

BOOK REVIEW: BACK TO JERUSALEM: CALLED TO COMPLETE THE GREAT COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

From the inception of the church, the spread of the gospel was from Jerusalem, the centre, towards the east in Asia Minor, and towards the west, as far as Britain, submerging the then-known world, including Rome. However, the gospel was taken further east, as well as into Russia, modern Africa, and India, and then, farther into the east, including China. Now, Chinese Christians envisage that the gospel, which had taken a wide turn to the east, farther and farther away from Jerusalem, will be taken by Chinese carriers towards Jerusalem again, making a full circle.

SUMMARY

Paul Hattaway records the inspirational life stories of three believers, who live their lives during the flowering and fruition of this great vision of carrying the gospel by Chinese hands from the east of China to its westward regions, and on to the countries bordering it.¹ Hattaway confesses that this book is the result of the desire, expressed by the house-church leaders of China. They asked that a book be written, in order for

¹ Three Chinese church leaders, with Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem: Called to Complete the Great Commission*, Carlisle UK: Piquant, 2003. The Chinese Christian church coined this term "Back to Jerusalem" as an expression of their obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, and His commission to go and preach the gospel.

the *Back to Jerusalem* movement to be explained to Christians around the world.

The author merely interweaves the story of the movement with the life stories of three prominent church leaders in China, namely, Brother Yun, Peter Xu Yongze, and Enoch Wang. After telling their stories, Hattaway adds a tribute to ordinary believers by sharing the testimony of another group of three believers, Sister Chang, Sister Yuen, and Brother Shui, under the title: “Disciples or Just Believers?”, making the book an authentic documentary of martyrdom that is lived out by ordinary believers.

An ethnocentric nation like China is beginning to evangelise the world today! Back in the 1890s, one observer noted the power of the Chinese leadership of the church with this episode:

Once a forest was told that a load of axe-heads had come to cut it down. “It doesn’t matter in the least”, said the forest. Later, it heard that some of its own branches had become handles to the axe-heads, and it said, “Now we have no chance.”²

A picture of a mission conference, which met in Shanghai in 1907, shows a shocking handful of Chinese workers among many Western missionaries. The missionary efforts despaired of large numbers of conversions against the background of high birth rate. But the church continued to grow steadily. God’s plans were different. In 1953, all the missionaries were expelled, under the rule of Mao. People predicted that, if the missionaries were to be allowed to go back to China, they would have a stupendous task of starting all over again. However, they were wrong. Today, the Chinese Christians joyfully explain how the hand of God overruled the communist efforts to wipe out the church, with multiple explosions of church growth and evangelism.

² Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem*, p. 9.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Hattaway presents a brief history of the church in China, and relates to us, in the rest of the book, the challenge of the church leaders in their own words. In doing so, Hattaway expects us “to be encouraged and challenged by the ‘Back to Jerusalem’ vision, and moved to prayer and involvement, in the fulfilment of the Great Commission in these last days, until ‘*the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever*’ (Rev 11:15).”³

³ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.