



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 RELEVANCE OF STUDY

Urban church planting is of prime importance to the church and her mission. During the 20th century cities have mushroomed on six continents, also in Africa. Urbanization and modernization, with their concomitants of materialism and secularism, have become salient features of our time. According to Shorter (1991:1-2), towns and cities are centers for generating wealth, but African socio-economic realities ensure that the wealth created by urbanization is far from evenly distributed. On the contrary, there are unmistakable signs of poverty, alienation and disorientation caused by urbanization, and particularly by the gigantic influx of urban migrants. There are also signs that the growth and multiplication of towns are hindering much needed development in rural areas.

It is clear from all indicated above that urbanization is one of the most important social realities in Africa today, and that Christian mission must take full account of it. The church has turned her attention to the African towns none too soon. Her own historical and theological inclinations have led her to favour the rural areas, where success has been widely achieved. Yet the whole Christian enterprise in Africa is threatened by urbanization, and a half-hearted approach to the towns will not save it. The church must take urbanization seriously and give it a priority that is absolute. Personnel have to be deployed in towns and proper structures created, if the Gospel is to continue to make an impact in urban areas.

Cities play an important role for the urban church growth. This is clearly confirmed by McGavran when he says: “The importance of cities for church growth increases when we see that larger and larger proportions of the earth’s population are living in them. The rush to the cities is on, and within the next few decades perhaps three-fourths of the human race will be born, lives, and dies in urban rather than rural areas” (1980:314).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Conn (1997:26), white churches “remained largely aloof from the movement and the urban context, self-insulated from public life, of evangelism from social transformation. Fearful also of programs and theologies that sounded too much like a revised social gospel, they moved deeper into ‘suburban captivity of the church,’ drawn to the growth potential of the suburbs. Urban mission for many was a synonym for evangelization in the city”.

One of the greatest challenges to world evangelization is urban ministry. Urban centers are complex mosaics, increasingly resistant to traditional evangelistic methods. The challenge can be met only by strategies that are adapted to the context, through planning based on accurate understanding of those to be reached (Engel 1997:46). There are many people who are migrating from rural areas to urban areas due to economic, political, social and other realities (cf Monsma 1989:108-110; cf McGavran 1980:315; Verster 2000:37; Greenway 1999:116). The problem needs to be faced is that many of the rural migrants, when they arrive in urban areas, leave or distance themselves from the church, and involve themselves in the life of robbery, drugs, prostitution, street life, etc. The questions that the local church should pay more attention to are as follows:



- What is urban mission?
- What is the biblical theology of urban mission?
- What are the needs of people living in cities?
- How should the local urban church minister in urban areas?
- What should be done to plant more churches in urban areas?
- Why should more churches be planted in urban areas?

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to explore the role of a local urban church of accomplishing the threefold goal of mission articulated by Gilbertus Voetus, the founder of Utrecht which are the conversion of the nations; the planting of the churches; the glorification and manifestation of divine grace (Jongeneel 1997:83; cf Verkuyl 1978:184; Kritzinger, Meiring and Saayman 1994:1; Müller 1987:31) within the context of urban areas. Johan H. Bavinck adopted the same goals and stressed that they are three aspects of the same goal. He placed conversion, church planting, and the glory of God's grace in the coming of the Kingdom. He further indicated that it must be emphasized, however, that these three purposes are not distinct and separate but they are in fact three aspects of a single purpose of God: the coming and extension of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Kingdom is concerned with God, with His greatness, with His honor and His grace. The coming of the Kingdom includes the extension of the church over the whole earth. And, the coming of the Kingdom realizes itself in the conversion of sinners. These are not three separate purposes, but one great and exalted final purpose that is disclosed to us in three blessings, of which the glorification of God is undoubtedly foremost, the establishment of His church second, and the conversion of the heathen third (Bavink 1964:155-156). According to Kritzinger et al (1994:36), the goal of mission can only be accomplished through a holistic approach. In this study the researcher will develop a

comprehensive mission strategy in which the following five components of mission will be explicated (Van Engen 1981:178-190; Kritzinger 1988:34-35; Van Engen 1993:89; Pretorius et al 1987:154):

- *Kerygma* – to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus
- *Koinonia* – to build the fellowship of believers
- *Diakonia* – to serve one another
- *Martyria* – to witness Christ and reconcile with God
- *Leitourgia* – to worship and serve God through our participation in His mission

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To understand the Biblical theology of urban mission.
- To discern the role of a local church in urban church planting.
- To develop a comprehensive mission strategy for the church in an urban setting.
- To evaluate the work of urban mission of the Reformed Church Tshiawelo.
- To develop the strategies that the Reformed Church Tshiawelo can utilize to plant more churches in metropolitan cities outside Gauteng Province.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

The younger churches on the African continent – especially in Southern Africa – are awaking to their missionary obligation, of moving from the position of receiving churches to sending churches. Especially in the growing cities of Africa the churches need to be informed and empowered to play their part in this regard. The hypothesis of this study is that: with a proper understanding of the Biblical mandate for mission, as well as of the

urban context in which the church has to function, a comprehensive strategy for mission in the cities of Africa may be developed. The congregation of the Reformed Church Tshiawelo in Soweto is used as a case study in the research.

1.5 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The central theoretical argument of this study is: the local urban church should be urged to re-evaluate her role of doing urban mission, and as a result plant more churches in urban areas, churches that address the real needs of the community they serve. Local urban churches should be motivated and empowered to play role in this regard. Chareonwongsak states that, "Because cities are the centers of complex social interaction, they are home to the nation's social, commercial, political, military, artistic, entertainment, educational, and mass media life. To evangelise a whole nation requires us to use these resources on the cities first" (1997:13-14).

1.6 WHY STUDY URBAN CHURCH PLANTING?

There are three vital reasons that encouraged the researcher to study urban church planting.

➡ The *first reason* is that the study of urban church planting is very crucial because of the fact that billions of people are moving from rural areas to urban areas because of different reasons (cf Meiring 1994:589; Grigg 1992:30-31; Aghamkar 1994:147), and when they arrive in urban areas, most of them distance themselves from the church. By developing urban mission, and as a result planting more churches in urban areas, people who have distanced themselves from the church and the not-yet Christians will be easily reached for the proclamation of God's Word.

➤ The *second reason* for doing this research is that a little has been done on this topic and the researcher wants to elaborate more on this subject. C. Kirk Hadaway is of the opinion that: "... research dealing with the urban church can benefit churches and denominations and help them to be more effective. It is my view that some very good research has been conducted, but much of it has not been publicized or translated in such a way that it can be used" (Hadaway 1997:35).

➤ The *third reason* is to give advocacy and encouragement to the local urban churches so that they can see urban church planting as their necessity and as a result prioritise it and put it on their agenda. Stuart Murray (2001:15) states that:

Church planting initiatives are in their infancy. Many opportunities for church planting have been identified. And for thousands of churches, the issue of church planting is not even on the agenda. Much more advocacy and encouragement is needed, if the trickle of church planting that has become a stream is to develop into the flood that many believe is vital, if our society is to be effectively evangelized.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The basis of this research was obtained through two research methods, namely, *literature study* and *empirical research*. In developing his methodology, the researcher was informed by the following guidelines:

1.7.1 Literature study

According to Melville & Goddard (1996:18), the term literature study is often used to describe the process of finding out about previous work from a range of sources (*only some of which are literary*). Study of the literature form a fundamental and integral part of the planning and undertaking of the research project (Smit 1995:9). Any good research involves two distinct literature studies:

1.7.1.1 A preliminary literature study

It allows the researcher to get a feel for the topic and issues involved, and to understand how the proposed research would fit into it. This is done as preparation for research and should precede any written proposal to conduct research.

1.7.1.2 A full literature study

It is a far more comprehensive study; this is part of the research process itself than part of the preparation for research. The bulk of this study should be done prior to embarking on experimentation or data collection in order that the results of the study may be used. However, during the course of the research itself, the researcher should 'top up' his knowledge of recent development by reading current publications.

The basis of this research was obtained through literature study, and especially in theological research. Theological books together with the Bible were consulted in order to have relevant information concerning this research. A thorough and in-depth identification and study of relevant sources of information were the fundamental aspects of the compilation of this research project (Smit 1995:22).

1.7.2 Empirical method

An empirical research was conducted in this research project. Other sources like interviews; observations; and questionnaires were conducted in addition to the literature study.

1.7.2.1 Interviews

Melville & Goddard (1996:49) are of the opinion that:

An interview involves a one-on-one verbal interaction between the researcher and a respondent. ...An interview should have a plan. ...One area where researchers would need to use interviews rather than questionnaires would be in getting information from people who can't read. Other advantages of an interview over a questionnaire are that the researcher can ask the respondent to clarify unclear answers and can follow up on interesting answers. Some advantages for a questionnaire over an interview are that the respondents can answer the questionnaire at times that are suitable to them, and the respondents may not be as inhibited in answering sensitive questions. However, a questionnaire is the only practical approach when dealing with many respondents.

The personal interviews were conducted in a group setting where each participant had a self-administered questionnaire which makes it possible to keep anonymity. A researcher called for qualitative data which were gathered in interviews with a few

selected individuals. This was in-depth interviews with an individual where the researcher continued to probe deeper into the responses (Søgaard 1996:103)

1.7.2.2 Questionnaires

Melville & Goddard (1996:43) define a questionnaire as a printed list of questions which respondents are asked to answer. Sapsford (2007:47) defines a questionnaire as a list of questions which informants answer themselves – a ‘self completion’ instrument. According to Søgaard (1996:104) the questions can be both structured¹ and disguised². The questionnaire is regarded as the best method of gathering data. Best and Kahn (1993:17) identified a few advantages of this method:

- Questionnaires demand less time.
- They are economically cheaper.
- They can be administered to large groups as opposed to interviews.
- At times questionnaires can be administered personally, thus, providing the advantages offered by the interview.

With the help of The Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research (IMER) at the University of Pretoria, the researcher has developed a questionnaire to use in the Reformed Church Tshiawelo, in order to obtain the necessary information and to test some of his findings. Church members and church leaders of the Reformed Church Tshiawelo were interviewed through the questionnaire in Appendix A and B.

¹ Structured questions refer to questions where the respondent will either not have any alternatives, or will have to choose between certain alternatives provided on the questionnaire (Søgaard 1996:104).

² Disguised questions refer to the questions where the purpose of the questions is not directly obvious to the respondent (Søgaard 1996:104).

1.7.2.3 Participant observer

In their daily lives people constantly observe reality to gather information. From what they see, they make their diagnosis and interpret events. Certain types of information will have to be gathered through observation (Søgaard 1996:106). In this study the researcher became a participant observer. Being an ordained Minister, he sometimes became a part of the situation being observed because direct observation is one obvious way of seeing what is done in practice and it is an effective way of collecting data (cf Sapsford 2007:142). Leady also indicated that:

Participant observation is characterised by the observer (researcher) becoming a part of the situation being observed. Participant observation is typically conceived of as existing along a continuum with the role of 'completed observer' on one end and the role of 'complete participant' on the other. Depending on the researcher's purpose and skill, different levels of participant observation are more or less appropriate (Leady 1997:159).

1.8 EXPLANATION OF CONCEPTS

1.8.1 Local church

In order to know what a local church is, it is of great importance to know first what a church is. Elwell (1984:231) indicated a good explication of the church in the following way:



The English word “church” derives from the Late Greek word *kyriakon*, the Lord’s house, a church building. In the NT the word translates the Greek word *ekklēsia*. In secular Greek *ekklēsia* designated a public assembly and this meaning is still retained in the NT³. In Hebrew OT the word *qāhāl* designates the assembly for God’s people⁴ and the LXX, the Greek translation of the OT, translated this word with both *ekklēsia* and *synagōgē*. Even in the NT *ekklēsia* may signify the assembly of the Israelites⁵; but apart from these expectations, the word *ekklēsia* in the NT designates the Christian church, both the local⁶ and the universal church⁷.

In this study the word “church” refers to the people of God (cf Heyns 1980:46) and, by implication then, as a pilgrim church⁸. The local church refers to the community of God which is found everywhere in the world. Therefore the local church becomes the church-in-mission Bosch (1991:373).

1.8.2 Urbanization

Greenway and Monsma (1989:xiii) define urbanization as the process by which, in a particular country or region, the percentage of people living in cities increases relative to the rural population, with consequent effects on human life. Where there is rapid urbanization, there is a relative decline in rural population. This process has marked the

³ Ac 19:32, 39, 41.

⁴ Dt 10:4; 23:2-3; 31:30; Ps 22:23.

⁵ Ac 7:38; Heb 2:12.

⁶ Mt 18:17; Ac 15:41; Rm 16:16; 1 Cor 4:17; 7:17; 14:33; Col 4:15.

⁷ Mt 16:18; Ac 20:28; 1 Cor 12:28; 15:9; Eph 1:22.

⁸ Bosch (1991:378) says, “The church-in-mission is, primarily, the local church everywhere in the world”.

major phenomenon of social change in the second half of this century: “By 1950, United Nations’ estimates placed 28, 4 percent of the world population in cities. By 1980, that figure had reached 41, 3 percent. And, by the year 2000, according to UN projections, it will reach 51, 3 percent” (Conn 1993:319). By the year 2025 it will reach 65 percent. In 1961 the Economic and Social Council of UN indicated the rapid growth of urban populations as “one of the most outstanding revolutions of the modern epoch” (Greenway 1972:227).

1.8.3 Urban areas

The word “urban” refers to that which pertains to or characterizes cities in distinction from rural areas. An urban area comprises a city and the communities that are related to and affected by it. An urban region may include a number of cities, towns, and related communities (Greenway and Monsma 1989:xiii).

1.8.4 Urban ministry

The biblical concept of “ministry” is service rendered to God or to people, in this instance to people living in urban areas. Ministry in the church has as its goal the edification of individuals with a view towards corporate maturity in Christ [Eph 4:7-16] (Elwell 1984:271). The concept of ministry or service is seen in the words *diakoneō* “service” and *douleo* “serve as a slave” and their corresponding nouns. The word *hypēretēs* indicates one who gives willing service to another e.g. servants of the “Word” (Lk 1:2), of Christ (Jn 18:36; Ac 26:16; 1 Cor 4:1) and of Paul and Barnabas (Ac 13:37). The term ministry therefore refers to the work both of those commissioned to leadership and of the whole body of believers (Elwell 1984:272).

1.8.5 Urban Church planting

The term “urban church planting” denotes the process whereby new churches are started in urban areas (i.e. in cities, towns, etc). This term is used consistently in this thesis.

1.8.6 Theology of urban mission

Gerald Anderson in *The Concise Dictionary of the Christian mission*, defined theology of mission as, “concerned with the basic presuppositions and underlying principles which determine, from the standpoint of Christian faith, the motives, message, methods, strategy and goals of Christian world mission” (Stephen, Anderson and Goodwin 1971:594). Theology of mission is a multi-and interdisciplinary enterprise. According to Charles Van Engen (1994:248), theology of mission is a relatively new discipline, with its first text appearing in 1961 in a collection of essays edited by Gerald Anderson, entitled *The Theology of Christian Mission* (Anderson 1961).

Theology of mission has to do with three arenas, which will be shown in interlocking circles. The Christians apply biblical and theological presuppositions and values to the enterprise of the church’s ministry and mission, and set them in the context of specific activities carried out in particular times and places. The following figure will illustrate the point.

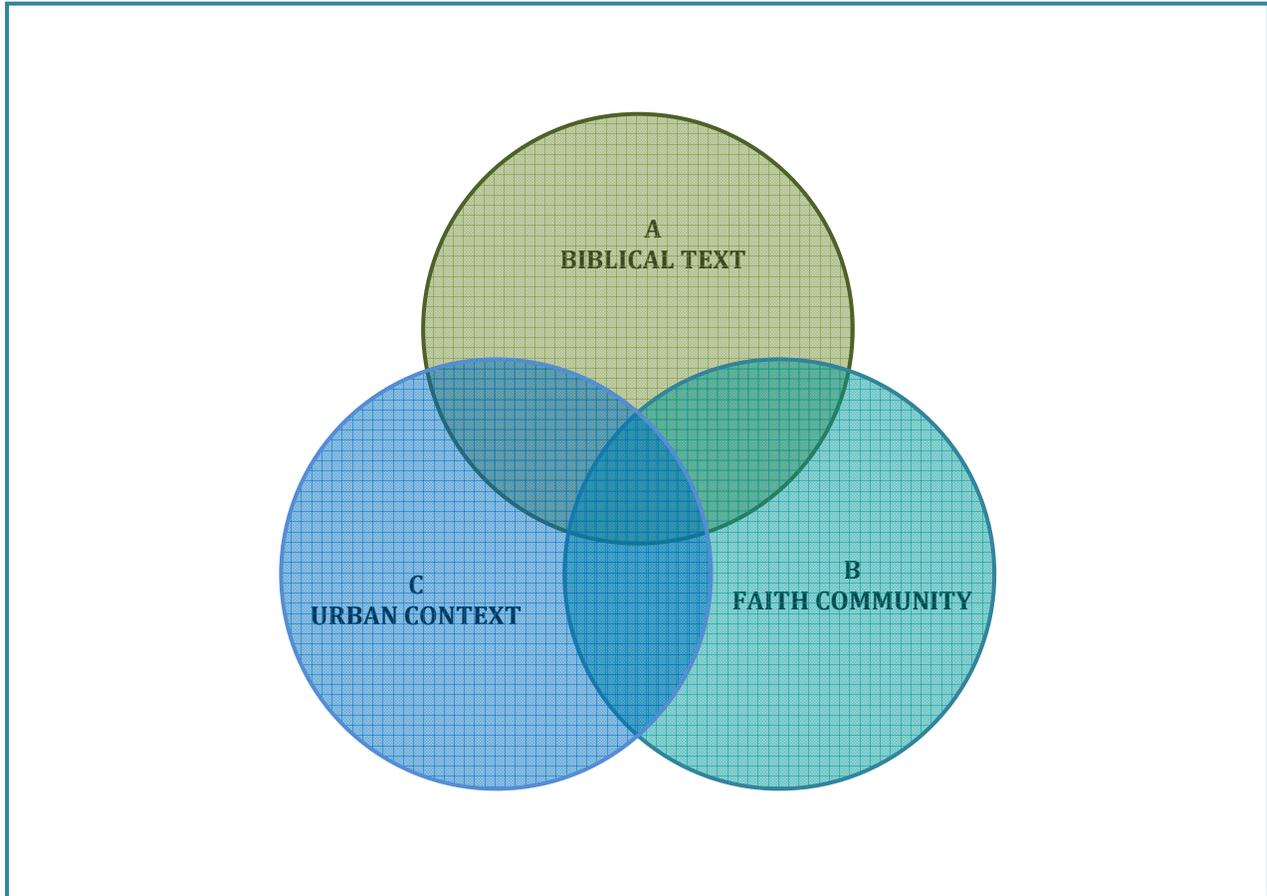


Figure 1.1 The tripartite nature of theology of mission – (Taken from Van Engen 1994:249)

According to Van Engen (1994:249-251) circle A in figure 1.1 above indicates *first*, that the theology of mission is theology, because fundamentally it involves reflection about God. It seeks to understand God's mission, God's intentions and purposes, God's use of human instruments in God's mission, and God's working through God's people in God's world. *Second*, theology of mission is theology of mission (circle C in figure 1.1). Here Christians are dealing with applied theology. This type of theological reflection focuses specifically on a set of particular issues, those concerning the church's mission. *Third*, theology of mission is specially oriented toward and for mission (circle B in figure 1.1). Theology of mission draws its incarnational nature from the ministry of Jesus, and always happens in a specific time and place. Hence circle C involves the missiological use of all

the social science disciplines that help Christians to understand the context in which God's mission takes place.

According to Charles Van Engen (1994:251), there are three things Christians have to consider in order to understand the city. Those things are as follows:

- *First*, Christians borrow from sociology, anthropology, economics, urbanology, the study of Christianity and religious pluralism in the city, psychological issues of urbanism, and a host of other cognate disciplines.
- *Second*, this makes them come to a more particular contextual understanding of the city in terms of a hermeneutic of the reality in which they minister.
- *Third*, this in turn calls them to hear the cries, see the faces, understand the stories, and respond to the living needs and hopes of people.

Charles Van Engen further indicated that the above three overlapping circles indicated in figure 1.1 need not be isolated from each other because when urban life and urban ministry happen, they do so in the midst of all three circles at once (1994:251).

1.9 PRELIMINARY OUTLINE

CHAPTER ONE gives an introduction: it focuses on the relevance of study, problem statement, aim and objectives, hypothesis, central theoretical argument, reasons for studying urban church planting, research methodology and explanation of related concepts.

In **CHAPTER TWO**, the biblical theology of urban mission is discussed. It focuses on what the Old and the New Testaments view about urban mission. In this chapter it is

clearly indicated that God is God who shows great concern to urban mission (Bakke 1997:42-44; DuBose 1983:56; McKeown 2003). Jesus Christ also shows a great concern to urban mission (DuBose 1978:43; Walker 1996:35). The apostles' concern about urban mission was also discussed in this chapter. Cities in the history of the church, is the last issue discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE focuses on urbanization. The researcher pays attention to urban growth (Monsma 1989:108; Linthicum 1991a:17-19; Shorter 1991:1-2). The causes of urban growth were discussed (Grigg 1992:29-30; Shorter 1991:17; Aghamkar 1994:147-148). The researcher ends the chapter by highlighting the problems that are encountered in urban areas because of urban growth, for example, urban poverty, prostitution, street people, crime, HIV/AIDS, etc.

CHAPTER FOUR discusses the development of a comprehensive mission strategy for the church in an urban setting. The church is called by Christ and sent to the world to work on His behalf in all spheres of life. An explication of five dimensions of mission was done. Those dimensions are *kerygma*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *martyria* and *leitourgia* (Van Engen 1993:89; Kritzinger et al 1994:36).

CHAPTER FIVE focuses on mission work of the Reformed Church Tshiawelo in an urban setting. The rebuilding of the Reformed Church Tshiawelo is the main issue discussed in this chapter. This chapter focuses also on equipping and mobilizing Christians for mission, the challenges of the Reformed church Tshiawelo. The last thing discussed in this chapter is the evaluation of the urban mission of the reformed Church Tshiawelo. This was done through the questionnaires that were handed to three groups of people, i.e, mission committee members, Church Council members and church members. The questionnaire included questions that evaluated the mission of the church

through the “Seven I’s” Programme (Kritzinger et al 1994:48), namely; Inspiration, Information, Interpretation, Involvement, Instruction, Investment and intercession.

CHAPTER SIX focuses on the strategies in which the Reformed Church Tshiawelo can utilise to plant churches in metropolitan cities outside Gauteng Province, e.g Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London, Kimberley, etc. The strategies were summarized in four phases which are: Visionary phase, planning phase, preparation phase for church planting and establishment phase of the daughter churches. Principles of urban church planting are also discussed, and the methods of church planting are the last issue discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN is the last chapter. In this chapter the researcher summarises the main findings of his research, discusses the implications of his thesis for both the study of Missiology and the missionary practice of the church. Recommendations in this regard, together with suggestions for further research in future, bring the chapter and the thesis to a close.



CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF URBAN MISSION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is devoted to a discussion of the biblical theology of urban mission. This chapter starts by introducing the biblical theology of mission in general. It focuses on what mission entails, the motives of mission, and specifically on how both the Old and New Testaments view urban mission. It will point out the involvement of the Triune God (God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) in the sending. The Apostle Paul's concern for urban mission will be the last issue to be discussed in this chapter. As urban mission is studied in this chapter from a biblical theology, explication of relevant texts will be done more in this chapter.

2.2 THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF MISSION

2.2.1 What mission entails

When Christians speak about mission, they are speaking about the work or process which always concern "sending". According to DuBose (1983:37), the word "send" whether is it used in a more general or in a special theological sense, always conveys threefold ideas. Those ideas are:

- an intelligent sending "source,"
- a sending "medium" (instrument, agent, etc.), personal or impersonal,
- a sending "purpose".

This simply means that one can not speak of mission in a real sense of the word if it does not have all the three vital ingredients of sending. A mission always has *a source, a medium, and a purpose*.

The researcher does agree with the above idea of DuBose because when he read the Bible, he discovered that there are many missiological texts in the Bible, and those texts have all the three vital ingredients of sending. Here, for example, the researcher constructs a systematic analysis of two of those texts. The *first* text is John 3:17: “God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through Him” (NCV). From this text, all the ingredients of sending are present. God the Father who is the Source in this text sends His Son Jesus Christ, who is the medium of sending, the work that Christ came for “to save the world’ is the purpose of the sending.

The *other* text is 2 Corinthians 5:20: “So we have been sent to speak for Christ. It is as if God is calling to you through us. We speak for Christ when we beg you to be at peace with God” (NCV). The idea of mission is expressed through the concept of the spiritual ambassadorship. All the ingredients of the sending are present without the language as such: the source, the instrument and the purpose. Christ the King sends us, His ambassadors, on His mission to reconcile the world to Christ (cf 2 Cor 5:18-20) (DuBose 1983:56).

2.2.2 The Triune God as involved in the sending

What do Christians understand when they speak of a Triune God? This is the type of question that needs a deep knowledge of theology. In answering this question, the researcher defines the term “Triune God” as the way God reveals Himself to Christians

in three persons, i.e the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Does this mean that Christians have three gods? This does not mean that, but it means that they have the one and only God who revealed Himself to them in three living persons (*Dutch Reformed Church* 1999:4). In a paper read at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, Karl Barth became one of the first theologians to articulate mission as an activity of God Himself (Bosch 1991:389). Throughout, the Barthian influence was crucial. Indeed, Barth may be called the first clear exponent of a new theological paradigm which broke radically with an Enlightenment approach to theology (cf Küng 1987:227). His influence on missionary thinking reached a peak at the Willingen Conference of the IMC (1952). It was here that the idea *missio Dei* first surfaced clearly. Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world (Bosch 1991:390).

There are many texts that speak about the Trinity of God. Christ prescribed baptism “in the name (singular: one God, one name) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, the three persons who are the one God to whom Christians commit themselves (Mt 28:19). So they meet the three persons in the account of Jesus’ own baptism: the Father acknowledged the Son, and the Spirit showed His presence in the Son’s life and ministry (Mk 1:9-11). “For when our Lord was baptized in the Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased’ (Mt 3:17) (NIV); the Son was seen in the water and the Spirit appeared as in the form of a dove” (*Dutch Reformed Church* 1999:5).

According to DuBose (1983:64), the language of sending has special significant implications for the doctrine of the Trinity. It was thus part in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity of God. Bosch (1991:292) further indicated that, “mission is primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate” (cf Kritzinger 1988:42).

Even in the Old Testament, there are hints of this Trinitarian expression in the language of the sending. For example, the psalmist spoke of God sending forth His Spirit to renew the earth (Ps 104:30). A more definite statement is from the voice of the servant in the significant Servant songs of the second section of the servant of the Book of Isaiah: “Draw near to me, hear this! From the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there. And now the Lord GOD has sent me and His Spirit” (Is 48:16) (NRSV).

2.2.2.1 God the Father as the Sender

In the Synoptic Gospels the Kingdom or Reign of God is the central theme in Jesus’ ministry. The opening words of Jesus’ ministry are: “The time has come” He said “The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News” (Mk 1:15) (NIV). Christ’s response to the Galilean people who tried to keep Him in their religion is: “I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God to other towns also, because that is why I was sent” (Lk 4:43) (NIV) (Goheen 2000:137).

Jesus Christ used various forms of the expression, “He who sends me” as a divine title of the Father. Although this concept is also found in the Synoptic Gospels and the Epistles, the Fourth Gospel develops it most completely. In an almost endless variety of

expressions⁹, yet with a remarkably consistent ring, Jesus spoke of the Father who sent Him. For example:

For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (Jn 3:17) (NIV).

I tell you the truth, whoever hears what I say and believes in the One who sent me has eternal life. That person will not be judged guilty but has already left death and entered life (Jn 5:24) (NCV).

Bosch (1991:392) is of the opinion that, “mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love to the people. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people”.

2.2.2.2 God the Son as the Sender

The Gospels make it plain that Jesus, the Son of God, not only was sent but also Himself sends. In fact, in two significant references, Jesus linked the Father’s sending of His own whom the Father had given Him. Christians observe this in the prayer just cited in John 17:18, “I have sent them into the world, just as you sent me into the world” (NCV). This is also indicated in the commission in John 20:21 where Christ said to His disciples, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, I now send you” (NCV) (Goheen 2000:162,178). According to Spindler, the pattern of “being sent out” is the first biblical idea behind the concept and reality of mission. Jesus sent out the twelve apostles (Mt 10:16) and the seventy two disciples (Lk 10:1-12). Jesus said to His disciples, “The

⁹ Jn 4:34; 5:30, 36-38; 6:38-39, 44,57; 7:28-29,33; 8:16,18,26,29,42; 9:4; 12:44-45,49; 13:20; 14:24; 17:3,8,18,25

harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2; Mt 9:38) (NRSV) (Spindler 1995:127, cf Wagner 1984a:19). He further said to them, “As the Father sent me, I now send you” (Jn 20:21) (NCV). In itself the term “apostle” like *Šaliah* in the Jewish tradition, stands for the “one who is sent” or the “envoy”, one who represents with authority, the one who has sent. What is indicated, therefore, is the distinct authority to represent Christ and His Father in the power of the Holy Spirit (Spindler 1995:127).

According to Goheen (2000:136), the commission words of Jesus “As the Father has sent me, I now send you” (Jn 20:21) (NCV) to the embryonic church demonstrate that ecclesiology is dependent on Christology. This mandate gives the church her missional identity and nature; the content of that missional identity and nature is defined by the way the mission of Jesus is understood.

The Synoptic Gospels had emphasized the fact that Jesus sent out the twelve (Mt 10:5, 6), Jesus said to them, “Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (KJV). According to Bonhoeffer (2001:148), “In His very first words Jesus lays down a limitation of the work, a circumstance which they must inevitably have found strange and difficult. The choice of field for their labours does not depend on their own impulses or inclinations, but on where they are sent. This makes it clear that it is not their own work they are doing, but God’s”. The Synoptic Gospels also emphasized the sending of the seventy (Lk 10:1). Jesus emphasized His sending role to His disciples: “I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me” (Jn 13:20) (NIV). This small group of disciples was the nucleus of the community He prepared to continue His mission: they were to continue His mission as the Father had sent Him (Scherer and Bevans 1992:133). L.A. Hoedemaker is of the

opinion that: “The church is related to the whole world, that its origin has to do with a vision for the whole of humankind, in short that the church is “sent” is one of the fundamental givens of the Christian faith. In the church and in the theology “mission” is a key word, and that has always been the case” (Hoedemaker 1995:157).

2.2.2.3 God the Holy Spirit as the Sender

The New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit both as being sent and as sending. Jesus spoke of His sending the Holy Spirit: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you“(Jn 16:7) (KJV). More Trinitarian in its impact is the two significant passages relating both the divine Father and the divine Son in the sending of the divine Spirit. In John 14:26, Jesus said that the Father will send the Spirit in the Son’s name; and in John 15:26, Jesus said that He will send the Spirit from the Father. DuBose (1983:66) indicates that full Trinitarian impact of the divine apostolate awaits the role of the Holy Spirit as Himself the Sender. This is dramatically illustrated in Acts 13:1-4:

In the church at Antioch there were these prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon (also called Niger), Lucius (from the city of Cyrene), Manaen (who had grown up with Herod, the ruler), and Saul. They were all worshiping the Lord and giving up eating for a certain time. During this time the Holy Spirit said to them, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to do a special work for which I have chosen them.” So after they gave up eating and prayed, they laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them out. Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went



to the city of Seleucia. From there they sailed to the island of Cyprus (Ac 13:1-4) (NCV) (cf Marshall 1983:213-218).

The Holy Spirit led the Church in Antioch of Syria in the dedication of Paul and Barnabas for their mission (Johnson 1987:53; cf Bavinck 1960:280). After the Church released them for their special mission assignment, Luke spoke climactically of Paul and Barnabas “being sent by the Holy Spirit (Ac 13:4).

According to Goheen (2000:183), the Book of Acts gives us a full exposition of the Holy Spirit as the primary agent of mission. The Spirit is poured out at Pentecost and immediately the eschatological gathering of God’s people begins. The Spirit continues to be the primary agent of mission. He brings Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Ac 8), prepares Ananias to receive Saul as a brother (Ac 9), prepares Peter and Cornelius for their encounter (Ac 10), initiates the first mission to the Gentiles (Ac 13), and guides the Apostles on their journeys (Ac 16:7).

2.3 DIFFERENT VIEWS CONCERNING THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE CITY

The fundamental question that might come to people when they hear about the biblical theology of the city might be, “What is a biblical theology of the city?” A biblical theology of the city refers to a way of viewing the city from a God point of view or from a God frame of reference. Concerning this biblical theology of the city, DuBose (1978:100-101) is of the opinion that:

The urban theme of the Bible is a very rich one. It furnishes us ample understanding of the city and therefore provides us a guide for

discerning both the negative and positive meaning of urban reality. The city is more than geography and artifact, however; it is first and foremost people. It is people who are compelled to structure their lives in terms of the demands of the urban way of life. The Bible has an uncanny way of speaking to that way of life, furnishing us with profound insight into its meaning and its implication for church life in a complex urban setting. The beautiful thing about the theological principles at work in New Testament church growth is that we do not have to find a way to relate them to the urban setting. The New Testament does this for us. However, the Bible does not suddenly thrust us into the Book of Acts with its marvelous account of church growth. Moreover, it is not the Book of Acts which first introduces us to the city. The Old Testament as well as the Gospels have prepared us. The God of the Bible has been at work in the cities from their very beginning. To see how He has been at work – to view the wide panorama of the city in the Bible – will give us the best basis for an understanding of the New Testament context of church growth. We must know the whole city and the whole truth about it. The Bible provides us with this understanding.

2.3.1 The negative image of the city

2.3.1.1 The city of Satan

According to Harvie M. Conn, Babylon was one of the first urban development projects recorded in the Bible. Her architects planned her as “the gate of the gods” (Gn 11:4). She ended as the place of confusion, the epitome of non communication (Gn 11:7-9) (Conn 1987:37). John, the author of the Book of Revelation first paints a picture of Babylon as the city of Satan (Rv 17:1-19:10) (Brooks 1986:151-160). Here we examine

the eventual result of a city which has no redeeming value, a city given over to the wholehearted worship and pursuit of evil. What caused the archetypal Babylon, the great city, city of power as indicated in Revelation 18:10, to be dumped by God? There are many reasons given by John, the author of the Book of Revelation. Here the researcher will give some of them, and also give an explanation so that we can clearly understand the reason why Babylon was dumped by God, and regarded as the city of evil.

The first reason is that, Babylon has become the city of Satan because she committed idolatry. Babylon has committed herself to the worship of the emperor and of the empire which he personifies (cf Rv 17:1-2; 18:2-3, 9-10). There are two words used to explicate the sin of Babylon. The words used are “prostitutes” and “adultery”. By seeing these words, one can think that Babylon committed adultery. Adultery is used regularly by the Old Testament prophets as a pseudonym for idolatry (e.g., Jr 3:8; 29:23; Ezk 16:32; 23:37). According to Linthicum (1991a:281), for Babylon to commit herself solely to emperor worship was not only to bring about her spiritual disintegration, but also to cause the corruption of the people of her city, and the nations and kings around her. With her total and complete submission to emperor worship and idolatry, Babylon’s spiritual interior had become irredeemably evil. Babylon had become the city of Satan first of all because she had committed herself to the worship of another god.

The second reason is that, Babylon had given herself to the unconditional exploitation of the world in order to foster her own economic security and luxury (Rv 17:4-5; 18:11-19). Babylon’s demand for wealth, economic security, and luxury has brought the wealth of the world to her; it was brought through both economic power and her military strength (cf Mounce 1977:309-310). To John, the author of the Book of Revelation, the serious misuse of the economic order was equal to the sin of idolatry.

Babylon's greed and lust for wealth and economic security impacted on the rest of the world, leaving her helpless and destitute, unable to cope with either the national or the individual demands of life. This implies that the radical impoverishment of the world, both of its peoples and its natural resources, meant nothing to Babylon, as long as she could have her little niceties and obscene luxuries.

The third reason is that, Babylon radically misused her political power in order to oppress those people who represented a threat to her. John, the author of the Book of Revelation indicated this point in the following way:

Then I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people and with the blood of those who were killed because of their faith in Jesus. When I saw the woman, I was very amazed (Rv 17:6) (NCV).

You are guilty of the death of the prophets and God's holy people and all who have been killed on earth (Rv 18:24) (NCV).

The above two texts, point out two groups of people who were persecuted unto death by Babylon. Those groups are *the prophets* and *the saints* (Christians). According to Linthicum (1991a:283), the prophets were persecuted because they were questioning the intentional idolatry, the economic exploitation of the world for the accumulation of that city's luxury, and both the political suppression of dissidents and the oppression of all who would question the ethics and intentions of the city's government. The Christians on the other hand questioned the policies which the economic, political, and religious systems of Babylon were using to deceive both themselves and their citizens. The Christians also proclaimed by their very lifestyle a way of life in total opposition to the one which the people and systems of the city had accepted as their own. The

marriage of the economics of privilege and exploitation, the politics of oppression, and a religion of idolatrous control inevitably resulted in the martyrdom of the poor, the prophetic, and the spiritually liberated of the city. There was no longer any place for such in a city given over solely to Satan.

As the Almighty God does not tolerate sins, He did not tolerate the sins of the city of Babylon. He promised to destruct Babylon for her sins (cf Rv 18:21-19:4). John, the author of the Book of Revelation indicated this in his book when he says:

After this vision and announcement I heard what sounded like a great many people in heaven saying: "Hallelujah! Salvation, glory, and power belong to our God, because His judgments are true and right. He has punished the prostitute who made the earth evil with her sexual sin. He has paid her back for the death of his servants." Again they said: "Hallelujah! She is burning, and her smoke will rise forever and ever" (Rv 19:1-3) (NCV) (Mounce 1977:336-338).

According to Linthicum (1991a:284), the city of Babylon was rejected by God and physically annihilated because she has given herself over fully to economic exploitation and privilege, political oppression of the weak and of the truth-tellers, and the selection of either her economic or her political order to serve as the center of her true and daily religion. Such seduction of Babylon's systems has led to the city's demonic domination by her principalities and powers, so that the interior spirituality of the city has become irredeemably evil. Such is the inevitable end of any city that allows herself to become the city of Satan.

2.3.1.2 The symbol of evil

According to DuBose (1978:102), the city seems to get off to a bad start in the Bible. The first urban reference in the Book of Genesis is a negative one, associating the building of the first city with the murderer Cain. Jacques Ellul further elaborated the idea of DuBose by indicating that:

The city is the direct consequence of Cain's murderous act and his refusal to accept God's protection. Cain has built a city. For God's Eden he substitutes his own, for the goal given to his life by God, he substitutes a goal chosen by himself – just as he substituted his own security for God's. Such is the act by which Cain takes his destiny on his own shoulders, refusing the hand of God in his life (Ellul 1970:5).

From Jacques Ellul's point of view, it is clear that he sees in Cain the prototype of all city builders and interprets the whole urban theme of the Bible from this premise. To him the city in the Bible represents the epitome of human rebellion against God, an attempt by man in his pride to construct his own social, political, economic, and even moral defenses in defiance of the will and purpose of God for man. It is undeniable that the developing urban drama of Genesis seems to confirm these early suspicions about the city and thus give credence to the view of Jacques Ellul.

The negative view of the city is not one which is confined to the Book of Genesis. The Old Testament prophets seemed equally sensitive to the evil capability of the city and urban life. For example, Micah exclaims: "The voice of the LORD cries to the city (it is sound wisdom to fear your name): Hear, O tribe and assembly of the city! Can I forget the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is

accused? "(NRSV) (Mi 6:9-10). Prophet Ezekiel also declared that the land is full of blood and the city is full of violence (Ezk 7:23) and he further indicated that "the land is full of blood and the city is full of injustice" (Ezk 9:9).

According to Bakke (1997:184) throughout the Bible, Babylon is a symbol of the city which is anti-God. Literally the name means "gate to God". The Babylonian disease leads a city to build towers that breach heaven's gates. Babylon was also the destroyer of Jerusalem, her temple and monarchy. The biblical references to Babylon in the New Testament are in Revelation 16:17-18:24. According to Brooks (1986:151) the subject of Revelation chapters 17 and 18, which belong very intimately together, is Babylon. Babylon is portrayed as the great prostitute seated on many waters, representing the various nationalities that Babylon subjugated (Rv 17:1, 15) (Arnold 2003). She is called 'Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations' (Rv 17:5) (NRSV) (Brooks 1986:152). DuBose (1978:103-104) indicates that "Babylon is described in the most repulsive terms conceivable: as the 'mother of harlots and of earth's abominations' who is 'drunk with the blood of the saints' (Rv 17:5-6)" (NRSV). But Babylon is a code name for Rome, for Revelation 17:18 states: "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth" (NRSV). Because of her great pride and luxurious living at the expense of those she tormented, Babylon's downfall is swift and total. "For in one hour your judgment has come" (Rv 18:10; 14, 17, 19) (NRSV). Arnold (2003) indicated that first-century readers of Revelation have undoubtedly understood 'Babylon' as a cipher for Rome, which could not have been openly criticized (cf Watson 1992). Just as ancient Babylon had been the wicked and ruthless enemy of God's people in Old Testament times, so now the Roman Empire was the enemy of Christians. The passage thus symbolizes the rapacious and violent nature of the imperial power sought by many earthly kingdoms. According to Arnold (2003), nations have continued to satiate their relentless appetite for secular power, but the practices of

real politic will not succeed for ever. Just as the early Christians celebrated the downfall of Rome, so every generation of believers waits expectantly for the end of oppressive world empires.

2.3.2 The positive image of the city

2.3.2.1 The city of God

It was clearly taught in the Old Testament that Jerusalem was something special, for she was the place that God had ordained and where His name would dwell (Dt 12:11), and even in ruins (Is 44:5; 49:16) affirmations could be made on her behalf and her future could be anticipated (Zch 8:21; Ps 86:9) (Bakke 1997:63).

According to Walker (1996:33), Jesus regarded Jerusalem as the 'city of the Great King'. This principle is seen most clearly in connection with Jesus' statement that His followers should not swear 'by Jerusalem' because she was the 'city of the Great King' (Mt 5:35). By using this phrase Jesus affirms that Jerusalem is a city with which God, the Great King, has been pleased to identify Himself. "A city, namely Jerusalem itself, became a symbol of God's presence and power in the world" (Bakke 1997:63). Linthicum (1991a:285) is of the opinion that the other archetypal city presented in the Book of Revelation is the New Jerusalem. This is the city which is totally dedicated to God: City as God has always intended city to be. She is described fully in Revelation 21:1-22:5. There is perhaps no greater description of the city of God than that which follows:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and there was no sea anymore. And I saw the



Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. She was prepared like a bride dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Now God’s presence is with people, and he will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain, because all the old ways are gone” (Rv 21:1-4) (NCV).

The researcher does agree with the above idea indicated by Robert C. Linthicum. In order to understand clearly what Linthicum said above, the researcher will elucidate three points that will help to understand the context of the nature of the city of God as indicated in the Book of Revelation 21:1-8.

First, verse 1 indicates that the city of God exists only within the context of a new order. She is built around a new physical environment and upon a new social order. The reason for this affirmation becomes clear in verse 2 where John the author of Revelation says, “I saw the Holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It was prepared like a bride dressed for her husband” (NCV). Both the image of a new environment and order and the image of an entire city being let down upon the earth exists by God’s actions, and not humanity’s. The timing for when the cities of this earth becomes the city of God will depend upon God’s activities, and not ours. We can not build the city of God, but our task is to faithfully practice our vocation as God’s people in the city through the presence, prayer, practice, and proclamation of the church (cf Mounce 1977:368-371).

Second, the context of God’s city is understood by showing Christians that the one who promises this city to them and will accomplish her formation is the only true God. This

is indicated in verse 6, where God is “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End”. This is the God who stood faithfully by His people from the call of the patriarch Abraham to leave the city of Ur to the call of the church into the city of the new Jerusalem, from the formation of Israel through Moses’ confrontation of the principality of Egypt to the church’s confrontation of a “divine Roman emperor” demanding worship, from the beginning of creation to the end of time. This God causes to be what is caused to be, and thus will bring to pass the city He has promised.

God’s city is meant to be a refuge for all of the world’s believing immigrant population. In God’s city, there are no slums, no squatter settlements, no *favellas* or *barrios* or *bustees*! There are neither governmental policies to try to keep people out nor any economic standards which exclude the marginalized from effective participation in the marketplace. God has built the city for the whole world! (Linthicum 1991a:287).

Robert C. Linthicum is of the opinion that, “The indicators of what God intends the city of God to be like are quite obvious. This will be a city fully under God, a religious environment where all will be in relationship with God and thus in *shalom* with each other (Rv 21:3, 6-8, 22; 22:3-4)” (Linthicum 1991a:289). God’s city will also be practicing an economics of plenty, equitable distribution, and security (Rv 21:13-14, 18-21, 26-27; 22:1-2). This will include a transformation of the natural order of death, illness, grief, and pain will be gone (Rv 21:4, 25).

Finally, the researcher concludes by indicating that, the city of God will have a political order which is centered in God with room for everyone, a city whose political life will be completely just and in which everyone will play a part in the city’s governance (Rv

21:24-25; 22:5). The principalities and powers remain a part of the city's life. But God transforms the powers, for here they are in the service of God, and consequently, of the people of the city (Rv 22:9, cf. Rm 8:19-21; Phlp 2:10-11; Hb 12:22).

2.3.2.2 A symbol of Good

In the Book of Joshua, God gave a direct order to Joshua to designate certain cities of refuge. The purpose of those cities was to serve as havens for persons guilty of manslaughter where they might flee the "avenger of blood" until a fair hearing could be held. Those cities therefore symbolized both mercy and justice. Moreover, they were built not by any motivation of man, let alone one man's pride and rebellion against God. Those cities were established by a direct order from God Himself and were therefore of divine motivation and origin (see Jos 20) (DuBose 1978:104).

What is interesting is that, even though the prophets were deeply aware of the potential for evil in the city, they were equally appreciative of the potential for good in the city. Prophet Ezekiel, whose negative views of urban life have already been cited (i.e in Ezk 7:23; 9:9), also has some very positive pictures of the city. In the close of his prophecy where he describes the restored city, Ezekiel reaches for a name which would best characterize this restored city. The very last line reveals that name: "And the name of the city henceforth shall be 'The Lord is there'" (Ezk 48:35) (NCV). Here the city becomes the very symbol of the presence of God Himself, the city to the Great King (Mt 5:35) (Walker 1996:33).

Francis M. DuBose is of the opinion that, the ultimate imagery of the Bible is strongly urban. He indicated this by citing an example of the city of Jerusalem as it is indicated in Psalm 46 and in the Book of Revelation 22:



The symbolism of Jerusalem is rich in imagery. Jerusalem became Mount Zion and thus incorporated the ancient idea of equating God's presence with "the holy mountain." It also incorporated the garden qualities of the Edenic paradise, though the language of Eden as such is carefully avoided. This is illustrated in such passages as Psalm 46:4: "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High." The Book of Revelation employs a similar figure in describing the New Jerusalem: "Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city" (Rv 22;1-2) (DuBose 1978:107).

2.4 URBAN MISSION FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

2.4.1 God's concern for the city of Nineveh

From the Old Testament we find that God showed a great concern for a sinful city of Nineveh. What were the sins of Nineveh? Nineveh was a city of cultural achievement and also of injustice, oppression, and violence (Jnh 1:2). She was the betrayer of nations and a city of harlotries. Every form of vice and witchcraft was practiced, and even its artistic achievements were fouled by obscenities and idolatry. According to Greenway (1989a:9), in scripture, the call to urban mission begin with the prophet Jonah and God's commission to go to Nineveh¹⁰ to preach a message of doom to the wicked inhabitants of Nineveh (Jnh 1:2) (McKeown 2003; Fernando 1988d:26). God's command

¹⁰ Nineveh was a *great city* Jonah 1:2. God's common grace was richly displayed there. It was not only a large metropolis, the capital of a powerful empire; it was famous for her beauty. Because of sin, the prophet Nahum (Nahum 3:1) called her "the city of blood". For violence and plunder made it what it was.

to Jonah is well known: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city” (Jnh 1:2; 3:1) (DuBose 1983:56). Rejecting this commission, Jonah boarded a ship and went in the opposite direction (Jnh 1:3). According to Bakke (1997:98), Nineveh was east, but Jonah went west. A violent storm pummeled the ship until sailors were forced to throw Jonah overboard (Jnh 1:12-16). But God provided a great fish to swallow Jonah and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights (Jnh 1:17). “Jonah speaks of being in the fish as being in ‘Sheol’, the place of the dead (Jnh 2:2). It was as if God was saying that this thing of great power, this thing which signifies death and destruction, even this thing God can use to fulfill His purposes” (Fernando 1988b:37). After being brought to land by a larger fish, Jonah complied with God’s renewed command and warned the people of Nineveh about their impending doom (1:17-3:4) (McKeown 2003). On the first day, Jonah started into the city of Nineveh. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned” (Jnh 3:4) (NIV). According to Fernando, starting to preach must have been very difficult for Jonah. Jonah did not overcome this difficulty by secretly entering the city at night and whispering the message to a few people. We are told that he cried out, he proclaimed. But once the start was made, the first big hurdle overcome, the news seems to have spread like wild fire. These people had already been prepared by God came in crowds to hear him (Fernando 1988c:49). Ninevites responded with repentance, and consequently God graciously averted the threatened destruction of their city (3:5-10). After their repentance we are told that they declared a fast and that they all of them from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth (Fernando 1988c:51). It is interesting to see the people of Nineveh repented (see Jnh 4:5-10) from their sins and it pleased God (see Jnh 4:11). According to Müller (1987:57-58) God proved to Himself to be a merciful and forgiving God and so Jonah was angry. God had a hard time convincing him of his intolerance and the narrowness of his piety. “Then shouldn’t I show concern for the great city Nineveh, which has more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know right from wrong, and many animals, too?” (NCV) (Jnh 4:11) (Fernando 1988a:68).

Müller (1987:58) states that Jonah 4:11 shows more than any other text that Yahweh is the God of all men and has mercy on all who call on Him. The God of revelation does not exclude anyone from His salvation, not in the Old and still less in the New Testament.

According to Bakke (1997:97-98), Jonah and Nahum, taken together form a historical parenthesis around Nineveh and God's dealings with what was arguably the most violent city in the ancient Near East. The hero of the Jonah story is not the prophet or the fish, but the struggle of the Almighty God to get a message of grace and forgiveness to the capital of the Assyrian Empire.

2.4.2 God's concern for the city of Sodom

"Sodom is mentioned more than fifty times in the Bible. People who know almost nothing about the Bible seem to know a great deal about this city, for its reputation for sex and violence has flourished in the worldwide film industry" (Bakke 1997:39).

According to Bakke (1997:42), the immediate context contrasts Sodom with even greater debaucheries of Jerusalem, which faced her own punishing judgment at the hand of Babylon. What specifically was the terrible sin of Sodom that displeased Almighty God? The rich were getting richer and were proud of their extravagant surpluses while the poor were getting poorer. And because in the midst of their awful haughtiness they did not aid the poor and needy, God said, "I did away with them."

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and the needy (Ezk. 16:49) (KJV).



Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 7) (KJV).

Bakke (1997:44-45) is of the opinion that “back in our Genesis account, Abraham faced Sodom and prayed earnestly for it”. Abraham took a long conversation with God pleading for the salvation of Sodom (Gn 18:26-36) (NIV):

The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?”

“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”

Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?”

He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

In this context, Abraham's prayer for Sodom is very significant precisely because it's a prayer of negotiation with God to save a wicked city. And, in fact, God's response is that the city will indeed be saved if ten righteous residents can be found within her. But what happened is that God destroyed Sodom, and saved Lot from Sodom (DuBose 1987:41).

2.4.3 God's concern for the city of Jerusalem

Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem,
look around and consider,
search through her squares.
If you can find but one person
who deals honestly and seeks the truth,
I will forgive this city (Jr 5:1) (NIV).

Ray Bakke (1997:44) says, "Now, remembering that ten people could have saved Sodom – and should have saved it, as both Abraham and God desired. Consider God's words to Jerusalem before her exile: 'Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city' (Jr 5:1) (NIV)". Ray Bakke further indicated that, "Just imagine the agony of God at the multiplied sins of Jerusalem. Now He is not asking for ten righteous as He did to Sodom; He is looking for just one righteous urbanite. That is all! The presence and righteous power of one person could have spared Jerusalem" (Bakke 1997:44).

God is looking for a few righteous people who will live in every city. But in Jerusalem it was the opposite, all people were living unrighteous lives, this is clearly indicated in Isaiah 59:14-21. The prophets discerned divine judgment upon the city, and they denounced her for her disregard of Yahweh (Is 22:11), her idolatry (Jr 7:17-18; Ezk 8:3), the corruption of her leaders (Jr 13:13; Mi 3:10), oppression of the poor (Mi 6:9-16), and her failure to observe the Sabbath (Jr 17:19-23) (Walker 2003). Why was God angry? More than angry – provoked furious (Is 59:18). He saw the sins of Jerusalem, and no one would do anything about it. So God acted righteously, delivered the city, restored the communities for families and sent the Spirit to live in the city with them (Bakke 1997:44).

2.5 URBAN MISSION FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

2.5.1 Jesus' concern for urban mission from the perspective of the Gospels

Jesus' life was centred mainly in an urban setting. He was born and bred in Galilee, "industrial complex" of Palestine, was crucified and resurrected in the city of Jerusalem. During Jesus time, Jerusalem was an awesome urban centre compared to the general social context of the day.

2.5.1.1 He preached in cities

The major thrust of Jesus' ministry was in the population centers of His day: "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the

people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them” (Mt 9:35-36) (KJV) (DuBose 1978:43).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes that:

The Saviour looked with compassion on His people, the people of God. He could not rest satisfied with the few who heard His call and followed. He shrank from the idea of forming an exclusive little coterie with His disciples. Unlike the founders of the great religions, He had no desire to withdraw them from the vulgar crowd and initiate them into an esoteric system of religion and ethics. He had worked and suffered for the sake of all His people (Bonhoeffer 2001:143).

The urban milieu of Jesus goes far beyond Galilee. Jerash in North Jordan, high in the Gilead hills, is one of the ten cities called Decapolis¹¹ where Jesus ministered and to which apostles (the former disciples) carried the Gospel after Pentecost. British scholar N.G.L. Hammond, in his study of Alexander the Great, suggests that these cities represented nearly total Macedonian control of the region, the area in Transjordan from Moab to Damascus. According to Matthew 4:25 and Mark 5:20, 31, Jesus’ message spread through these areas (Bakke 1997:131).

¹¹ **DESPOILS:** ten cities=deka, ten, and polis, a city, a district on the east and south-east of the Sea of Galilee containing “ten cities,” which were chiefly inhabited by Greeks. It included a portion of Bashan and Gilead, and is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Matt. 4:25; Mark 5:20; 7:31). These cities were Scythopolis, i.e., “city of the Scythians”, (ancient Bethshean, the only one of the ten cities on the west of Jordan), Hippos, Gadara, Pella (to which the Christians fled just before the destruction of Jerusalem), Philadelphia (ancient Rabbath-ammon), Gerasa, Dion, Canatha, Raphana, and Damascus. When the Romans conquered Syria (B.C. 65) they rebuilt, and endowed with certain privileges, these “ten cities,” and the province connected with them they called “Decapolis” (Bakke 1997:131).

What was the content of Jesus' ministry in urban areas? The ministry of Jesus Christ in urban areas includes the following:

- (a) Preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Mt 9:35)
- (b) He had compassion for the people (Mt 9:36)
- (c) He healed the sick (Mt 9:35; Mk 6:35)
- (d) He noticed population growth in the cities, and also the necessity for many leaders (Mt 9:37-38)
- (e) He gave warning to the unrepentant cities (Mt 11:20-24)

2.5.1.2 His concern for the city of Jerusalem

Jesus' concern for the city of Jerusalem is clearly recorded in Luke 13:34-35 and in Matthew 23:37-39. Jesus' cry, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" is a profound statement by Jesus concerning God's mission in the city (Walker 1996:25). It makes clear God's loving commitment to be involved with, and related to, the city. Dubose is of the opinion that Jesus loved the city of Jerusalem and wept over it: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not?" (Mt 23:37) (DuBose 1978:43; cf Walker 1996:35, 57).

Van Engen (1994:242) indicated that, "Although Jerusalem killed the prophets; God did not flee from or gave up on, Jerusalem. Instead God sent His son, who came as King David's descendant, who came 'in the name of the Lord', who came riding on a donkey on His way to the cross and the empty tomb – events that occurred in the midst of, and

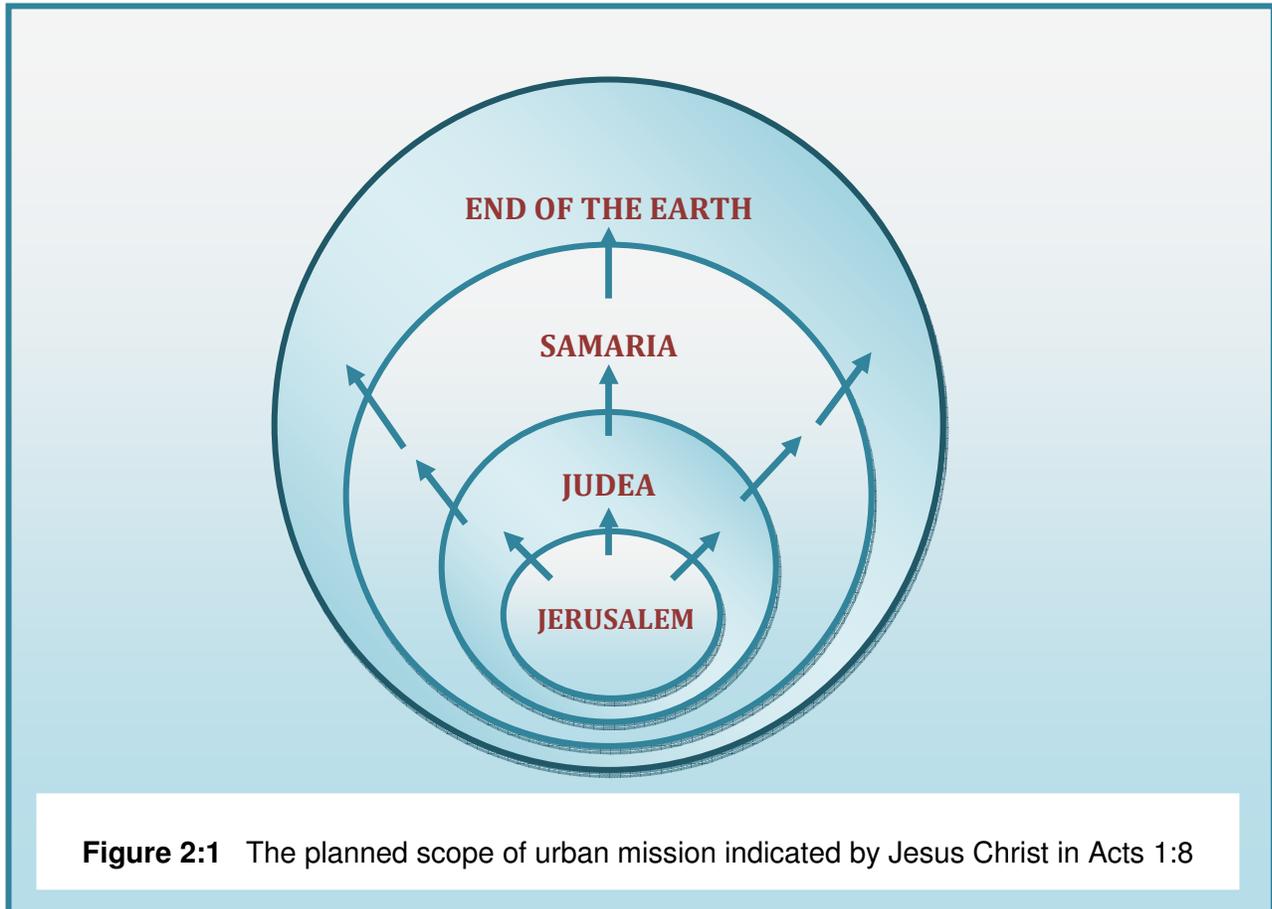
for the sake of, Jerusalem”. From the words of Jesus about a city of Jerusalem, we hear the deep pain of an urban missionary.

As a fitting climax to His earthly ministry, Jesus commanded His disciples to tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Lk.24:49) (cf Walker 1996:76). They were admonished to tarry, not in some rural haven, not in some desert cave, but in the city of Jerusalem – where He had been crucified, where a hostile urban establishment prevailed, where the problems were, where the action was, where the influence was (DuBose 1978:43-44).

2.5.1.3 He sent His disciples to preach in cities

Jesus commissioned the twelve and the seventy. “These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, ‘Go and preach’” (Mt 10:5, 7) (NIV). They were commissioned to proclaim His Word to the towns and villages: “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting” (Mt 10:11) (NIV). The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out in pairs ahead of Him into every town and place where He planned to go. He said to them, “There are a great many people to harvest, but there are only a few workers. So pray to God, who owns the harvest, that He will send more workers to help gather His harvest. Go now, but listen! I am sending you out like sheep among wolves” (NCV) (Lk 10:1-3) (DuBose 1983:56).

2.5.2 Jesus' concern for urban mission from the perspective of the Book of Acts



Jesus Christ in Acts 1:8 told His disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes, and as a result, they will be His witnesses from the city of Jerusalem, all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Boer 1982:93; cf Walker 1996:81). The scope of the disciples' task was worldwide (Marshall 1983:60). Roger S. Greenway is of the opinion that the mission movement of the New Testament was primarily an urban movement. After Pentecost, the Gospel spread from city to city and from city to the surrounding countryside (Greenway 1989d:13). This is quite clear that God, through

Christ, showed His great concern of spreading *missio Dei* to urban areas. Here the researcher will highlight on some of the cities in the New Testament that were targeted as mission field.

2.5.2.1 Jerusalem

According to DuBose (1978:44), it is significant that the church had her beginning in Jerusalem. As an urban movement, she was indigenous to her context. From the beginning she assumed the complexion of an urban institution. The evangelism of an early church took on a massive character in keeping with the institution of the mass public meeting typical of the first great urban wave.

According to Walker (1996:87), Jerusalem had been the source of the Gospel and also some of the Gospel's blessings had been experienced by Jewish people within their own 'mother-city'. Not only had the Gospel been openly proclaimed there, it had also produced a significant response; Luke wished this to be put on record for posterity. The Spirit had been powerfully at work in the city (Ac 2-7). Even if subsequently the Jerusalem church found herself in a difficult situation, Luke's portrait of the earliest days was bright (Ac 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:13-16; 6:7) (cf Marshall 1983:82-127).

2.5.2.2 Judea

According to Boer (1982:94), the Gospel to all Judea was brought by some of the Hellenist Jews who became Christians in Jerusalem. They scattered and preached the Gospel outside Jerusalem during persecution that was led by Stephen's death. The whole of Palestine was reached with the Gospel (Marshall 1983:177). The church in

Judea had peace and was built up; and she walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit she was multiplied (Ac 9:31) (cf Peterson 2003).

2.5.2.3 Samaria

The establishment of the Church in Samaria is recorded in Acts 8. The believers, who had fled Jerusalem during persecution, went everywhere preaching the Good News about Jesus. Philip, for example, as indicated in Acts 8, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah (Boer 1982:94). Crowds listened intently to what he had to say because of the miracles he did. Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city (Richardson 1978:91).

A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, claiming to be someone great. The Samaritan people, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as “the Great One—the Power of God.” He was very influential because of the magic he performed. But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself believed and was baptized (Marshall 1983:159-160). He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the great miracles and signs Philip performed (Richardson 1978:91-92). According to DuBose (1978:45), so great was the response that the apostles at Jerusalem, hearing the good report, sent Peter and John to Samaria to develop new Christian community there (Ac 8:14).

2.5.2.4 Antioch

The city of Antioch was known for both positive and negative things. The researcher will focus first on the positive things that the city of Antioch was known for, then her negative things, and then lastly, he will focus on how the Gospel reached this city.

(a). The positive things of the city of Antioch

According to Marshall (1983:201), Antioch the capital city of the Roman province of Syria had grown rapidly to become the third largest city in the Empire with a population estimated at around 500,000 (cf Greenway 1989a:31, Johnson 1987:46). According to Bakke (1991:146), the population of Antioch was between 500,000 – 800,000. The city of Antioch had everything to offer. Known as “Antioch the Beautiful,” the city undertook a tremendous building program, which was financed jointly by Augustus and Herod. According to Bakke (1997:145), Antioch on the Orontes was the most famous of the sixteen Antioch cities founded in honor of Antiochus I, the father of Selucius. Her athletic stadiums drew thousands to see the annual games. Antioch was the center for diplomatic relations with Rome’s vassal states in the East and a meeting point for many nationalities and cultures. She was a place where East and West came together, a truly cosmopolitan center (Greenway 1989b:32). According to DuBose (1978:45), Antioch was the second Christian center after Jerusalem.

(b). The negative things of the city of Antioch

According to Greenway (1989b:32), archeological excavations indicate that every religious movement in the ancient world was represented in Antioch. Magnus Zetterholm (2003:26) is of the opinion that, “in Antioch as in every other major city, the

gods of the Greek pantheon were well represented through temples and statues”. Different cults were found in Syria, such as the cults of Zeus, Athene and Apollo and the rest of the Greek pantheon. “Zeus and Apollo enjoyed a special status in Antioch since they were considered the protectors and founders of the Seleucid dynasty, and when the city was founded Seleucus I erected a temple for Zeus and a statue of Apollo” (Zetterholm 2003:25). “There were also the Syrian worship of Baal and the Mother Goddess, and the mystery religions with their teachings on death and resurrection, initiation, and salvation. Occultism was common along with magic, witchcraft, and astrology” (Greenway 1989b:32). At the root of the pagan conception of deity in Syria lies the idea of *ba’al*, carrying the primary meaning of ownership or possession (Wallace-Hadrill 1982:15). ‘The network of interconnected pagan cults in Syria had grown from the early Semitic conception of *ba’al* into the more clearly-defined pantheos of local deities, who in turn had to a considerable extent been overlaid first by the Hellenistic pantheon introduced by Alexander the Great, and then again by the Roman pantheon” (Wallace-Hadrill 1982:14). According to Greenway (1989b:32), Antioch was also known for her immorality. The dancing girls of Antioch were the talk of the Mediterranean world. As a large and rich commercial center, Antioch embodied the voluptuousness and corruption of a pagan society untouched by Christian influence. The city rivaled Corinth as a center for vice, and the Roman poet Juvenal, writing near the end of the first century A.D., charged that the wickedness of Antioch was one of the sources of Rome’s corruption.

(c). Witnessing Christ to the city of Antioch

The church in Antioch was founded by laypersons who were scattered by the persecution that arose in connection with the death of Stephen (see Ac 8) (Hemphill 1994:13), their names were not recorded but their labors began an important new chapter in the story of

Christianity. According to Bakke (1997:145), the Antioch church, the first city-center church was founded by Selucius I in 300 B.C. Boer (1982:96) states that the founders, who were Hellenists, natives of Cyprus and Cyrene, when they arrived in Antioch after being persecuted in Jerusalem, took the significant step of preaching the glad tidings to the Gentiles (Ac 11:19-26) and established the church in Antioch (cf Williams 1986:10-11). “At Antioch, Gentiles as well as Jews were recruited” (McKechnie 2001:44).

Apparently, in Antioch, people of different ethnic backgrounds began to cross the interior walls of the city to hear the Gospel and join the church (Richardson 1978:93). The Jerusalem church heard about this and sent Barnabas, the trusted Cypriot who had sold his land to purchase food back in Jerusalem (Ac 4) (Marshall 1983:109-110, 201-202), to strengthen the church (Hemphill 1994:13). He was sent implicitly to deal with issues raised by there being both Jewish and Gentile Christians in the first wave of Antioch converts - and then Barnabas brought Saul (Paul) from Tarsus to join the Antioch venture (McKechnie 2001:44-45; cf Richardson 1978:95). When he came to this city-center church, Barnabas built a pastoral team that consisted of Simeon the Black (an African), Lucius of Cyrene (A North African), Manean (possibly a slave of Herod’s father), Saul of Tarsus (native of Asia Minor, the land bridge to Europe) and Barnabas himself from Cyprus (Bakke 1997:146).

Antioch became the main gateway for the Gospel to the Gentile world. Antioch became a bridge for Christianity between the Jewish and Greek worlds. There, believers were first called Christians (Ac 11:26) (Johnson 1987:44). This attested to their witness before the pagan community (Hemphill 1994:13). In the Aramaic speaking world they continued to be called ‘Nazarenes’ (cf Ac 24:5) (McKechnie 2001:50). It is interesting to note that the New Testament never talks about Antioch’s wickedness and idolatry, her culture and beauty, or her importance as one of the great commercial centers of

antiquity (cf Johnson 1987:46). In describing Antioch, Luke refers only to the great spiritual events that took place there. Events in Antioch affected the course of the Gospel, threw open the empire to evangelization, and molded the character of the missionary enterprise. As for her impact upon the world, Antioch soon came to supersede Jerusalem, developing in to the missionary headquarters of the first century (Greenway 1989b:32) and was certainly an important centre of Christian theological learning (Johnson 1987:50). Through the establishment of the church in Antioch, it is quiet clear that God is the initiator of mission in that city. God used the persecution as the way of bringing His Good News to a city of Antioch.

2.5.3 Jesus' concern for the Seven Churches sited in Seven cities of Asia Minor

According to Armstrong (1972:8), the first real message of the Book of Revelation is contained in the second and third chapters – the messages to the seven churches (cf Linthicum 1991a:295). These messages according to the author come directly from Christ – they contain the direct testimony of Jesus Christ. Here Jesus takes the actual spiritual condition and functioning of these seven churches, then existing in Asia Minor, as a prophecy of the spiritual condition and the works and accomplishments, in carrying out Christ's Great Commission, of the true Church of God during the seven successive periods of time up until the end of this age and the Second Coming of Christ. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck write:

As stated in Revelation 1:11 Christ sent a message to each of seven local churches in Asia Minor. The order of scriptural presentation was geographic. A messenger would naturally travel the route from the seaport Ephesus 35 miles north to another seaport Smyrna, proceed still

farther north and to the east, to Pergamos, and then would swing further to the east and south to visit the other four cities (1:11) (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

These are the messages from Christ, the living Head of His Church, to His own true Church in her seven successive eras of time from about A.D. 100, until a period even yet future (Armstrong 1972:8-9). Each message deals with the same issues; only the content of the message different, reflecting the condition of each church (Linthicum 1991a:295). Robert C. Linthicum further indicated that the external Gospel is contextualized for each situation, so that it is relevant to each city. He indicated the following three important points:

- *First*, each message reveals an understanding of the history, the commerce, and the religious and political roles of that city in the empire.
- *Second*, each message deals with the question, “How have you reacted to your city, as you have sought to minister in and to her?” Each message describes the effect the city has had on the church and (or) the church has had on the city.
- *Thirdly*, each message affirms, exhorts, and makes promises to the church around the question, “What is that I, the Lord God, want you to do? Each message calls the church to faithfulness in ministry to that city (Linthicum 1991a:295).

The symmetry of the seven letters has long interested commentators. Each letter is prefaced by a charge to write to the angel of the specific church. This is followed by an identification of the author in descriptive phrases taken from the vision in chapter 1 of the Book of Revelation. The body of each letter is composed of an acknowledgement of the church’s positive achievements (except in Laodicea and, perhaps, in Sardis), followed by words of encouragement, censure, counsel, or warning. Only Smyrna and

Philadelphia escape some note of censure. The letters close with the exhortation to hear and a promise to those who conquer (Morris 1969:58; cf Caird 1966:27). The orderliness and symmetry of the seven letters betray a purpose that goes beyond ethical instruction to seven particular churches in the Roman province of Asia. The entire sequence is a literary composition designed to impress upon the church universal the necessity of patient endurance in the period of impending persecution (Mounce 1977:84). It is this motif which binds the oracles to that which follows. In the final conflict between Christ and Caesar, believers will need to hold fast to their confession of faith and stand ready for whatever sacrifice may be required. Bruce writes that the letters give a vivid impression of Christian life in Asia at a time when “pressure is being brought to bear on Christians to be less unyielding in their negative attitude to such socially approved activities as emperor worship and the like” (Bruce 1969:637).

There are some remarkable similarities in comparing these letters to the seven churches to the movement of church history since the beginning of the apostolic church. For instance, Ephesus seems to characterize the apostolic church as a whole, and Smyrna seems to depict the church in her early persecutions. However, the Scriptures do not expressly authorize this interpretation, and it should be applied only where it fits naturally. After all, these churches all existed simultaneously in the first century. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck write that:

Though each message is different, the letters have some similarities. In each one Christ declared that He knows their works; each one includes a promise to those who overcome; each one gives an exhortation to those hearing; and each letter has a particular description of Christ that related to the message which follows. Each letter includes a commendation (except the letter to Laodicea), a rebuke (except the



letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia), an exhortation, and an encouraging promise to those heeding its message. In general these letters to the seven churches address the problems inherent in churches throughout church history and are an incisive and comprehensive revelation of how Christ evaluates local churches (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

Here follows the explication of each letter to the seven local Churches in Asia Minor as recorded in the Book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3. We will focus on their destination, commendation, rebuke, exhortation and promise of each letter where applicable.



Figure 2.2: Map indicating the location of the Seven Churches cited in Seven cities of Asia Minor (from Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

2.5.3.1 Ephesus

2.5.3.1.1 Destination

According to Mounce (1977:85), the *first* letter is directed to the angel of the church in Ephesus. At the time this letter was written, Ephesus was a major city of Asia Minor, a

seaport, and the location of the great temple of Artemis (cf. Ac 19:24, 27-28, 34-35), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. “It was also a center for many other religious cults (including the Nicolaitans) (Linthicum 1991a:296). John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck write that Paul had visited Ephesus about A.D. 53, about 43 years before this letter in Revelation was sent to them. Paul remained in Ephesus for several years and preached the Gospel so effectively “that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord” (Ac 19:10). This large city was thoroughly stirred by Paul’s message (Ac 19:11-41), with the result that the silversmiths created a riot because their business of making shrines of Artemis was threatened (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

The church accordingly had a long history and was the most prominent one in the area. The Pastor or messenger of the church was addressed as the angel (*angelos*). The word’s principal use in the Bible is in reference to heavenly angels (Louw & Nida 1989:144). But it is also used to refer to human messengers (cf Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2; Lk 7:24, 27; 9:52). The letter comes from Christ who was holding seven stars in His right hand and walking among the seven golden lampstands. The “stars” were the angels or messengers of the churches and the “lampstands” were the seven churches (Rv 1:20) (Mounce 1977:86).

2.5.3.1.2 Commendation

In Revelation 2:2-3, Christ commended those in the Ephesian Church for their hard work . . . perseverance, their condemnation of wicked men, and their identification of false apostles. (False teachers were present in each of the first four churches; cf Rv 2:2, 6, 9, 14-15, 20). “The Ephesians had toiled to the point of exhaustion and borne patiently the hostility of a society at odds with their goals and efforts (if the problems of

Paul in Ephesus with disbelieving Jews, the seven sons of Sceva, and the mob aroused by Demetrius the silversmith) (Ac 19:8-40)” (Mounce 1977:87). In addition they were commended for enduring hardships and not growing weary in serving God (Linthicum 1991a:296). In general this church had continued in her faithful service to God for more than 40 years (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

2.5.3.1.3 Rebuke

In spite of the many areas of commendation, the church in Ephesus was soundly rebuked by our Lord Jesus Christ: “Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love”¹² (Rv 2:4) (NIV). The order of words in the Greek is emphatic; the clause could be translated, “Your first love you have left.” Christ used the word *agapēn*, speaking of the deep kind of love that God has for people (Louw and Nida 1989:293-294). This rebuke contrasts with what Paul wrote the Ephesians 35 years earlier, that he never stopped giving thanks for them because of their faith in Christ and their love (*agapēn*) for the saints (Eph 1:15-16). John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck further indicated that most of the Ephesian Christians were now second-generation believers, and though they had retained purity of doctrine and life and had maintained a high level of service, they were lacking in deep devotion to Christ. How the church today needs to heed this same warning, that orthodoxy and service are not enough. Christ wants believers’ hearts as well as their hands and heads (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

¹² The Ephesian Church had left her first love. The expression includes both love of God and love of mankind at large, but seems to refer to mainly their love for one another (as in 2 Jn 5). Jeremiah 2:2 is instructive. God speaks through the prophet to apostolate Israel, “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, and how you followed me in the wilderness” (cf Jdg 2:7, 10-11; Hos 2:14-16) (NRSV). A cooling of personal love for God inevitably results in the loss of harmonious relationships within the body of believers. Jesus had made it clear that “by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35) (Mounce 1977:88).

2.5.3.1.4 Exhortation

The Ephesians were first reminded to remember the height from which they have fallen. They were told to repent and to return to the love they had left (Rv 2:5) (Mounce 1977:88). Similar exhortations concerning the need for a deep love for God are frequently found in the New Testament (Mt 22:37; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27; Jn 14:15, 21, 23; 21:15-16; James 2:5; 1 Pt 1:8). Christ stated that one's love for God should be greater than his love for his closest relatives, including his father, mother, son, and daughter (Mt 10:37). Paul added that love for God should even be above one's love for his or her mate (1 Cor 7:32-35). In calling the Ephesian believers to repentance Christ was asking them to change their attitude as well as their affections (Linthicum 1991a:298). They were to continue their service not simply because it was right but because they loved Christ. He warned them that if they did not respond, the light of their witness in Ephesus would be extinguished: "I will . . . remove your lampstand from its place" (Rv 2:5) (NRSV).

John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck state that the Ephesian Church continued and was later the scene of a major Church Council, but after the 5th century both the church and the city declined. The immediate area has been uninhabited since the 14th century (Walvoord and Zuck 1985). The reprimand for having left first love is followed by commendation for hating, as Christ does, the works of the Nicolaitans¹³. This heretical

¹³ The Nicolaitans were the followers of a Christian leader named Nicolaus, who sought to minimize the differences between Roman society and the Christian faith. The Nicolaitans stressed that the Jewish Law was no longer formative for faith or ethics, that Christians were free to eat meat offered to idols, and that Christians need not practice the chastity and sexual regulations of the Law. Rather, the Christian was free to engage in both the feasts and the sexual promiscuity of the Romans, they taught, as well as to engage in Roman politics and their economic system. They believed that Christianity ought to be

group is mentioned in both the letter to Ephesus (Rv 2:6) and the letter to Pergamum (Rv 2:15). The mention of eating food sacrificed to idols and practicing immorality in the letter of Thyatira (Rv 2:20-21) as well as in the letter to Pergamum (Rv 2:14) where this is connected with the teaching of Balaam and closely related to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, indicates that all three churches were in some way affected by the sect¹⁴ (Mounce 1977:89).

2.5.3.1.5 Promise

As in the other letters, Christ gave the Ephesian Church a promise addressed to individuals who will hear. He stated, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rv 2:7) (NIV). According to Robert H. Mounce, "The overcomer in Revelation is not one who has conquered an earthly foe by force, but one who has remained faithful to Christ to the very end. The victory he achieves is analogous to the victory of Christ on the cross" (Mounce 1977:90). The tree of life, first mentioned in Genesis 3:22, was in the Garden of Eden. Later it reappears in the New Jerusalem where it bears abundant fruit (Rv 22:2). Those who eat of it will never die (Gn 3:22). This promise should not be construed as reward for only a special group of Christians but a normal expectation for all Christians. "The paradise of God" is probably a name for heaven (cf Lk 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4 — the only other NT references to paradise). Apparently it will be identified with the New Jerusalem

integrated into a culture, so that to be a good Christian and to be a good Roman were the same thing, for Christianity should endorse and bless the Roman system (Linthicum 1991a:297).

¹⁴ W.M. Mackay finds three separate sects in Revelation 2 which represent the three great obstacles to the witness of the Church in all ages; each is connected with a personal name – Balaam, worldliness; Jezel, false doctrine and Nicolas, ritualism ("Another look at the Nicolaitans" *Evangelical Quarterly*, 45 (1973) pp 111-115).

in the eternal state. Walvoord and Zuck (1985) indicate that this encouragement of true love reminded the Ephesians again of God's gracious provision for salvation in time and eternity. Love for God is not wrought by legalistically observing commands, but by responding to one's knowledge and appreciation of God's love.

2.5.3.2 Smyrna

2.5.3.2.1 Destination

The *second* letter was addressed to Smyrna, a large and wealthy city 35 miles north of Ephesus. Like Ephesus, she was a seaport. In contrast to Ephesus, which today is a deserted ruin, Smyrna was still a large seaport with a present population of about 200,000 (Mounce 1977:91; cf Walvoord and Zuck 1985). She was a great trading city and "the fairest of the cities of Iona" (Lucian). Smyrna was one of the very few planned cities in the world and had great, broad streets, magnificent temples and planned architecture (Linthicum 1991a:299). The name of the city, Smyrna, means "*myrrh*," an ordinary perfume. The perfume was also used in the anointing oil of the tabernacle, and in embalming dead bodies (cf. Ex 30:23; Ps 45:8; Can 3:6; Mt 2:11; Mk 15:23; Jn 19:39). While the Christians of the church at Smyrna were experiencing the bitterness of suffering, their faithful testimony was like myrrh or sweet perfume to God (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

Christ described Himself as the *First* and the *Last*, who died and came to life again (Rv 2:8). Christ is portrayed as the eternal One (cf. Rv 1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13) who suffered death at the hands of His persecutors and then was resurrected from the grave (cf Rv 1:5). These aspects of Christ were especially relevant to the Christians at Smyrna who, like Christ in His death, were experiencing severe persecution. According to Robert H.

Mounce, the strong allegiance to Rome plus a large Jewish population which was actively hostile to the Christians made it exceptionally difficult to live as a Christian in Smyrna. The most famous martyrdom of the early fathers was that of the elderly Polycarp, the “twelfth in Smyrna”, who, upon his refusal to acknowledge Caesar as Lord, was placed upon a pyre to be burned (Mounce 1977:91-92) on Saturday, 23 February C.E. 155 after he replied the police captain who begged him to deny Christ and make a sacrifice to Caesar, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” (Linthicum 1991a:299).

2.5.3.2.2 Commendation

What a comfort it was to the Christians in Smyrna to know that Christ knew all about their sufferings: “I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!” (Rv 2:9) (NIV). The church was being persecuted: her people were persecuted; some of them have been imprisoned; all of the people have been slandered. John identifies the source of the trouble: “those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”¹⁵ (Rv 2:9) (NRSV). Smyrna had a large and economically strong Jewish colony, and it was that colony which was organized against the church (Linthicum 1991a:299-300). They were being persecuted not only by pagan Gentiles but also by hostile Jews and by Satan himself. Apparently the local Jewish synagogue was called the synagogue of Satan (cf Rv 3:9). (Satan is mentioned in four of the seven letters: Rv 2:9,

¹⁵ Referring to people as “those who say they are Jews and are not” does not mean that they were not Jews, but they were acting in ways that denied their Jewishness. It was this synagogue of Satan or assembly of the Jewish colonists which was behind the persecution, which was making slanderous statements about the Christians, raising fear and anger at them and thus motivating both the people and the state to persecute them. The church had a most formidable opponent in the Jewish colony in Smyrna (Linthicum 1991a:300).

13, 24; 3:9). Walvoord and Zuck (1985) indicate that in the history of the church the most severe persecution has come from religionists. Besides suffering persecution, they were also enduring extreme poverty (Linthicum 1991a:299) (*ptōcheian* in contrast with *penia*, the ordinary word for “poverty”) (Louw and Nida 1989:564). Though extremely poor, they were rich in the wonderful promises Christ had given them (cf 2 Cor 6:10; Ja 2:5).

2.5.3.2.3 Rebuke

Notable is the fact that there was no rebuke whatever for these faithful, suffering Christians. This is in striking contrast with Christ’s evaluations of five of the other six churches, which He rebuked. Smyrna’s sufferings, though extremely difficult, had helped keep them pure in faith and life (cf Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

2.5.3.2.4 Exhortation

What does Christ want the church of Smyrna to do in the face of such ominous persecution? *Firstly*, they were to keep their focus on Jesus. By keeping their eyes on Jesus, the Christians in Smyrna would be able to maintain their resolve and commitment, because they would remember constantly that “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4) (NIV). *Secondly*, they were to stand firm and not allow themselves to fear about what they will continue to suffer. (Linthicum 1991a:300). The word of Christ to these suffering Christians was an exhortation to the Christians at Smyrna to have courage: “Do not be afraid (lit., stop being afraid) of what you are about to suffer” (Rv 2:10) (NIV). Their severe trials were to continue. They would receive further persecution by imprisonment and additional suffering for 10 days. The problem of human suffering, even for a limited time, has always perplexed faithful

Christians. Suffering can be expected for the ungodly, but why should the godly suffer? The Scriptures give a number of reasons. Suffering may be (1) disciplinary (1 Cor 11:30-32; Heb 12:3-13), (2) preventive (as Paul's thorn in the flesh, 2 Cor 12:7), (3) the learning of obedience (as Christ's suffering, Heb 5:8; cf. Rm 5:3-5), or (4) the providing of a better testimony for Christ (as in Ac 9:16) (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

2.5.3.2.5 Promise

In their suffering the believers at Smyrna were exhorted, "Be faithful, even to the point of death" (Rv 2:10) (NIV). While their persecutors could take their physical lives, it would only result in their receiving the crown of life. Apparently up to that time none had died, but this could be expected. Later Polycarp, having become the bishop of the church in Smyrna, was martyred, and undoubtedly others were also killed (cf Linthicum 1991a:299). "The crown of life" is one of several crowns promised to Christians (cf 1 Cor 9:25; 1 Ths 2:19; 2 Tm 4:6-8; 1 Pt 5:4; Rv 4:4). The crown of life is also mentioned in James 1:12. Believers are encouraged to be faithful by contemplating what awaits them after death, namely, eternal life. As in all the letters, an exhortation is given to the individuals who will listen. The promise is given to overcomers, referring in general to all believers, assuring them that they will not be hurt at all by the *second death*¹⁶ (Rv 2:11; cf Rv 20:15) (Linthicum 1991a:300). The reassuring word of Christ to Smyrna is the word to all suffering and persecuted Christians. As stated in Hebrews 12:11, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (NIV).

¹⁶ The *second death* is a rabbinic term for the death of the wicked in the next world (Dt 33:6; cf Jer 51:39, 57 and Is 52:14; 65:6, 15). In Rv 20:14 it is identified as the lake of fire, and in Rv 21:8 as the final lot of "the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted," etc. Over the faithful, who share in the first resurrection, it has no power (Rv 20:6) (Mounce 1977:94).

2.5.3.3 Pergamum

2.5.3.3.1 Destination

The *third* church was in Pergamum or Pergamos, about 20 miles inland from Smyrna. “Whereas Ephesus and Smyrna were the economic and cultural ‘capitals’ of Asia Minor, Pergamum was its political capital. It had been Asia Minor’s capital city for nearly four hundred years” (Linthicum 1991a:301). Like Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamum was a wealthy city, but she was wicked. Religion flourished in Pergamum. She was a center of worship for four of the most important pagan cults of the day – *Zeus*, *Athene* (the patron goddess), *Dionysos*, and *Asklepios* (who was designated *Sōtēr*, Saviour)¹⁷. The shrine of *Asklepios*, the god of healing (also known as “the Pergamene god”, attracted people from all over the world (Mounce 1977:95).

The city of Pergamum had the most outstanding library in Asia (two hundred thousand parchment rolls), second only to the library in Alexandria; in fact, parchment was invented in Pergamum. She was the administrative center and political capital of the Roman Empire in Asia. According to Walvoord and Zuck (1985), anticipating Christ’s rebuke for their being tolerant of evil and immorality, John described Him as the One who has the sharp, double-edged sword (also mentioned in Rv 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21). The sword is a symbolic representation of the Word of God’s twofold ability to separate believers from the world and to condemn the world for its sin. It was the sword of salvation as well as the sword of death.

¹⁷ The emblem of *Asklepios* was a serpent (Mounce 1977:95).

2.5.3.3.2 Commendation

The letter to Pergamum begins with an acknowledgement of the difficulty of living in an environment so distinctly pagan and a commendation for the church's faithful witness in the face of severe opposition (Mounce 1977:96). Christ identified this city as *where Satan has his throne*. Because Pergamum was the administrative center and political capital of Roman Asia, she was the center of emperor worship in Asia. This was why John identified her as "where Satan lives" – because nothing was more Satanic to the mind of the early church than substituting Caesar for Christ as one's lord (Linthicum 1991a:301).

Like the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamum was a church under attack. Because she existed in the city where Satan has his throne, and because the church very decisively opposed emperor worship, Rome have quickly perceived this church as an enemy. It is likely; therefore, that the attack the Pergamum church was under from the Roman authorities was severe (Linthicum 1991a:301). In these adverse conditions the church at Pergamum had held fast to the Name of Christ. They had not denied their faith by yielding to the pressure of burning incense to the emperor and declaring "Caesar is Lord". Not even in the days of Antipas, who was put to death in their midst, did they deny their faith. Little is known about this early martyr apart from the reference in Revelation (Bruce 1969:638). The legend appears in later hagiographers (*Simon Metaphrastes, the Bollandists*) that he was slowly roasted to death in a brazen bull during the reign of Domitian. Antipas' name means "against all" (Mounce 1977:97). Mounce further indicated that Antipas's name (abridged from Antipater) has mistakenly been taken to mean "against all", and the idea that he gained the name by his heroic stand against the forces of evil is unfounded noteworthy. What is noteworthy is that he is given the Lord's own title from Revelation 1:5 – "faithful witness" (NIV) (1977:97).

2.5.3.3.3 Rebuke

Although the church at Pergamum had remained faithful in the midst of severe opposition (even when Antipas was martyred), they were guilty of severe compromise by holding the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Balaam had been guilty of counseling King Balak to cause Israel to sin through intermarriage with heathen women and through idol-worship (cf Nm 22-25; 31:15-16) (Mounce 1977:97).

Earlier the Ephesian Church had been commended for rejecting what appears to be a moral departure (cf. Rv 2:6) (Linthicum 1991a:302). Some Greek manuscripts add here that God hates the teaching of the Nicolaitans, as also stated in Revelation 2:6. Compromise with worldly morality and pagan doctrine was prevalent in the church, especially in the third century when Christianity became popular. So compromise with pagan morality and departure from biblical faith soon corrupted the church (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

2.5.3.3.4 Exhortation

What was it that Christ's message called the church in Pergamum to do? The indifference of the church at Pergamum to the presence of Nicolaitans was a matter of considerable concern. Unless they repent Christ promised to come and war against them with the sword of His mouth (Linthicum 1991a:301). He promised that the judgment would come "soon" (*tachys*) which also means "suddenly" (cf Rv 1:1; 22:7, 12, 20). Only a portion of the church has fallen prey to the pernicious doctrine of the Balaamites, but all were guilty of not taking action against their presence. The church in Pergamum needed to continue to stand strong against emperor worship and not be tempted (like the Balaamites) to compromise with it in order to protect herself (Mounce

1977:98), if she does not repent, Christ would contend with them, using the sword of His mouth (cf Rv 1:16; 2:12; 19:15, 21). This again is the Word of God sharply judging all compromise and sin.

2.5.3.3.5 Promise

If she was to be a faithful church, then the church of Pergamum was instructed that she must follow her calling to stand strong in her faith and to make vital her relationship with Christ (Linthicum 1991a:302). To the faithful at Pergamum the risen Christ promised them “*the hidden manna*”¹⁸ and “*a white stone inscribed with a new name known only to the recipient*”¹⁹ (Mounce 1977:99). The hidden manna may refer to Christ as the Bread from heaven, the unseen source of the believer’s nourishment and strength. Whereas Israel received physical food, manna, the church receives spiritual food (Jn 6:48-51). The stone’s inscription which gives the believer “*a new name*” indicates the acceptance by God and His title to glory. This may be an allusion to the Old Testament practice of the high priest wearing 12 stones on his breastplate with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed on it. Though believers at Pergamum may not have had precious stones or gems of this world, they had what was far more important, acceptance by

¹⁸ The idea of hidden manna reflects a Jewish tradition that the pot of manna which was placed in the ark as a memorial to future generations (Ex 16:32-34; cf Heb 9:4) was taken by Jeremiah at the time of the destruction of Solomon’s temple (sixth century BC) and hidden underground in Mount Nebo. There it was to remain until the coming of the Messiah when Jeremiah would reappear and return the ark and its contents to the new messianic temple in Jerusalem. In the context of the letter to Pergamum it alludes to the proper and heavenly food of spiritual Israel in contrast to the unclean food supplied by the Balaamites (Mounce 1977:99).

¹⁹ Likely, this is a reference to the pagan custom, especially popular among children, of carrying a white stone with a god’s name upon it as a good luck amulet. For the church to be given a white stone would be a reminder to the Christians that they are safe in life and in death because they “carry” the name of the only true God around inside them (Linthicum 1991a:302).

Christ Himself and assurance of infinite blessings to come. Taken as a whole, the message to the church in Pergamum was a warning against compromise in morals and against deviating from the purity of doctrine required of Christians (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

2.5.3.4 Thyatira

2.5.3.4.1 Destination

Thyatira, 40 miles southeast of Pergamum, was a much smaller city. Thyatira was a commercial center with a large number of guilds established for people who worked with wool, leather, linen, bronze, outer garments, material dyeing, pottery, and baked goods, as well as those who traded slaves (Linthicum 1991a:303). In Acts 16:14-40 we meet a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods who also had a house at Philippi (Mounce 1977:102). The church was small, but she was singled out for this penetrating letter of rebuke. In keeping with what follows, Christ is introduced as the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. This description of Christ is similar to that in Revelation 1:13-15, but here He is called the Son of God rather than the Son of Man (Walvoord and Zuck 1985). The situation required reaffirmation of His deity and His righteous indignation at their sins. The words “burnished bronze,” which describe His feet, translate a rare Greek word “χαλκολιβάνω” (Louw and Nida 1989:27) also used it in Revelation 1:15. It seems to have been an alloy of a number of metals characterized by brilliance when polished. The reference to His eyes being, “like blazing fire” and the brilliant reflections of His feet emphasize the indignation and righteous judgment of Christ.

2.5.3.4.2 Commendation

The church in Thyatira apparently was thriving and prosperous. She was known through the city for doing good deeds and serving the needy. Her members were generous, and exhibited deep love and loyalty to each other (Rv 2:19) (Walvoord and Zuck 1985). The glorified Christ was not unmindful of the works which characterized the Thyatiran church. They were listed as *love, faith, ministry* and *patience* (Mounce 1977:102). Anyone looked at this church was attracted by the quality of her life and her commitment to the needy. She was a church whose Sunday services probably were packed and of which any person was proud to be a member (Linthicum 1991a:304).

2.5.3.4.3 Rebuke

Jesus' major condemnation concerned the woman Jezebel, who claimed to be a prophetess and taught believers to take part in the sexual immorality that accompanied pagan religion and to eat food sacrificed to idols (Mounce 1977:102). What was acceptable to that local society was abhorred by Christ. Their departure from morality had gone on for some time (Rv 1: 21). The church in Thyatira may have first heard the Gospel from Lydia, converted through Paul's ministry (Ac 16:14-15). Interestingly now a woman, a self-claimed "prophetess," was influencing the church. Her name "Jezebel"²⁰ suggests that she was corrupting the Thyatira Church much like Ahab's wife Jezebel corrupted Israel (1 Ki 16:31-33) (Walvoord and Zuck 1985). Christ promised sudden

²⁰ The Thyatiran Jezebel is probably some prominent woman within the church who, like her OT counterpart, was influencing the people of God to forsake the loyalty to God by promoting a tolerance toward and involvement in pagan practices. This extended to fornication and participation in the religious feasts connected with membership in trade guilds (Mounce 1977:103).

and immediate judgment, called her sin adultery and promised that all who followed her would suffer intensely. He also promised, “I will strike her children dead” (Rv 2:23) (NIV), meaning that suffering would extend also to her followers (Linthicum 1991a:304). The judgment would be so dramatic that all the churches would know that Christ is the One who searches hearts and minds.

2.5.3.4.4 Exhortation

After His condemnation, Christ extended a word of exhortation to the godly remnant that existed in the church in Thyatira, implying that the rest of the church was apostate. According to Linthicum (1991a:304), the Thyatiran Church was called to reject her own popularity and the grounds upon which that popularity has been won, and to follow Christ. The remnant He called “the rest of you in Thyatira . . . you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets” (Rv 2:24) (NIV). On this godly remnant He imposed one simple instruction: “Only hold on to what you have until I come” (Rv 2:25) (NIV) (Mounce 1977:105). Perhaps because the church was small, Christ did not command them to leave her (the church) but to remain as a godly testimony. Judgment on Jezebel and her followers would come soon and would purge the church (Linthicum 1991a:204). In modern times Christians who find themselves in apostate local churches can usually leave and join another fellowship, but this was impractical under the circumstances in Thyatira (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

2.5.3.4.5 Promise

Christ promised believers who were faithful that they will join Him in His millennial rule (Ps 2:8-9; 2 Tm. 2:12; Rv 20:4-6). The word in verse 27 translated “rule” (*poimanei*) means “to shepherd,” indicating that they will not simply be administering justice but will

also, like a shepherd using his rod, be dealing with his sheep and protecting them as well (Mounce 1977:106). Though Psalm 2:9 refers to Christ's rule, John's quotation of it here relates the ruling (shepherding) to the believer who overcomes. Believers will have authority just as Christ does (1 Cor 6:2-3; 2 Tm 2:12; Rv 3:21; 20:4, 6). Christ received this authority from His Father (cf Jn 5:22). In addition, the faithful will receive the morning star, which appears just before the dawn (Linthicum 1991a:304). The Scriptures do not explain this expression, but it may refer to participation in the rapture of the church before the dark hours preceding the dawn of the millennial Kingdom (Rv 2:28). The letter to Thyatira closes with the familiar exhortation to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Unlike the earlier letters, this exhortation follows rather than precedes the promise to overcomers, and this order is followed in the letters to the last three churches (Rv 2:29) (Mounce 1977:106; cf Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

2.5.3.5 Sardis

2.5.3.5.1 Destination

In the sixth century BC Sardis was one of the most powerful cities of the ancient world. Sardis was the capital city of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, the most obstinate of the foreign powers encountered by the Greeks during their early colonization in Asia Minor (Mounce 1977:108-109). The important commercial city of Sardis was located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira, on an important trade route that ran east and west through the kingdom of Lydia (Walvoord and Zuck 1985). Situated at the western end of a famous highway from Susa through Asia Minor, Sardis was a city of wealth fame. Under Croesus gold was taken from the river Pactolus (Linthicum 1991a:305). Jewelry found in the local cemeteries indicates great prosperity. It was at Sardis that gold and

silver coins were first struck. Important industries included jewelry, dye, and textiles, which had made the city wealthy.

From a religious standpoint she was a center of pagan worship and site of a temple of Artemis, which ruins still remain (Mounce 1977:109). Only a small village called *Sart* remains on the site of this once-important city (Walvoord and Zuck 1985). Archeologists have located the ruins of a Christian church building next to the temple. In addressing the message to the church, Christ described Himself as the One who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, similar to the description in 1:4. Here Christ said He holds them, speaking of the Holy Spirit in relation to Himself (Is 11:2-5; cf Rv 5:6). As in 1:20 the seven stars, representing the Pastors of the churches, were also in His hands (cf Rv 2:1).

2.5.3.5.2 Commendation

The only word of approval is in actuality a word of rebuke as Christ declared that they had a reputation for being alive and apparently were regarded by their contemporaries as an effective church (Linthicum 1991a:305).

2.5.3.5.3 Rebuke

Christ quickly stripped away their reputation of being alive by declaring, "I know what you do. People say that you are alive, but really you are dead" (Rv 3:1) (NCV). Like the Pharisees, their outer appearance was a facade hiding their lack of life (cf Mt 23:27-28). Christ added, "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God" (Rv 3:2) (NIV). They were falling far

short of fulfilling their obligations as believers. Linthicum (1991a:305-306) illustrated the unresponsiveness of the Sardian Church in the following way:

Sardis was a city where watchmen would sleep and posted soldiers would be absent from their battlements, where the people were soft, lazy, and comfortable, and the church had caught this infectious disease. This church was spiritually dead, unresponsive, and lethargic. Intriguingly, the church of Sardis faced none of the overwhelming problems of the other churches in Asia. She faced no heresy from within her ranks. She was not persecuted by the Jews. She was untroubled by the Roman authorities. She did not even face the seduction that comes with popularity. Any of the other churches gladly would have traded places with Sardis just to get some relief! But she was the Sardian church which was dead. She did not even have enough controversy to birth a heresy; the people did not hold strongly enough to their convictions to become a target of persecution. She was simply a dull church!

2.5.3.5.4 Exhortation

Christ asked the church to shake herself awake and take action before she dies from lethargy. Christ indicated three things that the church must do to awaken herself:

Firstly, she must remember the Gospel she had received and experience once again her vitality. *Secondly*, she must repent of her lethargic ways and recommit herself to a living Christianity. *Thirdly*, she must obey the commands of the Gospel and begin living and acting with such conviction that persecution and theological debate could conceivably result (Rv 3:3) (Linthicum 1991a:306). He warned them that if they did not

heed this exhortation, He would come on them like a thief, that is, suddenly and unexpectedly (Walvoord and Zuck 1985).

2.5.3.5.5 Promise

While this church as a whole was dead or dying, Christ recognized a godly remnant in the Sardis Church that had not soiled their clothes with sin. There was hope for some in the church in Sardis. There were some with a glimmer of life in them (Rv 3:4-5) (Linthicum 1991a:306). According to Mounce (1977:113-114), Christ gave a threefold promise to the overcomer:

The first promise was that the overcomer will be arrayed in white garments. The white garments promised in Revelation 3:5 represent the attire appropriate to the heavenly state. Since they are made white by washing in the blood of the lamb (Rv 7:13), the figure is highly appropriate to portray justification.

The second promise was that the overcomer's name will not be blotted out of the book of life. The idea of a divine ledger is first mentioned in the OT in Exodus 32:32-33 where Moses prayed that if God will not forgive the sin of His people, He wished to be blotted out "of the book you have written" (NIV) (cf Ps 69:28; Dn 12:1). Thus, in the OT, the book of life was a register of all those who held citizenship in the theocentric community of Israel.

Finally, to the overcomer Christ promised that He will confess His name before His Father and angels. This is a clear reminiscence of Matthew 10:32, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven" (NIV) (cf Lk 12:8; Mk 8:38 or Lk 9:26).

According to Walvoord and Zuck (1985), the letter also concludes with the exhortation to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The letter to Sardis is a searching message to churches today that are full of activity and housed in beautiful buildings but are so often lacking in evidences of eternal life. Christ's word today is to "remember," "repent," and "obey," just as it was to the church in Sardis.

2.5.3.6 Philadelphia

2.5.3.6.1 Destination

The city of Philadelphia was 28 miles southeast of Sardis. She was located in an area noted for its agricultural products but afflicted with earthquakes which destroyed the city several times, most recently about A.D. 37. The city was named for a king of Pergamum, Attalus Philadelphus, who had built this city. "Philadelphus" is similar to the Greek word *philadelphia*, meaning "love for one's fellow believer" or "brotherly love" (Louw and Nida 1989:293) which occurs seven times in the Bible (Rm 12:10; 1 Th 4:9; Heb 13:1; 1 Pt 1:22; 2 Pt 1:7 [twice]; Rv 3:7) (Linthicum 1991a:307). Only here is it used of the city herself. Christian testimony continues in the city in this present century.

Christ described Himself as "the One who is Holy and true, who holds the key of David, and who is able to open or shut a door which no one else could open or shut" (Rv 3:7) (NCV). The holiness of Christ is a frequent truth in Scripture (1 Pt 1:15), and being Holy He is worthy to judge the spiritual life of the Philadelphian Church. "The key of David" is a metaphorical expression indicating complete control over the royal household (Mounce 1977:116). According to Walvoord and Zuck (1985), "The key of David" seems to refer to Isaiah 22:22; cf Job 12:14b, where the key of the house of David was given to Eliakim who then had access to all the wealth of the king. According to Robert

H. Mounce, the language of Isaiah is used to present Christ as the Davidic Messiah with absolute power to control entrance to the Heavenly Kingdom (Mounce 1977:116).

Christ earlier had been described as the One who holds “the keys of death and hades” (Rv 1:18) (NIV). The reference here, however, seems to be to spiritual treasures (Walvoord and Zuck 1985; cf Mounce 1977:116).

2.5.3.6.2 Commendation

As in the messages to the other churches, Christ stated, “I know your deeds”. In keeping with the description of His authority to open and close doors. He declared, that He has placed before them an open door that no one can shut (Rv 3:7). There is no word of rebuke, though Christ said, “I know that you have little strength”²¹ (Rv 3:8) (NIV). These words, however, become a basis for His commendation that they have kept His Word and have not denied His name. According to Robert C. Linthicum, the church in Philadelphia may be small and weak, but she has been faithful to Christ against overpowering odds. Because she has been faithful, Christ is now going to open to this church the door of missionary opportunity (Rv 3:8) (Linthicum 1991a:307).

Mounce (1977:118) states that Revelation 3:9 takes us into the heart of serious conflict between Church and synagogue in Philadelphia. The Jewish population was convinced that by national identity and religious heritage she was the people of God. Not so, claimed the Christians. The Apostle Paul in Romans 2:28-29 taught that “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No,

²¹ Christ recognizes that although they have little power (it was probably a fairly small congregation and they had not made a major impact upon the city), they have, faithfully kept His word and not denied His name (Mounce 1977:117).

a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God" (NIV). It was the Philadelphian Church that could now be called "the Israel of God" (Gl 6:16) (NRSV), for the Jewish nation had forfeited that privilege by disbelief. Members of the local synagogue in Philadelphia claimed to be Jews, but the very claim constituted them liars. By their slander and persecution of Christians they have shown themselves to be the "synagogue of Satan" as indicated by Christ in Revelation 3:9. According to Linthicum (1991a:307), Christ declared that He will make the Christians' opponents to come and fall down at their feet and acknowledge that He has loved Christians in the city of Philadelphia.

2.5.3.6.3 Promise

The church in Philadelphia received no rebuke from Christ. Instead Christians were commended and given a promise because they had been willing to endure patiently for His sake (Bruce 1969:640). Christ promised that He will also keep them from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth (Rv 3:10). Mounce (1977:119) says that the hour of trial is that period of testing and tribulation that precedes the establishment of the eternal Kingdom. It is mentioned in such passages as Daniel 12:2; Mark 13:19; and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. It is the three and a half years of rule by Antichrist in Revelation 13:5-10. In fact, all the judgments from Revelation 6:1 onward relate to this final hour of trial. It is during this period that Christ will reward the faithfulness of the Philadelphian Church by standing by to ward off all the demonic assaults of Satan.

George Ladd writes, "Although the church will be on earth in these final terrible days and will suffer fierce persecution and martyrdom at the hands of the beast, she will be

kept from the hour of trial which is coming upon the pagan world. God's wrath, "poured out on the kingdom of the Antichrist, will not afflict His people" (Ladd 1972:62). The promise is consistent with the high-priestly prayer of Jesus, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (Jn 17:15) (NIV).

Additional promises were given. Christ promised, "I am coming soon" (Rv 3:11) (NIV), a concept repeated often in the Book of Revelation. The thought is not simply that of coming soon but coming suddenly or quickly (cf Rv 1:1; 2:16). Linthicum (1991a:307) is of the opinion that this news was to be encouragement to them in their ministry, comfort to the oppressed, and warning to those who ignored Christianity. And if the church in Philadelphia remains faithful to the open door of missionary opportunity given to them, Christ will richly reward them. They will be seen as pillars in the heavenly temple of God. Jesus will write upon them the name of His God, the temple of God (Rv 3:12).

2.5.3.6.4 Exhortation

The Philadelphian Christians were exhorted in the light of His coming to continue to hold on to what they have. The letter closed with the familiar appeal; "...hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rv 3:13) (NIV) (Linthicum 1991a:308). The promise given to the Philadelphia Church and the challenge to continue to be faithful is certainly God's Word to His whole church today.

2.5.3.7 Laodicea

2.5.3.7.1 Destination

According to Robert C. Linthicum, the city of Laodicea was founded in 250 B.C.E. by Antiochus of Syria. She was strategically located where three major roads converged. She was, consequently, one of the wealthiest cities in the Roman Empire. He further indicated that the city's wealth came from three main sources. *First*, she was the center of the garment industry of Asia, specializing in raising black sheep which became the base for naturally black clothing (Linthicum 1991a:308). According to Mounce (1977:123), by careful breeding a soft, glossy black wool had been produced which was much in demand and brought fame to the region. Among the various garments woven in Laodicea was a tunic called the *trimita*. So widely known was this tunic that at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 Laodicea was called *Trimitaria*. *Second*, she was Asia's primary banking center, specializing in buying and selling gold. *Third*, she was a medical center specializing in ophthalmology, and many in the city made a great deal of money from the sale of eye ointments and salves (Linthicum 1991a:209). Walvoord and Zuck (1985) indicate that the wealthy city of Laodicea was located on the road to Colosse about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia. About 35 years before this letter was written, Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake, but she had the wealth and ability to rebuild. According to Robert C. Linthicum, the city's citizens rebuilt the entire city out of her public and their private coffers; they refused any financial assistance from Rome. In fact, one citizen donated a stadium and others donated other public buildings out of their own treasuries (Linthicum 1991a:308). There is no record that Paul ever visited this city, but he was concerned about her (Col 2:1-2; 4:16).

In addressing the church Christ introduced Himself as the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Ruler of God's creation. The word "Amen," meaning "so be it," refers to the sovereignty of God which is behind human events (cf 2 Cor 1:20; Rv 1:6). (Mounce 1977:124). In speaking of Himself as "the faithful and true Witness" Christ was repeating what He had said earlier (Rv 1:5; 3:7). As "the Ruler of God's creation" Christ existed before God's Creation and is sovereign over it (cf Col 1:15, 18; Rv 21:6). This description was in preparation for the stern word of rebuke which Christ would give the church in Laodicea.

2.5.3.7.2 Rebuke

No word of commendation was extended to the Laodicean Church. They were pictured as utterly abhorrent to Christ because they were lukewarm (Linthicum 1991a:309). In referring to the church as "lukewarm" Christ had in mind that this was her permanent situation. In their feasts as well as in their religious sacrifices people in the ancient world customarily drank what was hot or cold—never lukewarm. This rebuke would have been especially meaningful to this church, for water was piped to the city from Hierapolis (Walvoord and Zuck 1985). Four kilometers north across the Lycus was the city of Hierapolis, famous for her hot springs which, rising within the city, flowed across a wide plateau and spilled over a broad escarpment directly opposite Laodicea. By the time the water reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm (Mounce 1977:125). Their being lukewarm spiritually was evidenced by their being content with their material wealth and their being unaware of their spiritual poverty. Christ used strong words to describe them: wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked (Rv 3:17) (Linthicum 1991a:309, cf Mounce 1977:126).

2.5.3.7.3 Exhortation

Christ urged the Laodicean Christians to buy not ordinary gold, but refined gold, referring to that which would glorify God and make them truly rich. Through her banking industry the city had material wealth. But the church lacked spiritual richness. Though they had beautiful clothes, they were urged to wear white clothes (cf Rv 3:4), symbolic of righteousness which would cover their spiritual nakedness. As wool was a major product of the area, Laodicea was especially famous for a black garment made out of black wool. What they needed instead was pure white clothing (Linthicum 1991a:309). Then Christ exhorted them to put salve . . . on their eyes. A medical school was located in Laodicea at the temple of Asclepius, which offered a special salve to heal common eye troubles of the Middle East. What they needed was not this medicine but spiritual sight. The church at Laodicea is typical of a modern church quite unconscious of her spiritual needs and content with beautiful buildings and all the material things money can buy. This is a searching and penetrating message. To all such the exhortation is to be earnest, and repent (Walvoord and Zuck 1985). Robert C. Linthicum is of the following opinion about the Laodicean Church:

The church must repent! She must get converted! She needs to recognize that she is Christian in name only, and receive Christ both as Lord and as Saviour. And when those lukewarm, so called Christians respond with an earnest commitment to Christ, they will discover that He is there, awaiting them. For He stands by the door of their church, ready to respond to their response. All they need to do is to undo the latch and swing wide the door, and He will enter into the life of their church, will break Communion bread with them, and will be at one with them (Linthicum 1991a:310).

In their blind self-sufficiency they had, as it were, excommunicated the risen Lord from their congregation. In an act of unbelievable condescension He requests permission to enter and re-establish fellowship (Mounce 1978:129). To be a faithful church, the Laodicean Christians were called to repent of a conventional, indifferent Christianity, recognize their spiritual bankruptcy, and allow Christ to “remold them from within” (Rm 12:2). Christ rebuked them because He loved them, which love would also bring chastisement on this church (Linthicum 1991a:310).

2.5.3.7.4 Promise

Dramatically Christ pictured Himself as standing outside and knocking on a door. In a familiar painting the latch is not shown but is assumed to be on the inside. The appeal is for those who hear to open the door. To them Christ promised, “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rv 3:20) (NIV) (Walvoord and Zuck 1985; cf Linthicum 1991a:310). With Christ on the outside, there can be no fellowship or genuine wealth. With Christ on the inside, there is wonderful fellowship and sharing of the marvelous grace of God. This was an appeal to Christians rather than to non-Christians. This raises the important question concerning the extent of one’s intimate fellowship with Christ. To those who respond, Christ promises to give the right to sit with Him on His throne and share His victory (Mounce 1977:130). Once again the invitation to listen and respond is given: “He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rv 3:22) (NIV).

2.5.3.8 A message to the churches today

In conclusion, the letters to the seven churches are a remarkably complete testimony of problems that face the church today. The recurring dangers of losing their first love (Ephesus 2:4), of being afraid of suffering (Smyrna 2:10), doctrinal defection (Pergamum 2:14-15), moral departure (Thyatira 2:20), spiritual deadness (Sardis 3:1-2), not holding fast (Philadelphia 3:11), and lukewarmness (Laodicea 3:15-16) are just as prevalent today as they were in first-century churches. Because these letters come from Christ personally, they take on significance as God's final word of exhortation to the church down through the centuries. The final appeal is to all individuals who will hear. People in churches today would do well to listen to what our Lord Jesus Christ says to them, and fulfill their obligation of being salt and light to the cities they are located at. This will be done by uncovering the darkness overwhelming our cities with the Word of Christ, and as a results plant many urban churches.

2.5.4 Paul's strategies for urban mission

One of the most important figures in early Christianity, St Paul made extensive journeys as a Christian missionary throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Paul's goal, to reach peoples still untouched by the work of evangelists, proved to be a strenuous and often difficult task. He survived three separate journeys during the AD 40s and 50s, bringing Christianity to Macedonia and Greece. During a *fourth* trip, however, the Romans arrested Paul in Jerusalem and probably executed him in Rome in AD 62 (Encarta Encyclopedia 2005 CD). On the above map these journeys are indicated by differently coloured or differently stippled lines (Boer 1982:98).



Figure 2.3: Map indicating the journeys of an Apostle Paul (Encarta Encyclopedia 2005 CD).

2.5.4.1 He was more focused on big cities

According to Murray (2001:98), Paul's strategy, as described in the New Testament, seems to have to concentrate on the main urban centers and then move on, leaving these urban churches to plant further churches in the rural areas.

2.5.4.2 Paul's missionary method

Bosch (1991:130) is of the opinion that there is undoubtedly a certain method in Paul's selection of the centres. He concentrates on the district or provincial capitals, each of which stands for a whole region: Philippi for Macedonia (Phlp 4:15), Thessalonica for Macedonia and Achaia (1 Th 1:7-9), Corinth for Achaia (1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 1:1) and

Ephesus for Asia (Rm 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Cor 1:8) and Paphos the centre of Roman rule in Cyprus (Ac 13:6,7,12) (cf Marshall 1983:218-220). These “metropolises” were the main centres as far as communication, culture, commerce, politics and religion were concerned (cf Haas 1971:85). To say that Paul “did not think in terms of individual ‘gentiles’ so much as ‘nations’” (Hultgren 1985:133; cf Haas 1971:35) is, however, misleading and, actually an anachronism, Paul was thinking regionally and not ethnically; he chose cities that have a representative character. In each of those cities, he laid the foundations for a Christian community, clearly in the hope that, from those strategic centers, the Gospel would be carried into the surrounding countryside and towns. This apparently happened, for in his very first letter, written to the believers in Thessalonica less than a year after the first arrived there (Malherbe 1987:108), he said, “And the Lord’s teaching spread from you not only into Macedonia and Southern Greece, but now your faith in God has become known everywhere. So we do not need to say anything about it” (1 Th 1:8). We also read in passages like Acts 19:10 that all the Jews and Greeks living in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord during the period of two years, while Paul was working in Ephesus.

Green (1970:262) agrees that Paul’s strategy was an urban strategy. Paul’s approach is not exclusively urban, but also personal (reaching prominent leaders in society), provincial and global (Green 1970:316-321). Through reaching cities it became possible to reach regions (provinces) and eventually the globe. Greenway states that the movement in the New Testament was primary an urban movement. After Pentecost the Gospel spread from city to city and from the cities to the surrounding countryside (Greenway 1989d:13). Wayne Meeks points out that Paul was a city person through and through. The city lives in his language. Paul’s language and metaphors are drawn primarily from the urban world. When Paul rhetorically catalogues the places where he

suffered danger, he divides the world into city, wilderness and sea (2 Cor 11:26) (Meeks 1983:9-10).

2.6 CITIES IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Throughout the history of the church, the 3 lines were continued:

2.6.1 City as the place of rebellion against God

For many centuries cities were regarded as centers of sin or desperation. Havie M. Conn is of the opinion that:

During the industrial revolution there was a coalescence of industrialization and urban growth. And out of it came a renewal of the polarized mythology on the rural side. There was a renewed fear of urban life as dehumanizing. The symbol became a symbol of social disorder and artificiality, anomie and chaos. And that picture was mythic in proportion. It permeates the popular as well as the academic view of the city life (Conn 1987:19).

People were pessimists rather than being optimists about the city. When they think about the city, they think about negative words such as “ghetto, crime, stress, anomie, loneliness, loss of individuality, rapid change, loss of personhood”, and those words stood out boldly (Conn 1987:65). John Palen is of the opinion that, “Pessimism breeds fear, and fear seems widespread. A mid 1970s survey indicated that 56 percent of people (75 percent women) living in cities of more than one million were afraid to walk the streets at night in their own neighborhoods” (Palen 1981:267). By so doing, they



were afraid of both the city and to suffer in the city for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christians should not be afraid to suffer for the sake of proclaiming the Word of God, even though their lives could be in danger for the sake of witnessing Christ. As a true disciple of Christ, they should be ready to suffer for the sake of Christ's Gospel.

Suffering is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master. Following Christ means *passio passiva*, suffering because we have to suffer. That is why Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the Church as the community of those 'who are persecuted and martyred for the Gospel's sake'. If we refuse to take up our cross and submit to suffering and rejection at the hands of men, we forfeit our fellowship with Christ and have ceased to follow Him. But if we lose our lives in His service and carry our cross, we shall find our lives again in the fellowship of the cross with Christ. The opposite of discipleship is to be ashamed of Christ and His cross and all the offence which the cross brings in its train (Bonhoeffer 2001:450).

2.6.2 City as the place where God is worshipped

People were optimistic about the cities. They viewed cities as centres of faith, where God is worshipped. According to their views, urban people were regarded as (*τούς Χριστιανούς*) Christians, while the rural people were regarded as *παγανοί* (*pagan people*). This implies that it was impossible to find a Christian in a rural area because rural areas were regarded as the places where gods were worshipped.



The city not only edged dramatically into Jesus' life and ministry but subsequently became central to the future expansion of Christianity. It was from such metropolises as Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth and Rome that the Gospel was carried into the countryside, where the rural sorts – the *ganai* (hence the term *pagan*) – were the last to convert. This Christianity which began in hamlets like Bethlehem and Nazareth in the person of Jesus finally came full circle through the mediation of urban culture (Maier 1991:9).

2.6.3 Strategic value of cities, where many people are reached

According to Conn (1987:47-48), people were encouraged to plant more churches in newer working-class neighborhoods because they were “receptive areas”. Others pleaded for urban church planting because the rural-urban links will not last forever. For the time being, they were told that large numbers of the city dwellers were at heart villagers. However, the argument continued, the come-and-go business was a transitional phenomenon. Larger and larger numbers of people are becoming permanent residents of the city – as in the West, they never return to their rural solitudes (cf McGavran 1980:315). Timothy Monsma in his opinion indicated that:

People who move to the city seek out members of their own tribe, for this gives them as sense of security and identity in the midst of change. Many new urbanites plan to retire to their tribal area someday, and they do not want to lose their tribal identity. The church can capitalize on this thirst for tribal identity by offering church services in tribal languages and fellowship among those who think alike (Monsma 1976:69).



According to Roger S. Greenway there was a period during which urbanologists maintained that family ties tend to disintegrate in the city and that home plays a lesser role in shaping the lives and attitudes of city people. Based on this premise, the “industrial mission” strategy was developed. Industrial missionaries theorized that in the urban setting vocational, educational, recreational, and political relationships take on larger significance than do primary-group relationships, particularly family relationships. They reasoned that urban people are best reached in the places where they work and spend their leisure time, and not primarily in the setting of the home and family (Greenway 1989d:19). Harvie M. Conn is of the opinion that:

That theory about the urban family, and the mission strategy stemming from it, have now largely been set aside. There is an ample body of research that suggests that the family was to play very important roles in meeting the needs of companionship, affection, and basic security. The urban person’s most fundamental identity is still connected with the family (Conn 1987:40-42).

2.7 CONCLUSION

The biblical theology of urban mission was discussed in this chapter. It was clearly indicated that mission always entails “the sending”. The Triune God is involved in the sending. God the Father sent Christ to the world; God the Son also sent His disciples to do mission work in villages, towns and cities. God the Father and God the Son sent the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas to do mission. From the biblical theology of the city, the city was viewed negatively as the city of Satan and as the city of evil. From the positive image, the city was viewed as the city of God and as a symbol of good. It was quite clear in this chapter that God from the OT perspective,



showed great concern for many cities, for example, the city of Nineveh, the city of Sodom, the city of Jerusalem, etc. From the NT perspective, Jesus Christ also showed great concern for cities. He preached in cities, He sent His disciples to preach in towns and cities; He showed concern for the city of Jerusalem. Lord Jesus Christ in Acts 1:8 gave the city of Jerusalem first priority to receive the Gospel, followed by Judea, Samaria and then other parts of the world. The Apostle Paul in his strategies for urban mission focused on big cities. He concentrated on the district or provincial capitals, each of which stands for a whole region. Throughout the history of the church, the three lines were continued: the city was regarded as the place of rebellion against God; she was viewed as the place where God is worshipped; and lastly the city was regarded as the place where many people are reached. As the biblical theology of urban mission was discussed in this chapter, in the following chapter urbanization is discussed.