

24:14 Goal

Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (72 months)

Can We Hasten the Lord's Return? Clarifying Some Misunderstandings about 24:14

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People around the world are excited about the 24:14 Coalition.¹ Leaders and catalysts of movements across the globe have begun working together to identify unreached people groups (UPGs) and places. Fresh efforts are developing to bring gospel witness among those peoples and places. But while some rejoice, others protest, seeing 24:14 as a shallow bandwagon—long on zeal and short on missiological depth. In weighing the apprehensions, both scholarly and popular, it appears many of the concerns arise from misunderstandings. In this article, I hope to clarify some that recently appeared in print.

¹ 24:14 is an open-membership community committed to four things:

1. Fully reaching the UNREACHED peoples and places of the earth
2. Reaching them through CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT strategies
3. Engaging them through movement strategies with URGENT SACRIFICE by 2025
4. COLLABORATING with others in the 24:14 movement so we can make progress together.

For more information about this Coalition, see www.2414now.net.

Clarification #1:

The 24:14 Coalition has never set a date by which we expect (or are predicting) the Lord will return.

In the most recent issue of *Themelios* journal, C. J. Moore² implies that the 24:14 Coalition has launched a countdown to the date of Christ's return. He writes: "A modern example of the eschatological motivation for missions is being developed in the *Mission Frontiers* magazine, through their³ 24:14 Coalition based on Matthew 24:14. They include a new countdown, as seen in the title of the January/February issue of 2018: 'Are You In? 24:14: The Coalition to Foster Movements in All Peoples by 2025.'"⁴ He later comments: "man should

² In his article, "Can We Hasten the Parousia? An Examination of Matt 24:14 and Its Implications for Missional Practice," *Themelios* 44.2 (2019), 291-311

³ Contrary to Moore's use of "their," the 24:14 Coalition neither was started by nor is owned by *Mission Frontiers*. *MF* simply makes its readers aware of this coalition.

⁴ *Ibid*, 295



not believe that he can expect or suspect when this day will come (e.g. the year 2000 or 2025).”⁵

We anticipated this concern and penned a clarification in the lead article of that same issue of *Mission Frontiers*.

« The 24:14 Coalition has never set a date by which we expect (or are predicting) the Lord will return. »

In “24:14—The War that Finally Ends,” Stan Parks and Steve Smith stated: “2025 is not the end. It is just the beginning of the end. We need CPM teams in every one of these 130,000 segments sacrificially committed to the war effort of spreading God’s kingdom through movements. Once a team is in place (between now and 2025) the fight has just begun to evangelize the lost and multiply disciples and churches to see a kingdom transformation of those communities.”

For the sake of any who might have missed or misunderstood this, a year later, in the January-February 2019 issue of *Mission Frontiers*, Tim Martin and Stan Parks penned this among their answers to FAQ:

Are you setting 2025 as the year that all nations will be reached?

No, our goal is to engage every unreached people and place with an effective kingdom movement strategy by December 31, 2025. This means that a team (local or expat or combination) equipped in movement strategy will be on location in every unreached people and place. We make no claims about when the Great Commission task will be finished. That is God’s responsibility. He determines the fruitfulness of movements.⁶

5 Ibid, 310

6 In “24:14 FAQ: Clarifying Some Misconceptions,” 38-40. Both these articles are now included as chapters in the book *24:14—A Testimony among All Peoples*, edited by Stan Parks and Dave Coles.

We hope that by once again publishing these clarifications, we can diminish misunderstanding.

In the same article, Moore also claimed: “many who hold to this view [eschatological motivation for missions] believe that once they complete the task of world evangelization, Christ will *immediately* come back, as will be examined in the next section. In other words, all He is waiting on is us.”⁷ And, “those with this motivation have often been proponents of ‘countdowns’ to the completion of world evangelization, which to this day, have proven unsuccessful.”⁸ Such claims do not match anything written by the 24:14 Coalition. Predicting when Jesus will return is not in any way the purpose of 24:14. Rather, it is a call to action for God’s people.

Clarification #2:

We believe 2 Peter 3:12a is best translated as “hastening” the day.

In context, the verse reads: “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet. 3:11-12a, ESV). All other New Testament uses of any form of the Greek word *spoudō*⁹ clearly intend the concept of hastening (and are consistently translated as such in those places). The other possible meaning of *spoudō* (“to desire earnestly”) is only cited from non-biblical sources.¹⁰ All major Bible translations¹¹ translate *spoudontas* in 2 Peter 3:12 as “speed” or “hastening.” The context of this verse also clearly grapples in numerous ways with the issue of *timing*. Verse 4 quotes an accusation that while

7 Ibid, 293

8 Ibid, 293

9 Luke 2:16; 19:5, 6; Acts 20:16; 22:18

10 Some sources, such as *Strong’s Concordance* and *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, list Isaiah 16:5 (LXX) as an example of the meaning “to desire earnestly.” However, the meaning “hastening” is preferred there—not only by *The Septuagint Version: Greek and English*, by Sir Lancelot Brenton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 851; but also by modern Bible translations, such as ESV, NIV, NRSV, NKJV, and MSG.

11 NIV, ESV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, RSV



time goes on, God is not fulfilling the promise of his coming. Verse 8 clarifies that God's timetable is different than ours. Verse 9 explicitly states: "The Lord is not **slow** in keeping his promise" (NIV, emphasis added).

Numerous commentators accept and expound on *spoudontas* in this verse as meaning "hasten." I will cite just three. Michael Green¹² writes:

Wonderful as it may seem, we can actually "hasten it on" (NEB)...In other words, the timing of the advent is to some extent dependent upon the state of the church and of society. What a wonderfully positive conception of our time on earth.... It is intended to be a time of active cooperation with God in the redemption of society.... Evangelism is one way in which we can be said to hasten the coming of the Lord (cf. Mark 13:10).

Dick Lucas & Christopher Green write: "The Old Testament prophecies of the hastening of God's return (e.g. Isa. 62.11) have a new force following the first coming of Jesus, and Jesus underlined that it is within the control of God either to shorten or to lengthen that interim period as he sovereignly wills." (Mark 13:20; Luke 13:6-9)¹³

Edwin Blum¹⁴ writes: "But how can Christians hasten what God will do? Peter would probably answer by saying that prayer (Matt. 6:10) and preaching (Matt 24:14) are two principal means to bring people to repentance."

As these commentators have noted, the concept of hastening the day of Christ's return fits well with other Scriptures and serves also as a wonderful and appropriate motivator to passionate godliness and ministry. Attempts to avoid this more likely meaning of 2 Peter 3:12 fall short of credibility.

« This age-old tension, portrayed throughout Scripture, impacts our understanding and our action, especially in matters of prayer, evangelism and missions. »

Clarification #3: The concept of hastening the day is entirely compatible with God's sovereignty.

As reflected in the title of D.A. Carson's book *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspective in Tension*, these two factors fit together in a marvelous way. This age-old tension, portrayed throughout Scripture, impacts our understanding and our action, especially in matters of prayer, evangelism and missions. In each of these realms, the role of human action *vis-à-vis* the will of a sovereign God work *together* in mysterious ways that defy simple human analysis. As Carson writes: "It seems to me that most (although not all) of the debate can be analyzed in terms of the tendency toward reductionism...attempts to resolve the tension may only serve to distort the balance which the Bible preserves in its treatment of the tension."¹⁵

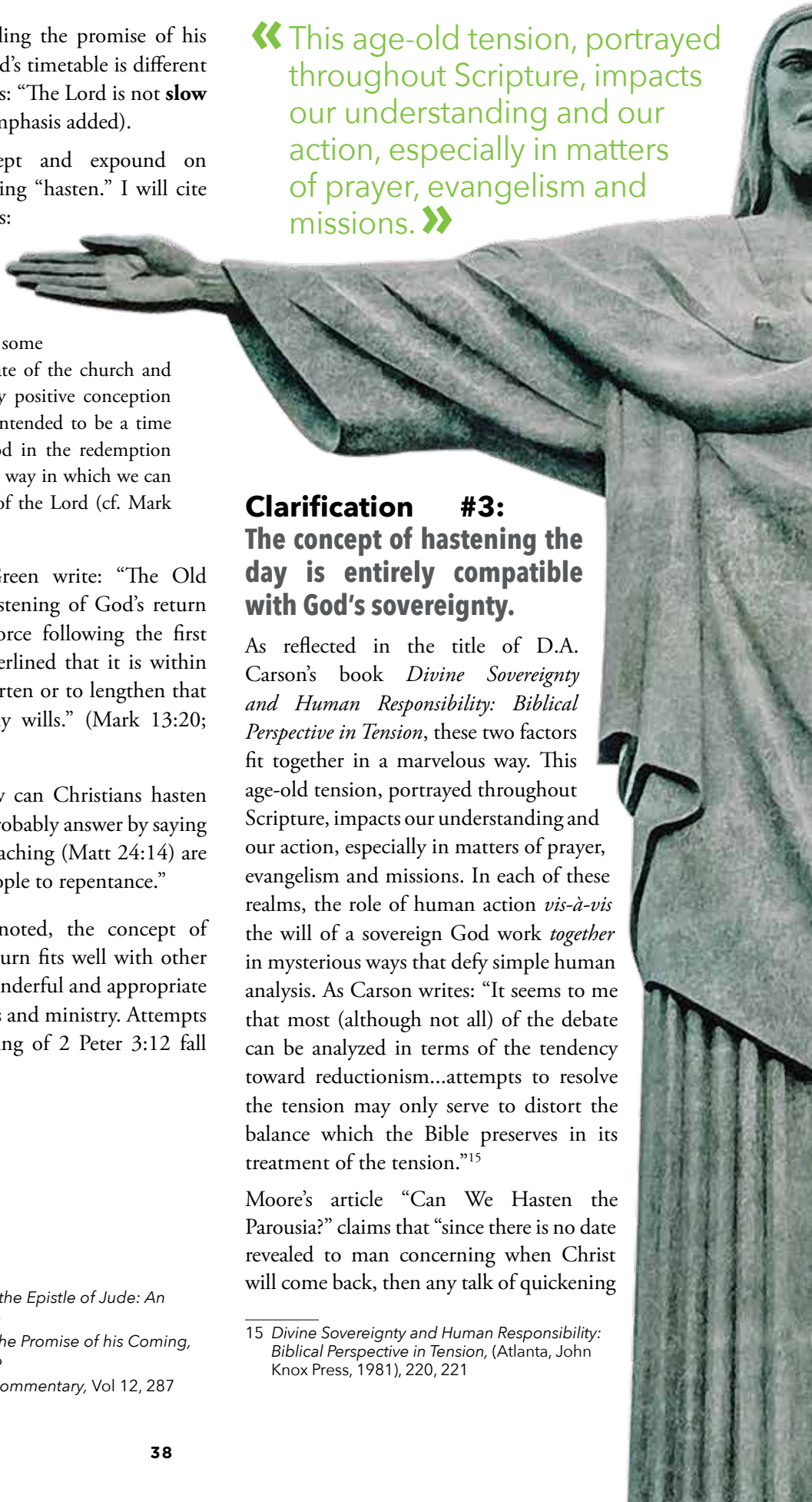
Moore's article "Can We Hasten the Parousia?" claims that "since there is no date revealed to man concerning when Christ will come back, then any talk of quickening

12 In *The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, 153

13 In *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude the Promise of his Coming*, Downers Grove: IV Press 1995, 146

14 In "2 Peter," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol 12, 287

15 *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspective in Tension*, (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1981), 220, 221



or hastening that coming is nonsensical.”¹⁶ He also states, “the notion that we might ‘hasten’ a day that the Lord is sovereign over is somewhat absurd. God, in his omniscience, knows when the Parousia will be; that day will not change. Man cannot surprise God with efforts that supposedly quicken a day that is already set. As well, man should not believe that he can expect or suspect when this day will

come (e.g. the year 2000 or 2025). It will certainly be a surprising day for all of mankind. Moreover, to believe that the Parousia can actually be “hastened” might logically lead to the heresy of open theism (though one could argue that this is the extreme, logical conclusion).¹⁷ This claim seems to reflect a shallow understanding of the interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Objections of this sort are answered not only in Carson’s book but also in J.I Packer’s classic: *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, in which he writes: “The belief that God is sovereign does not affect the *urgency* of evangelism.”¹⁸

Hundreds of years before Carson and Packer expounded this mystery, Jonathan Edwards described it extensively. He employed the phrase “use of means” countless times in his careful and detailed descriptions of the mysterious interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. For example, in *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the*

¹⁶ Ibid, 309

¹⁷ Ibid, 310

¹⁸ *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 98

Spirit of God he wrote: “It is surely no argument that an effect is not from God, that means are used in producing it; for we know that it is God’s manner to make use of means in carrying on His work in the world.”¹⁹

John Piper and Justin Taylor note that “Edwards’... more general emphasis on a proper use of means is reiterated by many other Puritans.”²⁰ Clearly, the theme of human means accomplishing what God has sovereignly decreed has a long history among Reformed and other Protestant writers.

Sadly, the *abuse* of God’s sovereignty as an argument against earnest human effort in missions also has a long history. John Ryland Sr., the chairman of William Carey’s Baptist denomination, enunciated it most notably in 1787 by when he replied, “Sit down young man. You are an enthusiast! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without consulting you or me.”²¹ The charge of shallow “enthusiasm” still lingers, aimed at those passionately pursuing the reaching of all *ethnē*. Yet we best honor God’s sovereignty by earnestly using all means He has given us to disciple all nations.

Clarification #4: Hastening the Lord’s return is just one among many biblical motivations for ministry among those who believe in it.

Moore claims “proponents of the eschatological motivation not only believe they can quicken the coming of Christ, but **they also have this primarily in mind** with regard to their work. **Therefore, they often do** whatever possible to achieve this end, which leads to missional malpractice” (emphasis added).²² Contrary to his claim to know others’ minds, he misrepresents the intent and actions of these fellow believers.

To the best of my knowledge, every missiologist, missionary and biblical scholar who believes mission activity can hasten the Lord’s return holds that belief as *one among many* noble motivations for ministry. Other commonly mentioned motivations would include

¹⁹ In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol 2*. (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986) p. 263

²⁰ In *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2004), 242.

²¹ “William Carey: A Baptist Page Portrait” <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/bcarey15.html>, accessed 9/4/2019

²² Moore, *ibid*, 292

God's glory (e.g. Ps. 86:9), salvation made known to all nations (e.g. Ps. 67:2), obedience to Jesus' final command (Matt. 28:18-19); love for the lost (e.g. 1 John 4:19), bringing reconciliation (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:18-20) and preparing Christ's bride for his wedding feast (Rev. 19:7). We have a wealth of noble motivations for proclaiming the good news.

Clarification #5: Believing that mission activity can hasten the day increases missional diligence, not missional malpractice.

To note just one example of increased effectiveness: since the 24:14 Coalition began only two and a half years ago, greater mutual trust has yielded better collaboration among agencies and better understanding of gaps in engagement among UPGs. These in turn have already led to fresh sending efforts among dozens of UPGs.

The allegation has been made: "the eschatological motivation for missions has often led to practices that are outright dangerous."²³ Also, "In particular, the countdown itself has led to malpractice; because certain workers want to complete the Great Commission by a certain date, they often do whatever works to maximize the number of converts."²⁴ This accusation is buttressed with a quote from the *Perspectives* reader: "Peter Wagner has even stated that 'setting goals for world evangelization ... requires a degree of pragmatism.'" He goes on to say that workers need to stop or change what they are doing if people are not substantially coming to Christ."²⁵ But what Wagner *actually* wrote conveyed more nuance and wisdom: "If we are investing resources of time, personnel and money in programs which are supposed to make disciples but *are not*, we need to reconsider them and be *willing* to change the program *if needed*"²⁶ (emphasis added).

Moore presents Jim Montgomery and the DAWN effort as a Case Study of "The Danger of the Eschatological Motivation for Missions." "Montgomery ... had the year 2000 in mind and went well on his way to pragmatism: 'Unless [workers] are armed with a vision of multiplying churches, they can easily fall into the trap of using familiar methodologies that produce little or no growth when other methods might produce a great harvest.' Montgomery and others like him assume that if a methodology is not producing immediate and quantifiable results, then it should be disregarded."²⁷

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"Go slow to go fast"
to counsel slow and careful laying of the
foundation for a hoped-for movement. »

Granted that Montgomery's insight could be *misapplied*, we need to ask: "Is there in fact a missiological danger of "using familiar methodologies that produce little or no growth when other methods might produce a great harvest"? Based on over two decades of missionary experience, I would say "Yes, absolutely!" But Montgomery's potentially helpful insight is then twisted by the addition of

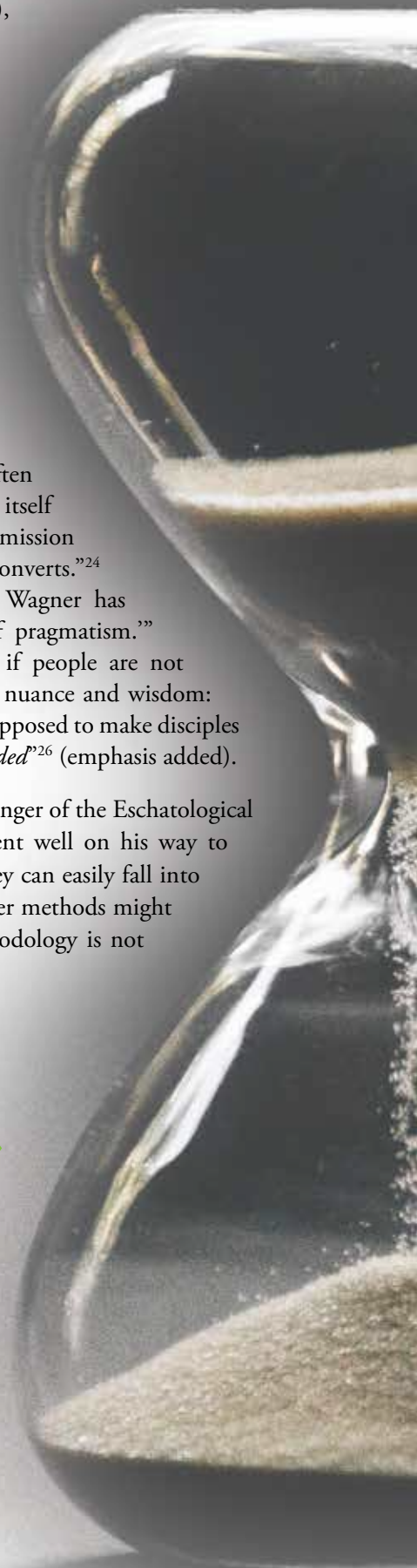
23 Ibid, 292

24 Ibid, 293

25 Ibid, 292-293

26 "On the Cutting Edge of Mission Strategy," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th Ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 578

27 Ibid, 293



interpretive words: “immediate and quantifiable results.” I know of no CPM methodology claiming “immediate and quantifiable results.” In fact, numerous CPM trainers use the pithy “Go slow to go fast” to counsel slow and careful laying of the foundation for a hoped-for movement. Back in 2013 Ted Esler wrote: “A critique of CPM has been that it is all about speed. This is actually not a fair assessment because the original stages, as put forth in the theory, are slow-growth stages and large-scale growth does not occur until later on.”²⁸ It appears the danger here lies more in the critic’s misunderstanding than in the methods being criticized.

After admitting that “the overall goal behind this [DAWN] strategy is sound,”²⁹ Moore claims to know Montgomery’s (problematic) thoughts better than Montgomery himself. [Montgomery] “often claims he **did not mean** the goal had to be completed by 2000, but it seems apparent that **he had this in mind**” (emphasis added).³⁰ We prefer to honor our brothers’ and sisters’ expressed intentions rather than publicly accusing them based on attempted mind-reading of their true intentions. The next paragraph after that quote presents good questions about the fruit of the DAWN efforts (i.e. “Were these churches really healthy?”). But no evidence of answers is offered, one way or the other. The questions function as innuendo, followed by a speculative negative conclusion: “Not to mention, Montgomery **may have been misguided** by his interpretation of certain passages” (emphasis added).³¹ Yet no evidence at all is offered of any misguidance or misinterpretation.

Moore admits that noted missiologist David Hesselgrave “stated there was no harm in setting [the year 2000 as a] specific goal.”³² Yet Moore continues, “However, this traditional understanding of the eschatological motivation for missions has, again, often led to pragmatic methods that should have been avoided.”³³ The prime example cited of this egregious behavior might surprise many: A.B. Simpson and his legacy (the founding of the Christian Missionary Alliance). His main complaint with A.B. Simpson’s approach was that he “rushed church planting with a notable lack of reverence for biblical ecclesiology. Rather than ‘adopting complex doctrinal formulations that polarize,’ Simpson sought to start churches ‘with a few distinctive points about Christ on which many [would] readily concur.’”³⁴ This leads to the indefensible claim that “Simpson essentially promoted unity **without truth**” (emphasis added).³⁵ Simpson is also criticized for sending mission recruits to a Bible college, in order to more quickly get mission candidates to the field, “foregoing the more traditional model of seminary education.”³⁶ Readers can decide for themselves whether the 130+ years of global ministry by the Christian Missionary Alliance constitutes missional malpractice.

Other cases of “Eschatological Motivation for Mission” cited include the AD 2000 movement. Related quotes include: “The attendees of the Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelization, an ecumenical movement for reaching the whole world

²⁸ “Coming to Terms: Two Church Planting Paradigms,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 30:2 Summer 2013, 71

²⁹ *Ibid*, 293

³⁰ *Ibid*, 294

³¹ *Ibid*, 294

³² *Ibid*, 295

³³ *Ibid*, 295

³⁴ *Ibid*, 295

³⁵ *Ibid*, 296

³⁶ In private email correspondence dated August 21, 2019

with the gospel, affirmed the following together: “There is nothing magical about the date [2000], yet should we not do our best to reach this goal? Christ commands us to take the gospel to all peoples.” It appears *any* mention of dates or goal setting can become fodder for criticism, even when those are explicitly *not* directly tied to claims of Christ’s return.

Other than this questionable criticism of the Christian Missionary Alliance, the only other example cited in “Can We Hasten the Parousia?” which sounds at all like “missional malpractice” comes from the nineteenth century: shallow conversion of Jews by a group called LSPCJ. Over 100 years have passed since the events described (by a secondary source). A representative of CMJ (The Church’s Ministry among Jewish People—the current name of the former LSPCJ) comments³⁷ on this characterization: “CMJ...does not adopt any one particular eschatological framework” and the article cited “fails to give any evidence as far as I can see to support such a strong and critical view.”

So in spite of repeated claims that eschatological motivation for mission results in missional malpractice, the case seems to consist mainly of innuendo, a dubious 100+-year-old example, a claim of mind-reading someone who died 13 years ago, and an attack on one particular denominational founder of over 100 years ago. Missiological malpractice *does* exist today, but “Can We Hasten the Parousia?” fails to identify *any* current cases, much less to substantiate repeated accusations against those believing their efforts can “hasten the day.”

Clarification #6:
**Gospel proclamation becomes
 more fruitful with awareness
 of diversity of contexts.**

« Those aiming for maximum cross-cultural fruitfulness study and apply Paul’s contextual principles and examples. »

The Apostle Paul described his diverse approaches to different groups, specifying Jews and Gentiles: “Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible....I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:19, 22b, NIV). His diverse methods of gospel proclamation among different groups are well illustrated in Acts 13, 14 and 17. Those aiming for maximum cross-cultural fruitfulness study and apply Paul’s contextual principles and examples.

« The way of wise missiology follows the Psalmist’s path of acknowledging and learning from the glorious works of our mighty God. »

Moore, in contrast, offers this simplistic suggestion: “What if the method is simply the proclamation of the gospel, ordained by God as the primary means to salvation (Rom. 1:16)? Should this, then, be changed?”³⁸ Not only the biblical texts of 1 Corinthians and Acts, but also the history and present case studies of missions show clearly that not all methods of proclamation are equally fruitful. No method guarantees fruit, as the harvest belongs to the Lord and salvation is a work of his Spirit. Yet a methodological recommendation of “simply the proclamation of the gospel” invites missiological ignorance and counterproductive efforts. Countless examples could be cited, along the lines of this video: “Preaching outside largest market in Indonesia” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-97H3AOfyKg>.

The way of wise missiology follows the Psalmist’s path of acknowledging and *learning from* the glorious works of our mighty God. “Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them” (Ps. 111:2, NIV). By considering the Lord’s great works in bringing many to salvation through movements, we can glean much. We can learn not only about God’s mighty power at work today, but also about various proclamation approaches that have been more (or less) helpful in various contexts.

The same scholar claims: “There is no way for mankind to know what God considers ‘reached’ and what he considers ‘unreached.’” The Apostle Paul disagreed. He wrote:


38 311

37 “Coming to Terms Two Church Planting Paradigms,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 30:2 Summer 2013, 293

“It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (Rom. 15:20, NIV). For our current application of this verse, we can easily distinguish (for starters) between those individuals who have made a credible profession of saving faith and those groups who, to the best of our knowledge, have no known believers and no known gospel witness. We need not be tightly bound by estimates of 1%, 2%, 5%, etc. But if we are serious about the gospel being proclaimed to “every tribe and language and people and nation” we rightfully distinguish between those who have already heard and those who have never heard. A small strategic step further asks who has *abundant* opportunities to hear and who has very few. This constitutes responsible stewardship toward completing the commission Jesus has given us—to make disciples of all nations.

« We choose—and invite others to join us in—diligent and responsible collaboration and mission effort to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, as soon as possible to as many as possible. »

Conclusion

Can we hasten the Lord’s return? Responsible exegesis leans toward a positive answer, while no one we know of in the 24:14 Coalition claims a specific date for that return. Mission effort is not the only factor in God’s sovereign determination of the end of this age, but it’s clearly a relevant factor—and the only one over which we have any control. We choose—and invite others to join us in—diligent and responsible collaboration and mission effort to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, as soon as possible to as many as possible. May God be glorified through these endeavors. 

GOOD
NEWS
IS COMING