

Elevate Multiplication

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Digging Deeper

Elevate: *Multiplication*

Written by: Robert Ismon Brown (bbrown@c1naz.org)

Connections Pastor for Education

Chicago First Church of the Nazarene, Lemont, Illinois

Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: Acts 13:1-3, Acts 14:1-7, 1 Peter 1:1

Introduction

Jesus ministered *multiplication* in his public work. For him “multitudes” proved to be both a challenge and an opportunity. Often he found himself pressed on every side by the demands of those needing healing or simply driven by curiosity. His words were at times enigmatic, spoken in parables and provocative in their claims. His adversaries relished debating with him, contradicting his teaching, arguing with him, and usually silenced by the force of his speech. People were drawn to such controversies in large numbers. Crowds were fruitful fields for spreading his ministry (Matthew 4:25; 5:1; 7:28; 8:1; 9:36; 13:2; 14:13, 15; 15: 30; 19:2; 21:9, 11; 22:33; 23:1). They could also be dark forces to distract the main message he preached and lived. Yet, Jesus invited engagement, whether in groups or with individuals. At the outset he mentored the Twelve disciples, sending them out on itinerant missions on his behalf to reach others. Soon, the Twelve would not be sufficient, and so he *multiplied* the *Twelve* to *Seventy-two* (Luke 10:1-20). By the time he ascended to heaven, the leadership community grew to *One Hundred and Twenty* (Acts 1:15) who together shared in the Pentecost gifting of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) and reached *Three Thousand* (Acts 2:41).

Among the telling texts which speak of *multiplication* in the Gospels, are these:

³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:36-38).

³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" (John 4:35-38).

Crowds, harvest, and workers — these altogether lead to *multiplication* and the continuing growth of Jesus' community.

One notable symbol of Jesus' multiplication work is his miracle of the loaves and the fishes. Mark's account is one version. Finding themselves in a distant place without food, the disciples first response is to send the crowds away to buy their own meals. Jesus shows them another way:

³⁸ "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five-- and two fish." ³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand (Mark 6:38-44).

The Gospel Jesus taught his disciples in this setting includes the tangible resources for life and not only spiritual truths. His followers need to put shoe-leather on their words, for the whole Gospel is for the whole person. Faced with the enormity of the task, Jesus performs four crucial gestures of multiplication: He took, he blessed, he broke, and he gave. His gift of food fell into the hands of his followers who distributed it through a miracle of multiplication that satisfied all and produced a surplus. The miracle is not only about food; it's about the

disciples. Like the food, Jesus also takes them, blesses them, breaks them, and gives them to the world. We are reminded of the Eucharist in his actions here, whether with food or with the Twelve. On the night of his betrayal, Jesus repeated the same gestures:

²² While they were eating, Jesus *took* bread, *gave thanks* and *broke* it, and *gave* it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body" (Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; Matthew 26:26).

The future work of the church in the world would be through lives that the Holy Spirit *takes* hold of, *blesses*, *breaks* through self-sacrifice, and then *gives* in *multiplied* numbers to the world.

In John's Gospel, near the end of his public ministry, an unusual development prompts Jesus to tell his disciples about the coming multiplication of their shared mission:

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:20-25).

Through the resurrection life of Jesus, the single grain of his ministry would be *multiplied* in the ministry of his followers. His death, like the single seed, would be followed by his glorification, and that gift of the Father to His Son would mean something crucial for his followers. Like him, they would "lose" their lives, and then find them again. They also, as *multiplied* instances of Jesus — "little Christs, Christians" — would extend his words and deeds throughout the Roman Empire. The vision remains the same for us: *multiply!*

Scripture Texts

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² 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." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:1-3).

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. ² But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴ The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. ⁵ There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. ⁶ But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷ where they continued to preach the good news (Acts 14:1-7).

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance (1 Peter 1:1-2).

The Antioch Multiplication (Acts 13:1-3)

The church did not remain insular in Jerusalem. In his parting words to the apostles, Jesus cast the vision for world-wide expansion:

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." ... ⁸ 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 1:4,).

With the promise of the Holy Spirit, given in Jerusalem assured, the apostles would set their course in a series of concentric circles of *multiplication*: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. While Jesus did not initially specify the process that would initiate this multiplication, in due time events would conspire to accelerate the outward missionary movement.

In a crucial account in Acts 11, we learn how it was that from Jerusalem they would arrive in the city of Antioch. Part of that dynamic was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a Jewish leader who engineered a fierce

persecution of the Christians. The risen Jesus appeared to him and announced God's plan for him to become the apostle to the Gentile world (Acts 9). Although Saul had been an enemy of Jesus' followers, leading to the death of the first martyr, Stephen, his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus in Syria changed the direction of his life. Luke gives us a view of the aftermath:

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. ²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. ²² News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. ²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:19-26).

Scattered to places like Phoenicia and Cyprus, some distance from Jerusalem, some returned to Antioch in Syria with a call to reach non-Jews, the Greeks. Consequently, "a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." The *multiplication* had begun!

These developments proved to be the opportunity for Saul's recruitment by Barnabas whom he brought to Antioch and supported the teaching of "great numbers of people." Another result was the formation of a new identity for the Christ followers who accepted a new name: Christians, a word meaning "little Christs" — a suitable description for those who were multiplying the Christ presence in increasingly more places. Further challenges came to the church from Herod, king of the Jews, who seized and executed James the brother of John (Acts 12:1-2). Herod's attempts to silence the movement in Jerusalem by imprisoning Peter for execution failed when the apostle mysteriously escaped through the help of an angel (Acts 12:5ff). No long afterward, Herod's arrogance against the movement led to his sudden death (Acts 12:19-23). Luke's commentary on these events concludes with good news: "But the word of God continued to increase and spread" (Acts 12:24).

It is at this point of the narrative that we come to Acts 13 and the decision of the church in Antioch to commission Barnabas and Saul for the mission outside of Israel. The language of that commission comes from the leading of the Holy Spirit: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). The idea for multiplying the work of the Gospel comes, not from the clever planning of human minds and hearts, but from the direction of the Lord through His Spirit. Echoes of the divine call would appear time and time again in the letters of Paul where he wrote:

Paul, an apostle-- sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead (Galatians 1:1).

The decision to *Elevate* the mission of the church is not our idea, but God's. The Lord Jesus multiplies the Gospel through Spirit-filled leaders who are willing to devote their lives to the claims of the Good News on their lives.

Saul would soon leave Antioch, bearing the sacred mission, along with Barnabas (Acts 13:3-4). In a curious note from the text of Acts 13, Luke tells the reader about a change in Saul's identity: "Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit..." (13:9). Only when Saul received and executed his mission to multiply, did he begin to use this other name. The name "Paul" is a Roman first-name, whereas "Saul" is Jewish. Later information about Paul reveals that his father, from Tarsus, held Roman citizenship and also secured the same status for his son. Paul no doubt also benefitted from a good classical education in Tarsus, a university town. It was common for persons with dual cultural backgrounds to use both names, and in this case, that meant he was called "Saulus Paulus."

Coincidentally, his first missionary destination on Cyprus brought him before the proconsul who was domiciled in the town of Paphos, a man known as Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7). We can only speculate the small-talk between these two men who shared the name "Paul"! By using his Roman name, Paul identified with the wider world of the Roman Empire where his *multiplied* mission would occupy his efforts until his death under the

Emperor Nero (ca. 62 CE). He never ceased to honor his Jewish heritage and faith, but because of the demands of his world-wide mission, he chooses his Roman name to better engage with the Gentiles in his audience. Cross-cultural identity, then and now, proves to be a helpful stratagem to gain an audience for the furtherance of the Gospel. In Paul's case, Sergius Paulus witnessed the power of God in Paul's life and became a believer:

¹² When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord (Acts 13:12).

Paul was blessed with *multiplied* fruit, even at the highest levels of Roman power. Did his willingness to accept the Roman identity of Paul help him in his work? We'd like to think so. At any rate, he would later write the following about his missionary work:

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

The heart of Paul blazed with a passion for multiplication, in his words: "I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." Multiplication requires such a heart!

Multiplication and Division (Acts 14:1-7)

Acts 13-14 chronicles the first missionary journey of Paul, the initial stages of which we have addressed in the previous section above. The lead-in to that ministry took Paul and Barnabas through the island of Cyprus and their encounter with Sergius Paulus the proconsul in the city of Paphos. Upstream from this first objective was great turmoil back in Israel with considerable efforts by the authorities to silence the Jesus movement, lately resurrected in the work of the apostles and men like Stephen, a deacon. All the seeds for discord were being sown, and yet the very fact of opposition became fruitful opportunity to divide and multiply in wider ways. A later church father once remarked, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" (Tertullian, 155-240 CE, *Apologeticus*, chapter 50). Seed equals growth and multiplication.

Because Paul and his associates made it their practice to engage both Jews and Gentiles in their missionary work, invariably conflict would ensue. Observant Jews, not yet in agreement with the Jesus movement, saw Paul's efforts as a definitive threat to the purity of the ancient Hebrew faith and a concession to the long-standing idea that Yahweh had chosen Israel and not the nations to be His people. Of course, Paul's recent conversion reshaped his understanding of Israel's chosenness, seeing it as God's way of also choosing the whole world by way of the Abrahamic blessing (see Genesis 12). In the text for this section (Acts 14) the division comes into sharp focus. To that we now turn.

Were we to travel throughout the eastern half of modern-day Turkey, we would encounter a city called Konia. This is the site of the biblical Iconium mentioned in this section. It is the easternmost city of the Phrygian portion of the Roman province of Galatica (or Galatia). In the writings of Xenophon (*Anabasis*, i.2.19), we learn that Iconium was a frontier town between Phrygia and Paul's next destination, Lystra, in Lycaonia. Phrygia has a long ancient history, reaching back to the days of the fall of Hittite Empire when Indo-Europeans and Sea Peoples filled the vacuum left by this event. The Romans simply divided up this region, the westernmost area becoming part of the province of Asia (Minor), while the eastern section was incorporated into Galatia. Towns like Antioch-Pisidia and Iconium are sometimes included in the designation "Southern Galatia," and thought to be the recipients, among others, of Paul's letter to the *Galatians*. Continuing references to Phrygia during the Roman period (when the events of *Acts* are taking place), simply underscore the ancient history of the region, and thus carry a *cultural* rather than a *political* significance. Though in the province of Galatia, these residents were still Phrygian at heart.

The mythic past of this region contained the names of Gordias and Midas who were made famous for their "knot" and "touch" respectively! Josephus claimed the Phrygians were founded by the biblical figure

Togarmah, grandson of Japheth and son of Gomer. The Phrygians spoke an Indo-European language. The Phrygian language was most likely close to Greek and Thracian. In most cases the Phrygian language used an alphabet originating with the Phoenicians. Although the Phrygians adopted the alphabet originated by the Phoenicians, and several dozen inscriptions in the Phrygian language have been found, they remain untranslated, and so much of what is thought to be known of Phrygia is second-hand information from Greek sources. From Acts 2:10 we know that a Jewish community existed in this region, having some representatives present on the day of Pentecost who heard Peter's sermon and witnessed the unusual events surrounding the giving of the Holy Spirit.

The journey from Antioch-Pisidia to Iconium was slightly less than 100 miles. At the end of his life, Paul referenced this travel log in 2 Timothy 3:11. Most likely, Paul and Barnabas took the *Via Sebaste*, a finely paved road built by the Romans, connecting the main colonies, and accommodating a variety of conveyances. The Gospel missionary was blessed by the timing of God's providence: Roman roads were among the advantages for Christians bringing the Gospel to Gentile soil.

The Greek phrase *kata to auto* tells the reader that Paul and Barnabas followed the "same practice" of going into the Jewish synagogue *first*, as they did in previous cities. Once more a significant Gentile contingent was present and joined with the Jews in a "great number" (*polu plēthos*) of those who believed (*pisteusai*, "to believe"). By contrast, those Jews who *did not believe* (*hoi apeithēsantes*, "the unpersuaded ones"), mounted a campaign against "the brothers" (*kata tōn adelphōn*). Their initial strategy was to "poison their minds," literally (from *ekakōsan tas psuchas*) "do harm to the souls/minds" of the Gentiles. When someone "harms the soul," the net result is to "poison" it against someone or something, thus the metaphorical translation. The notion of "mislead" is also present in the phrase. In his letter to the *Galatians*, Paul would later make similar charges against the so-called "Judaizers" who sought to plant seeds of doubt in the minds of the converts. These believers in Iconium would have been among this group of Galatians to whom Paul addressed his concerns.

How do Paul and Barnabas respond? Until violence forces a new strategy, they do the following things:

1. Spent considerable time in the city (Greek: *hikanon...chronon*; the adjective implies whatever time would be "adequate" or "required"). Luke uses the Greek word *diatribō* to communicate that they remained where they were.
2. Spoke "boldly for the Lord." The notion of "boldness" is conveyed by *parrēsiazomenoi* which denotes boldness and courage (see 1 Thessalonians 2:2). This quality first appears in connection with Saul immediately after his conversion in 9:27-28. We also find it in 13:36; 18:26; 19:8 and 26:26. It appears at the end of Paul's teaching about spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:20. In the present context, it occurs in the present tense, suggesting an ongoing and persistent boldness, not easily upset by the opposition lodged against them. What they defend is not *themselves*, but the *Lord* (*kurios*). They are "servants of the Lord" and serve at his pleasure, not at their own. Both men know that the most important quality found in a servant is "faithfulness" (1 Corinthians 4:2).
3. Gave witness to the "message of grace." Literally, Luke writes, *tō logō tēs charitos*, "the word of grace." The emphasis of "grace" is on the idea of the "gift" given by God, though not deserved by the recipient. Within the highly structured institutions of Second Temple Judaism, even in the *diaspora*, "works of law" took precedence. Certainly every observant Jew knew that they required God's grace for salvation. But in order to hold fast their time-honored traditions, they put excessive emphasis on the "markers" which distinguished them from all the other peoples. Grace got lost in the shuffle. However, the Gospel Paul proclaimed restored that emphasis, but also invited criticism from those Jews who supposed that the sort of grace Paul offered would erode the discipline of a well-ordered Jewish life.
4. Performed "signs and wonders." In order to "witness" to something, there must be some concrete evidence for it. The *evidence for grace* takes the form of the familiar "signs and wonders" which appeared early on in Luke's narrative (see Acts 2 for the beginning). Recall that signs (*sēmeia*) refer to meaningful God-sent events which draw attention to some specific truth about Him: they have "significance" and are not merely

pulled from a "bag of tricks." "Wonders" (*teras*) capture the heart and inspire the soul — they literally "move" those who see them.

The consequence of this persistent and faithful ministry was a *division* in the Iconium community. Luke uses the word *eschisthē* to describe this separation between those who "sided with the Jews" and those who "sided with the apostles." This reminds us of Jesus' words: "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword..." (Matthew 10:24-26). He proceeded to tell his audience that families would be divided because of him (Luke 12:52-53). Later in Acts 23:7 the Jewish community itself would experience a division because of Paul's preaching. The decision to hear and respond to the Gospel is laden with potential conflict, and it will cost the follower of Jesus to make that choice. The verb Luke uses is the basis for our English word "schism," which means "a division." "You cannot serve two masters," Jesus once said. "You cannot serve both God and money." Followers of Jesus soon discovered that their conversions led to isolation and ostracism from the majority community. It often meant they could not keep their jobs or membership in the guilds.

We also observe that this is the *first time* (14:4) that the word "apostles" is applied to Paul and Barnabas, even though, all along, they have acted in ways which fulfill the role of those who have been "sent" (*apostellō*) by the church in Antioch. Normally *apostolos* was reserved for "the Twelve" — the original eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. However, Paul will freely adopt this term and apply this word to himself, stating that he was "the least of the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:9), "not worthy to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of God." On other occasions, when his role as an apostle was questioned, he rose to his own defense with the words: "Am I not an apostle...Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? (1 Corinthians 9:1-2)." He made clear that he was an apostle by the authority of God, not human beings (Galatians 1:1), and was so "by the will of God" (2 Timothy 1:1). The various ministries Paul performed were often linked together, as in "preacher, apostle, teacher" (2 Timothy 1:11). Still, it seems odd that Luke waits until this point in his narrative to explicitly apply the word to these two men. Perhaps the surrounding atmosphere of opposition and persecution, met with courage, boldness and faithfulness, warranted Luke's application of this honored title to Paul and Barnabas. Had they not shown themselves, through these actions, to be *authentic* apostles indeed!

According to 14:5, there was a *hormē* afoot to stone Paul and his companion. This Greek word actually means "a rushing motion," and figuratively comes to mean an impulse or desire of the will to do something. In James 3:4, the writer applies it to the pilot of a ship who "wants" to turn it this way or that using the rudder. Perhaps our idea of *conspiracy* applies in the present case. The classical writers used it for a violent movement forward, as in an assault, attack or onset of a battle or march. Used of natural things, it referred to the raging of a fire or the shock of a wave. The term seems limited to the *first impulse* but not to the actually fulfillment of the affair. Before the plotters could carry out their intentions, Paul and Barnabas got wind of it and left town. Luke uses the word *kataphugon* from the verb *kataphugō*, "to flee for safety." There is no dishonor in this action, since what they escaped was the first stirrings of a plot against them. Jesus himself quietly avoided an early death by taking steps to simply "slip away" (see Luke 4:28-30 for one example). There was no point of an early martyrdom for our two missionaries — they had much more work to do. Recall the words of Jesus: "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

A certain strategic choice followed their departure from Iconium, a border town of Galatia-Phrygia, as previously noted. Luke informs us — and his geography is especially accurate — their arrival in Lystra meant that they had entered a region known as *Lycaonia*, still in Galatia but no longer in Phrygia, located between Iconium and the foothills of the Taurus Mountains. For a time, this might well put them outside the jurisdiction of Phrygian authority. According to 14:11 the residents of this region still spoke their own dialect, though perhaps a form still related to Greek. There is a theory that the name "Lycaonia" is a Greek-adapted version (from a Greek named Lycaon) of an original word, "Lukkawanna," which meant "the land of the Lukka people" in an old Anatolian language related to ancient Hittite. The dialect may also have affinities with ancient Assyrian. Some scholars think the name means "wolf land." Lycaonia is for the most part a dreary plain, bare of trees, destitute of fresh water, and with several salt lakes. It was about 20 miles long from east to west, and

13 miles wide. A certain ethnic and national independence persisted among the people of Lycaonia, perhaps such as we find among the Irish who largely speak English, but whose pride of culture causes them to nurture a love for all things Gaelic, including that language. Coincidentally, the Celts are present in both Galatian and Irish history.

Within Lycaonia, Paul and Barnabas arrive at the city of Lystra. Though located in a distinctly independent region, Lystra, like Antioch-Pisidia, had been made a Roman colony in 6 C.E. by Caesar Augustus. A military road connected both colonies, but was not accessible from Iconium. Some eighteen miles separated them from their previous destination. Choosing a city with the status of a Roman colony was consistent with an emerging missionary strategy: to bring the Gospel to important centers of the Empire. And it proved worthy of the detour.

"They continued to preach the Good News" (14:7). With these words, Luke introduces Paul and Barnabas to their latest mission. The Greek word *kakei*, roughly translated "there also," opens this new phase of their missionary efforts. This disruptive development is consistent with the pattern which the Holy Spirit seemed to follow in moving the Jesus people from one place to another. Rather than bemoaning the inconvenience experienced at the end of their work in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas willingly embrace their new destination as God's way of *multiplying* the church in new parts of the world. Like the metaphor of the pearl and how it is formed in a shell, opposition to the Gospel is the grain of sand that causes the sea creature to secrete the material around the grain which forms the pearl. Jesus himself called the Gospel of the kingdom "the pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:45-46), and he knew full well that the church would multiply in the face of great persecution.

We live in troubled times when the church is no longer at the center of the village green nor is it the power behind the throne. The script for culture doesn't consult the church for its lines, and often criticizes the work that it does. The Gospel doesn't inform the practice of economics, even in what was once thought to be a "Christian nation." Ours is a post-Christian world, even as the Roman Empire of Paul's day was a pre-Christian one. That said, the irritant of a hostile world spurs on the passion of the church to "overcome" and not grow faint of heart. Pearls still multiply, and the kingdom grows, "though we know not how" (Mark 4:27).

Multiplication of Strangers Scattered (1 Peter 1:1-2)

The brother of Andrew, Peter was active in the family fishing business based in his Galilean hometown of Bethsaida (John 1:44). Archaeology has, in recent years, revealed that fisherman were not necessarily illiterate and in most cases ran respectable businesses.¹ Clearly Acts 4:13 calls Peter (and his associates) persons without formal academic education. But that does not mean Peter lacked the ability to read and write Greek, something useful in operating a fishing concern in Galilee. Jesus called him early in his mission (Mark 1:16-18; John 1:40-42), and he remained on the official rosters of apostles (e.g. Mark 3:16-19).

Peter's personality is famous, perhaps more so than is true of the other apostles. He was slow to understand, quick to speak, changed his mind impulsively, showed a cowardly side, though boastful about his loyalty. A leader, he stoutly announced faith in Jesus as the Christ, and later took charge of things after Jesus' ascension. Pentecost endued him with new spiritual power, and though resistant to the idea of Gentiles in the church, he yielded to the vision from God and preached to the house of the Roman Cornelius. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels and *Acts* will reveal these facts. His missionary activity followed the pattern of Acts 1:8, taking him to Judea, Samaria, back to Galilee, outward to Antioch, into Asia Minor, and finally to Rome where tradition placed him at the time of his martyrdom (see the non-biblical writings of 1 Clement 5:1-4; Ignatius to the Romans 4.3). The later church historian Eusebius confirms this picture based, he claims, on the earlier writings of Tertullian, Gaius, and Dionysius. Though Mark penned the Gospel bearing his name, we learn from

¹ Frederick M. Stickert, *Bethsaida: Home of the Apostles*, Liturgical Press, 1989.

the church fathers Papias, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria that what Mark actually put down in writing were actually the memoirs of Peter.²

To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ... (1 Peter 1:1b)

If we compare the geographical references in the prescript with a map of the ancient world, we discover that they appear within what is modern-day Turkey, north and west of the Taurus Mountains, as seen below:



The “Asia” as it appears on this map, refers the western region and not to what we commonly conceive of as the “Far East” or the “Middle East.” The familiar “Seven Churches” of the book of *Revelation* belong to this area. The Christian communities of Asia owed their existence largely to the work of Paul and the oversight of John. “Bithynia and Pontus” was the name of a province on the Black Sea coast to the north, formed by the union of the former kingdoms of Bithynia and Pontus. The Roman writer Pliny the Younger was governor of the province in 110-3 AD. Peter separates them in his Prescript, suggesting that the older national distinctions still remained, even though Rome administered both regions as a single unit. “Cappadocia” was known for its underground cities as documented by Xenophon in his *Anabasis* (4 B.C.E.). Once serving as a protection from wild animals, these cities later became hiding places for the Christians who lived there escaping persecution. “Galatia” refers to two distinct regions, one north and one south. Southern Galatia includes the first cities evangelized by Paul in Acts 13-14. Migrations of Celts and Gauls contributed to the development of this area.

As noted previously, another listing of geographical regions appears in Acts 2:9-11. Persons from these areas were present on the day of Pentecost and heard the preaching of Peter. Among the provinces mentioned were “Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia.” This has led to the suggestion that the core groups influencing the development of Christianity in this part of the Mediterranean came from the converts to Peter’s preaching. On this account, they would have returned to their homes and brought the Gospel with them, proclaiming it to their townsfolk. It might also explain why *1 Peter* might have taken interest in these followers of Jesus who lived far from Jerusalem. The original audience who heard Peter’s sermon would have included Jews belonging to what was known as the *Diaspora* — the scattered ones. Since the days of the Assyrian deportation (722 B.C.E.) and the Babylonian exile (586 B.C.E.), Jewish people found themselves scattered “among the nations” where they should “seek the welfare” of their pagan neighbors (see Jeremiah 29:7). The book of *Esther* reveals a

² J. Ramsey Michaels provides a good summary of the issues affecting the life of Peter and the authorship of the letter, 1988, pp. lv-lxvii.

continuing presence of Jewish people *outside of Israel and Jerusalem*, even after the return from exile (538 B.C.E. and later). As a matter of history, most Jews did not return. By remaining among the nations, they had an opportunity to bear witness to the one true God, and to create synagogue communities.

What significance did the Diaspora have for Jews generally? To some it was a sign that the people of God remained in exile, perhaps as a result of continuing disobedience or disfavor with God. To others, it served to connect them to their ancient forbears, the patriarchs who were “sojourners and strangers” in the promised land *before* they actually took it as an inheritance from Yahweh.

Peter addresses himself to a somewhat larger community, however, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. When, in his Prescript, he refers to “the dispersion” he is using the familiar *diaspora*. However, considering the Roman policy of *colonization*, other ethnic groups were no doubt included in the populations of the named regions. Once these areas had been annexed to the Roman Empire, displaced people groups would have been brought here to assist in the development of towns and cities and in the social infrastructure. Rome’s intention was to replicate its culture within these newly formed communities. We know that the Jews who were expelled from Rome during the reign of the Emperor Claudius (see also Acts 18:1-2) settled elsewhere.³

Gentiles figure in this mix, as evidenced within the letter itself (1 Peter 2:12; 4:3). The recipients are described as “once not a people” but are now the people of God (1 Peter 2:10). This compares with Paul’s remarks to Gentiles in his letters (Romans 9:25-26).

Further, the listing of the various regions in 1:1 provides the carrier of this letter with a distribution list for the delivery of this *circular letter*. Much like *Revelation* and the letters of the seven churches, *1 Peter* was just such a letter, carried by one or more couriers who presumably would read it to the various churches.

The string of descriptors translated here as “elect exiles of the dispersion” comes from the Greek: *eklektois parepidēmois diasporas*. We have already discussed the *Diaspora* as a migration phenomenon affecting the Jewish people. However, in relationship to the whole Christian community, Jew and Gentile, it also has significance. As noted in the extended quotations above, especially from Quadratus, the Christ followers did not claim any land for themselves. From the standpoint of Jesus’ teaching, they were “inheritors of the earth” (see Matthew 5:5), something attributed by the New Testament also to the patriarch Abraham who would “inherit the world” (Romans 4:13). Still, until the kingdom of God would come in its fullness, the condition of the Christian church would be that of a scattered people. This was experienced by the early church as a result of Jewish persecution (see Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19). In point of fact, the Christian *diaspora* was a beneficial reality. Like the word which they preached, the Christians were scattered as seed throughout the Roman Empire — in this case in Asia Minor — where they would take root and bear fruit through evangelism and church planting efforts. Had not Jesus told a parable about the word of God as seed, scattered in a variety of soils where it would face suffering and hostility but would, in time, produce a harvest (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8)?

Further, the word *parepidēmos* occurs in conjunction with the readers’ scattered condition. Analyzing the word into its constituent elements yields *para* (alongside, wide)+ *epe* (on)+ *dēmos* (home). The New Testament uses this term to describe the status of the readers as “foreigners, aliens, strangers, temporary residents” who live in a place from which they did not originally come. We use the phrase “resident alien” to designate persons without permanent, but yet legal status. In Acts 7:6, Stephen uses the term to describe the status of Israel while living in Egypt. The word appears in the LXX version of the Old Testament where Abraham applies it to himself when he lived in the land of Canaan (Genesis 23:4). Ironically, his Hittite neighbors call him “a prince of God among us” despite his alien status (23:6)! The New Testament consistently sees both the Old Testament believers and Christians as a *pilgrim people* in search of God’s new world (Hebrews 11:13). Though they have this standing

³ In the “Introduction” to her commentary Karen H. Jobes summarizes the research on Roman colonization and its potential effect on Christian migrations during the first century (pp. 28-44).

in the world, they do not have this status in relationship to each other (Ephesians 2:12, 19), but as persons formed into the new people of God they have at last found *a home*.

Joel Green remarks:

For persons thus branded as “not at home,” intimate with day-to-day cancerous slander and calamity, the temptations are several: to embrace the dispositions and practices conventional in the wider world (i.e. the threat of assimilation and defection) and to query one’s status before God chief among them. Crucial challenges therefore include negotiating and maintaining community boundaries, identity formation and coherence, and finding positive, redemptive meaning from, diasporic life. Peter will address the issue of boundaries and behavior in his repeated calls to holy and honorable living...⁴

Perhaps the word *eklektos* draws the greatest attention for the biblical scholar. Simply translated as “chosen,” the word has to do with God’s choice of His people, granting them favored status based, not on their social standing, wealth or ethnicity, but on the simple fact that God has loved them. This understanding of “chosen people” is as old as the Hebrew Scriptures. Consider:

And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power ... It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7; 10:15).

Paul, using similar language, speaks of God’s choice of His people “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). The doctrine of *election* is rooted in God’s love for His fallen world and His desire to raise up in the midst of it a proto-type people — the model of what He wants to do for the whole world. Far from being *exclusive and arbitrary*, God’s election is truly unconditional, based on nothing in us and on everything found in His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Jesus repeatedly spoke of His disciples as the objects of his choice, destined for a purpose in the fruitful harvest field of the world (John 15:16, 19). God’s choice of us is wholly atypical and includes those whom the world would normally despise (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). Paul describes this choice as the revelation of a great mystery — the selection of Gentiles alongside Jews — the true “wealth of nations”!

...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be *multiplied* to you (1 Peter 1:2).

From all outward appearances, this scattered people should lack social cohesion and group identity. Thrown together in an alien culture, the dangers facing such a community include either assimilation or isolation. Consistent with Jesus’ own teaching, however, they ought be “in the world” while not “of the world” (John 17:15). What makes possible their sense of “chosenness”? The answer lies within the character of God Himself.

From 1:2 we discover a clearly Trinitarian explanation of the church’s sense of “calling.” The following chart captures the key elements:

Person: God	Role
Father	According to <i>foreknowledge</i> of ...
Spirit	In the <i>sanctification</i> of ...
Jesus Christ	For <i>obedience</i> to ...; for <i>sprinkling</i> with his blood

The writer uses a series of prepositions to correlate each person of the Godhead with their special work in the life of the Christian community. Nothing is left to chance or fortune, as if the church’s scattered or homeless state within the world dooms it to irrelevance or scorn. Far from it. God acts in ways which bring together the otherwise alienated followers of Jesus and gives to them their *eklektos*, or “vocation” in the world. Part of God’s work in remedying our “HoliMess” is to order our relationships according to His own internal

⁴ Green, p. 17.

relationships, and then to outfit us for service within His kingdom on earth. It is important, then, to see as the unifying idea this sense of calling, vocation, and chosenness. It is no accident that the Greek word translated “church” is actually *ekklēsia*: the community of the *called* ones, the *chosen ones*. We consider each of these unique roles.

Foreknowledge: The Father

Greek word: *prognōsis* is used in the accusative case with the preposition *kata* commonly translated as “according to,” but has the sense of “consistent with.” *1 Peter* is telling the audience that God’s choice of His people, both Jew and Gentile, living as resident aliens in the provinces of Asia Minor, is consistent with His *prognōsis*. If we allow the English word “foreknowledge” to exhaust the meaning of this term, then the emphasis falls on what God knew “before-hand,” and this opens the door to a theological discussion of the doctrine of predestination. But is this what Peter intends? The classical usage suggests “perceiving beforehand” but also has the sense of *prognosis* — as in the medical *outcome* of certain diseases. How will all of this “turn out”? The noun has a corresponding verb form, *progignōskō* (or the simpler, *proginōskō*) which literally means “to know, perceive, learn, understand beforehand, judge beforehand.” What sort of “knowledge” is this? From a purely Hellenistic perspective it is *perceptual* or *cognitive* knowledge. However, the Hebrew framework shifts the emphasis toward an experiential knowledge which includes *love* and deep forms of intimacy. This is not “picture knowledge,” merely reflective of what happens (or will happen). God is not passively peering into the future and saying, “Ah, that’s how things will eventually work themselves out.” He is personally and actively involved in bringing about His purposes in the world, but He is doing it, not as the “puppet-master” pulling the strings, but as a “personal-Savior” bringing about the restoration of human beings.

As we noted in our discussion of chosenness above, God’s choice of Israel to be His people was rooted in His love for them and in His determination to bring about the best for them. The same applies to God’s purposes for the New People of His choice, scattered though they be in a strange land. When Peter speaks of *prognōsis*, he implies the *proactive* love of God which seeks the good of His creation.

God’s “foreknowledge” is His “pro” action in the whole plan of salvation for the world. In a chaotic world where hostile powers and painful realities threaten to destroy, God demonstrates His *proactive love* which resists evil and *multiplies* everlasting good. Because of this love, the prognosis is hopeful. Where once we were strangers and “aliens,” God has made us *brothers*, conformed to the image of His Son, no longer separated from Him or each other.⁵ Division leads to *multiplication*.

Sanctification: The Spirit

Sanctification means holiness. The root word *hagios*, “holy,” is found within the various terms having to do with “being holy,” “making holy,” and “the state of being holy.” Thus, we have: 1) *hagiasmos*, “consecration, dedication, sanctification, holiness” (Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, 7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 12:14); 2) *hagiazō*, “set apart as sacred to God, make holy, consecrate, regard as sacred, purify, cleanse” (Ephesians 5:26; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 2:11; 9:13; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12; John 17:17, 19; Acts 20:32; 26:18; Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; 1 Timothy 4:5; 2 Timothy 2:21; Revelation 22:11); 3) *hagios*, “set apart to or by God, consecrated, holy, morally pure, upright, most sacred, sanctuary” (Mark 6:20; 8:38; Luke 1:49, 67, 70, 72; Acts 7:33; 21:28; Romans 1:2; 12:1; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 7:34; Ephesians 1:4; 3:5; 5:27; Colossians 1:22; 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:8; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2:21; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 3:1; Revelation 4:8; 15:4; 16:5; 20:6; 21:2, 10; 22:19).

The Old Testament is the foundation for our earliest understanding of “holy” and its derivatives. These are based on the Hebrew word family of *qadosh*, “holy,” which includes the meanings “separate, sacred.” The root *qad-* implies an utter uniqueness, first applied to Yahweh, the God of Israel “whose name is holy” (Isaiah

⁵ Marshall, “God took the initiative and chose them before they had done anything to deserve it” (p. 31). In his Note on 1:2 he also references Numbers 16:5 and Amos 3:2 which focus *prognosis* on choice and love rather than knowledge.

57:15). This God seeks a “holy people” who will bear His name in the world and become His prototype people through whom He seeks the restoration of humanity (Exodus 19:6). To this people He issues the command, “Be holy, as I am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Israel is set apart from the nations, not because God wants to isolate them and thereby abandon the rest of the world, but because He wants to make them the instruments for the eventual sanctification of the whole world. They are His holy “firstfruits” (Jeremiah 2:3; Romans 11:16), and He expects *more to follow*. Holiness is both a *personal* and a *corporate* reality: God wants holy *persons*, but He also seeks a holy *people*, as evidenced by the phrase “holy nation” found in Exodus 19:6.

In the Old and New Testament, the adjective “holy” appears in conjunction with “Spirit” (Hebrew: *ruah* (Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 63:10-11); Greek: *pneuma*) some 92 times. When we refer to the “Holy Spirit,” the emphasis falls on the one who is himself “Holy,” because he too belongs to the Trinity and is fully divine. He is holy in his *character*. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is the author of holiness in the character of human beings. He is holy in his *creation*. Psalm 104:30 reminds us that when God sends forth His Spirit, things “are created...” and “renewed.” This recalls Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit “hovers over” the unformed and empty deep, preparing to transform it into its function as the creation of God.

A distinctively New Testament meaning takes shape as we begin to see the role of the Holy Spirit in the New Creation: “...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Once more, we hear echoes of the Old Testament:

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26).

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, calls for a state of blessedness which comes from a “pure heart” (Matthew 5:8; compare Psalm 24:4; 73:1; 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Peter 1:22). The role of the Holy Spirit in all of this is seen in texts like this one:

...God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5:5).

Throughout *1 Peter* these themes of “holy” and “holiness,” along with their expression in the experience of “sanctification,” are frequent (1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:5, 9; 3:5, 15). This fits beautifully into the wider metaphor of “resident aliens” placed in a hostile world but called upon to bear the holy image of Christ. As we shall see shortly in 1 Peter 2:9-12, being holy persons in an unholy world is our vocation and the reason for our own sanctification. We are not holy *for our own sakes*, but for God and His purposes in creation. This is a *transformational holiness* not merely a *positional* one. The Holy Spirit is God’s *multiplication* agent who lives within His scattered people, making them the agents of genuine change and renewal.

Peter no doubt recalled the words of Jesus that the Holy Spirit would “teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). The role of the Holy Spirit in bringing the truth to the hearts of Jesus’ followers was well-established in Christian thinking within the early days of the newly *multiplied* community of God:

1. Through the “filling of the Holy Spirit”, the apostles speak God’s word boldly (Acts 4:31).
2. National Israel is warned by Stephen about not “resisting the Holy Spirit” by ignoring or rejecting the message of Jesus (Acts 7:51).
3. Paul’s own ministry is begun through the “filling of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17).
4. The strength, peace and encouragement of the church, even after persecution, is brought by the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31). Its numeric growth and reverence for the Lord is similarly grounded.
5. When Peter speaks the message of the gospel to his first Gentile audience, “the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message” (Acts 10:44-47; 11:15-16).
6. The commissioning of workers takes place by the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2, 4; 20:23).

In summary, the life of the early church was shaped, led, and *multiplied* by the Holy Spirit. It would be hard to imagine this community of Jesus seeing itself as a holiness community without making direct reference to the *multiplying* work of the Holy Spirit among them.

The Holy Spirit is the Lord's agent for multiplication in our lives. His residence is our hearts, his domain is our bodies, and his Temple is the Lord's people. Is it any wonder that his name is "Holy" and that his work is multiplication?

Obedience and Cleansing: Jesus Christ

The third and climactic role in this series of prepositional phrases has to do with Jesus Christ. It is introduced by the preposition *eis* (“into, in, among, concerning, for, as, by”) which, in this case, points to goal, purpose, result and outcome. Two distinct nouns follow *eis*: “obedience,” from *hupokoē*; “sprinkling,” from *hrantismos*. The two nouns belong together and describe the finished work of Jesus on the cross. While the goal is *our* obedience and *our* cleansing, the agent for these is Jesus Christ who himself *obeyed His Father* and *shed his blood on the cross for our sins*.

Jesus is called the obedient Son of God. 1) “one man’s (=Jesus) obedience” leads to the righteousness of others (Romans 5:19); 2) The Son learned obedience through his suffering (Hebrews 5:8); 3) Jesus wanted God’s will more than his own human will (Matthew 26:39, 42; John 6:38; Hebrews 10:7-9); 4) Jesus wanted God’s will done on earth (Matthew 6:10).

Jesus came to bring about the obedience of the world to the will of God. This idea lies at the heart of Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God — God’s active rule of His world; God becoming king once again among His people. The apostles see this as their goal: the “obedience of faith among the nations” (Romans 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; 2 Corinthians 10:5).

We are called to be the obedient children of God. Peter especially emphasizes this when he refers to his audience as “obedient children” who no longer live like Gentiles but like Christians (1 Peter 1:14). A strong connection exists between “purification of the heart” and “obedience to the truth” (1 Peter 1:22a). The sanctification by the Holy Spirit, accomplished in human hearts (see above), has its basis in the work of Jesus Christ whose blood cleanses “the heart.” The result is “sincere brotherly love ... from a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22b). Our hearts obey God instead of obeying sin (Romans 6:16). This obedience “is known to all,” and therefore *multiplies* within the surrounding culture (Romans 16:19).

Jesus taught that cleansing *multiplies* on the “inside” (i.e. the heart) and not just on the “outside” (Matthew 23:25-26; Luke 11:39). When the Jerusalem Council met to certify the mission to the Gentiles, they heard Peter tell the church that God “...cleansed their [the Gentiles] hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). Paul appealed to the Christ followers in his care to “cleanse” themselves from the “yeast” of sin in their midst (1 Corinthians 5:7), suggesting the corporate nature of this process. He further explains:

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work (2 Timothy 2:21).

Christ “cleanses” the church (Ephesians 5:26), and, according to James, we must *multiply* his achievement by appropriating his cleansing in our lives (James 4:8).

In order to keep “short accounts with God,” John reminds us of these important truths about daily cleansing:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

To summarize: Jesus Christ provided for our cleansing through his work on the cross. We are called upon, as his distinctive people, to *multiply* cleansed lives so that the surrounding world may see what God has *multiplied* and come to the fountain as well.

May grace and peace be *multiplied* to you (1:2b)

Peter uses the familiar salutation found throughout the New Testament letters. He addresses a *plural* audience (“to you,” Greek: *humin*). Those among the Christian *diaspora* who read the words “grace and peace” would no doubt find special meaning. The grace of God points to “all that the Christian community receives from God.”⁶ Nor is this gift limited to the present, since Peter also writes about the “grace *to be given*” (1:10) and “grace *to be brought when* Jesus Christ is revealed” (1:13) — plain references to the Second Coming. Considering the daily needs of Peter’s readers, living as resident aliens in a hostile environment, grace is *multiplied* for them and not just a one-time experience. Through His grace, God saved them at the beginning, and He saves them *now*. The text applies the verb *plēthunō* to “grace and peace,” using the aorist optative form which expresses a strong wish or prayer applied to Peter’s audience in a decisive way.

“Peace” naturally originates in the Hebrew idea of *shalom* which has to do with more than cessation of war. Greeting someone with the familiar “Shalom” means wishing for them health, well-being, as well as rich personal relationships. If we factor in the Roman significance (*Pax Romana*), we might also suggest that as citizens of God’s kingdom, theirs is more than a peace maintained by force, but by the gracious gift of God’s reconciling love *multiplied* through Jesus Christ.⁷ Though “scattered” the followers of Jesus are thereby *multiplied* in the cities and towns of the Roman Empire, where they bring the peace of Jesus through the life and witness of the Gospel.

Conclusion

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and *multiply*, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion (Genesis 1:28).

For the earth will be *filled* with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14)
"I will surely bless you and *multiply* you" (Hebrews 6:14).

When the church *Elevates* its commitment to *multiply*, the glory of God likewise *multiplies* and, in the words of Habakkuk, “fills the earth, as the waters cover the sea.” What a thickly worded metaphor! Ours is a privileged calling and humbling to the core. At one point in his ministry, Jesus encouraged his disciples:

³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

Courage is the virtue for *multiplication*. The vision of a courageous church trusts the gifts of God for such a momentous task as this: Vision to plant churches that are sustainable in a variety of settings — in urban communities, on the block, and in the home. In that effort we reproduce the earthly work of the heavenly Jesus and become in fact the “body of Christ.”

The scattered followers of Jesus in the first century discovered the secret of outward progress that reached the unreachable in yet undiscovered places. Likewise, within the boundaries of the post-Christian West, Christians with vision for *multiplication* see the diversity of culture and ethnicity, not as a threat, but as an opportunity to extend the influence of the Gospel everywhere. From the lips of the Christian prophet, John, we hear the witness of the church in heavenly glory, from its great hymn of praise and *multiplication*:

⁹ They sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from *every tribe and language and people and nation*; ¹⁰ you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth" (Revelation 5:9-10).

Glory to God! Amen.

⁶ Michaels, p. 13.

⁷ See *Sanhedrin* 11b as cited by Witherington, “May your peace be multiplied,” p. 73.