

## Mission in the Early Church

Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia-Pontus (c. A.D. 110), complains to Trajan about the aggressive expansion of the repulsive “superstition” to which the crucifixion had given rise as people of every age and social standing were affected by it, even in villages and the countryside (Pliny *Ep.* 10.96.8–10; cf. Hengel 1983, 48). How was it possible that religious convictions inseparably linked with the Jewish faith came to be accepted by increasing numbers of non-Jews? (See *DJG*, Gentiles; *DPL*, Mission.)<sup>1</sup>

J. M. Scott has advanced the thesis that according to the evidence in Acts and in Paul’s letters the early Christians had a missionary policy based on the table of nations. The apostles seem to have decided on territorial jurisdictions in their respective missions drawn along the lines of the sons of Noah (which Luke supposedly adopts in the literary structure of Acts): Peter was responsible for the mission to “Shem” (Acts 2:1–8:25), Philip is involved in the mission to “Ham” (Acts 8:26–40), Paul is responsible for the mission to “Japheth” (Acts 9:1–28:31; Scott 1994, 522–44; 1995, 135–80). This proposal seems convincing from a tradition-historical point of view, and it illuminates various aspects of Paul’s travels, although it is impossible to verify whether Paul consulted the table of nations tradition when making tactical decisions. His responsiveness to divine guidance seems to point to a high degree of flexibility, and Scott’s view that an infringement of Peter and the “men of James” on Japhetite territory (Gal 2:11–14) caused Paul’s strong reaction is doubtful. The dispute was not about territorial jurisdiction but about proper relations between converted pagans and messianic Jews.<sup>2</sup>

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c. circa, about (with dates); column

cf. compare

*DJG* *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. J. B. Green and S. McKnight

*DPL* *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. R. P. Martin and G. F. Hawthorne

<sup>1</sup>Martin, R. P., & Davids, P. H. (2000, c1997). *Dictionary of the later New Testament and its developments* (electronic ed.). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

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