

Revivals And Church History :: Back to Jerusalem: Origins of a missionary vision by Tony Lambert**Back to Jerusalem: Origins of a missionary vision by Tony Lambert - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2012/7/12 17:59**

In 1949, soon after the Second World War, Phyllis Thompson, a missionary stationed in Chongqing (Chungking) with the China Inland Mission, wrote:

“The thing that has impressed me most has been the strange, unaccountable urge of a number of different Chinese groups of Christians to press forward in faith, taking the gospel towards the west. I know of at least five different groups, quite unconnected with each other, who have left their homes in east China and gone forth, leaving practically everything behind them, to the west. Some are in Sikang, some in Kansu, some right away in the great northwestern province of Sinkiang or Chinese Turkestan. It seems like a movement of the Spirit which is irresistible. The striking thing is that they are disconnected, and in most cases seem to know nothing about each other. Yet all are convinced that the Lord is sending them to the western borders to preach the gospel, and they are going with a strong sense of urgency of the shortness of the time, and the imminence of the Lord’s return.”

Here is precious testimony of an eyewitness to the extraordinary events that began in the 1940s in China—a totally indigenous missionary movement with a burden to preach the gospel through northwest China and then “Back to Jerusalem.” Now more than fifty years later, people and organizations both within China and overseas are making great claims for fulfilling this same mission on an even grander scale. So it is important to examine the spiritual and historic roots of the “Back to Jerusalem” movement. Who were these men and women? What was their vision and motivation? Was it biblical? If so, to what extent was it fulfilled then? And, most importantly, how far are leaders and organizations who use the same slogan today the legitimate spiritual successors of those early pioneers? It is to give some answers to these vital questions we now turn in this and future issues of China Insight.

The Mass Exodus to the West

The Japanese invasion of China from the mid-1930s caused immense suffering and turmoil. The Nationalist government took refuge in the far western city of Chungking (now Chongqing). The city, safe behind the Yangtze gorges from the Japanese infantry, but not safe from periodic heavy bombing, became the temporary capital of “Free China.” A mass exodus of government and universities to West China followed the fall of the great cities of the east such as Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing to the Japanese. Many Christians and Christian mission organizations were caught up in this human tragedy and also moved West to minister the gospel to the suffering millions. However, perhaps the only positive indirect benefit of this exodus was the opening up and beginnings of development of West China as government administrators and academics saw first hand for the first time its poverty and backwardness. It was in the midst of war and human deprivation on a massive scale that a few Chinese Christians caught a vision to preach Christ to China’s hitherto neglected border regions and then beyond.

Mark Ma and the NorthWest Bible Institute

The Japanese invasion was indirectly responsible for the formation of the Northwest Bible Institute. In 1941 Rev. and Mrs. James Hudson Taylor (grandson of the founder of the CIM) had to flee the Japanese invasion of Henan and move west into Shaanxi. In spite of the continual danger of enemy bombing, they had a vision to establish a new Bible school in this province where war had driven them. The CIM offered the use of mission property in the city of Fengxiang (also then known as Paoki) and a start was made with eight students who came for a three-month Bible course. The new Bible institute was jointly sponsored by the CIM and the Free Methodist Mission and had a board of 15 trustees, of whom two-thirds were Chinese. Rev. James Taylor became the principal and later Pastor Mark Ma became the vice-principal.

Mark Ma was born in Henan and educated in Kaifeng. The only son of Christian parents and a scholar at the Free Methodist Mission school, he nevertheless was opposed to the gospel. He became a teacher, and it was not until 1937 that he was converted when the death of his little son brought him in sorrow and repentance to God. He then left his secular job and accompanied Rev. Taylor to Shaanxi where he was on the staff of the new Bible institute from its commencement.

Pastor Ma wrote: “On the evening of November 25, 1942, while in prayer, the Lord said to me: ‘The door to Sinkiang is already opened. Enter and preach the gospel.’ When this voice reached me I was trembling and fearful and most unwilling to obey, because I did not recall a single time in the past when I had prayed for Sinkiang; moreover it was a place

to which I had no desire to go. Therefore I merely privately prayed about this matter not even telling my wife.

“After exactly five months of prayer, on Easter morning the 25th of April 1943 when two fellow workers and I were praying together on the bank of the Wei River, I told them of my call to Sinkiang and one of the fellow workers said that ten years before she had received a similar call. I thanked God that He had already prepared a co-worker. When I returned to the school I learned that on that same Easter Sunday at the sunrise service eight students had also been burdened for Sinkiang. It was with joy that I gathered all together and we planned a regular prayer meeting. On the evening of May 4th we held our first prayer meeting and there were actually 23 present, including members of the faculty and students. On May 11th we received the first offering amounting to \$50.”

It is significant to note that the movement was birthed in fervent prayer and had the whole-hearted support and encouragement of the CIM whose missionaries were already working to some extent in the western minority areas.

The Vision and Naming of the Band

Mark Ma wrote: “Gradually the question arose as to what our group should be called, if in the future God should send forth workers from our midst, since the volunteers were from several denominations. Some suggested calling it, ‘The North Western Evangelistic Band’, others ‘The Sinkiang Evangelistic Band’. At last we decided to wait and pray longer about the name. On the morning of May 23rd as I fasted and prayed about the name of the Band the Lord revealed the verse of Scripture to my heart: ‘This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.’ (Matthew 24:14)

“I said, ‘O Lord what does this mean?’

“It is this. I not only want you (the Chinese church) to assume responsibility for taking the gospel to Sinkiang but I want you to bring to completion the commission to preach the gospel to all the world.”

“I asked, ‘O Lord, has not the gospel already been preached to all the 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 Europe; from Europe to America and then the East; from the Southeast of China to the Northwest; until today from Kansu on westward it can be said there is no firmly established church. You may go westward from Kansu, preaching the gospel all the way back to Jerusalem, causing the light of the gospel to complete the circle around this dark world.’

“I said, ‘O Lord, who are we that we can carry a great responsibility?’

“The Lord said, ‘I want to manifest my power through those who of themselves have no power.’

“I said, ‘That section of territory is under the power of Islam and the Mohammedans are the hardest of all peoples to reach with the gospel.’

“The Lord said, ‘The most rebellious people are the Israelites, the hardest field of labor is my own people the Jews.’ At the same time the Lord brought to my mind the words found in Ezekiel chapter two which tells of the rebelliousness of Israel. The Lord continued speaking, ‘Even you Chinese, yourself included, are hard enough but you have been conquered by the gospel.’

“I said, ‘O Lord, if it is not that their hearts are especially hard, why is it that missionaries from Europe and America have established so many churches in China but are still unable to open the door to Western Asia?’

“The Lord said, ‘It is not that their hearts are especially hard, but that I have kept for the Chinese church a portion of inheritance, otherwise, when I return will you not be too poor?’

“When I heard the Lord say that he had kept for us a portion of inheritance, my heart overflowed with thanksgiving and my mouth uttered many hallelujahs! I stopped arguing with the Lord. Then finally the Lord revealed Numbers 33:53 to my heart: ‘And ye shall take possession of the land and dwell therein; for unto you have I given the land to possess it.’ At the same time the Lord made me realize that if we did not go quickly to possess the land, then the people there would certainly be reached with the gospel from other places, and we would lose all glory in the millennium. Therefore my hope is that our Chinese church will with determination and courage hold fast this great responsibility and, depending upon our all victorious Savior, complete this mighty task, and taking possession of our glorious inheritance, take the gospel back

to Jerusalem. There we shall stand on the top of Mount Zion and welcome our Lord Jesus Christ descending in the clouds with great glory! Oh, how he longs to pitch the heavenly tabernacle among men and dwell with those he loves! Listen to what he has said, 'Yea, I come quickly.'

"On the evening of May 23rd I reported the above revelation to our prayer group. The name 'Pien Ch'uan Fu Yin T'uan' (literal translation—the Preach-Everywhere Gospel Band) was accepted by the whole group and I was elected as treasurer to receive funds."

We may note, therefore, the "Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band" was the name given by Western missionaries. It accurately reflects the vision of the Band but was not the actual name in the original Chinese which was less specific. At the same meeting Pastor Ma said he believed the Lord was calling them not only to the outlying provinces of China but beyond—to Tibet, Afghanistan, Iran, Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Palestine. Soon after, the Chinese constitution of the Band was drawn up. It was an "inter-denominational but not an anti-denominational group of workers accepting the whole Bible as God's revelation. Its aim is to join members of the Lord's body in fellowship to concentrate strength and will on the preaching of the gospel in order to be ready for the Lord's return."

The sphere of work was to be two-fold:

"First, pioneer work as follows:

1. In the seven provinces on the borders of China: Sinkiang, Mongolia, Tibet, Sikang, Tsinghai, Ninghsia;
2. In the seven countries on the borders of Asia: Afghanistan, Iran, Arabia, etc.
3. Any other needy places.

Secondly, to establish new churches in evangelized areas as well as to shepherd and revive existing churches." Although thoroughly indigenous, the Band was strongly influenced by the CIM in its ethos. Its theology was strongly premillennial (which was the common theology among conservative Western missionaries at the time) and its vision for evangelism was stimulated by a fervent expectation to fulfill the great commission before Christ's return. Moreover, it was, in the tradition of the CIM, a "faith mission" as it stated quite clearly in its constitution that "We look to the Lord alone for all financial supplies."

The Band was now established and poised to send out its first workers.

from: <http://tinyurl.com/78w6p3g>

Re: Back to Jerusalem: Origins of a missionary vision by Tony Lambert - posted by dvndsn, on: 2012/7/12 19:07

Great article brother. As one who will soon depart for overseas missions, it is a great encourager.

Re: , on: 2012/7/12 19:30

The Back to Jerusalem movement torch is still being carried on by the Chinese church. This movement is discussed very prominently in the book, The Heavenly Man.

Bearmaster.

Re: - posted by dvndsn, on: 2012/7/12 20:53

A fellow brother is traveling to China on mission the same time I leave overseas. We see each other often and enjoy encouraging one another. I need to start praying for him. EDIT: I checked out that book and put it on my wishlist on Amazon, it looks really interesting.

Some paid the price, rejoicing in the face of the Red Dragon., on: 2012/7/12 22:07

I was led into China also. I went alone, and with no contacts, and felt to go to the area of Hunan; deep in the country-side. I staged at Hong Kong, at High Rock, a former missionary conclave, but now taken over by secular Communists.

I prayed my way in. I met a bible smuggler who knew an American Pastor in a mainland city, and met an interpreter who took me in to the home town area in Hunan...maybe 800 miles inland. The "underground" church came to me at night, and I taught, and washed feet.

I call them, "The hunted church." If you know their names, or if they receive money, they probably are not authentic. Most of the male leadership had fled, or were in hiding, and were very cautious.

There is much spiritual warfare around them, as there is a brokenness and dependence on God. For now, they are continually needy, and need our prayers more than all.

Thanks for the article Greg, and the history. It is inspiring to know that some have paid the price, and continue too. BT