

The Earliest Christian Mission to "All Nations" in the Light of Matthew's Gospel.

*By James LaGrand. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. xiv, 290. Paperback \$32.**

In this reissue of a work originally published in 1995, the author, currently pastor of a church in Indiana, argues the thesis that the Matthean "Great Commission" derives from Jesus and charges the Twelve, both as representative Israel and as apostolic nucleus of the church, to fulfill the messianic mission to the nations. After a sketch of the history of interpretation and clarification of terminology, LaGrand investigates references to Israel and the nations in the Old Testament, LXX, and Apocrypha, as well as in writings roughly contemporary with the New Testament. The bulk of the volume is devoted to an in-depth study of the Great Commission in the context of Matthew's gospel.

Overall, LaGrand's thesis is sound and represents a welcome corrective to recent Matthean scholarship, which has been focused on the "Matthean community" and has largely denied the Great Commission's authenticity. Matthew's primary source is indeed the Old Testament, particularly the Abrahamic promise, the Davidic covenant, and Isaiah's Servant songs. And in Matthean theology, Jesus does in fact recapitulate Israel's history with a view toward reconstituting a new messianic community for the purpose of fulfilling Israel's mission to the nations.

Whether LaGrand's way of arguing his case is the most effective is another question. The flow of his discussion tends to get bogged down in side issues (e.g. the Synoptic problem, pp. 163–67); the implications of lengthy sections for his larger case remain regularly unstated (e.g. chap. 2 on terminology); and there are no chapter summaries. Failure to interact with important recent contributions (such as McKnight or Goodman on the issue of a "Jewish mission" prior to Jesus) frequently renders LaGrand's treatment strangely dated. These and other flaws detract from an otherwise interesting study that no doubt will spark further discussion on this important subject.

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