



Hermeneutic Implications of Matthew 28:18-20 to Contemporary Missions in Loti Mission Field, Wasinmi, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract	Original Research Article
<p>This research is an exegetical study of Matthew 28:18-20 with the overall aim of studying its implication as it relates to contemporary issues facing missions today. The research was motivated by the numerous numbers of unsaved people the researcher saw on his visit to Loti mission field during an evangelistic outreach to the village where there is a mix of Egba and Zabarmarwa people. The village has only one church that is struggling to reach the large muslim Zabarmarwa and idolatrous populace of Egba descent despite its proximity to Abeokuta, a city where there are churches on almost all the streets. The study adopted the observational and unstructured interview method of the survey type to elicit response from a few respondents. Findings revealed that several churches attempted to evangelize Loti but failed. Though a church exist in the village but her impact is not felt due to underfunding and poor oversight from the sending church. More so, they do not have enough missionary presence working among them to fulfill the great commission. The study concludes that there are numerous grounds to cover in the pursuit of the Great Commission especially among unreached people groups because churches have concentrated most of their efforts in reached places at the neglect of those places lacking sufficient presence of churches. This study recommends that the church should make the Great Commission her priority and give all necessary support for those sent to unreached places among other necessary things.</p> <p>Keywords: Missions, Contemporary, Great Commission, Implications.</p>	

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Commission is the main calling of every child of God that is born again, this mandate lies at the very core of Christian identity and purpose.¹ Rooted in the authoritative words of Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew 28:18–20, this commission encompasses three foundational imperatives: make disciples of all nations, baptism

in the name of the Triune God, and teaching them to obey the commands of Christ. These three dimensional imperatives can be summarized as evangelism, missions, and discipleship.² Though evangelism may sometimes occur as a singular, decisive encounter, missionary engagement extends far beyond that initial moment. It is a sustained, comprehensive endeavor that incorporates both the



proclamation of the gospel and the long-term formation of converts into committed followers of Christ.³

For generations, a significant portion of the global church has interpreted the Great Commission outside the precise theological and linguistic framework in which Jesus originally delivered it. When Christ issued the directive to "go and make disciples of all nations," the underlying Greek expression *panta ta ethne* carries a meaning far more nuanced than contemporary ecclesiastical understanding tends to acknowledge.⁴ The concept of "nations" as Jesus employed it bears little resemblance to the modern geopolitical notion of nation-states. This interpretive gap has, over time, considerably hindered the full realization of Christ's redemptive vision for global evangelization.⁵

The Greek term *ethne*, from which the English words "ethnic" and "ethnicity" are directly derived, points unmistakably to people groups, tribes, and kinship communities. Consequently, the missional imperative of Christ was not merely a call to cross national borders, but a deliberate commission to penetrate every distinct ethnic and tribal community on earth with the message of the gospel.⁶

From a sociological standpoint, the concept of a "nation" is best understood not through political boundaries, but through shared cultural identity encompassing common language, customs, and collective affinity. It is the convergence of multiple such distinct nations within a defined geographical territory that constitutes what we commonly refer to as a country. This distinction is critically important for missiology: while the international community formally recognizes 196 sovereign countries, anthropological and ethnolinguistic research has identified approximately 17,446 distinct people groups or nations across the globe, a figure that dramatically reshapes the church's understanding of what it truly means to fulfill the Great Commission.⁷

It is precisely this vast and staggering number of distinct people groups awaiting the gospel that renders the Great Commission truly deserving of its name. A believer or minister with limited

missiological awareness might erroneously conclude that the evangelistic task is complete upon having preached across all 196 recognized sovereign nations of the world. Yet such a conclusion profoundly underestimates the scope of Christ's mandate, given that tens of thousands of ethnolinguistic communities remain unreached by the gospel to this day.⁸ Remarkably, the biblical conception of "nations" as derived from the Greek *ethne* aligns seamlessly with the sociological understanding of nationhood — both frameworks anchoring identity not in political geography, but in shared ethnicity, language, and cultural heritage. This convergence of biblical language and social science lends compelling weight to a people-group-centered approach to global mission.⁹

Throughout modern missionary history, evangelically minded missionaries who have grasped the ethnolinguistic scope of the Great Commission have deliberately directed their efforts toward penetrating distinct tribal and ethnic communities across the globe. Central to this evangelical missionary enterprise has been an unwavering commitment to carrying the gospel to those who have never encountered it. Yet despite this noble pursuit, the very concept of Christian missions has been widely misunderstood and in many cases, distorted within local church communities far removed from serious missiological reflection.¹⁰

It is worth noting that when Christ entrusted the Great Commission to His earliest disciples, the mandate was never intended to expire with the apostolic generation. Rather, it constitutes a standing charge to the Church in every age until the close of this present era. What makes Christian missions distinctively unique is its role as the ordained instrument through which God draws unregenerate men and women particularly those in geographically and culturally isolated communities into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.¹¹

Among evangelical missiologists, there exists a broad consensus that unreached people groups represent the most pressing frontier of global mission. The commonly accepted threshold for classifying a community as "unreached" is the

absence of an indigenous Christian population exceeding two percent of the total group. Crucially, missiological research consistently reveals that the majority of these communities have not rejected the Christian message, they simply have never been exposed to it. The pursuit of these forgotten peoples, therefore, remains the irreducible core of the Great Commission mandate.¹²

At the very heart of Christian theology lies a profound truth: that God Himself is inherently missional in nature. The sending of His only Son into the world stands as the supreme expression of this divine missionary impulse, as Christ came not merely as a teacher or miracle worker, but as the ultimate missionary, willingly laying down His life to atone for human sin and restore a broken world to fellowship with its Creator. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ form the theological foundation upon which the possibility of reconciliation between God and humanity rests — a reconciliation made accessible to all through genuine repentance and faith.¹³

Before His ascension, Christ commissioned His followers to carry forward this same redemptive work in the world. It is therefore a matter of grave concern that significant portions of the contemporary Church have gradually shifted their focus away from this sacred calling, becoming preoccupied with pursuits that, however well-intentioned, fall short of this primary mandate. A measurable decline in missionary zeal toward unreached peoples is among the most telling indicators that a congregation or indeed an entire Christian community has grown distant from its foundational devotion to Christ. In both the Western church and across the African continent, few things speak more plainly to a deeper spiritual erosion than believers who have grown indifferent to the eternal condition of a world without Christ.¹⁴

The Great Commission, in its fullest sense, articulates the very reason the Church continues to exist in the world between Christ's ascension and His promised return. Until the King of kings gathers His own to Himself, the Church's primary occupation remains unchanged going into every corner of the

earth, declaring the love and lordship of Christ, making disciples, administering baptism, and instructing new believers in wholehearted obedience to all that Christ has commanded.¹⁵

In recent decades, a notable pattern has emerged within African Christianity, one in which the energies of the Church have been largely channeled toward the multiplication of congregations in territories already exposed to the gospel, while the equally vital task of pioneer evangelism in unreached regions has received comparatively little attention. The Church, rightly understood, carries a dual responsibility: to consolidate and nurture existing Christian communities while simultaneously pushing beyond familiar boundaries to plant the gospel where Christ has never been named.¹⁶

Compounding this imbalance is the widespread proliferation of prosperity-oriented and self-centered gospel expressions across the African church landscape. This theological drift has gradually dulled the missionary conscience of many believers, displacing a burden for the lost with a preoccupation with personal comfort, material blessing, and individual advancement.¹⁷ Similarly, an intensified and often theologically ungrounded emphasis on deliverance ministry and sensational prophetic activity has further diverted congregational attention away from the Church's primary redemptive mandate. When spiritual warfare and prophetic spectacle become the defining identity of a congregation, the call to global mission is almost inevitably relegated to the margins.¹⁸

It is also a practical reality that churches positioning themselves primarily as centers of prosperity or deliverance tend to attract rapid numerical growth, a growth largely driven by felt needs rather than genuine discipleship. In contrast, congregations committed to the slower, more demanding work of training and releasing believers into missionary service may grow less dramatically, yet contribute far more meaningfully to the advancement of the Kingdom at its furthest frontiers.¹⁹

2.0 Authorship

Since the times of the early church fathers, apostle Matthew has always been accredited with the authorship of the first gospel (canonically). Even the title "According to Matthew" (KATA MAQQAION) is found in the earliest manuscripts, and was the most highly regarded and quoted of the gospels by the church fathers.²⁰ Matthew is also called Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27), and was the son of Alphaeus (Luke 5:27). He was a tax collector, probably stationed on a main trade route near Capernaum where he would have collected tolls for Herod Antipas from commercial traffic.²¹ Additionally, being a tax collector might better qualify Matthew for his role as an official recorder of the life and actions of Christ.²²

After the resurrection there is no other mention of him in the New Testament. According to the resources available to us, Papias (the Bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia ca. AD 130) was the first to associate the apostle Matthew with this document. Eusebius, the early church historian, records Papias' account: "Matthew collected the oracles (ta logia) in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could."²³ This quote also introduces some problems. What was Papias referring to when he stated that Matthew wrote in the Hebrew dialect? Some have understood this not as a reference to the Hebrew as we have in the Old Testament, but instead the Syro-Chaldaic, or Aramaic. On the other hand, most scholars insist that Matthew was originally written in Greek because many parts of the Gospel are extremely (if not identically) similar to Mark's, which was indubitably written in Greek. Others have also concluded that Matthew wrote two Gospels—one in a Palestinian language and the other in Greek. Ralph Martin's conclusion is that "Papias' tradition can at best relate only to a collection of material later used in the composition of the entire Gospel."²⁴

Not until the eighteenth century did the question of authorship become an issue. More recently, since Matthew does rely heavily on Mark's Gospel ("Date and Location of Composition" below), some scholars have discarded the idea that the author was one of the twelve apostles. On the other hand, Papias also said that Mark was the

interpreter of Peter and therefore, the apostle Matthew would not have a problem with deferring to the early leader of the church.²⁵

Date and Location of Composition

Various estimates have placed the date of Matthew's composition anywhere from AD 50 - to AD 100. But before a date can be decided, its relation to the Gospel of Mark must first be addressed. If Mark was written first, then Matthew must have a later date (and vice-versa). The most widely accepted hypothesis is that both Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source for various reasons. Matthew even reproduced about ninety percent of Mark, while Luke reproduced about sixty percent.²⁶ Without going into much detail on the dating of Mark's Gospel, it was probably written somewhere between AD 50 and AD 55. Consequently, Matthew's Gospel could have reasonably been written anywhere between AD 55 and AD 60. This date allows time for Matthew to have access to Mark's Gospel, and suggests that he completed the Gospel before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, because it would seem strange for the author not to mention this event in light of chapter 24.²⁷

This dating also allows time for Luke to use Matthew's Gospel in composing his own Gospel, as well as its sequel (Acts, ca. AD 62). Though dating the Gospel maybe difficult or complicated, it is even more problematic to determine where Matthew wrote the Gospel. Most scholars conclude that Matthew was written in either Palestine or Syria because of its Jewish nature. Antioch of Syria is usually the most favoured because many in the early church dispersed there (Acts 11:19, 27). Another reason for favouring Antioch is that the earliest reference to Matthew's Gospel was found in Ignatius' (the Bishop of Antioch) *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (ca. 110).²⁸

Themes

The overriding theme shows Jesus as the messiah, but there are also several minor themes, some of which directly relate to the major theme.

These other themes include the kingdom of heaven, the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, Jesus as the fulfiller of the law, and the king who will return in the clouds.²⁹

Literary Structure, Coherence, and Unity

The structure of Matthew's Gospel is very remarkable. The Gospel can be divided into three parts: the prologue (1:1-2:23), the body (3:1-28:15), and the epilogue (28:16-20). Matthew constructed his body around five distinct discourses: the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29), the Commissioning of the Apostles (10:1-42), Parables about the Kingdom (13:1-52), Relationships in the Kingdom (18:1-35), and the Olivet Discourse (24:1-25:46).³⁰

Each discourse also ends with a recognizable closing statement (7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1), for example: "When Jesus had finished saying these things...." Even more interesting are the intricate parallels between the first and fifth discourses, and the second and fourth discourses. This leaves the third discourse (Parables about the Kingdom) as the focal point. Though we are not sure about the comparison of Jesus' baptism with his death, there is a rather striking parallel between Emmanuel (1:23; lit. "God with us") and Jesus' last words, "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (28:20).³¹

Text of Matthew 28:18-20 in Greek Language

¹⁸καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

¹⁹πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος,

²⁰διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετείλαμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος (SBGLNT)

Text of Matthew 28:18-20 in English Language

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (NIV)

Lexico-Semantic Study of Matthew 28:18-20

The immediate context of 28:18-20 provides us examples for how to testify about Christ (28:1-10) and how *not* to testify about Christ (28:11-15). But the context of the whole Gospel of Matthew further informs how we should read this passage, especially because it is the conclusion of the Gospel and readers would have finished the rest of this Gospel by the time they reach it.³²

The command to "make disciples" of all nations (KJV has "teach" them) is surrounded by three clauses in Greek that describe how we make disciples of the nations: by "going," "baptizing," and "teaching." Jesus had spoken of "going" when he had sent his disciples out even within Galilee (10:7), but here disciples must go to other cultures and peoples because they will make disciples of the "nations." Making disciples of the "nations" fits an emphasis developed throughout this Gospel. The four women specifically mentioned in Jesus' ancestry (1:2-17) appear to be Gentiles: Tamar the Canaanite, Rahab the Jerichoite, Ruth the Moabitess, and the "widow of Uriah" the Hittite (1:3, 5-6). Ancient Jewish genealogies normally emphasize the purity of one's Israelite lineage, but this genealogy deliberately underlines the mixed-race heritage of the Messiah who will save Gentiles as well as Jews.³³

When many of his own people ignored or persecuted him, pagan astrologers from the East came to worship him (2:1-12). God and his Son could raise up Abraham's children even from stones

(3:9), work in “Galilee of the Gentiles” (4:15), bless the faith of a Roman military officer (8:5-13), deliver demoniacs in Gentile territory (8:28-34), compare Israelite cities unfavorably with Sodom (10:15; 11:23-24), reward the persistent faith of a Canaanite woman (15:21-28), allow the first apostolic confession of Jesus’ Messiahship in pagan territory (16:13), promise that all nations would hear the gospel (24:14), and allow the first confession of Jesus as God’s Son after the cross to come from a Roman execution squad (27:54). Matthew probably wrote to encourage his fellow Jewish Christians to evangelize the Gentiles, so the Gospel fittingly closes on this command.³⁴

“Baptizing” recalls the mission of John the Baptist, who baptized people for repentance (3:1-2, 6, 11). Baptism in Jewish culture represented an act of conversion, so as “going” may represent cross cultural ministry, we may describe Jesus’ command to “baptize” as evangelism. But evangelism is not sufficient to make full disciples; we also need Christian education. “Teaching” them all that Jesus commanded is made easier by the fact that Matthew has provided us Jesus’ teachings conveniently in five major discourse sections: Jesus’ teachings about the ethics of the kingdom (chs. 5-7); proclaiming the kingdom (ch. 10); parables about the present state of the kingdom (ch. 13); relationships in the kingdom (ch. 18); and the future of the kingdom and judgment on the religious establishment (chs. 23-25).³⁵

But in Matthew’s Gospel, disciples are not made the way most Jewish teachers in his day made disciples. Disciples are made not for oneself but for the Lord Jesus Christ (23:8). This final paragraph of Matthew’s Gospel fittingly concludes various themes about Jesus’ identity in this Gospel as well. John (3:2), Jesus (4:17), and his followers (10:7) announced God’s kingdom, his reign; now Jesus reigns with all authority in all creation (28:18). Further, we baptize not only in the name of God and his Spirit, but in the name of Jesus (28:19), thereby ranking Jesus as deity alongside the Father and the Spirit. And finally, Jesus’ promise to be with us always as we preach the kingdom until the end of the age (28:20) recalls earlier promises in the

Gospel. Jesus himself is “Immanuel,” “God with us” (1:23), and wherever two or three gather in his name he will be among them (18:20). To any ancient Jewish reader, these statements would imply that Jesus was God.³⁶

Does the promise that Jesus will be with his people “till the end of the age” (28:20) imply that once the age ends he will no longer be with them? Such an idea would miss entirely the point of the text. Jesus is promising to be with his people in carrying out his commission (28:19); that must be accomplished before the age ends (24:14), so the nations can be judged according to how they have responded to this message (25:31-32). Taking this passage in the context of the entire Gospel provides us plenty of preaching material without even stepping outside Matthew.³⁷

To be more specific, the words μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (make disciples of all nations) must be closely examined as it is the focal point of this research. They contain the very important phrase “all nations” which is often referred to in the Greek from *panta ta ethne* (*panta=all, ta=the, ethne=nations*). The reason this is such an important phrase is that *ethne*, when translated as “nations,” sounds like a political or geographical grouping. That is its most common English usage but it should be noted that the word *ethneis* where we get the English word “ethnic”.³⁸

However, the common usage of the word ‘nations’ in English is not exactly what it means in the Greek. In the New Testament, the singular *ethnos* (*ethnos*) never refers to Gentile individuals. This is a striking fact. Every time the singular *ethnos* (*ethnos*) does occur, it refers to a people group of “nation” - often the Jewish nation, even though in the plural it is usually translated “Gentiles” in distinction from the Jewish people.³⁹

Here are some examples to illustrate the corporate meaning of the singular use of *ethnos*:

Nation (ethnos) will rise against nation (ethnos) and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places (Matthew 24:7);

*By your blood you ransomed men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (ethnos) (Rev 5:9)*⁴⁰

What this survey of the singular establishes is that the word *ethnos* very naturally and normally carried a corporate meaning in reference to people groups with a certain ethnic identity.

In fact, the reference in Acts 2:5 to "every nation" is very close in form to "all the nations" in Matthew 28:19. And in Acts 2:5, it must refer to people groups of some kind. Unlike the singular, the plural of εθνος (*ethnos*) refers to heterogeneous ethnic or people groups.

It is also worth acknowledging that the term *ethne* does not exclusively denote organized ethnic communities in every instance of its use across the New Testament. In certain contexts, the word carries a more fluid meaning, referring simply to Gentile individuals who may not necessarily constitute a formally defined ethnic group. The precise meaning, therefore, is always governed by the literary and narrative context in which the term appears. A telling illustration of this contextual flexibility is found in Acts 13:48, where Luke records that upon Paul's deliberate turn toward the Gentiles following his rejection by the Jewish community in Antioch, the assembled Gentiles responded with joy and gave glory to the word of God. In this particular passage, Luke's reference is clearly to a gathering of individual Gentile listeners present at the synagogue — not to an organized ethnic nation or people group. This contextual nuance is important for responsible exegesis, as it guards against a rigid or overly uniform application of the term that fails to account for the diversity of its usage across different New Testament contexts.⁴¹

The primary exegetical concern, however, remains the precise meaning of *panta ta ethne* as it appears in Matthew 28:19. A careful survey of all eighteen occurrences of this phrase across the New Testament yields illuminating results. Of these eighteen uses, only the instance in Matthew 25:32 appears to demand the reading of "Gentile individuals." Three additional occurrences in Acts 2:5, 10:35, and 17:26 require the people group or

ethnic community interpretation on purely contextual grounds. Six further uses in Mark 11:17, Luke 21:24, Acts 15:17, Galatians 3:8, and Revelation 12:5 and 15:4 demand the ethnic group meaning on account of their explicit Old Testament connections. The remaining eight occurrences in Matthew 24:9, 24:14, 28:19, Luke 12:30, 24:47, Acts 14:16, Romans 1:5, and 2 Timothy 4:17 are contextually ambiguous and could plausibly sustain either interpretation. Nevertheless, the weight of exegetical evidence surrounding Matthew 28:19 strongly favors the reading that Christ is commissioning His followers to pursue evangelization along ethnic and people group lines. This, in the fullest sense, represents the central thrust of New Testament missionary theology.⁴²

This conclusion is further reinforced when one examines the broader Greek textual tradition. In the Greek Old Testament the Septuagint the phrase *panta ta ethne* appears approximately one hundred times, and in virtually every instance it carries the corporate meaning of "all the nations," understood as distinct peoples and ethnic communities beyond the boundaries of Israel, rather than referring to Gentile individuals in any disaggregated sense.⁴³

Luke's account of Christ's post-resurrection words in Luke 24:45–47 provides particularly compelling corroborating evidence. In this passage, Jesus deliberately opens the minds of His disciples to comprehend the Scriptures before declaring, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations (*panta ta ethne*), beginning from Jerusalem." The structural logic of this passage deserves careful attention. Jesus first anchors His disciples in Old Testament Scripture, then articulates three coordinate infinitive clauses detailing what is written therein that Christ would suffer, that He would rise on the third day, and that the message of repentance and forgiveness would go forth in His name to all nations. The commission to reach *panta ta ethne*, therefore, is presented not as a novel apostolic invention but as the fulfillment of a divine purpose long embedded in the Old Testament

Scriptures.⁴⁴

This Old Testament conception of God's worldwide redemptive purpose as the apostle Paul himself recognized was always a purpose to bless all the families of the earth and to gather a worshipping community from among all peoples. The evidence is therefore compelling that Jesus, in Luke 24:47, understood *panta ta ethne* to refer to the full array of the world's ethnic communities and people groups, each of whom must hear the message of repentance and receive the offer of forgiveness. This is, at its core, what the Great Commission is truly about. Every mission-minded church and believer is therefore called to ask with urgency: which people groups and ethnic communities have yet to receive the blessing of the gospel through deliberate missionary engagement?

HERMENEUTIC IMPLICATIONS OF MATTHEW 28:18-20 TO CONTEMPORARY MISSIONS IN LOTI MISSION FIELD, WASINMI, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA.

Brief History of Loti village

Loti village is one of rural settlements under Wasinmi district within Ewekoro Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The socio political administration of this community is under the *Iledi Ogboni* — the traditional institution based in Wasinmi that has historically superintended religious observance and governance across the surrounding villages.⁴⁵

From oral tradition, Loti village was founded by the early nomadic hunters and fishermen from the old Egba kingdom particularly the Owu sub people group. There were a few of them who hunted together in those days. Some of those whose names remained as founders include three related men viz: Akintolu (the first Pa Akintolu), Pa Loki, and Pa Omishola. Only Pa Omishola was known to be fisherman in the list here but there were others with him in the fishing job those days. They were descents from the Egba-Owu origin who go about in search of daily food for their families until they decided not to

return to the central Egba communities inside the Abeokuta metropolis. Their sojourn must have numbered about 300 years ago (though there is no written document to back this figure), it was gathered that it was the river (Ogun River) in which the fishermen hunted, as well as the beautiful river bank available in the area that attracted the hunters that led the earlier settlers to always rest before continuing their journey to wherever they will end the day.⁴⁶

The etymology of the name of the village was derived from the activity of a particular Dry Gin seller who was always found with the early settlers. The woman (possibly wife of one of the settlers) always served anyone who came to buy dry gin at the river bank. So she made the river bank very popular to the point that people always direct other friends to meet them at "Ebute Oloti" (Meaning: The river bank where dry gin was sold). Eventually, as time passed on, people thereafter preferred to call the village Loti as a short form of "Ebute Oloti." The first Baale (village head) was Chief Oladehinde Akintolu who was a brother to Chief Jeremiah Akintolu who became the "Baale" (Village head) after the demise of his brother. The current baale is named Chief Olanrewaju Ishola Akintolu. At present, Loti is not just a settlement for Egba people but the Zabarmawa tribe from Kebbi and Sokoto states and Fulani tribes who are largely muslims and classified among the unreached people groups. They have made this small village their home due to the booming ogun river dredging business. These people who are now the majority have bought lands, built houses and are raising their families there. This is of great missional concern.⁴⁷ The researcher was on ground to do a field work and all these were confirmed true as most indigenous Loti people have left for the city leaving only their aged ones and a large populace of muslim foreigners in their homeland.

Mission Expansion and Growth of the Gospel in Loti.

The (earliest) first mission effort in Loti village was pioneered by The African Church, Nigeria. From the oral narration gathered, none can remember any specific date of establishment. The

mission thrived at first and had members coming all the way from the neighbouring villages. It was the mission effort of the African Church that made them to be the first to have a Church building in that environs which was built to the taste of its time, and it became the only church in Loti village till date but not thriving as it should because it cannot meet the evangelistic and mission demands of the current population and influx of muslim foreigners.⁴⁸

Despite the nearness of Loti village to Abeokuta, a city with many thriving churches and the first church in Nigeria in the mid-19th century,⁴⁸ Loti village has been under evangelized, unreached and neglected by many denominations who could hitherto evangelize and plant thriving churches in her.

According to oral tradition, several churches have attempted to spread into this community but could not make a head way. The Christ Apostolic Church tried to plant a church in Loti, but they could not make a headway because of misunderstanding with the 'Baale' of the village. Also, Ibara Baptist Church, Abeokuta gained access into Loti through her mission efforts at Ogbere and Ajade which are neighbouring villages in the year 2019. Though their mission intention is still alive, but it has suffered a lot of set backs. The current baale of the village seems not to be interested in allowing them. The church rented a building which had not been in use for years to hold services on Sundays and weekdays. It was first agreed to, but the agreement was broken by the baale without any tangible reason; and the building is still of no use till date. When the church decided to buy a piece of land to erect a place of worship, the price which the baale called as the amount was to ridiculous to be acceptable. Though, there are two Baptist missionaries currently engaging the people in discipleship teachings as some of their converts now prefer to walk to Ajade to fellowship

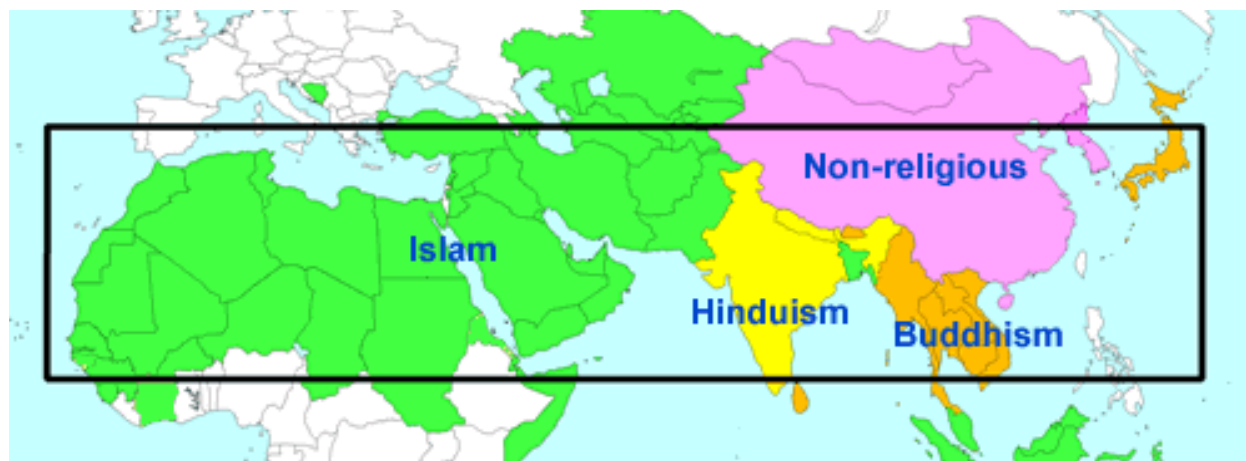
with the Baptist church there.⁴⁹

HERMENEUTIC IMPLICATIONS OF MATTHEW 28:18-20 TO CONTEMPORARY MISSIONS IN LOTI MISSION FIELD

The exegetical study of Matthew 28:18-20 shows that missions is meant to be done along ethnic lines, reaching one people group per time. The Greek *ethne* carries the weight of a people who speak one language and have a common culture. Sociologically, we can call them a people group with shared cultural identity.⁵⁰

Ralph Winter opines that a people group is a significantly large sociological grouping of individuals bound by common affinity, typically characterized by shared language, culture, geography, religion, and ethnicity factors through which the gospel can flow without encountering significant barriers of understanding or acceptance.⁵¹ Summarily, we can say a people group refers to peoples of the same tribe and ethnic groups. This clearly underscores what the focus of the Great commission should be as commanded by Christ. Till now, there are tribes in several countries that are largely unreached with the gospel dubbed as 'Unreached People Groups'.

In an attempt to show where most unreached people groups can be found, Luis Bush, a Christian mission strategists coined a geographical term commonly known as 10/40 window to denote the areas of the world where the unreached people groups can be found. The 10/40 Window is the rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia approximately between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude. The 10/40 Window is often called "The Resistant Belt" and includes the majority of the world's Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.⁵²



A diagrammatic representation of the 10/40 window⁵³

Loti village, with a large population of Zabarmawa tribe can be dubbed as unreached because the percentage of Christians in this village is very insignificant from the researcher's field observation. Only a few indigenous villagers are Christians yet they have not evangelized these foreigners who have made their village a home. Most Loti villagers are either Muslims or African traditional worshippers with only a few believers.

Despite Loti's nearness to Abeokuta, about 35 minutes drive from Wasinmi, the impact of the spread of the gospel has not been felt in Loti village. The historic city of Abeokuta which is the capital city of Egba people and all indigene of Ogun state, happens to be the first city in 19th century with the first church in Nigeria.⁵⁵ Ever since, all major Pentecostal churches and mainline denominational churches have a wide presence in that city but they have not spread into the surrounding villages where there are numerous unreached tribes from.

According to Joshua project, the Zabarmawa people are from Kebbi and Sokoto states of Nigeria though they are scattered across West African countries like Benin republic, Niger and Ghana. They are classified among the unreached people in West Africa and their geographical location is covered within Luis Bush's 10/40 window where most unreached people groups can be found.

According to Joshua project, their total population is 5,263,000 with less than 2% evangelicals. This aptly classifies them among unreached people groups.⁵⁶

It is unfortunate that their presence in Loti village, has no salvific impact on them yet because most churches in surrounding towns where the gospel has reached sufficiently did not deem it fit to evangelize them. The lack of understanding about preaching to 'nations' from Matthew 28:18-20 has made most denominational churches cross the border to preach in other countries thinking the Great Commission command meant preaching across countries instead of preaching the gospel across (nations) tribes where the gospel has not been preached.

Aside the fact that most churches do not have a grasp of the exegetical import of Matthew 28:18-20, the prosperity gospel scourge has impacted mission drive in most churches negatively as most churches will prefer to plant churches in cities where they can get fat tithes and offerings instead of investing money and resources among unreached people. This is the bane of modern missions.⁵⁷

Conclusion

The missionary mandate of the church is to make disciples of all nations. It is an assignment that

is global in scope and the target should be to reach out to cultures and people groups that are unreached with the gospel. There are billions that are yet to hear the gospel not because they resisted the message but because no one has taken the message of the gospel to them. There is a large concentration of churches and church planting efforts in places that are reached. It is not wrong to say that certain areas are oversaturated whereas God want us to spread. While it is not bad to execute the Great Commission task among the reached, however, there must be a balance between reaching the reached and the unreached people groups. As the church make disciples among the reached, they should be trained and deployed to reach the unreached. The church must consciously awaken herself from the slumber of complacency with reached cultures and places.

Islam is the fastest growing religion in Africa as we speak and even in Europe.⁵⁸ They decided to pick up the work of 'Da'wah' (Islamic Evangelism) in places where the church has refused to go especially the 10/40 window region of the world. Fundamentalists has seized opportunities such as this to radicalize⁵⁹ the people and make them foot soldiers of bloody Islamic Jihad. If the church had reached out to those places and regions first, maybe those carrying AK-47 guns may be carrying the bible.⁶⁰ Terrorism is one of the products of our neglect of the great commission.

Further, there should be adequate support given to those that have committed themselves to reaching the unreached especially when crossing cultures. It is plausible that missionaries who tried to take the gospel to Loti village were not adequately supported. The church's effort to reach people across cultures has not been all that successful because the same mistake is being repeated by today's church because those sent to the mission field lack adequate support. The church must arise to fix this. The praxis of the church should gear members up to become mission minded.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are

proposed by the researcher for individual believers and the Church at large.

1. The church should constantly emphasize the great commission task in her teachings.
2. The church must align her mission drive with the exegetical truth of Matthew 28:18-20
3. The church should make reaching the unreached in 10/40 window a topmost priority in her missionary endeavors
4. A mission team should be set up to undertake the work of missions.
5. The church should search for unreached tribes who are in diaspora as it is the case of Zabarmarwa people in Loti
6. The church should organize mission exposure trips for individuals in the church as this would gear them up to become active participants in this assignment.
7. There should be a financial plan for missions and special incentives for those that volunteer to go to unreached places.
8. The intercession and prayer of the church should reflect the Great Commission and her missionary engagements.

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