance by the Chinese Public Security Bureau (PSB), which is the Chinese equivalent to the CIA in America or the KGB in Russia, so meeting with her was neither safe nor easy.

To make the most of my time with her, I asked my associates to travel with me to Xinjiang and film her story. Thankfully we were able to capture hours of video of our time with her. Grace passed away at the age of ninety-seven. She was the last remaining founder of the Back to

Jerusalem Traveling Band.

Even in her weak state, Grace remembered the vision very well. She did not call it the Back to Jerusalem vision—the name came later—but she clearly remembered the call from God to take the Gospel westward to Xinjiang and all the way back to Jerusalem.

The Northwest Bible Institute, which Grace attended, was established in 1941 by Pastor Dai Yong Mian, together with China Inland Mission¹⁰⁵ and Hudson Taylor’s grandson, James Taylor.¹⁰⁶

On the night of November 25, 1942, while teachers and students at the college were praying, they saw a vision of the Chinese church owing a “gospel debt” to every nation. Following this meeting, Associate Dean Mark Ma held another prayer meeting in 1947 for the specific purpose of praying over paying back the gospel debt. At this second meeting, Pastor Ma felt that God had opened a road for Chinese disciples to take the gospel back to Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷

Mark Ma started having powerful visions, and he was not alone. Others at the school were feeling it too, including Grace.

The vision Mark Ma received in November of 1942 was of huge pool of water. The pool had streams of water from every direction flowing into it, but it did not overflow because there was a huge hole under the pool.¹⁰⁸

Mark shared the vision with Grace, who later wrote,

“Lord, what does this picture mean?”

“The pool is the Chinese Church. Even though many missionaries from outside have come into China, the Chinese Church only receives but does not give out. Compared to other nations, China is too poor spiritually. The Chinese Church must start missionary work. Let

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.gospeltimes.cn/portal/article/index/id/22116>.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Golf and Pastor Lee, *The Coming Chinese Church: How Rising Faith in China Is Spilling Over Its Boundaries* (Monarch Books, 2013), 124.

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.gospeltimes.cn/portal/article/index/id/22116>.

¹⁰⁸ Mingri Jin, *Back to Jerusalem with All Nations: A Biblical Foundation* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2016), 7.

the river flow!”

“Lord, where do you want us to go?”

“Go to the West. Keep going towards the West through Shanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. Keep going till you arrive in Jerusalem, passing through Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, even through the Arab nations where Muslims live. Preach the Gospel to Jerusalem!”¹⁰⁹

The vision God was giving to Mark of going west through “Shanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang was exactly along the ancient Silk Road that cut straight through their school. They were in the perfect place for God to give them the Back to Jerusalem vision.

In the 1940s, there was no real reason to go west. The farther one traveled westward in China, the more poverty and fewer Chinese one would find. It was not rational for anyone to go to Muslim-dominated Xinjiang during those days, but what is foolish for man is not always foolish for God.

After that clear vision, Grace, together with more than seventy students and teachers, resolved to pray for the five provinces of northwest China every Wednesday.¹¹⁰

The following year several people at the Bible school dedicated themselves to travel west and preach the Gospel. Moved by this, Mark prayed to God about what he should name the group.

On May 23rd, as he prayed about the name for the band, a verse of Scripture was the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 24, verse 14. He explained below what he experienced:

“This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world; and then the end shall come.”

“Oh Lord, what does this mean?”

“It is this; you have to preach the Gospel not only in Xinjiang but also to the entire

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁰ <https://www.gospeltimes.cn/portal/article/index/id/22116>.

world.”

“Oh Lord, has not the Gospel already be preached to the entire world?”

“The Lord said, ‘Since the beginning at Pentecost, the Pathway of the Gospel has spread, for the greater part, in a Westward direction; from Jerusalem to Antioch to all of Europe; from Europe to America and then to the East; from the Southeast of China to the Northwest; but today, west of Gansu, there is no firmly established church. You must go westward from Gansu, preaching the Gospel all the way back to Jerusalem, causing the light of the Gospel to complete the circle around this dark world.’”¹¹¹

This was a divine conversation between Mark Ma and God! God was explaining to Mark Ma His plan of all time.

Based on Matthew 24:14, the first name for Back to Jerusalem was actually, “The Group That Travels Spreading the Gospel All Over the Place” (遍传福音团).

Their vision explained their mission. They were called to go and preach the Gospel all over the place. They did not petition Western churches for money and wait to receive funds. They were ready to go and be a witness for Christ.

On May 15, 1946, Grace helped formally organize the official Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band, complete with a constitution, the election of officers, and membership requirements.¹¹²

The newly founded organization was filled with zealous young candidates eager to fulfill the calling of God on their lives. They began to send out missionaries from their base at the Northwest Bible Institute in Shaanxi along the Silk Road toward Xinjiang.

A month later Mecca Zhao, Dai Yanzhong, Huang Qingzhi, and others left to serve in Qinghai, passing through all the provinces they had been praying for every Wednesday night.

But they were not just passing through like tourists on a prayer trip; they were ministering

¹¹¹ Jin, 8.

¹¹² R. G. Tiedemann, *Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 243.

and connecting with people along the way. The Gospel was desperately needed in these areas. As the Back to Jerusalem team traveled through Qinhai, Dai Yanzhong decided to stay behind in the city of Huangyuan to start a church.¹¹³

Back to Jerusalem was already making its first impact in one of the provinces they had been praying for. Huangyuan is very close to Xining and is about 50 percent Muslim and 50 percent Tibetan Buddhists. Even today, this is a dangerous place for Christian ministry.

Mecca Zhao, one of the team members, continued on, all the way to Xinjiang. He did not ask for money or support, but instead had a small business of carving stamps to financially support himself.¹¹⁴ He learned the local language to help him with his business.¹¹⁵

Mecca Zhao's real name was Zhao Zhongyi. When he was a teenager, he had a vision where the Lord showed him a piece of paper with the word *Mecca* on it.¹¹⁶

Mecca was from Henan Province, and as a teenager he was drafted into the Nationalist Army to fight the Chinese, where he was wounded in battle. Mecca did not know it then, but his time in the army was a blessing that somewhat protected him during the Back to Jerusalem mission work. The Chinese army guards who eventually arrested the other Back to Jerusalem missionaries did not arrest Mecca because of his heroic fight against the Japanese. The younger Chinese officers respected him.

After arriving in Xinjiang Province, Mecca settled outside of Kashgar, close to where I met Grace Ho decades later. Grace traveled to Kashgar to serve with Mecca. They eventually married and dreamed of a life together serving the Lord in the west.

In 1949, the Communists took over China and the government shut the borders to Xinjiang, not allowing people to leave the country. Almost all of Grace's co-workers were arrested and thrown in prison.

They never gave up the vision. When everything seemed to be falling apart all around them,

¹¹³ <https://www.gospeltimes.cn/portal/article/index/id/22116>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Wonsuk Ma, *Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship*, Paperback Series, Book 14 (Regnum Edinburgh Centenary: 2015), 180.

¹¹⁶ David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 73.

they continued to stay and serve where God told them to. In 1954, Grace and Mecca gave birth to a son and named him Zion, in recognition of the holy city of Jerusalem.

When Mecca received the vision about of his name, he did not know that the word was the birthplace of Islam, but God gave him the name to serve the rest of his life among the Muslims in Xinjiang Province.

When I asked Grace if she would ever return back to her home in eastern China, she gave me a small smirk and shook her head no. “Never,” she said. “God called me here, and I will stay here until He calls me home.”

Chapter 24

Back to Jerusalem Vision Resurrection

In 2011, while conducting research for my book *Underground House Church*, which tells the history of the underground house church in China, I found myself in the rural area of Pindingshan, Henan Province. There, near a secret mountain I was there to research, a man died who breathed life back into the Back to Jerusalem vision long after it had been forgotten.

In his biography called *The Heavenly Man*, Brother Yun, together with co-author Paul Hattaway, tells the story of when he first met one of the original Back to Jerusalem missionaries, Simon Zhao, who carried the vision to a new generation of believers.

In 1995, Brother Yun was preaching at an illegal underground house church gathering in Henan Province. He had heard about the Back to Jerusalem vision of the early church and was certain the Lord was calling him to be a part of the Chinese missionary movement in Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim nations. He learned an old song about the Back to Jerusalem vision that went like this:

Lift up your eyes toward the West

There are no laborers for the great harvest

My Lord's heart is grieving every day

He asks, "Who will go forth for me?"

With eyes filled with tears

And blood splattered across our chests

We lift up the banner of Christ

And will rescue the perishing sheep!

In these last days the battle is drawing near
And the trumpet is sounding aloud
Let's quickly put on the full armour of God
And break through Satan's snares!

Death is knocking at the door of many
And the world is overcome with sin
We must faithfully work as we march onward
Fighting even unto death!

With hope and faith we will march on
Dedicating our family and all that we have
As we take up our heavy crosses
We march on toward Jerusalem!¹¹⁷

“But I did not sing it that way,” Brother Yun later admitted in a private conversation with me.

One day while Brother Yun was singing the song, an older man in the crowd began to make his way forward. It was clear the man was known, but Brother Yun had never seen him before.

When the man came to the front of the stage, he asked, “Who told you that you could change the words to that song?”

Brother Yun was confused. “I didn't know what he was talking about,” he admitted to me. “But he was visibly angry. ‘How do you know that I changed the words?’ I asked.

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‘Because I wrote the song! he said.’”

The older man was Simon Zhao, one of the original leaders of the Back to Jerusalem movement from the Northwest Bible Institute in Shaanxi.

Before Simon met Brother Yun, he was a shell of the man he used to be. He had experienced so much suffering and hardship.

Simon Zhao, whose original name was Zhao Haizhen, was born and raised in the Manchurian city of Liaoning. As a young boy, he lost his father and was raised by a single mother. Without a man around to protect her, Simon’s mother was viciously raped.¹¹⁸

When Simon was a bit older, the Lord gave him a vision to take the Gospel to the west, and he did so with the Northwest Spiritual Movement out of Shandong.

In Shaanxi, he connected with Pastor Mark Ma and preached the Good News all the way to Xinjiang. In Xinjiang he connected with Mecca Zhao.

Shortly after arriving in the city of Kashgar, every member of the Northwest Spiritual Movement was arrested and put in prison, including Simon and his new bride. Simon and his wife had only been married for a few months and Simon’s wife was several months pregnant.¹¹⁹

For years, Simon sat in prison wondering why God called him all the way to Xinjiang only to waste away in prison. Every evening Simon would face westward toward Jerusalem and hold to the vision God had given him.

Over the years, one by one all of the zealous companions who came to Xinjiang to fulfill the Great Commission died. Simon was beaten, tortured, and had to work hard in the prison camp. The guards taunted him and tried to get him to deny the name of Jesus. When he didn’t, they beat him with a wooden bench in the room. Whenever they would catch him praying, they would kick him and punch him.

The prison forced him to work in the coal mines for fourteen hours a day, and most prisoners died after six months. Day after day, he carried large loads of coal out of the long, dusty

¹¹⁸ “Passionate Generation: A Generation Living Entirely for God,” December 29, 2007, <https://revivekashgar.wordpress.com/2007/12/29/back-to-jerusalem/>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

shaft in baskets tied to his back.¹²⁰

For years, he wanted to die, but the only thing that kept Simon alive was the thought of one day being reunited with his wife. The prison guards never bothered to tell Simon that his wife had died not long after she was thrown in prison.

Simon was transferred to another prison in Xinjiang where he was forced to work in a toxic chemical plant. Every evening he was beaten by the fellow prisoners who were Muslim and hated him because he was a Christian. The guards rewarded the prisoners for abusing Simon.

During one of those times of suffering, Simon wrote a short poem:

I want to experience the same pain and suffering

Of Jesus on the cross

The spear in his side, the pain in his heart

I'd rather feel the pain of shackles on my feet

Than ride through Egypt in Pharaoh's chariot.¹²¹

It seemed that Simon got what he prayed for, because his life was a living hell for thirty-one years. It was more than any human being could take.

To add to the misery, after thirty-one years, when he was released from prison, Simon found that he was homeless, with nowhere to go. No one he knew was alive. He had no job, no money, and no family. It seemed that everything God had shown him was a big waste of time.

Finding a small piece of canvas, Simon made a little hut and lived under that. He had been forgotten, and his miserable life had no meaning and no purpose.

What Simon did not know was that while he was in prison, the church in his hometown in Henan Province was having a revival. Thousands of new believers were coming to Christ every day, and somehow they were hearing the legends of Simon's missionary work.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

When church leaders heard Simon was alive and living in Kashgar, they immediately sent representatives up to get him to come to Henan Province and share his story. To their surprise, he refused to come.

Simon was in pain. He had lost everything. More than anything, he felt he had wasted his life and missed the calling God had on his life.

One sister I have worked with for many years named Deborah Xu, the sister of Peter Xu, a pastor from a fellowship in Henan Province, decided to go and beg him to come to Henan and share his story.

One sister traveled by train and bus all the way to Kashgar to prayerfully persuade him to reconsider. Every day she was away we prayed that the Lord would grant her success. To start with, Simon Zhao was hesitant. He said, “The Lord called me to go west back to Jerusalem and here in Xinjiang I am at least on the way. Why should I travel back east again and go further away from Jerusalem? Why don’t you leave me alone to die here in Kashgar?”

This sister is very persistent in the Lord! She wouldn’t take no for an answer and followed Uncle Simon wherever he went, repeatedly asking in a loving manner if he would come back to Henan. She assured him that we had no intention of taking him away from the front line of the battle. We only wanted to bring him back to where there were thousands of new troops who needed training and equipping if the Back to Jerusalem mission was to be rekindled in the life of the Chinese church. She explained that his vision could be multiplied many times over and that thousands of new recruits would be sent back to fight on the front lines if he would just come and share his story.

Finally Simon Zhao realized this sister would not give him any peace until he agreed to return to Henan Province with her. He started to realize that it must be the Lord who had given this woman such stubborn persistence!¹²²

¹²² Ibid.

Simon received a hero's welcome from the house church leaders in Henan Province. When he met Brother Yun in 1995, he shared with him and a group of leaders about the call of the Chinese church to complete the Great Commission.

The Chinese leaders understood that this mission was not just a program of the Chinese church. It was a calling to usher in the last days for the return of the Messiah!

Simon Zhao passed away on December 7, 2001, at the age of eighty-three in the small village of Pingdingshan. When I went there, I talked to the elders about him, and they told me glowing reports of his vision.

After the long winter of Mao Zedong's reign, it seemed the Back to Jerusalem vision was dead and forgotten. The work and sacrifice that Pastor Jing, Grace Ho, Mecca Zhao, Mark Ma, and so many gave might have been forgotten had it not been for the testimony of Simon Zhao. Simon brought the vision back to life, but the burden of carrying that vision was not an easy one.

The vision of Back to Jerusalem is not filled with goose bumps and good feelings. It is a call that leads to the final battle on earth and requires painful sacrifices.

Chapter 25

Back to Jerusalem: A New Generation

The Back to Jerusalem vision never died. It is being advanced by a new breed of believers in China who now see the vision as a mission for the last days.

Simon Zhao and Grace Ho succeeded in passing down the vision to tens of millions of new believers in China, and it burns hotter than ever. The leadership of China has a clear vision to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to all of the nations between China and Jerusalem.

I felt the burden of the Chinese pastors to complete the Great Commission seven years ago when I stood in a hotel room in southern California with Brother Yun, Pastor Peter Xu, and his sister, Deborah Xu.

Peter Xu has been called the “Billy Graham of China.” He planted a church of what some estimate to be around twenty million believers. Though today the church has been broken up into many smaller networks, it was still one of the most important movements of the 1990s.

“Oh Lord, we desire to see You return again!” Peter cried out as he prayed with Brother Yun and Deborah Xu. I had a question to ask them about logistics regarding an upcoming meeting, but it was clear the three of them were lost in prayer. “Help us to carry the message of the cross to all the nations and complete the task that You have given us to do.”

Speaking to North Star Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, during the same year, Peter said, “God has used persecution and suffering to refine His church in China, to provide training for the believers in China, to complete the Great Commission all the way back to Jerusalem.”¹²³

Pastor Shen Xiaoming is of the same heart regarding Back to Jerusalem. He is the pastor of China Gospel Fellowship, considered to be one of the largest denominations in the world with over ten million believers. I lived with Pastor Shen on and off over a period of two years as I wrote his biography, *Kidnapped by a Cult*.

He shared with me that “the road of the cross is not always an easy one, but it is sweeter than the alternative. During the hardest moments in life there is the sweetest of sanctuaries found in Him, and it is not as difficult as you might think to be refreshed. The rewards are not obvious to observers, but they are unmistakable to the gladiators in the midst of the raging battle. God’s ways are so much higher than our ways, and allowing my fears to crumble in His mighty hands was the best thing that I ever did. I believe in the words of Paul when he says in the book of Romans that all things—*all things*—work together for the good of those who love the Lord.”

Then he said a phrase I will never forget: “Pain brings repentance, and I am not done repenting. Brokenness ushers in revival, and oh, how I hunger for more revival. This temporal world can offer nothing to me anymore. It is the eternal flame of the Holy Spirit that brings everlasting joy and satisfaction.”

He continued on, describing the exact mind-set as those who have told me of the early

¹²³ <https://vimeo.com/43977243>, 1:13–15. Note: The English translation was not the same as Pastor Peter Xu’s words.

sufferings of Pastor Jing, Mark Ma, Simon Zhao, Mecca Zhao, and Grace Ho when he said, “God announced His calling to us through persecution and trials. He spoke to us and revealed Himself to us during our most trying times. My heart aches for the new generation in China if they do not have the same opportunities to see the hand of God move in their lives during trying times.”

Pastor Shen is under constant police observation. The government knows he is a pastor, and they try to keep him from causing too much trouble. The sheer size of Pastor Shen’s ten-million-member church is a testimony that they have failed at this task. He told me of one conversation he had with a police officer from Tanghe County. “He was in a jovial mood, and he jokingly said to me, ‘You know, you should actually thank us. If it were not for us, you would not be so well known. We made you famous!’

“We laughed together and then I responded, “It is true! If it were not for you I would still be just another handicapped man living in a small village in Tanghe County. You chased me and put posters up about me and that pushed me into big cities all over China. You know, if you keep chasing me and persecuting me, you might just push me out of China and make me famous all over the world! Right?’ We both laughed at the irony. It was funny because it was true.”

Then Pastor Shen explained further, “China has a huge population and has a vision for missions. The older generation had this vision and started by going to Xinjiang. They gave us the vision to do world missions, and we can see that the Arabic people like the Chinese people more than Westerners. They do not have anything against the Chinese like they do the Americans or Europeans. We already have many Chinese companies there. The Silk Road has prepared the way for this effort. The Chinese economy is growing very fast, and our neighboring countries welcome Chinese investment. God has given the Great Commission to the entire church body, but today China has a special part to play.”

I had the same exact conversation with Pastor Zhang Rongliang when I was staying with him and helping him write his autobiography called *I Stand with Christ*. Pastor Zhang is probably the most well-known underground house church pastor in all of China. He has stopped counting the

number of members in his fellowship, but it too is estimated to be more than ten million believers.

He said,

As China proceeds to grow economically, politically, and militarily, it is also growing spiritually. As a people, we are marching out of the black void of atheism and into the destiny of our Creator. Today, “Back to Jerusalem” is the heartbeat of the Chinese church’s vision for the future, which is the vision to take the gospel of Jesus Christ from the borders of China into the poorest, darkest, most violent areas on earth until Jesus’ Great Commission is fulfilled and every tribe, tongue, and nation has heard the good news.¹²⁴

Pastor Zhang also believes the church in China has benefited from the suffering. He believes the persecution has prepared them for the hard road ahead.

Today, the underground house churches in China are not trying to survive. They are unified in the Back to Jerusalem vision, and churches are sending out missionaries into Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and atheist countries around the world. Our church now has missionaries serving in Pakistan, Dubai, India, and many other nations that are hostile to the gospel. Additionally, our young people are moving into China’s cities in large numbers, but it is not for the purpose of making money. They are moving there to plant churches, to preach the gospel, to raise support for foreign missions, and to send new firebrand believers into the field. I can’t help but feel excited about the future of China and the Chinese church.¹²⁵

It is sometimes not easy for Western Christians to see persecution as a helpful thing. In the West, we spend so much time praying against persecution. We lobby against it and use every financial, political, and military tool at our disposal to resist it, but in China it is treated completely differently.

¹²⁴ (Zhang Ronliang and Eugene Bach, *I Stand with Christ* (Reno, NV: Whitaker House, 2015), 229.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 203.

Of all of the Chinese believers in China, I do not know many better than I do Brother Yun, also known as the Heavenly Man. He is probably the most well-known living Chinese evangelist in the world today. He first came to my home in southern California in the late 1990s, and I have been working with him ever since. I spend a lot of time with him on the road, traveling from church to church sharing about the Back to Jerusalem vision.

In 2017, we were meeting with churches in the US when we had a small, private pastors meeting not far from Kansas City, Missouri. It was a roundtable discussion where pastors spent time with Brother Yun and had the opportunity to ask him questions. Brother Ren, Brother Yun's pastor, was translating for him when one of the pastors asked Brother Yun about the persecution that had started to increase that year. All of the pastors were concerned and wanted to know what they could do to help.

"Brother Yun," the pastor started off, "we have heard so much about the persecution of the Chinese. On the news we have seen that the Chinese government has torn down several thousand crosses. What is the church doing to stop this?"

Without blinking Brother Yun smiled and said, "I am not worried one bit that the Chinese government have been ripping the crosses down from the buildings in China."

"You're not," the pastor said, clearly confused.

"Naaahhhh," Brother Yun replied. "The crosses never should have been on those buildings in the first place. Jesus told us to that we are to carry the cross every day. The cross belongs on our backs. We have gotten lazy and placed it on a building in hopes that the building would hold the burden of the cross for us. The government has pulled the crosses down so that Christians can once again carry their own crosses."

"But what about the churches the government has been destroying? This must be disturbing to you to watch as the government destroys thousands of church buildings throughout China, right?" The pastor was clearly more perturbed by the persecution against the Chinese church in China than Brother Yun was.

“This does not bother us in China. Why should it? It is only a building. We are the church. Our vision in China is to see so many Muslims come to the Lord that the mosques will be transformed into meeting places for the churches. Our prayer is that we will see so many Buddhists come to Christ on our way back to Jerusalem that the Buddhist temples will be transformed into revival centers for Christians. Let’s not use the resources of the Christians to build new buildings for the Body; let’s repurpose the resources the enemy has used to facilitate the needs of the church.”

In his book *Back to Jerusalem: Three Chinese House Church Leaders Share Their Vision to Complete the Great Commission*, author Paul Hattaway further explained Brother Yun’s understanding of the Back to Jerusalem vision when he wrote, “I came to understand clearly that the destiny of the house churches of China is to pull down the world’s last remaining spiritual strongholds—the house of Buddha, the house of Mohammad, and the house of Hinduism—and to proclaim the glorious gospel to all nations before the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!”¹²⁶

But Brother Yun warns that the Back to Jerusalem vision cannot measure success in the same way that Western Christians have been measuring success for so many years.

As Back to Jerusalem gains momentum please don’t judge it by a worldly standard. If you hear that hundreds of us have been killed or imprisoned, don’t assume that is bad news and that the vision has failed! In China we have learned to trust the sovereignty of God. If we are in prison, it is because he wants us there. The very thing some people may think of failure may turn out to be the point of breakthrough and victory.¹²⁷

The Back to Jerusalem vision of the Chinese church starts with the leadership and goes down into the ranks of every new believer. It is the heartbeat of the underground house church of China, and they believe that it will usher in the return of Jesus Christ.

¹²⁶ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem: Three Chinese House Church Leaders Share Their Vision to Complete the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: IVP Books, 2005), Kindle version, Loc 1113 of 3028.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1174 of 3028.

Chapter 26

Back to Jerusalem Attacked

Before diving into the eschatological aspects of Back to Jerusalem, it is important to first take a pause and address the opposition. To say that the Back to Jerusalem vision of the Chinese church is not without its critics is an understatement. The opposition to the vision has been both honest and dishonest. There have been honest concerns raised about Back to Jerusalem, and there have been vicious attacks that have no foundation in truth. I hope to address both the rational and the irrational concerns about Back to Jerusalem, because by asking questions—even irrational ones—we can learn more about what we believe and why we believe it.

Opposition to the Back to Jerusalem vision takes many forms, but there are four main categories they fall into: personal, financial, logistical, and theological.

Personal

There were, are, and most likely always will be personal attacks against those who champion the vision of Back to Jerusalem. Pastor Jing of the Jesus Family was accused of sexually exploiting female members.¹²⁸ Members of the Jesus Family were accused of homosexuality.¹²⁹ Mission boards in China claimed that charismatic expressions of faith were demonic and led to insanity and even suicide.¹³⁰

Personally, I have been attacked so many times for so many reasons that I have lost count. I have received special letters from “God’s prophets” in the mail with pictures of hell’s fires that await me upon my death, which, according to one “prophet,” should have already happened by now.

But recently, because the Chinese evangelist Brother Yun, commonly called the Heavenly

¹²⁸

Xi Lian, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), Kindle edition, location 1677 of 7912.

¹²⁹ Ibid., location 1677 of 7912.

¹³⁰ Fenggang Yang, *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies* English and Chinese edition (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Pub; 2017), 53.

Man, has been such a visible advocate for this end-time mission movement, he has received the overwhelming majority of attacks.

One letter that claimed to be authored by the highly respected Samuel Lamb was sent out to churches all around the world. It claimed,

This heavenly man has several names: Liu Zhenying was his real name. In China, he called himself “The Heavenly Man”. After he arrived in the West, he called himself “Teacher Tian” among the Chinese but to the West he is “Liu Yun”, “Brother Yun” in short . He was born on 22 Feb, 1958 in Hung Ni Wan, Nanyang, Henan Province. He is talented in preaching and exploits human psychology. His wife is Yang Deling, his son Isaac and daughter Elim.

He was most corrupt while in China. To the West, he claimed that he is the leader of over 58 million Christians in the underground churches in China. He had once sought support from the “Born Again Sect”. He is the most skilful con man in Chinese church history.¹³¹

In case there was any misunderstanding of what the letter said, it was entitled “‘The Heavenly Man’—The Big Con Man of China.”

Since Brother Yun is practically a part of my family, this attack was personal.

Pastor Samuel Lamb was a hero of mine, and before his death, I traveled together with a colleague from the United States to meet with him to ask him face-to-face why he would say such a thing. We filmed the meeting. When we asked Pastor Lamb if he had ever personally met with Brother Yun, he said that he had not. When we asked if Pastor Lamb had ever personally read the book *The Heavenly Man*, he admitted that he had not. When we asked what the basis of his attacks were, he did not answer. He merely smiled and preferred to remain silent.

My respect for him did not waiver, but this personal attack was a painful one.

Another letter signed by multiple leaders in China in 2004 said, “We oppose the way that

¹³¹ Lin Xiangao (Samuel Lamb), “‘The Heavenly Man’—The Big Con Man of China,” accessed March 6, 2020, http://jesusreturn.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/C125.book_LinXiangao.C2.wP.Engl_April05B.J5.pdf.

Heavenly Man boasts and lies to strive for fame, wealth and status by making use of the name ‘suffering, unity & mission’. We can’t agree with Heavenly Man. He has no qualification to represent churches in China to speak.”¹³²

This letter hit even deeper, because it was signed by co-workers I served with in China and knew very well. However, when I traveled to China with other colleagues with the letter in hand to ask the signers about it, all of the leaders who had put their name on the letter emphatically claimed they had been tricked. The letter they were shown was something completely different.

After that event, something beautiful happened. All the top leaders from the underground house church from Henan Province and Anhui Province met in north Thailand and prayed together. At the end of that event, the groups that were represented at the meeting officially appointed Brother Yun to help be their voice to the church in the West.

Financial

Attacks have been launched against Back to Jerusalem as an organization, claiming they have brought in millions of dollars to get rich off of the Chinese vision.¹³³

This claim is the easiest to answer.

Back to Jerusalem is a vision, and as such there have been many organizations that have raised funds to support the BTJ vision.

However, the organization Back to Jerusalem has a third-party ministry that handles all of the funds. Funds sent to Back to Jerusalem (the organization) go to a separate ministry with an independent board and an independent auditing team before they are sent to the field to ensure the highest level of accountability.

The organization Back to Jerusalem currently has representative offices in the USA, Canada, the UK, Holland, South Korea, and Brazil. Brother Yun does not handle and has never handled any of the funds. The Back to Jerusalem headquarters in the United States, at the writing of this, is a hand-built wooden shed on rented property.

¹³² “An Open Letter of Love Advice from Leaders & Co-workers of Chinese Churches,” accessed March 6, 2020, http://jesusreturn.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/OPENLETTER05TOTALeng_de_cn.pdf.

¹³³ Ibid.



Financially, the Chinese church does not need income from the West to complete the task God has given them. Most of the Chinese leaders who currently partner with Back to Jerusalem (the organization) only do so because of a long thirty-year friendship. They reject much of the funds offered by Western ministries because they understand that those funds often come with strings. Western ministries often have notions of administrative control attached to their financial support. As a result of this mentality, many Chinese underground house church networks are completely unknown to the Western audience because they refuse to take Western funds.

The Chinese church can absolutely do the task without outside funding, but it is a privilege for all of those involved to partner together and pool all of the resources available for the completion of the Great Commission.

Logistical

The Chinese vision to send out 100,000 missionaries from China into the unreached nations between China and Jerusalem does not seem practical to many Western observers. Many heard about the vision for the first time in 2003, when *The Heavenly Man* book came out. Immediately there were many ministries that openly scoffed at the idea.

From the armchair perches of plush Western headquarter offices, “mission experts” dismantled the Chinese notion that they could possibly send out 100,000 missionaries or complete the Great

Commission. Their reasons were multiple, but just a few of them were:

8. China was still unreached. How could the Chinese church possibly attempt to leave their nation to reach others when their own nation was and is still largely unreached.
9. The Chinese church does not have the proper structure in place to send out so many missionaries. As one missiologist wrote, they need “policy manuals, financial guidelines and personnel structures.”¹³⁴ They first need to establish finance departments, health insurance plans, retirement benefits, furlough planners, college funds for their children—you know, all the things the Western mission organizations have.
10. The Chinese need training schools. They need cross-cultural training programs. They need training curriculum written by professionals. As one organization said, “The BTJ Movement has been compared to a chain with many rings linked together. The problem is that all of the rings are incomplete, and many of them are missing altogether. These missing links include: Need for training schools. . . . Quality training programs do not materialize overnight.’ “In order for the movement to mature, much more original training material needs to be written. This, however, will take many years, even decades.”
11. The Chinese church does not have proper Bible schools in place or education programs to train up the leaders. How can they call themselves leaders if they do not have a degree? As one mission newsletter put it, “What is probably needed is the translation of a whole set of Master’s degree level training material.”
12. The Chinese are emotionally driven. They can’t just jump into this missionary work. It takes time. It takes planning. It takes a well-thought-out plan.
13. The Chinese tend to over-spiritualize missionary work. Over-spiritualization can lead to too many Chinese desiring to be missionaries without truly understanding what the work entails.

¹³⁴ I have purposely omitted citations for these quotes because I do not wish to disparage particular ministries. I have no doubt that some of these organizations are good intentioned but they ...

One China mission group wrote, “The talk of a large number of workers being put in prison and sacrificing their lives is frightening to all of us. Such a plan is certainly not strategic and can hardly achieve the goal of taking the gospel all the way to Jerusalem.”

In short, the logistical criticism of the Chinese church is that it is simply too immature and ill-prepared to tackle such a huge task. The assumption is that the Western church is far more mature and the Chinese should seek their help, advice, and leadership.

The lack of mission statements, pie charts, and strategy meetings led by respected mission professionals point to a lack of understanding about the “correct” way in which missions should be done.

When reading through the common, logistical criticisms of the Back to Jerusalem vision, it seems there is an overwhelming feeling that Chinese missionaries need to put in the time for preparation to be successful in spreading the Gospel. Suffering and persecution are not contributing experiences to take the place of education. There are academic dues that must be paid.

When Brother Yun’s book *The Heavenly Man* was first released in 2003, the Back to Jerusalem vision of sending missionaries from China was only a vision. Today, with Chinese missionaries in virtually every country between China and Jerusalem, it no longer just a vision—it is a reality.

Theological

There will always be theological differences regarding anything that has to do with missions, but one well-known Chinese missiologist wrote,

There is no biblical basis for the church in China to ‘take up the last baton’ of the Great Commission. There is no support for the church in China to ‘finish the Great Commission’ by itself. There is no historical evidence that the gospel traveled only in a westward direction (from Jerusalem to Europe, to North America, then to China), and that by taking the gospel from China to Jerusalem, the Great Commission will be completed.

The entire first part of this book should more than adequately answer this theological challenge. However, there is a deeper theological divide that exists here, and it is not just between the Chinese church and the church in the West. It is one that exists between the Chinese churches and the Back to Jerusalem vision.

It would be wrong to say that all Chinese Christians have a vision for Back to Jerusalem, because they clearly do not.

There are many Chinese fellowships in the West that do not embrace Back to Jerusalem, but it is important to understand that most of the Chinese Christian churches in the West are conservative in nature and embraced the leadership of the early Western missionaries. They hail from very traditional Baptist, Presbyterian, or Methodist backgrounds. The foundation for what they believe today originally came from Western, conservative, fundamentalist missionaries. They respect titles and methodology. They see the charismatic movement in China as a foolish endeavor, embraced by an uneducated rural farmer class, and as a result they stay clear of those who teach about Back to Jerusalem.

Another group of Chinese Christians that have not traditionally gravitated to the global call of Back to Jerusalem is the government-endorsed Three-Self Churches. There are roughly sixty thousand government-controlled churches in China,¹³⁵ and it is the policy of the government that evangelism not be practiced outside of the authorized areas of the church. Mission activities, though commanded by Christ, are outlawed by the Communist Party of China.

Secretly, though, there are some official government pastors who are interested in BTJ. I have been unofficially invited to speak at several government churches about the BTJ vision.

Underlying many of the challenges against Back to Jerusalem is often a very simple misunderstanding. In general, the Western mind-set desires to be persuaded and shown independent proof, history, and references that can be studied, and the Chinese can easily believe the supernatural without proof, if the person sharing it is trustworthy.

¹³⁵ “Three Self Church,” billionbibles.com, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.billionbibles.com/china/three-self-church.html>.

Back to Jerusalem believes in the supernatural power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the Chinese do not have to be convinced of this. Western Christians are often too quick to think the ways of the East are primitive and backward—and perhaps they are—but perhaps they are also biblical.

It might benefit many overseas churches to accept the Chinese church as it is and partner with it anyway. The Western church does not need to change to be like the Chinese church, and the Chinese church does not need to change to be like the Western church. Maybe the differences are complimentary on the mission field, just as the Lord designed it. God is the inventor of diversity.

It is easy to misunderstand the Back to Jerusalem vision as an ethnocentric vision that is anti-foreign in nature, but that would be a mistake. The Chinese warmly welcome and join together with all nationalities in the vision. They know their vision would not be possible otherwise. They merely attempt to guard and carry the gift God has given them so that they can serve in the unique place God has allotted to them.

Pastor Jing of the Jesus Family said it this way:

Therefore we missionaries need to be careful, or we shall produce native Christian who have lost their individuality. This is no theory, but a melancholy fact, known and seen by many. By contrast with us, a native becomes one of our church members, if he is weak. If he is strong, he branches out for himself, as he should do, and becomes “anti-foreign.” Many of the indigenous movements, which have been called “anti-foreign” have been seriously misjudged. Missionaries have often found, when they have come into close contact with these movements, that they contact very excellent and beloved brethren in the Lord.¹³⁶

The role of the overseas church is the same as in any other missionary situation: to partner together with the Chinese church; not to come in and take over, not to assume leadership, not to attempt to transform the Chinese vision into something that looks familiar for the Western missionary, but to use the resources at their disposal and serve the vision together with the Chinese .

¹³⁶ D. Vaughan Rees, *Jesus Family in Communist China* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster Press, 1959), 7.

. . as equal partners.

Part IV

China's Vision of Back to Jerusalem and Eschatological Prophetic Writings

Chapter 27

Back to Jerusalem and Signs from the Mount of Olives

The Back to Jerusalem vision is not an exhaustive explanation of all the signs of the coming of the Messiah, but it is a focus on the return of the Messiah as it relates to the Great Commission. The Good News shared with all the nations is the main way Jesus said we would know when He would return.

The exact verse that God gave to Pastor Mark Ma as the motto for the Back to Jerusalem vision is the same verse that Jesus gave to His disciples regarding when He would return:

Matthew 24:14. The scripture says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (NIV).

Matthew 24 is one of the most revealing chapters in the entire Bible as it pertains to the return of Jesus Christ.

The first thing to notice about this section of Matthew is the location. Location. Location. Location.

Jesus took His disciples up to the Mount of Olives. It was here on the Mount of Olives that Jesus sat down with His disciples and told them the secrets regarding the end of the world.

“As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’” (v. 3 NIV)

The first thing Jesus said, before He answers the disciples’ questions, was a warning not to listen to the doomsday peddlers.

Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.” (vv. 4–8 NIV)

Whenever calamity hits with disease, war, or natural disaster, there are always those who use the fear as a prop for their false message. These verses are not saying the end of the age doesn’t come without calamity. It does! But it is not the sign.

Jesus went on to say,

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. (vv. 9–13 NIV)

Here, Jesus pointed to the persecution and apostasy that will be an inevitable experience for those who follow Jesus. There will be hard and trying times, and those who persevere will be saved. But that will not be the sign.

What will be the sign of the end times?

Jesus, sitting on the Mount of Olives and facing west toward Jerusalem, then gave the answer: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (v. 14 NIV).

This is the sign.

Many focus on what Jesus said next as a sign of the end times, but clearly it is not. He told the disciples,

So when you see standing in the holy place “the abomination that causes desolation,” spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. (vv. 15–21 NIV)

Jesus was describing a horrible event that will take place, but this is *not* the event that will usher in the return of the Messiah. If it were, He would not tell His people to run for the hills. Who would they be running from? The Messiah? No. The people of the world will be afraid when Jesus returns, but His people will not (vv. 30–31).

Jesus then clarified He was no longer talking about the end, but about the horrible things people must endure until the end, when He said, “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened” (v. 22 NIV).

What days need to be shorted? The days *prior* to the end of the age. This calamity is on a massive scale, but it is not the end.

Just in case any of the disciples did not understand, Jesus explained Himself further.

At that time [What time? The time of calamity that Jesus is describing] if anyone says to you, “Look, here is the Messiah!” or, “There he is!” do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, “There he is, out in the wilderness,” do not go out; or, “Here he is, in the inner rooms,” do not believe it. (vv. 23–26 NIV)

Jesus could not have been clearer.

Jesus is sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking west towards the city of Jerusalem and explaining the returning of the Son of Man as lightning going from east to west.

From Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24 that the main sign of Messiah’s return is not the destruction, persecution, war, and disaster that is about to come. These things are going to happen even to those who were listening to Him on the Mount of Olives (v. 35). Instead, the primary thing that needs to take place for Jesus to come back is that all of the nations hear the message of the Kingdom.

It cannot be emphasized enough the role the Mount of Olives plays as Jesus is giving *this* instruction to His disciples about His return.

The eschatology wrapped in this location is key to understanding the Back to Jerusalem vision. The Mount of Olives is connected in at least ten ways to the return of Jesus and the Back to Jerusalem vision of the Chinese church.

1. Olivet Discourse: Jesus shares with His disciples about His return on the Mount of Olives.

2. Anointing: While in Bethany on the Mount of Olives, Jesus pointed to the message of His sacrifice being preached in the world.

While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman

came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” (Mark 14:3–9 NIV)

The image of the woman being scolded by the disciples is easily relatable for the Chinese missionaries focused on the Back to Jerusalem vision. They, like the woman, are giving everything to honor Jesus and are washing His feet with their tears of suffering. Like the woman, the members of the underground house church are nameless and faceless, with all of their focus on Jesus.

Notice that the woman is in the house of Simon the Leper. If Simon had been healed of leprosy, then why was he still being referred to by his disease? Lepers were unclean. Like the lady in the story, the Chinese underground house church comes from an unclean nation that does not serve the Lord, but that is not stopping them from pouring out everything in sacrifice for the Lord.

The message of her sacrifice is now making it all over the world, just as the Chinese are sharing the Gospel in the unreached areas of the world.

3. Triumphant Entry: Jesus rode westward, down from the Mount of Olives, through the East Gate, and into Jerusalem to fulfill biblical prophesy of the Messiah triumphantly entering the city. This is a clear picture of Jesus’ second coming.

4. Arrest and Betrayal: Jesus was arrested and betrayed, not just by Judas and the Romans,

but by the entire human race in the Garden of Gethsemane, which is at the foot of the Mount of Olives. This is a picture of the love Jesus has for the world that rejected Him then and rejects Him still. *Gethsemane* means “oil press.” The image of Gethsemane on the slope of the Mount of Olives where Jesus prayed before He was betrayed and arrested provides a vivid picture of the anointing oil that flows from the pressure when we are crushed in the press.

5. Ascension and Return: From the Mount of Olives, Jesus ascended into heaven.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:10–11 NIV)

6. The Return of the Messiah: “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south” (Zech. 14:4 NIV)

7. The Glory of the Lord Restoring Jerusalem: Ezekiel had a vision of the Lord of the Jews being restored again in the last days: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again” (Ezek. 11:17 NIV). After this event the Lord moves from Jerusalem and rests on the Mount of Olives: “And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city” (v. 23 ESV).

8. The Bridge of Salvation: During the days of Jesus, the Mount of Olives was where the Miphkad Altar was located (the altar to sacrifice the red heifer).¹³⁷ Before priests could enter into the temple, a special sacrifice first had to be made to purify them. A bridge, known as the Red Heifer Bridge, was built over the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives to keep those crossing from coming in contact with the dead bodies in the cemetery. Ashes from the red heifer was a part of the process of purification (Heb. 9:13).

Numbers 19:3 says, “Ye shall give her [the calf] unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring

¹³⁷ <https://templeinstitute.org/the-ceremony/>

her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face [that is, on the east side of the sanctuary, because God figuratively sat on His throne in the Holy of Holies and He faced eastward to view all the activities of His people assembled in or in front of the sanctuary]” (KJV). To be “before the face of God” meant to be east of Him in all the geographical associations involving the sanctuaries.¹³⁸

According to the Jewish protocol for the sacrifice of the red cow, “The heifer is bound to the altar with cords made from reed-grass, which do not become impure. It is placed on top of the wood arrangement with its head on the south side, and its face westward—towards the Temple. The priest stands on the eastern side, also facing west.”¹³⁹

Both the priest and the sacrificial heifer are on the Mount of Olives and facing west toward the East Gate of Jerusalem.

This alter, to the east of the temple on the Mount of Olives, would need to be rebuilt in order for the Third Temple to be built.

In 2018, when the first red heifer in two thousand years was born in Israel, it immediately sparked mass speculation about the return of the Messiah and the coming of Armageddon.¹⁴⁰

9. Resurrection with the Messiah: Today one the most sought-after places for Jews to be buried in Jerusalem is on the Mount of Olives.¹⁴¹ Jewish believers are paying top dollar to be buried on the Mount of Olives so that they will be the first to be resurrected back to life when the Messiah comes.

10. Solomon's Temple: The Mount of Olives is the key to the return of the Messiah and the olive wood was key for God to enter the Holiest of Holies. The massive door frames leading into the inner sanctuary were made of pure olive wood (1 Kings 6:33) and made up a fourth part of the wall.

¹³⁸ Ernest L. Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha*, 2nd ed., p. 43–51, <http://www.askelm.com/golgotha/Golgotha%20Chap%2003.pdf>.

¹³⁹ <https://templeinstitute.org/the-ceremony/>

¹⁴⁰ Harvey Sullivan, “Apocalypse Cow,” *Sun*, September 10, 2018, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7217719/bible-prophecy-apocalypse-firs-red-heifer-born-israel/>.

¹⁴¹ Josefín Dolstein, “Why Some American Jews Pay More Than \$20,000 to Get Buried in Israel,” *Times of Israel*, June 7, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/why-some-american-jews-pay-more-than-20000-to-get-buried-in-israel/>.

The majestic double doors leading into the inner sanctuary were at the entrance facing east and were made of pure olive wood (v. 32).

And in the Holy of Holies, there were two winged cherubim at center of it all and were the throne seat of God's presence, that were made of pure olive wood (vv. 23–27).

The Mount of Olives is of the utmost importance to the Back to Jerusalem vision. We can begin to see why Jesus spent more time there than almost anywhere else (Luke 22:39). It not only establishes the signs of Jesus' return, but it also confirms the historical winds of the Spirit's westward move.

Chapter 28

Back to Jerusalem and the Temple of Jerusalem

An army of Chinese believers from the east being key to fulfilling the Great Commission seems theologically ill-established at first, but a deeper look shows that the Back to Jerusalem vision is on extremely solid biblical ground. The biblical concept goes much deeper than most people realize.

As shown earlier, there is biblical mandate for the vision of Back to Jerusalem in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The biblical foundation was then supernaturally revealed to the Chinese church through visions and dreams and has lasted through years of persecution.

The confirmation of scriptures for the Back to Jerusalem vision quickly pile up and even continue in the prophecies regarding of the return of the Messiah from Jesus and from the prophets.

Ezekiel had an extraordinary vision that predicted the glory of the Lord coming from the east with a roar like mighty rushing waters:

Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the God of Israel

coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. (Ezek. 43:1–4 NIV)

Jesus, while on the Mount of Olives, confirmed this vision when He said, “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt. 24:27 NIV).

There is an undeniable significance focused on the glory of the Lord coming from the east in Scriptures.

From the very beginning, the Lord’s presence was with man when the “LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed” (Gen. 2:8 NIV).

But when man was kicked out of Eden and out of the presence of God, cherubim were stationed at the entrance to the east to block the return of man (Gen. 3:24).

Adam and Eve were sent eastward out of. To reenter the presence of God they would have to move westward. The further man gets from God, the farther east he is pushed. To return to God, man must travel westward.

This is further illustrated after Cain kills his brother. “Cain went out from the LORDLORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden” (Gen. 4:16 NIV). Even the sun, when it rises in the east, banishes the darkness as it moves west.

The idea that going toward the west is moving toward God’s presence and going east is moving away from God’s presence is not just a theory; it is illustrated throughout the carefully constructed Jewish temple in Jerusalem and reflected in the temple sacrifices.

the movement of the sun, when it rises in the east, it banishes the darkness as it moves west.

The construction of the Temple and the sacrifices all point to a westward movement of the Gospel and the return of the Messiah from the East.

Both the tabernacle and the temple were *always* built with an eastern entrance so those approaching God were going from east to west. This set Jehovah's priests apart from the pagan priests. When Jehovah's priests worshipped God, their backs were always to the east and they were facing west. This was opposite of the pagans, who desecrated the temple by facing the opposite direction (Ezek. 8:16–18).

The very first tabernacle set up at Mount Sinai by Moses only had one entrance—from the east. One could not merely stroll into the tabernacle from any direction; you had to approach from the east toward the west. This movement represented leaving the sin of man and moving toward God. The far end of the tabernacle was at the western wall (Exod. 26:27) and did not have an entrance or an exit. The farther east you were in the tabernacle, the further you were from the presence of God.

The opening to the temple faced eastward toward the morning sun as it rose. “One of the unique aspects of Jewish temples and altars, is their eastern orientation. All Jewish temples and altars face east. No other religion in the Middle has this easterly orientation. Archeologists can easily and immediately identify a Jewish altar in distinction from pagan altars because of this unique fact that they face the rising sun.”¹⁴²

The temple was built to receive the maximum amount of sun during the equinox:

In Jerusalem, on the morning of the Equinox, the sun rises over the Mount of Olives and shines through the door of the Temple, straight onto the Holy of Holies, where God's presence dwelt on this earth. . . . When the sun shines into the Temple, and the light of the Messianic symbol enters into the presence of God, on that day the Messiah is to land from heaven upon the Mount of Olives, splitting that mountain into two, down to its very roots.

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“East Orientation of Jewish Temples and Altars,” accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-jerusalem-temple-mount-east-orientation-jewish-temples-altars.htm>.

And then would begin the Last and Final Judgement on the Day of the Lord.¹⁴³

The spring equinox brings the maximum amount of sun from the east on the most holy day of the year: Passover. In the west we call this Easter. It is a weekend to remember the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Easter comes from the old Germanic word *oster*, or from the east.¹⁴⁴ On Easter Day, the sun rises over the Mount of Olives and shines into the temple exactly true east.

The direction of the tabernacle and temple is not meaningless. It is all preordained by God and points to our origins and destination. Ezekiel recognized the importance of cardinal direction when he observed the temple was facing east with a river flowing east.

The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was trickling from the south side. (Ezek. 47:1–2 NIV)

Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the gate of the house of the LORD that faces east. (Ezek. 11:1 NIV)

Not only do the tabernacle and the temple face east, but so do the ceremonies, as we saw with the sacrificing of the red heifer in the previous chapter. For instance, when presenting a sacrifice to the Lord, it had to be done at the east entrance (Lev. 1:5), and even the sacrifice was westward, with the slaughter taking place from a westerly direction and the waste going to the east:

If the offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, you are to offer a dove or a young pigeon. The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off the head and burn it on the altar; its

¹⁴³ James E. Tochihara, *And We Beheld His Glory* (Lulu Publishing, 2019), 323.

¹⁴⁴ Lexico.com, s.v. "Easter," <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/easter>.

blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. He is to remove the crop and the feathers and throw them down east of the altar where the ashes are. (Lev. 1:14–16 NIV)

The westward focus is reinforced as one moved into the Holy of Holies.

The priest entered the tabernacle or the temple from the east and approached the Alter of Sacrifice for forgiveness. Then he continued westward to the Bronze Laver or water basin for cleansing. In a westward direction he moved past the lamp stand or menorah to the south and the Table of Showbread to the north.

The Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies laid directly ahead due west at the far western end.

When Jesus came in the triumphant entry, He was coming from the east, acknowledging the manner in which the sacrificial offering always came into the temple. Jesus also compared Himself to the same idea of a singular entrance as the way to approach God: “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved” (John 10:9 ESV). “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 NIV).

The Back to Jerusalem vision of the Chinese missionaries focuses its mission in this same westward manner. At first the direction of mission may not seem important, but a closer look at the movements in the Bible, the history of missions, the return of Jesus, the sacrificial ceremonies, and even the construction of the temple make it clear there is a directional focus!

The farther we move westward in the Great Commission, the closer to God and the return of Jesus we get. Psalms 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (NIV).

The Great Commission started on the Mount of Olives and moved westward. Now, the city of Jerusalem faces eastward awaiting for the Good News to complete the full circle. We eagerly await the day when the sun rises over the ridge of the Mount of Olives for the last time and shines with the glory of the coming Messiah. “I lift up my eyes to the mountains-- where does my help

come from?” (Psalms 121:1)

Chapter 29

Jerusalem: The Epicenter

As the return of Jesus Christ grows closer, watch for two things to happen.

First, the nations will be evangelized.

Second, Jerusalem will become more of a focus.

With a name like Back to Jerusalem, it is not hard to understand the Chinese emphasis on the city of Jerusalem. As the underground house church of China sets their eyes on the return of the Messiah, they find themselves facing westward toward Jerusalem.

However, it is important to understand that the Back to Jerusalem vision is not about Chinese missionaries traveling to Jerusalem. This is a common misconception. The Chinese do not intend to board planes and fly to Jerusalem. Ninety-nine percent of all the Chinese missionaries I work with have never been to Jerusalem and have no plans to travel to there. Instead, their vision is to travel to the nations between China and Jerusalem that have not heard the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Jerusalem is, however, the focus for the Chinese believers, even if it is not the destination. This is not just true for the Chinese believers, but for the entire world. This is an important difference. Christians and non-Christians, Jew and Gentile, should all have a focus on the city of Jerusalem, even if they have no plans to travel there.

Both Jesus and Satan are focused on the city of Jerusalem because it is a city that points to the prophesy for the return of Jesus Christ.

Jerusalem has been at the center of the world since the beginning. It is at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Asia. “The Sovereign LORD says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her” (Ezek. 5:5).

Jerusalem is directly west from China and is the direction of the revival fires coming out of China. It is a central focus of the vision and has always been a central focus for God.

Jerusalem is also the center for destruction by the enemy. It has been attacked by Babylon, Persia, Macedon, Rome, Muslim Caliph Umar, the Crusaders, Saladin's Kurdish Muslims, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, the British Empire, Jordan, and many others. It is the most fought-over city in the world.¹⁴⁵

What is amazing is that the city has always bounced back. Even when it seemed it would be forever vacant, God never removed His promise from the people or the city. After the destruction of the temple in AD 70, it seemed the city would be in rubble forever. The Jews were again scattered; many lost their names and identity in new nations. Jerusalem and Israel were defeated and even renamed. Then, in the twentieth century, another leader out of Germany arose on the scene to completely destroy the Jewish people in their diaspora named Hitler. He killed as many as he could as fast as he could, but did not complete the task.

Try as he might, the enemy has not been able to destroy the Jewish people and has not been able to destroy the city of Jerusalem.

The Muslim nations in the Middle East decided they would come together and attempt to destroy Israel. They could not.

Iran has tried to make plans to destroy Israel, but has not been able to.

Even when the people of Jerusalem have been completely defeated, enslaved, and scattered around the world, God still continues to keep His covenant.

The nation of Israel ceased to exist after the Babylonian and Assyrians defeated both the northern and southern kingdoms. The first temple was destroyed, Jerusalem was left in ruins, and the leaders were killed off. The ten tribes were considered to be lost forever, but God somehow saved them from the brink of extinction.

The second temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. In 135, Roman emperor

¹⁴⁵ Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the Congress, Vol. 97, Part 11, United States Congress, U.S. Government Printing Office, December 31, 1950, A206.

Hadrian abolished the names of Judea and Samaria, creating the new name of Palestine for the region in an attempt to erase any memory of the Jewish race. Jerusalem was named Aelia Capitolina.¹⁴⁶ Today a group of people refer to themselves as Palestinians, from the homeland of Palestine, and give no credence to the land of Israel and do not recognize Jerusalem as their capital.

The Jews were scattered into different nations . . . but they kept their identity. They were surrounded by different cultures . . . but they kept their religion. They were forced to learn different languages . . . but they kept their language. This is the miracles of miracles. “For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord” (Zeph. 3:9 NKJV).

God keeps His promises and will bring His people back from all the nations of the world and dig the city of Jerusalem out of the ash heap of history and make it their capital.

This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: “Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their ancestors to possess,” says the LORD. (Jer. 30:2–3 NIV)

I will say to the north, “Give them up!”

and to the south, “Do not hold them back.”

Bring my sons from afar

and my daughters from the ends of the earth. (Isa. 43:6 NIV)

He will raise a banner for the nations

and gather the exiles of Israel,

he will assemble the scattered people of Judah

¹⁴⁶ Emmanuel Friedheim, “The Religious and Cultural World of Aelia Capitolina—A New Perspective,” January 2007, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235911652_The_Religious_and_Cultural_World_of_Aelia_Capitolina_-_A_New_Perspective.

from the four quarters of the earth. (Isa. 11:12 NIV)

The impossible was made possible just as the prophets foretold. The Jewish people were gathered from all the nations of the world and brought back to their homeland of Israel.

“Who has ever heard of such things? Who has ever seen things like this? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment?” (Isa. 66:8 NIV). Yet, on May 14, 1948, God did exactly that and Israel was born in a day! The Jewish people again had a home. The ancient language of Hebrew was restored, and Israel became a nation once again.

Jews poured in from Europe, Eastern Europe, Russia, North America, and South America—literally from the four corners of the world. Even Jews from Africa and Asia came pouring in. “From beyond the rivers of Cush [Ethiopia] my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings” (Zeph. 3:10 NIV). Between 1984 and 1981, more than sixteen thousand Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel.¹⁴⁷ After 1949, when Mao Zedong came to power, twenty thousand Jews from Shanghai left for Israel.¹⁴⁸

The restoration of Israel is only part of the plan for the final days. There is still a fulfillment that has yet to come: the time of the Gentiles. Paul, as a Jew, wrote that Israel will experience a hardening for a time until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled.

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written:

The deliverer will come from Zion;

he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

And this is my covenant with them

when I take away their sins.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Spector, “Shamir’s Greatest Legacy,” *Tablet Magazine*, July 3, 2012, <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/105324/shamir%E2%80%99s-greatest-legacy>.

¹⁴⁸ James Griffiths, “Shanghai’s Forgotten Jewish Past,” *Atlantic*, November 21, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/11/shanghais-forgotten-jewish-past/281713/>.

(Rom. 11:25–27 NIV)

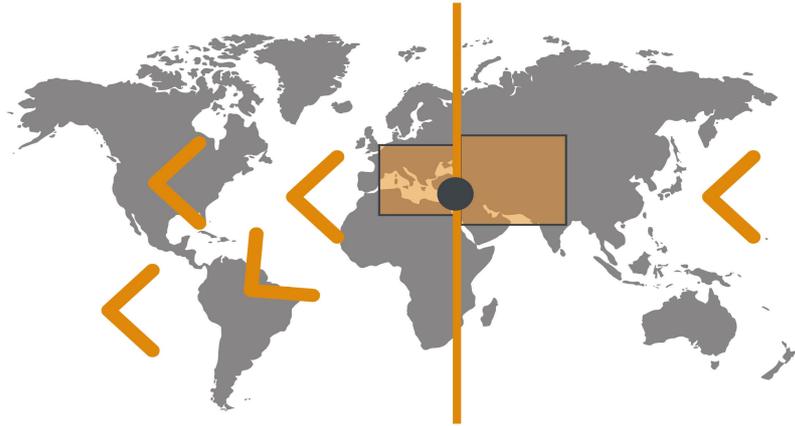
We are now in the time of the Gentiles, where God is giving salvation to all who will believe. Peter said:

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. (Acts 10:34–38 NIV)

Jesus, while with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, shared with them, “They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24 NIV). China is a part of that “times of the Gentiles,” when God’s grace is shared throughout the entire world so that all might be saved (1 Tim. 2:4).

The “times of the Gentiles” are often associated with the occupation of Israel and the diaspora of the Jewish people, but it could be more spiritual than that. As Paul wrote, the times of the Gentiles is “until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”

The Great Commission is what prompted the passionate missions work of the disciples so that the “times of the Gentiles” would be fulfilled. The map below shows the general movement of the Gospel during the time of the Gentiles.



The **Center Line** is the starting line and finish line of the Great Commission.

The **Black Dot** is the general travel of Jesus.

The **Gold Boxes** indicate the general area covered by the twelve apostles.

The **Gold Arrows** indicates the general direction of the Gospel message throughout history.

The Back to Jerusalem vision pays particular attention to the movement of the Gospel according to the book of Acts:

Mount of Olives (disciples with Jesus) → Jerusalem (disciples with Peter) → Samaria (Peter), Juda (Peter) → Lydda (Peter) → Joppa (Peter) → Syria (Paul) → Antioch (Paul) → Galatia (Paul) → Asia Minor (Paul) → Greece (Paul) → Rome (Paul) → Spain (Paul's vision, but never arrives).

The glory of the Lord has always been associated with moving from east to west. There is no reason to believe that the age of the Gentiles will be any different. Jerusalem was the starting point and is the finish line.

The goal of the Back to Jerusalem vision is to reach as many people with the Gospel message all the way back to Jerusalem and usher in the glorious return of the Messiah.

Chapter 30

The Back to Jerusalem Vision Today

Theories and doctrines are nice, but what matters in the end is what we do and what we don't do (James 2:20).

The best way to gauge a theory of missions is to see how or if it is being used on the field. Military strategist Helmuth von Moltke once said, "No battle plan survives first contact with the enemy."¹⁴⁹

The challenge with so many academic mission theories is that they do not necessarily work in practice. That is why they populate the conferences one year and then are replaced with a shiny new one the next. The Back to Jerusalem vision, however, is a vision that has been in the hearts of the Chinese for almost a hundred years. Even with all of the hardship and persecution, the vision has not died.

One does not have to agree with the Back to Jerusalem vision in order to acknowledge that it is currently making a difference on the mission field.

What is interesting about China is that the majority of the underground house church could not write an acceptable dissertation regarding the Back to Jerusalem vision, but they are willing to give their lives for it.

When Paul Hattaway's book *Back to Jerusalem* came out in 2005, I remember talking with him about all of the disbelief and skepticism regarding the idea that the Chinese house church would be sending out missionaries. As we looked at previously, many "experts" said the Chinese church was not ready for such a task and that they would need many years to build up and prepare.

However, before that book was ever released, there were already several Chinese missionaries who had been sent out. The Back to Jerusalem vision of sending out missionaries to the nations between China and Jerusalem was not just a theory. It was reality.

In March 2000, thirty-nine missionaries had been sent out from their churches in China. Burma and Yemen were the first two nations I was personally involved in assisting. In 2004, a year

¹⁴⁹ Sean Newman Maroni, "No Battle Plan Survives First Contact with the Enemy," January 10, 2015, <https://blog.seannewmanmaroni.com/no-battle-plan-survives-first-contact-with-the-enemy-966df69b24b9>.

before Paul's book was released, I helped arrange for eight Back to Jerusalem missionaries to be sent to Yemen. Sixteen years later, one of those missionaries is still serving in an undisclosed country in the Middle East and is a pastor in one of the largest congregations in their city.

Since the first missionaries were sent out from China, there have been many challenges and failures. Many Chinese missionaries have come back to China after only a short time on the field. I have received many of those sad, unfortunate phone calls asking me to prepare the return plane ticket back to China.

For each return ticket I have arranged, I have heard the voices of the critics in my head saying, "I told you so!"

However, I am reminded that walking in God's grace and following the leading of His Spirit is not a guarantee of smooth waters. In fact, Jesus promised the opposite (John 15:20).

If hardship while serving as a missionary were chiefly due to a lack of preparedness, then the apostle Paul had to have been the textbook definition of not being prepared for ministry. He wrote,

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. (2 Cor. 11:23–27 NIV)

The hardships for Back to Jerusalem missionaries were a given, but not because the Chinese church was not ready or prepared, but because the regions between China to Jerusalem are just . . .

hard. The Back to Jerusalem missionaries who have been sent out from China have never been to Bible school or seminary, but they have spent years in prison for their faith.

It is true the overwhelming majority of Back to Jerusalem missionaries have not been to secondary school, so they would not be qualified by most Asian mission board standards like those found in South Korea, Hong Kong, or Singapore.

They do not have an official website, no social media presence to speak of, no online fundraising efforts, no large fundraising mission conferences, no Go Fund Me page, no newsletter, and they often use fake names for security reasons.

When I attend underground mission conferences in China, I am not allowed to take photos. No one is posing for selfies and updating their Twitter account to tell others about what the Lord is doing at the meetings. Advertisement and fame are the last things Back to Jerusalem missionaries desire.

Most of the Back to Jerusalem missionaries come from poor rural, agrarian areas. They do not have much to give, but when the offering plate is passed around to take up donations for missions, many Chinese believers are known to have placed the offering basket on the ground and stepped into it, giving themselves as an offering to be sent to the mission field.

When Back to Jerusalem missionaries are sent out from China, there is not a central database to keep track of them.

In China, the Back to Jerusalem activities are illegal, so for security reasons they are not recorded.

Over the years, however, I have kept a small database for my own records. For more than twenty years, I have worked with Back to Jerusalem missionaries in more than forty of the fifty-four nations in the 10/40 Window. The Chinese underground house church members I work with come from the traditional house churches that are primarily operating from Henan, Anhui, and Shandong Province. Over the years, I have also worked with several independent house churches in the urban centers of, among others, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou, Zhengzhou, and

Wenzhou.

The chart below reflects my own data base.

For security reasons, the following chart is not up to date but is from the year 2015.

The number of missionaries reflected in the chart below is *not* comprehensive and only includes groups I am exposed to.

The total number of BTJ missionaries is most likely five to ten times the number on this graph.

The chart below represents missionaries sent out from networks that have foreign support or exposure to Western mission agencies (**GREEN**), have very little exposure to Western mission agencies (**BLUE**), and have no foreign exposure to Western mission agencies (**RED**). I work with those in **RED** the most.

I estimate that the number of missionaries has more than tripled since it was last updated in 2015.

Country	Henan Group 1	Henan Group 2	Henan Group 3	Anhui Group 1	Anhui Group 2	Shandong	Guangzhou	Total
Afghanistan	15	2	0	2	0	0	5	24
Bahrain	0	4	0	2	0	0	1	7
Bangladesh	5	0	6	0	0	0	1	12
Cambodia	6	10	30	8	20	0	3	77
Djibouti	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	8
Egypt	8	10	56	12	1	0	0	87
Ethiopia	0	19	17	0	5	0	0	41
India	5	9	4	7	10	0	15	50
Iran	0	5	3	0	0	0	0	8
Iraq	0	0	12	0	2	0	0	14
Indonesia	8	5	2	29	0	0	25	69
Israel/ Palestine	0	2	3	5	10	2	6	28
Japan	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
Jordan	2	0	19	2	0	0	0	23
North Korea	0	0	4	7	0	0	0	11
Kuwait	4	0	0	4	3	0	0	11
Kazakhstan	10	4	6	6	10	0	0	36
Laos	7	11	3	10	12	0	2	45
Lebanon	3	0	4	3	2	0	0	12
Libya	0	0	0	8	0	0	1	9
Myanmar	55	39	40	25	15	0	2	176
Nepal	2	2	32	4		0	2	42
Oman	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Pakistan	50	50	20	32	2	14	5	173
Qatar	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Saudi Arabia	5	3	0	2	2	0	0	12
Sudan	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	4
Syria	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Somalia	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Tajikistan	12	10	0	2	0	0	0	24
Thailand	20	20	14	15	4	0	0	73
Turkey	4	0	0	2	0	0	0	6
Turkmenistan	0	4	0	6	0	0	0	10
UAE	22	2	12	20	0	0	4	60
Uzbekistan	4	0	24	30	0	0	0	58
Vietnam	8	4	4	20	20	1	4	61
Yemen	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	4
Network Total	259	219	320	277	118	18	77	1288
Total								1288

The graph above is incomplete for the following reasons:

1. The House Church Network leaders do not keep a list of missionaries.
2. Network leaders maintain security by only sharing on a need-to-know basis. Since I do not help every missionary go into the field, details of those I am not working with are not shared with me.
3. Because of the fluid process in China, Network leaders are not aware of all of the missionaries they have sent out.

As I said above, it can be safely assumed that the total BTJ missionaries is five to ten times higher than is represented in this chart. The reason why is very simple.

First, the most complete missionary list on the chart is represented by Henan Group #3, and

Henan Group #3 is one of the smaller Network House Church groups on the list. Henan Group #1, Henan Group #2, Anhui Group #1, and Anhui Group #2 are much larger house church networks and more than likely have three to five times the number of missionaries represented in this chart.

Second, the chart above is not a complete list of the underground house church networks currently sending out missionaries. Only seven networks are listed, but we work with many more.

Last, there are many mission organizations currently in China working with Back to Jerusalem missionaries that are not connected to any of the networks represented in the chart above. Groups like Youth With a Mission (YWAM), International Mission Board (IMB), and several agencies from South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong have programs focused on helping Chinese missionaries that do not include anything on the graph above.

The Back to Jerusalem vision is to send out at least 100,000 missionaries. The church sent out their first Back to Jerusalem missionaries in 2000. Fifteen years later, it can be best estimated they have sent out anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 missionaries.

For a nation to go from zero missionaries to sending out 5,000 to 10,000 missionaries in only fifteen years is a massive accomplishment for the Body of Christ. The accomplishment is even greater when one considers the countries they send the missionaries to.

The 10/40 Window, or the unreached nations of the world, represent two-thirds of the world's population. Nine out of every ten unreached people groups in the world today live in the same area that is roughly between China and Jerusalem.¹⁵⁰ This is the region considered to be the final frontier of missions that is largely unreached.

Unfortunately, most missionaries, when they leave their home country to go and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to another nation, go to America, not to the most unreached nations of the world.¹⁵¹

A missions statistics group known as the Traveling Team said it this way:

¹⁵⁰ "10/40 Window: Do You Need to Be Stirred to Action," [snu.edu](http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/1040.htm), accessed March 8, 2020, <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/1040.htm>.

¹⁵¹ Joe Carter, "The U.S. Sends—and Receives—More Christian Missionaries Than Any Other Country," Gospel Coalition, February 20, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-u-s-sends-and-receives-more-christian-missionaries-than-any-other-count/>.

If everyone is obeying God's "calling" to be a missionary wherever they are then God is calling 99.9995% of people to work among the 44.3% of the world population that already has the gospel, and calling virtually no one (.0005%) to relocate among the other 55.7% of the world population that are not Christian. You have a better chance of being in a plane crash than being one of the few missionaries to the unreached out of the total 2 billion Christians in the world.¹⁵²

The most unreached areas of the world with groups that have been identified as frontier unreached groups and have virtually no Christians living among them receive a fraction of a percent (.0005 percent) of those called to missions. If the Traveling Team's statistics are correct, and only 0.0005 percent go to preach among the frontier unreached people groups, that would mean that out of the roughly 400,000 missionaries in the world today, only 200 are ministering to those people groups without an active witness.

Even if those numbers are not completely accurate, it is easy to say with somewhat certainty that there are currently more Chinese missionaries serving in the 10/40 Window than from any other nation in the world.

To put it another way, China has more missionaries on the ground to complete the Great Commission than all the other nations of the world combined.

Only ten years from when Paul Hattaway's book *Back to Jerusalem* was published (2005 to 2015), China went from having almost no missionaries to being the number one missionary sending nation to the 10/40 Window.

Back to Jerusalem is no longer just a vision of the underground house church of China.

It is a reality, and its efforts are best explained by telling what is currently happening in closed nations.

The following is a rare look behind the scenes at just a few unreached areas where BTJ

¹⁵² "Mission Stats: The Current State of the World," Traveling Team, accessed March 8, 2020, <http://www.thetravelingteam.org/stats>.

missionaries are now serving.

*For security reasons, some information has been changed or relabeled.

North Korea

North Korea has been a very difficult nation for most missionaries to get access to. It is universally acknowledged as one of the most closed nations in the world. Chinese Back to Jerusalem missionaries, however, have been working inside North Korea since 2007. Today, several missionaries are living and working in that nation, preaching the gospel and using small electronic Bibles to help spread the Word.

For several years, Back to Jerusalem has been delivering Bibles, which are extremely difficult to get and extremely dangerous to have, inside of North Korea. In 2016, Back to Jerusalem began sharing digital Bibles that were e-readers the size of a credit card. Most digital Bible e-readers need to have batteries, but batteries cannot be easily purchased in North Korea.

Some ministries suggest using digital Bibles with a solar charger, but this is a problem for three reasons. First, small solar chargers that are the size of a credit card produce more power in theory than reality. It might take days or weeks to get one single charge. Second, units set out in the sun for charging need to be able to handle the harsh elements of North Korean weather. This is not always price friendly. Third, North Korea Christians do not feel comfortable putting electronic equipment outside, in the sun, for all to see. It is not safe.

So BTJ develop new digital e-readers that focused on low energy consumption. The new digital Bible e-readers were handmade in China by the Back to Jerusalem missionary teams and could last a whopping five to seven years without changing or charging the battery.

After thousands of these units were smuggled into North Korea, the local believers told us they needed an even smaller Bible than the ones we were sending.

We answered that need with a new holographic type of Bible that is the size of a small pill and can illuminate the air in front of your face with scripture. In 2019, these pill-sized Bibles were

being produced in China to put into the hands of the Chinese missionaries living and working in North Korea.

Bhutan

Bhutan is a small land-locked nation in the Himalayas, sandwiched between India and China. Back to Jerusalem has been working together with indigenous believers from the most unreached tribes in Bhutan to produce and distribute the only praise and worship songs available in the national language.

As of this writing, several mission projects have been launched to give missionary workers platforms to share the Gospel message. In the early 2000s, BTJ worked with missionaries to purchase land to be used for hosting house church meetings and teaching new pastors in the most remote mountain areas of Bhutan.

Myanmar

Myanmar, or Burma as many people still call it, is considered to be a soft-landing place for Chinese missionaries. It is easy for Chinese to go back and forth across the border. The needs in Burma are many, so the Chinese missionaries see this as a great place to provide training for future missionaries.

Many missionaries like Caroline (not her real name) get their first taste of missions in Burma. “I traveled to Burma with a team of Chinese missionaries when I was seventeen years old,” Caroline shared with me. “I worked with a team of fifteen other Chinese missionaries. I had run away from home because my family rejected my newfound faith. I traveled together, ministered together, lived together, and ate together with my coworkers as we served in Burma. My personal calling was to serve in India, but Burma was where my church sent me to be trained. It is the location where many Chinese Back to Jerusalem missionaries are trained.

Burma was where Brother Yun’s daughter got her missionary experience as well. She was able to serve local efforts run by Chinese missionaries who had been serving in Burma for several years. She worked with them and learned the skills needed before she was sent to another nation

between China and Jerusalem, where she currently serves together with her husband and family.

Nepal

In 2015, there was an earthquake in Nepal that killed almost nine thousand people. BTJ missionaries were already on the ground to assist in the disaster relief effort. When other nations were having difficulty flying in aid, BTJ missionaries were able to bring it across the border from neighboring China.

Hundreds of BTJ missionaries participated in the effort and were able to deliver food, blankets, solar panels, cooking oil, rice, and the Gospel message.

Most, if not all, of the relief agencies that went to help with the recovery effort have now left Nepal. However, the Chinese missionaries are still there, building on the foundation they established. Their efforts garnered friendships with the locals. Those friendships turned into new believers, those new believers were discipled, and today they are planting churches in the mountains of Nepal.

Pakistan

“For they have gone out for the sake of the Name...”

3 John 7



Martyred for Christ In 2017

In 2017, Pakistan claimed the lives of two BTJ missionaries (pictured above).

Two young BTJ missionaries set out from their church in Wenzhou and were then kidnapped and killed by the Islamic terrorist group ISIS. The two Chinese missionaries, identified as Li Xinheng (left) and Lu Ling Lina (right), had built relationships with the locals and were loved by everyone. They were learning the local language as well as working as language instructors at a local school.

The two Chinese missionaries were driving in car during a lunch break at the school when

they were stopped by men on the road dressed as police officers. When the Chinese stopped at the checkpoint, three men with guns pulled them out of the car and dragged them into another vehicle. The car they were put into did not have license plates.

A third Chinese female was with them, but she was able to escape and run back to the school and call for help. Muhammad Zahir, a local, tried to help the Chinese but was shot. He told AFP:

“I was walking on the road when I saw three men forcing a Chinese woman in a white car and she was refusing and crying, I stopped to observe the situation but they had forced the woman in the car by then and were pushing the man. So I rushed to them and asked what they were doing. One of them said we are from the crime branch of the police and we are taking them for investigation and I told them that they should not misbehave with people, then the driver came out and shot me in my foot,” the 35-year-old said.¹⁵³

After this event, Xiao Min penned a Chinese hymn for the Chinese church. Xiao Min is one of the most beloved treasures in the underground house church today because of the hundreds of songs she has written. Her songs are filled with passion and sacrifice and are sung by underground house churches all over China.

After hearing the testimonies of BTJ missionaries Li Zingyang and Meng Lisi, she sat down and wrote another song to honor their memory.

The song is #1810 of the Canaan Hymns and is called “Blood of Missionaries Scattered in Presence of Worldly Rulers.”

Below are the lyrics:

Blood of Missionaries scattered in presence of worldly rulers

Their stories are shared around the world

Their families feel the pain

The Lord will comfort them and turn their pain into testimony

¹⁵³ Mohammad Zafar, “Two Chinese Nationals Abducted from Quetta,” *Express Tribune*, May 24, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1418016/two-chinese-nationals-abducted-quetta/>.

Gaze upon their faces and see how they are so beautiful and calm

During their youth and strength they devoted their lives

My heart cannot remain still

My tears continue to flow

I am ready to be a martyr on this road westward

Your blood was not shed in vanity, but it gives a powerful testimony in Pakistan

Wait for us, the Chinese Church is marching to you

Since the event in Pakistan, it is estimated that the number of missionaries from China to Pakistan has increased ten-fold.

Iran

Back to Jerusalem missionaries have a long history with the nation of Iran as they traded on the Silk Route.

Because of the close relationship between China and Iran, it has been possible to provide emergency aid during earthquake and flood disasters when most Western aid agencies have been banned.

Back to Jerusalem missionaries have been able to start businesses in Iran and share the Gospel through those businesses. Ministering through business has been a highly effective way to share the Good News, as these businesses have added to the production and distribution of several hundred thousand Bibles. Those Bibles were only possible because BTJ has set up several digital Bible production and distribution points throughout the country. Those secret locations are called “Bread Factories” because they produce the Bread of Life.

Iran was also the testing ground for our Gospel Cloud Unit.

The Gospel Cloud Unit is a battery-operated, handheld, Wi-Fi hotspot/server that allows a missionary to walk into a restaurant, sit on a bus, or hang out in a coffee shop and share the Gospel

through a wireless device the size of a mobile phone that fits in their pocket.

The Gospel Cloud sends out a Wi-Fi signal, but instead of connecting the user to the internet, it connects them directly to the device and allows anyone to download digital Gospel content directly onto their mobile device.

The Gospel Cloud can be easily hidden in a flowerpot, under a rock, or even in a jacket pocket, and wherever it is, so too is the Gospel message.

Confidential Location

One 10/40 Window nation that BTJ is working in is connected with an embassy in the nation that assists BTJ missionaries with safety and business investments.

The embassy provides Chinese missionaries with cover and security in a very dangerous nation, and in turn the BTJ missionaries provide local business investment opportunities, teaching the locals how to start and run a business.

The missionaries also provide on-the-ground business management tool, investments and loans, and access to supply chains in China.

This gives Chinese missionaries access to a nation where there are basically no known Christians, no churches, and no known missionaries.

In 2005, there were many naysayers who declared the Chinese missionaries would never be able to succeed on the mission field. Fortunately the Chinese missionaries do not subscribe to Western Christian magazines or have access to Christian books at their local bookstore, and as a result they were left completely unaware of what God was not capable of doing through their lives.

Chapter 31

Back to Jerusalem Guerrilla Warfare

One of the things that makes the BTJ vision unique is that it was born and nurtured in a nation that

opposes Christianity. Christians are under daily attack in China.

Christians in China have been born in the fire and tested in the flames. When they go to nations like North Korea, Afghanistan, Iran, or Somalia, they are familiar with the environment. The adjustments they need to make in order to share the Gospel under hostile governments are small.

In battle there are only two choices: submit and surrender, or resist and fight.

The Christians in China have chosen not to submit to the enemy, but they also recognize they are greatly outnumbered, so they have adapted a type of guerrilla warfare. Spiritual guerrilla warfare is a form of warfare by which the seemingly weaker side assumes the tactical offensive posture. Instead of being on the defense, the Chinese are taking the initiative away from the enemy and choosing the time, place, and type of battles to engage in.

Guerrilla fighters are different from conventional soldiers, because they believe in something greater than themselves and are willing to die for it. The U.S. Marine Corps instruction manual on guerrilla warfare states, “The essence of guerrilla warfare is thus revolutionary in character.”¹⁵⁴

In conventional warfare, the winner is the one that defeats the other side in battle, but guerrilla warfare is different. The revolutionary is not defeated when the other side controls the battlefield. As Sankaran Kalyanaraman once said, “The guerrilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win.”¹⁵⁵

Chinese are not merely traveling to the unreached areas of the world and holding alter calls every evening. Instead, they have infiltrated the enemy’s camp and are attacking it from within, using strategic platforms that give them access to the nationals. Recently the Chinese have been able to fit right into the marketplace even more seamlessly because of President Xi Jinping.

In 2013, President Xi Jinping launched the most ambitious infrastructure investments ever

¹⁵⁴ FMF 12-25, *U.S. Marine Corps Manual*, “The Guerrilla and How to Fight Him,” 5.

¹⁵⁵ S. Kalyanaraman, “Conceptualisations of Guerrilla Warfare,” *India Defense Policy*, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, article in *Strategic Analysis*, April 2003.

conceived called One Belt One Road initiative.¹⁵⁶ It is a plan to invest in roads, trains, communications, and businesses of all kinds along the ancient Silk Road, which runs along the 10/40 Window corridor, all the way to Jerusalem.

The primary target region to connect with is Europe, but Asia, the Middle East, and Africa are where the investment for infrastructure is needed most. The Chinese government is willing to spend upward of \$8 trillion USD,¹⁵⁷ and the manpower needed from China to complete this project is in the tens of thousands.

Chinese Christians are taking advantage of this moment in history and moving into the areas that are being targeted by the One Belt One Road initiative. They are able to set up businesses along the road and live as missionaries in the most unreached nations on earth—all thanks to the Communist Party.

Another one of the major ways Chinese Christians are able to infiltrate nations like North Korea, Iran, and Somalia is by using Business as Mission, or BAM.

Chinese Christians are not using the traditional structure of missionary-sending agencies in the West. It is not a sustainable concept to try to raise funding to support 100,000 missionaries. Missionaries from China have the desire to be sustainable and self-supported on the mission field.

“The missionaries we send out are not going to other nations to be foreigners forever,” Pastor Luke (not his real name) said during an introduction to his training center in southern China in 2018. “Our vision is to send missionaries who sell their Chinese identity and embrace the identity, language, and culture of the locals. If we send our missionaries never-ending financial support, they will always be a Chinese living in a foreign country, forever tethered to China.”

Pastor Luke provides all the missionaries who go through his center with BAM training. “Everything we do here is sustainable. The students all come and study tuition free. Everything is paid for through businesses that are run by our missionary students.”

¹⁵⁶ “China’s Massive Belt and Road Initiative,” Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

¹⁵⁷ Jonathan Hillman, “How Big is China’s Belt and Road?,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 3, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-big-chinas-belt-and-road>.

Pastor Luke has a circuit of businesses that he trains all of his students for, from textile factories, to medical care, to the service industry. Every missionary gets hands-on training in running a business before they are sent out by Pastor Luke's network.

When Western ministers first meet Pastor Luke, sometimes they are a little confused. They do not know if Pastor Luke is running a business training school or a missionary training school. In the West, these are always separate. However, in China, they naturally mix. The idea that the two should not be integrated is not exactly biblical. This false dichotomy has deeply affected views on work, business, church, and missions.

In America for instance, there is the false idea of separation of church and state, a deeply ingrained cultural concept that religion and faith need to be quarantined from other aspects of secular life. This idea is usually supported by quoting Mark 12:17, where Jesus said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (ESV). If that is your interpretation of this one area of Scripture, then you have taken this scripture out of context and missed the entire message of the biblical stories preceding this statement, where businessmen, kings, leaders, judges, crop owners, and soldiers interconnected every aspect of their life with the will of the Father.

Chinese missionaries are not the first group to employ BAM, but they are among the few today to integrate it so seamlessly.

In China, culture, business, religion, family, friends, politics, etc., are all intertwined. For instance, it is not uncommon to go to a shop in China and find the parents eating dinner in the back and one of the children doing school homework at the register. It would also not be odd to find a Chinese shop selling basic amenities that also has a sewing machine, a computer, and a tool belt in the back with the daughter as the cashier, the mother the seamstress, the son a website designer, and the father a handyman. And if they have a car, there will be an Uber driver as well.

Because of this culture, Chinese Christians in other nations easily transition to incorporating missions into their business ventures. Often a training center like Pastor Luke's is not even needed.

For example, in Egypt there is a Chinese businessman who saw an opportunity to start a grocery store. He was a Christian, but his investment was a financial one and was not done with missions in mind.

Soon after he arrived in Egypt, he met Brother Yun, the “Heavenly Man,” who reintroduced him to the BTJ vision. The businessman then decided to use his business as a ministry and give visas (and jobs) to BTJ missionaries. The Chinese who left China to work for him did not care if they were going to work in a grocery store or clean toilets at the local zoo; they were just looking for an opportunity to serve God in Egypt. By working for the grocery store, the missionaries were able to start a local church without needing funds from the Chinese church.

The Chinese have been setting up businesses in the 10/40 Window for generations. This is nothing out of the ordinary, and now with the One Belt One Road initiative, Chinese Christians who use BAM fit right in.

Today, I work with BTJ missionaries in more than twenty nations building restaurants, hotels, travel agencies, electronic shops, alternative energy companies, and many other business platforms. Together we launch as many as ten small businesses per year in the most unreached areas of the world.

In addition to providing income, those businesses also provide amazing access to goods that can be used during disasters and national emergencies. BTJ missionaries have been able to respond to floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, and even virus outbreaks by delivering aid produced by fellow BTJ missionary businesses.

These are all opportunities that have opened up because of the vision that was given to the Chinese church in the early 1900s.

Chapter 32

Conclusion

In this book I sought to illustrate that Back to Jerusalem is not just a mission movement springing forth from the Chinese underground house church revival, but is an eschatological event in history supported by Scripture.

I have attempted to do this by using both Old and New Testament scriptures as a foundation, and further proved that the Back to Jerusalem vision can be explained historically by studying the movement of world church history.

It has also been pointed out that it is theologically sound to see the Back to Jerusalem vision eschatologically by comparing the signs of the end times as foretold by Jesus and the prophets. Not only is Back to Jerusalem a result of end-time prophecy, but it can be used as an hourglass, helping us predict the last days by measuring the number of unreached people groups that have yet to hear the Good News.

Additionally, one of the most compelling arguments for the veracity of the BTJ vision is that Back to Jerusalem lines up with the meaning and purpose of the architectural layout of the Jewish temple and required biblical sacrifices.

However, none of these proofs mean a thing if there are no actions. I have attempted to also prove that Back to Jerusalem is not just a vision; it is a reality.

The completion of the Great Commission is inevitable. The return of Christ is unstoppable.