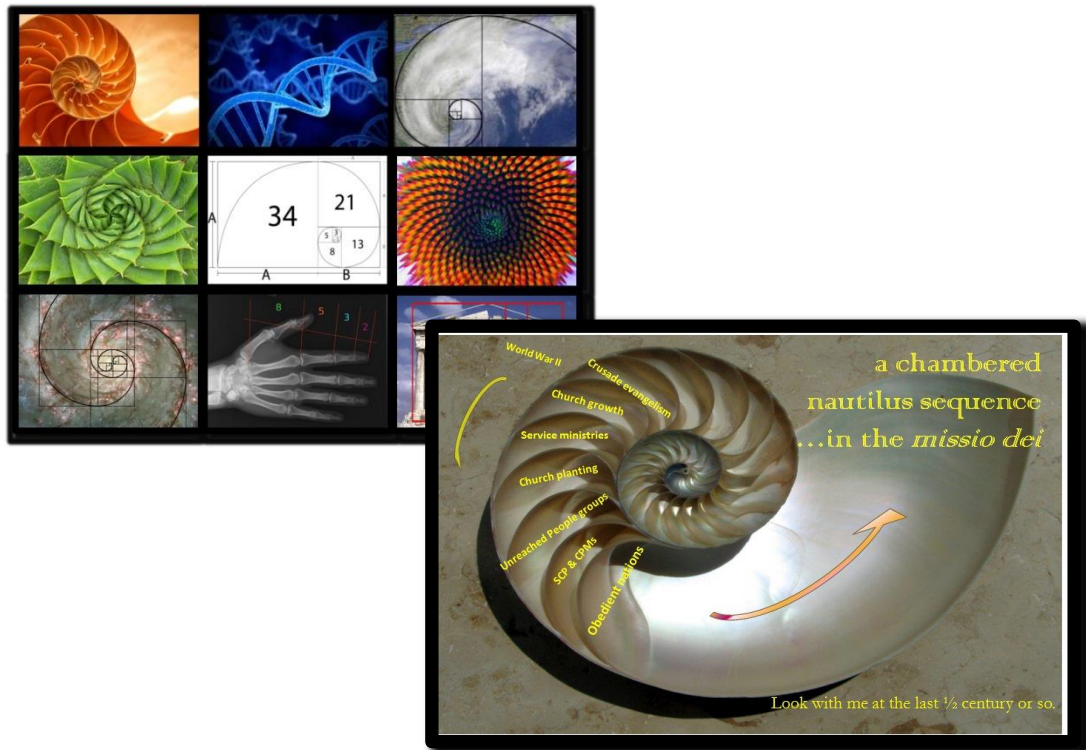


Opening the Nautilus

A metaphor & biblical prospectus on the breadth of our missional task



Steve Spaulding

resident missiologist, O.C. International

Colorado Springs, CO 80923

719-332-6974 stevespaulding@oci.org

"Opening the Nautilus"

Steve Spaulding, 2016

This is not really a "paper" but rather a PPT presentation, which I've often presented. The text may seem choppy at points, in part because it was originally dependent on the slides; and I imported mostly those with some graphics attached.



As I've pondered this vision in recent years, one of the ways I like to communicate it is through an extended metaphor, which I call "Opening the Nautilus." I'll see about file size, but I may embed some PPT slides into this text, just by way of a more visual presentation of some of these thoughts. But do remember, the metaphor is not the principle idea—it's just a fun introduction to the 'main idea.'

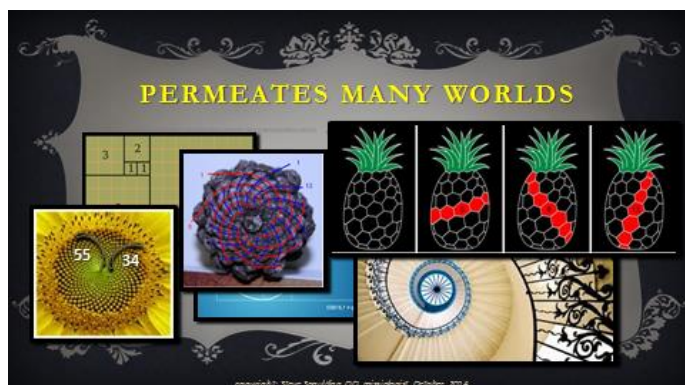
When I say, "Nautilus," usually at least three things come to mind. First is the ocean animal, the large-shelled, 'chambered nautilus' which I've pictured here. But quickly, secondly, it's the ship that Jules Verne spoke about in his classic, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. But lastly, most people know something of the "Fibonacci Sequence" or the Golden Spiral, etc. The roots of this sequence are found most obviously in the chambered nautilus shell.

Let's explore this briefly. It was an Italian mathematician, almost a thousand years ago, by the name of Leonardo of Pisa who became known as "Fibonacci" who seemed to discover a wonder in nature which many others, both before and after him, have found all through our created world. What he discovered was an exact sequence, which was the squaring of numbers and adding their roots together, to create this flawless, 'golden spiral' which the nautilus shell

best illustrates. You take the number one, square it, then two, square that, then add one and two to get three, square that, adding two and three to get five, square that, and the process is then infinite;

the smaller number, added to the larger, then squared, when diagrammed together, create this beautiful golden spiral. And that's the spiral you see inside of this ancient shell.

Evolutionists claim that this nautilus predates all of the dinosaurs by at least 200 million years, so it is an ancient animal, but still exists in our oceans today, swimming usually between the surface to 2800 feet in depth. But it's that perfect outward angle we want to explore more



fully. For we find in at every conceivable size and in many corners of our universe.

If you look at the bottom of your typical pine cone, the seeds are arranged in ovals, the ones going to the right are 13 angled rows, the ones going to the left are 8 angles rows. If you examine the outside of the pineapple, you can usually find five rows of seeds which are almost horizontal, another set of eight rows which are at a 45 degree angle, and then another set of 13 which are almost vertical. Now look at the large face of one of those sunflower seeds.

There are angled rows of 34 seeds which curve to the right and then 55 which curve to the left—depending on the size of your sunflower bloom. These are ALL “Fibonacci numbers.” And that beautiful golden angle we can see in so many visions of our natural and created elements—like a high winding staircase. But it was even as far back as the Renaissance, that we realize that the great painters of that era had discovered the wonder of the Fibonacci sequence buried in the perfect human face. At some

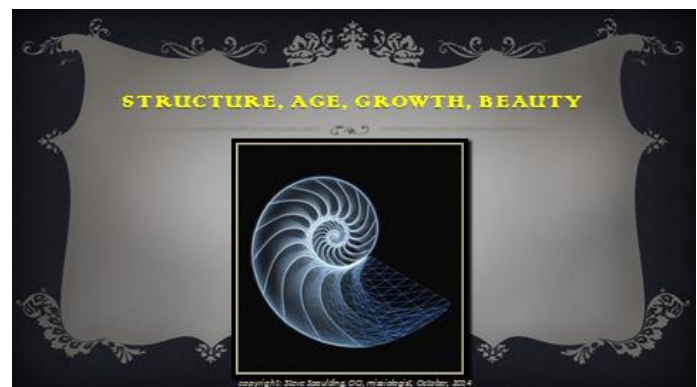


point someone measured the joints in a typical male hand, and found that the outer bone, measured about 2cm, the second, 3cm, the third 5cm and the fourth 8cm! When we go back even another 1000 years, we realize that the Greeks, in building the giant structures like the Acropolis actually utilized and employed the Fibonacci numbers in the structures, a few of which last to the present. And, when we examine the wide range of stringed instruments in the world of musical instruments, there is a constant

reminder of a Fibonacci sequence in the 5 to 8 measurements of the various parts of these violins, cellos, guitars, etc. More recently, our scientist friends have also pointed out that the winds of your average hurricane and actually the dimensions of about one-half of the galaxies in our known universe, all have within them this perfect golden spiral. And even more recently, the scientists at the microscopic levels have also found that the DNA structure of even our human genome actually complies with the early numbers of the Fibonacci sequence.

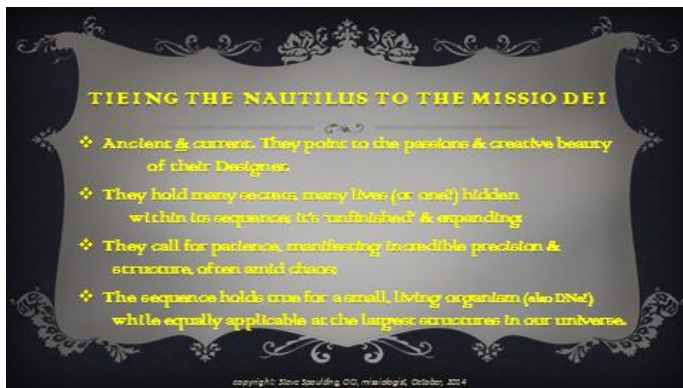
So, this is a ‘natural wonder’ throughout all of the created order, obviously filled with **structure**, certainly **age**, but also revealing **growth** (the seeds reveal this in the pine cone, sunflower and pineapple, but also the sequence is revealed in the Nautilus only because the animal is constantly growing and is forced to create new, larger chambers) and—finally—**beauty**.

From this, I’d like to propose a tying of this nautilus to the *missio dei*:



First, it's both ancient and very contemporary, and these characteristics certainly point to the passions and creative beauty of their Designer.

Secondly, they also hold many secrets or lives hidden within their sequence. It's unfinished and expanding.



They all call for patience, manifesting incredible precision and structure, often amidst will chaos (think of the perfect spiral of the hurricane hurtling refrigerators through a tormenting wind.

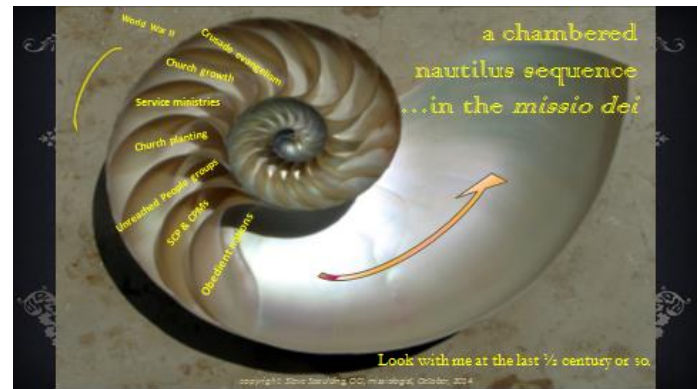
The sequence holds true for the smallest and the largest structures of our entire known universe (DNA and the spiral galaxies)

Now, let's visit the chambered nautilus as it might be illustrated in the contemporary *missio*

dei, the current (past half-century) mission of God on this planet. If we simply superimpose the latest 50-70 years of major emphases in global mission—as if they were individual chambers in the chambered nautilus we'd show various trends or emphases which in many ways have 'come and gone' but have shown an evolution in our missional enterprise, which speaks to the growth and beauty of the global works of God. Now, as was pointed out to me when I presented the specifics of this lay-out in India, there were elements of it which to them seemed too American or Western. That's certainly not intended, although until recently there was much to global mission which actually was "the West to the rest." This is not meant to be expressive or at all comprehensive. It's just pointing out various emphases, most of which were, in the end, global in impact.

1. Right around the end of the World War II, "Crusade Evangelism" which had certainly been developed for centuries prior (through the likes of John Wesley, George Whitefield and many others like Billy Sunday) was impersonated by Billy Graham. But also, with crusade evangelism, was the emphasis on "personal evangelism" by the likes of Campus Crusades' founder, Bill Bright.
2. Not too long after the wide use (with the aid of simple technologies like speaker sound systems and large stadiums) of crusade evangelism came the introduction of a more holistic ministering to people through things like World Vision's child adoption and feeding programs.
3. With the advent of Donald McGavran came the whole "church growth" school of thinking and application in the global mission scene.
4. In the 1970's, especially at the large, 1st global missional gathering in Lausanne, Switzerland, came, among other things, the whole concept of 'unreached people groups' especially through the seminal paper presented there by Ralph Winter.
5. In the 1980's, out of the "church growth" school of thinking, and applied in the missiological sense, came the whole DAWN strategy or 'saturation church planting' by Jim Montgomery—of which I played a personal role myself, mostly in Asia.
6. Then, in the 1990's there was the whole AD2000 and Beyond movement with various converging streams and emphases, like global prayer for mission, but also the advent of much more serious, simply 'house-church movements' and various missional moves away from 'just decisions' to much more of a disciple-making emphasis and breakthroughs seen in the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist worlds.

There is no reason to be too specific, and there were hundreds of sub-movements happening at the same time, in other streams of the Body of Christ worldwide. But I mention these because, in some ways, there really were almost decadal shifts in emphasis in the global mission-sense of the Body of Christ worldwide. And I do realize that these things which I've mentioned here, fall largely within the 'Evangelical Steam' of the Church and there would be very different emphases or rallying cries if one spent time in other streams of the Church than an American or Eurocentric Evangelical faith.



But I mention these because for many of us, these were very real, almost distinct, emphases throughout our recent history. And I lay them out almost as sectors or spheres within the larger *missio dei*, as illustrative of a growing, global set of emphases on the mission of God—as we saw it—to point to a sort of global build-up or a progression to a 'what's next?' motif. If you look at contemporary history through this lens, it's not difficult to see this almost decadal shift in thinking and emphasis as the growth of a symbolic 'chambered nautilus shell' expanding toward ever larger spheres of the Body of Christ working more intentionally, more united, and more strategic than in times past, but that each of these tends to point to yet more significant, larger spheres of convergence.

So, as this point in our discussion, I'd like to propose something:

First, my proposal is that our so-called 'Great Commission' is very possibly greater than we imagined.

Secondly, we are at a unique moment in this *missio-dei*, in this particular time in the mission of God.

Lastly, most of the activities and the vision behind these, point to something both synergistic as well as far vaster, on our horizon, than we've possibly been able to imagine in the systems we cherished in the past.

Our next steps must be guided by: the Spirit, by the Scriptures, and by his- Story.



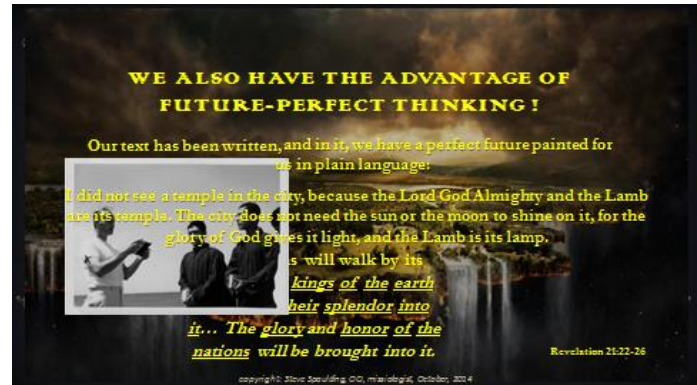
Just to lay the groundwork for our way forward, let's do some 'future-perfect thinking.' What IS future perfect thinking? From the sources I had, years ago, apparently 'future-perfect thinking' emerged from NASA, about 3 or 4 decades ago, when, apparently at one point, they summoned a group of their top astrophysicists, aeronautical engineers and other geniuses of various technologies, basically locked them in a war-room, and told them, "We have just sent a manned spacecraft to Mars and back in one

month. Now, please tell us how we did it!" Thus began the notion of 'future-perfect thinking,' for they began with a scenario of some perfect future, and were rather forced to move from that future scene back to their current setting, in which the existing array of technologies would not allow them to arrive at this rather perfect ending.

From this vantage point, we as Christ-followers do hold an incredible advantage, for as we look at our text, there really exists a picture of our “perfect future.” Here is a snapshot of that future:

I did not see a temple in the city [of God], because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple... The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it... The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

Rev 21:22...26



Now, all scholars tend to separate the last two chapters of Revelation from the rest of revelation, as they do the first two chapters of Genesis, in terms of the ideals from which and to which our Maker began and will eventually take his creation. And it is clear from a casual reading of Revelation, that there is plenty of symbolic language, but it does seem that these last few verses of this chapter and the beginning of Revelation 22, that there are real people (e.g. “the kings of the earth”) which are not to be seen strictly in metaphorical language. We can have strong confidence that this passage seems to encompass the bulk of “the people of God” at the latter moments of this age—or the door into the eons to come.



So, as I meditate on this passage, my first question is, much as those NASA scientists asked decades ago, “How in the world will this have happened...” in which kings are bringing their nations—with all of their glory and splendor—into the city of God, as described so clearly by John?

As we proceed backward from here—as the scientists in NASA did—we can also lean heavily upon the strong conviction that Scripture, for all

of the breadth of history in which it was written, for the variety of its genres, authors and societies and languages, does present a revelation which has throughout it the divine author, who has his passions for this planet, which tie it all together, unite it with some major themes which point to its larger rationale.

For this theme laid out by John in the final chapters of Scripture to have historical precedent or a prior vision, then it must have been germane to the thinking and vision of the apostle Paul, the greatest missionary of the church age, the apostle to the Gentiles and the writer of the largest segments of the New Testament. Did anything he write in all of those pastoral epistles speak to this larger vision of the *ethne* being prepared for this moment in our corporate, global picture? For economy of space, I'll just visit his closing words at the end of what was likely his most popular epistle, the book of Romans:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him...

Rom 16:25-26

Here Paul, in giving his benediction to likely his most popular writing, ends this book with a description of a vision that *panta ta ethne* (the same phrase Jesus used in his Matthew 28:18-20 missional commission)... All the nations might believe and obey God. This is “the obedience of faith” with which Paul began this same, seminal letter to the Roman followers of Christ, but the substance which so attracts me here is that this vision—which Paul says God himself has hidden for long ages past, but now, in that 1st century church had made known—by the command of the eternal God... that not just ‘lots of disciples’ are made, but that all the nations are moved to believe and to obey God.

This is not foreign language in Scripture. It is foreign language to us, especially in the West, who have such a love affair with individualism, and whose understanding of things like conversion and discipleship are almost exclusively individualistic in application. But it does remind me of passages in the O.T. in which God, speaking, for instance, through the prophet Jeremiah of his pronouncements of blessing and cursing on whole nations, and that nations can indeed “not obey me” and be judged for it as nations (Jer. 18:9,10). And that in Zechariah’s case, God refers back to a time when he made “a covenant with all the nations” (Zech 11:10). Or remember the historic lay-out of the role of the intercessor in Ezekiel in which:

"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD."

Ezek. 22:30-31

It was not a soul at stake but the whole land and God’s potential judgment of the nation residing there.

But if this was included in the vision of Paul—and his understanding of the mission of the church in that era, what about his calling and career? It is Luke who did thorough research to lay out “what Christ has done” both in his life, ministry, death and followed by the acts of the apostles. In his record of Paul’s conversion he says that just three days after his radical, Damascus Road conversion, Paul is to be visited by Ananias:

*But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before **the Gentiles (ethne)** and their **kings** and before the **people of Israel**."*

Acts 9:15-16

So, this greatest missionary of the church age is told in no uncertain times, in his missionary calling, that he is to go to **three** audiences. It is not hard to understand why “the Hebrew to the Hebrews” was sent to his own people, but the other two audiences, I believe, should very possibly be a little more propositional for us in this New Covenant era than we’ve given it: to the *ethne*—the nations of this world, and their kings.

It does almost seem as though Luke took this calling and even structured the book of Acts around them, for the first chapters of this book are almost exclusively about the Jews, the middle chapters are about the Gentile nations/*ethne* to whom Paul went on those three missionary journeys. But then, rather against his initial will, he in in chains and spends the final six chapters of the book of Acts being traipsed around the Roman empire, actually spending the bulk of his time with kings: Felix, Festus, Agrippa (and his wife), the governor of Malta and finally, Caesar’s household. I had one friend who told me this was certainly not a strategy of Paul’s, but as I’ve thought of it, I may beg to differ, for remember that one exchange between Agrippa and Festus, in which Agrippa told him that “if he had not appealed to Caesar, he would be a free man.” I see here a strategic move on Paul’s part, as a

prisoner of the Roman justice system, appealing to Caesar primarily because he would certainly have remembered that Christ had told him to go to those three audiences and he had really only gone to two of them.

So this is reflected by the space Luke gives to that final audience, is reflected in Paul's rendition of the vision God had given to that first-century church and the beautiful picture drawn by John about the actually final array of whole nations coming "with all of their glory and splendor...into the city of God..." and led by their earthly kings.

We need not spend much time on the central and longest version of Christ's 'great commission' in Matthew 28, but it is worth reciting here, as part of this laying out of a consistent theme in all of Scripture—of 'obedient nations.'

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything** I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Matt 28:18-20

Books about this passage seem almost to be a dime a dozen, but I have seen very few who actually make much of the target of this task being whole nations. It seems almost everyone, including popular theologians, who basically stop with the mandate to 'make disciples,' without realizing that in this passage, it seems pretty clear that Jesus is speaking of discipling, specifically, not individuals, but whole peoples, whole nations, larger families of the earth.... So that, in the end, when he speaks of 'teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you,' the precedent here is still *panta ta ethne*, not lots of individual 'disciples.'

And, the beginning of this passage actually sounds very much like a direct quote from the tempter, three years earlier:

*The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you **all their authority** and splendor, for **it has been given to me**, and I can give it to anyone I want to."*

Luke 4:5-6

So it almost seems as though the risen Christ, on the mount of ascension, is looking out of the corner of his eye, as he issues this final mandate, to his ancient enemy, and saying, in the side, 'Tempter, all those kingdoms you showed me three years ago, claiming all their authority, which had been given to you...? Well, that's all over. My death, burial and resurrection undoes all that you claimed. So now, all those kingdoms over which you've claimed authority for millennia, now belong to me, and my followers are being commissioned to make them my followers.'

If, then, we go back one step, into the birth, life/ministry, then trial, death and resurrection of our Lord, we have one lengthy tutorial in the great and good reign of God. The 'wise men' who came looking for him after his birth were looking for one credential...that he was born king. His temptation, as we've cited, did have to do with the many kingdoms of this world. His ministry began with an introduction to the coming and nearness of the kingdom of God/heaven. In His famous sermon on the Mount, he told all of his followers to "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all of these other things will be added to you" (Mt. 6:33). But in it, he also gave us the Lord's prayer (what I call "the most quoted, least believed words in history"), in which the apex was a request for his Kingdom to come, his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. A radical, actually utopian prayer—heaven on earth—as the only prayer he left in our hands to pray. The core and dominant theme, by far, in all of his teachings—was

the kingdom of God. His trial and crucifixion were surrounded by real and pseudo-claims to kingship, with the mocking of the soldiers, the crown of thorns, the royal robe, and his conversation with Pilate. At one point, Pilate finally says, "You are a king then?!" to which Jesus replied:

"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

John 18:37

And then Pilate had the audacity to print over Jesus' head, in three languages, the same claim. All of this discussion has led me closer and closer to a 'dominion theology,' for I not only see Jesus' fixation on the good rule of God, but also on the long list of parables which had to do with our rulership, and his granting us, his followers, the kingdom and the keys of the kingdom, say with that gift, that "whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven...."

I also like to pause here and take just one last look at the grand Messianic themes of the O.T. and point to just one of the earliest of these, to see how, even in antiquity, the Jewish patriarchs were envisioning the coming of a King, an Anointed One, but here are Jacob's words as he blessed his son Judah before he died:



The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

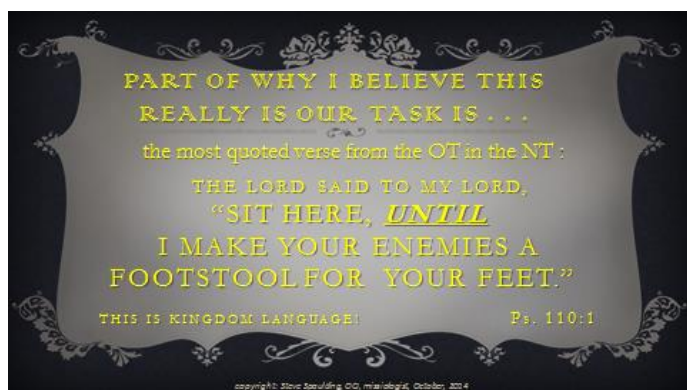
Gen. 49:10

So, throughout our text, we keep coming back to something I was never taught in all my years of 'studying' or 'doing' mission in the Evangelical world, and that is: "obedient nations."

And now, we are back to our grand design, a chambered nautilus of the ages, in which we've looked at various stages along the way and find that increasingly, even with many preliminary or penultimate sections of our task being accomplished, a sense of 'what's next?' And here, I believe we are, at this juncture, opening something before us that is both ancient and very contemporary/modern. But when we open and examine it, do we find some new horizons in our *missio dei*?

And, from this question, I ask another one: How might our work change, if we were actually after a different end-product – to borrow the language of our future perfect friends? If we believed that our commission was embodied in the seeing of whole peoples, whole nations, with their kings, being brought to fuller obedience to the commands of Christ, how might our daily, missional activity actually evolve and develop into new endeavors, maybe a fresh vision statement, new recruiting, new partnerships, a new, more kingdom economy, maybe new donors, fresh intermediate and longer-term goals?

I often enjoy pointing out to people I share these ideas with, a shift in my own thinking, centered on my eschatology. But that really centers on just one verse in Scripture, which I found out a few years back, is apparently the most often quoted verse from the OT in the NT:



*The LORD says to my Lord:
"Sit at my right hand, until I make your
enemies a footstool for your feet."*
Ps. 110:1

This verse is quoted in all the synoptics, Peter's first sermon in Acts 2, Paul's great resurrection chapter, I Corinthians 15, but also in Hebrews 1 and 10, with sections of it elsewhere. In some ways, it really answers that simple question put forward through the ages: "When will Jesus

come back?" Apparently, and as popular as this text is with the NT writers, Jesus and they must have known, when he ascended to the Father, that he was fulfilling this verse, and that his coming would not be characterized by so much of what my dispensational roots would call, "the world has just got to get worse and worse, and then Jesus will come back and set up his kingdom!" No! It's really just the opposite. Hebrews 10, citing this same passage, tells us that Christ is now waiting for that to become a reality, for his enemies to be made a footstool for his feet, and, citing this same verse, Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15, that "the final enemy to be destroyed is death." My perusal of some common commentators simply intoned that this was obviously referring to the second coming of Christ, because we all know that at that time, there will be a general resurrection.



I usually bring this discussion to a close at this point, allowing these Scriptures to really sink in, for us to meditate on their implications for us, our job descriptions, our visions and dreams of the future, and our stepping into God's grand future for us all. And I have found that once this vision begins to sink in, I find a new flock of great promises in Scripture which make me an optimist of this age, and a joint longing for the realities of the coming kingdom of God to be part of my personal approaches to this new view of our unfinished task.



One of these key passages is another of many promises of God scattered throughout Scripture, which points to an ever-more victorious future. We all remember Isaiah 9:6, about God's coming Son, and that "the government shall be upon his shoulders!" but hear what 9:7 has to say!

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end!

That sounds pretty triumphalistic to me. It's a simple promise of God, the context being the coming of his Son—the Prince of Peace. And this context is also speaking of his *first advent*, his birth, but then moving immediately toward things which my own eschatological roots used to point exclusively to a rather nebulous, coming millennium. I have grown to slowly disagree with that

interpretation, and increasingly sense that the language of Christ, his titles, his actions throughout the gospels, and his commissions to his followers throughout and at the end of his brief career on this planet, point to a kingdom which is now coming, and a second coming which will not be characterized by a planet which is so bad off that 'only he can fix it,' but rather a planet on which, increasingly the enemies of Christ *have been made his footstool*, over which he has final victory, collaborating as he had throughout history, with his people, the children of God. Does that mean I'm now post-millennial? I don't know and I really don't care very much, since the millennium is spoken of in only six consecutive verses in one chapter of Scripture; in my opinion, not a great baseline for so much eschatological discussions and debates we've had for centuries. I would say that my eschatology, in light of this rendition of our task, is largely 'basileocentric' ...kingdom-centered. That's, after all, what Christ told us all to seek first, along with his justice.

I could certainly go on, but I'll let things rest here. God bless you each one, as you continue, as do I, to study God's word, and ask Him for insight into his passions, especially as they relate to the *missio dei*, and then seek creative ways to obey him in these callings.

Steve Spaulding, resident missiologist, OC International, Colorado Springs, CO 80923; stevespaulding@oci.org; 719-332-6974