

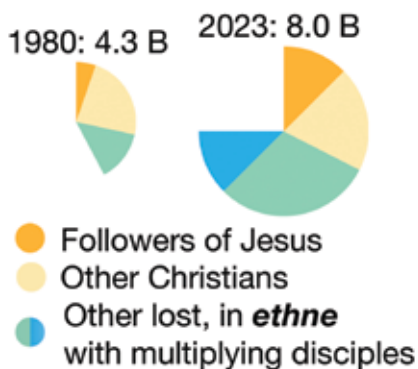
The Astonishing Power & Progress of God's Promise

By **ROBBY BUTLER**

Robby Butler served for 24 years with the U.S. Center for World Mission—first in the computer department and later as Ralph Winter's personal assistant. In 2004, he and his wife Jackie founded Mission Network to support ministries and individual ministries in blessing those ethne still without movements to Jesus. Robby is a recovering "activist," learning to wait in prayer on God for direction in His timing. RobbyQButler@pm.me



Four thousand years ago, God told an elderly, childless man that all of earth's family-lines would one day be blessed through his descendant, then confirmed this promise with an oath. Two thousand years later, Jesus commissioned and equipped His followers to fulfill this promise. In 1980, this blessing was only spreading among 40% of humanity. Yet today—less than 50 years later—this blessing is multiplying among 75% of humanity.



How central is this promise to God's purpose?

The LXX/Septuagint—which translated the Old Testament into Greek before Jesus' birth—helps us trace God's promise through the Old and New Testament around the Greek word *ethne* (family-lines).

Of the five times God declares His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, these two in the LXX read:

"... all ethne on earth will be blessed through him [Abraham]" (Gen. 18:18).

"... I swear by myself," declares the LORD, "... through your offspring [Abraham] all ethne on earth will be blessed (Gen. 22:18).

Hebrews identifies Genesis 22:18 as clarifying God's purpose:

"Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, He confirmed it with an oath" (Heb. 6:17).

Both times, God was angry enough to destroy the Israelites and start over with Moses; Moses appealed to this “Genesis 22:18 oath”:

“Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom You swore by Your own self” (Exod. 32:13).

“If you put all [Israel] to death ... the ethne ... will say, “The LORD was not able to bring them into the land He promised them on oath ...” (Num. 14:15–16).

Ethne appears nearly 700 times in the LXX, in virtually every book of the Old Testament, including:

- Psalms:

“Ask me, and I will make the ethne your inheritance ...” (Ps. 2:8).

“...proclaim among the ethne what He has done” (Ps. 9:11).

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the ethne ...” (Ps. 46:10).

- Isaiah:

It is too small a thing for You to be My servant to ... bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make You a light for the ethne, that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6, cf. Acts 13:47).

In the New Testament, Paul calls God’s promise to Abraham both the “Gospel” and the “mystery”:

“Scripture ... announced the Gospel ... to Abraham: ‘All ethne will be blessed through you’” (Gal. 3:8).

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery ...: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the ethne has come in” (Rom. 11:25).

“... in accordance with my Gospel, ... in keeping with the revelation of the mystery ... that all the ethne might come to the obedience that comes from faith” (Rom. 16:25-26).

“This mystery is that through the Gospel the ethne are heirs ... and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6).

“... God has chosen to make known among the ethne ... this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

Of course, Jesus’ concern for the *ethne* appears throughout His teaching, for example:

On My account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the ethne (Matt. 10:18).

This Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all ethne, and then the end will come (Matt. 24:14).

And the Gospel must first be preached to all ethne (Mark 13:10).

... Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all ethne’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers’ (Mark 11:17).

Jesus’ concern for all *ethne* becomes especially evident in His commissioning of His disciples:

Therefore go and disciple all ethne, ... (Matt. 28:19).

This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all ethne ... (Luke 24:46–47).

What did the Holy Spirit do in those first followers of Jesus?

Like most people, Jesus’ first followers had deep prejudice against other *ethne*, and started off only in same-culture witness to other Jews (Acts 11:19)! Yet as they were led by the Holy Spirit, He:

- Overcame Peter’s prejudice against other *ethne* (Acts 10).
- Addressed the general prejudice of Jewish believers against other *ethne* (Acts 15).
- Raised up Paul as the apostle to the *ethne* (Gal. 2:7).

This initial Spirit-led movement to Jesus recorded in Acts became the first domino in a long chain which may be finishable in our generation.

How far have we come?

Those earliest followers of Jesus could not have humanly grasped the complexity of their commission. However, today we can estimate the challenge before them and see the progress to date, as summarized in the accompanying graphics, starting in 33AD¹:

¹ 1792 figures estimated from Carey’s 1972 *Enquiry*:
 WmCarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf
 1980 data from Ralph Winter’s 1980 Hidden Peoples poster:
 JoshuaProject.net/1980pie
 2022 data mostly from Joshua Project’s interactive map:
 JoshuaProject.net/frontier/interactive

World population was about **0.25 billion**, with virtually everyone isolated from the first multiplying followers of Jesus in thousands of distinct *ethne*.

33 AD: 0.25 Billion

- 120 Followers of Jesus
- 0.25 B in undisciplined *ethne*



1792: 0.73 Billion

- 110 K Followers of Jesus
- 180 M Other Christians
- 550 M needing **pioneer** teams



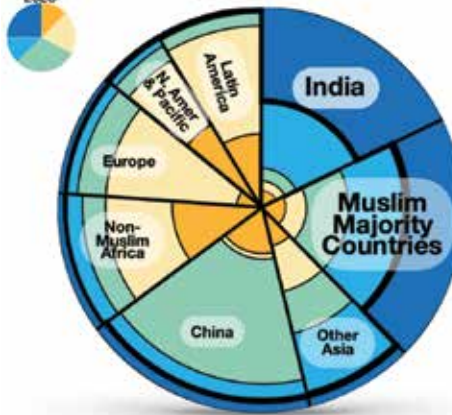
1980: 4.3 Billion

- 0.23 B Followers of Jesus
- 1 B Other Christians
- 0.6 B Other lost, in *ethne* with multiplying disciples
- 2.5 B in **Frontier ethne**, needing **pioneer** teams



2023: 8 Billion

- 1 B Followers of Jesus
- 1.6 B Other Christians
- 2.4 B Other lost, in *ethne* with multiplying disciples
- 2.0 B in **Frontier ethne**, needing **pioneer** teams (1.6 B in ~300 largest *Frontier ethne*, each over 1M in population)



- Just **120 followers** of Jesus drew together in prayer prior to Pentecost (Acts 1:14–15).
- Thus for every **one** of these first followers of Jesus, roughly **TWO MILLION** lived in *ethne* needing pioneer, cross-cultural workers.

Today the global situation is much clearer.

- Humanity now numbers eight billion, in 17,000 distinct *ethne*. Forty percent are “unreached” (less than two percent Evangelicals), but only twenty-five percent (**two billion**) remain in **Frontier People Groups (FPGs)**—with virtually no followers of Jesus, no movements to Jesus, and still needing pioneer, cross-cultural workers.
- **Followers of Jesus** have meanwhile multiplied to an estimated **one billion** (movement disciples have been doubling every three-to-five years, and now number 115 million. Another 900 million Evangelicals, Charismatics and Pentecostals are doubling every 20 years).
- Thus for every **one** follower of Jesus, there are only **TWO** individuals living in *ethne* that need pioneer, cross-cultural workers.

What's Next?

Of the two billion in *Frontier ethne*, 80% (1.6 billion) are concentrated in less than 300 large groups (over 1 million each). Many of these have been “engaged” by Christianity for decades or centuries, becoming case studies in how our intuitions and strategies can go wrong.



SCAN ME

United global prayer, leading to Spirit-led collaboration, must be our next step with these peoples. Join in at: GlobalFamily24-7Prayer.org.

