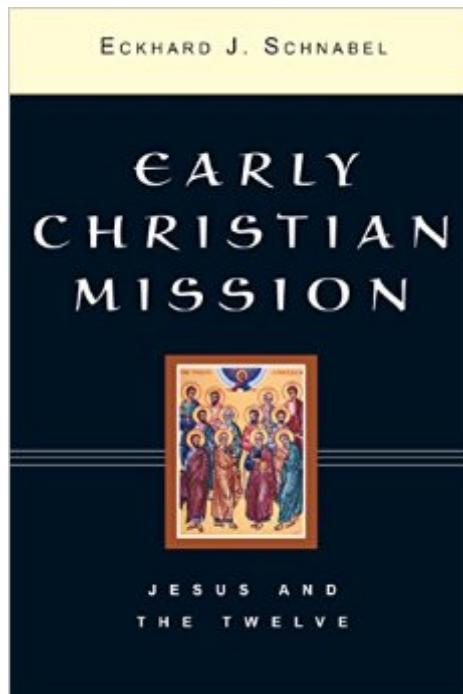


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Early Christian Mission (2 Volume Set)



Synopsis

How is it that a first-generation Jewish messianic movement undertook a mission to the pagan world and rapidly achieved a momentum that would have a lasting and significant impact on world history? This momentous question has surprisingly eluded the concentrated focus of historians and New Testament scholars. Perhaps it is because the story of early Christian mission encompasses so much of the history of early Christianity. And to tell that history is to traverse a broad spectrum of issues in contemporary New Testament studies, all of which have been investigated in specialized depth, though frequently unconnected to a unified picture. On the other hand, as Eckhard Schnabel comments, those who have attempted to paint "the portrait of early Christian missions" have "often painted with brush strokes too broad." As a result, an "undifferentiated picture of early Christian mission" is widely held. In this monumental study, Schnabel gives us both a unified and detailed picture of the rise and growth of early Christian mission. He begins with a search for a missionary impulse in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism. He then weighs the evidence for a mission of Jesus to Gentiles. But the center of focus is the apostolic missionary activity as it is related in Acts, Paul's letters and the rest of the New Testament. Here is a study that seeks to describe all the evidence relevant to the missionary strategy and tactics of the early church, to explain the theological dimensions of the early Christian mission, and to integrate the numerous studies published in the last decades into a synthetic overall picture. Schnabel's detailed and immensely informed analysis will reward careful reading and reflection, and form a solid basis for a new understanding of the rise of Christianity and the nature of Christian mission--both then and now. When you order this item you will receive two volumes: Jesus and the Twelve (Volume 1) and Paul & the Early Church (Volume 2). An outline of both is in Volume 1 and the indexes are in Volume 2.

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Customer Reviews

Eckhard Schnabel has produced a mammoth two volume discussion of the historical and theological foundations of the Christian missionary movement. The thesis of Early Christian Mission is that the movement began with the ministry of the historical Jesus and was perpetuated by the work of his earliest followers. A key point for Schnabel is that there was no active Jewish mission to Gentiles prior to the ministry of Jesus. He painstakingly expounds salient texts in the Hebrew Bible as well as texts from other relevant Jewish texts to show that even though there were eschatological promises of a general conversion of Gentiles to the God of Israel, that there was no active Jewish mission. In making this assertion, Schnabel has some significant exegetical obstacles, namely the book of Jonah (where Schnabel explains that Jonah was trying to get the Ninevites to repent, not to convert), and texts such as Isaiah 26:19 (which he regrettably overlooks), and Matthew 23:15 (where Schnabel is forced to admit that the text may speak of a uniquely Pharisaic ministry to reach non-Jews.) The bottom line is that strictly speaking, the Christian mission cannot be considered the first actively Jewish effort to reach Gentiles. But this early misstep for the most part does not affect later assertions. Schnabel is certainly right to say that the historical Jesus began a unique ministry to the people of Israel while not ignoring the needs of inquiring Gentiles. He explains that Jesus could have easily visited the 175 towns and villages of Galilee, in accordance with the summaries in texts such as Matthew 9:36.

Two very heavy volumes with a total of nearly 2,000 pages. Closely reasoned and researched. It all adds up to an instant classic, the new gold standard on the subject of early Christian mission. "The Christians understood themselves as milites ('enrolled soldiers') of Christ, as members of his militant church...they applied to non-Christians the term paganus, which was applied by soldiers to all who were not" (p 39) in the army. The tiny group of believers faced a Roman empire with a population "estimated to have numbered between 50 and 80 million people" (p 558). Following the death of Stephen, Luke speaks of a severe persecution in Jerusalem, which sent believers fleeing and thus began the missionary outreach to the diaspora Jews and the pagans. By the time of Rom 16:3-16 Paul's greetings shows "the existence of seven house churches in the city of Rome...at A.D.

50-55. And there is also evidence for other house churches" (p 818). This was explosive growth - and this was only the beginning. Schnabel has clearly studied every available scholar on his subject. He cites Foster about a "passage in...Jerome in which he gives four example of unusual and rare words...that indicate that Paul spoke a local Cilician dialect of Koine" (p 925). In addition, the fact that Paul went to Jerusalem to study indicates he likely came from the well off elite. Schnabel finds in Paul neither clear evidence that he falls into the Shammaite or Hillelite schools. Why did Paul persecute the earliest Christians? While some scholars have argued that "the reason for the synagogal punishments was connected with the followers of Jesus admitting Gentile Christians without circumcision" (p 927).

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