

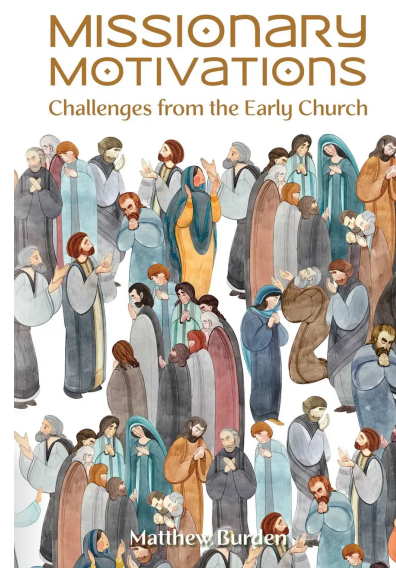
**Burden, Matthew. *Missionary Motivations: Challenges from the Early Church*. Littleton, Colorado: William Carey Publishing, 2023.**

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Many scholars of early Christian missions publish works about that period. *Missionary Motivations* focuses specifically on the impetus for Christian missions in the rapid expansion of the early church. The Great Commission and concern for unreached people groups may seem obvious reasons for missions today, but these concepts are largely absent from the early writing on missionary motivations. What were the theological concerns that drove the church to global missions?

Matthew Burden asserts that the early church understood Jesus Christ to be the Messianic Priest-King and triumphant victor over sin, death, and Satan. His followers are his kingdom and royal priesthood, called to live holy, Christ-like lives and establish gospel communities. These truths shaped the way Christianity grew. Burden writes, “There was an overriding conviction that an entirely new stage of history had begun, a glorious age of Christ the Priest-King’s reign, and that the Christian church constituted the embassy outposts of that advancing reign, expanding its influence until it touched the very ends of the earth” (4). Christians wanted to see this messianic age come to full completion.

Christianity spread rapidly around the world. In the book, Burden details the major participants, methods of evangelism (both active and passive),



and motivations as the gospel spread throughout different regions. After surveying the history, *Missionary Motivations* draws some conclusions about the mission strategies of early Christianity and gives the reader present-day applications to consider.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Burden provides a concise, easy-to-read understanding of the missionary motivations of the early church and their implications for today. *Missionary Motivations* avoids harsh critique of current missionary reasoning. Rather, the book presents the motivations of the early church as compliments to the driving forces of current missionary work.

The book is honest in its description of early church expansion. At times evangelism was intentional through witnessing, preaching, and church planting. Other times converts were the by-product of monks seeking solitude, sectarian conflicts, or political motivations. Burden details this history without lauding sinful behavior or inflicting presentism upon early church practices.

The author does acknowledge one limitation of this work. While we know much of what happened in the early expansion of Christianity, little record exists of the specific missiological ideas of those missionary movements. Early missionary motivations cannot be directly quoted but must be inferred from the data available.

### **Significance for Cross-Cultural Work**

I would highly recommend this work to missionaries and missions supporters. Today's missionaries do not work in a vacuum. Understanding past motivations and practices helps us to be better missionaries today. Personally, the focus on planting gospel communities encouraged me. Burden writes, "It was the community of faith that was considered the central incarnation of the reign of Christ, and so it was the establishment of new communities that took on preeminent importance" (90). While individual

conversions are essential, I have seen the planting of local churches to also be foundational in mission work. Believers united in the church demonstrate God's kingdom and love for the world in a clear way.

I was also intrigued by the early church's gratitude, sense of responsibility, and desire for holy living. These Christians understood that the gospel changed every aspect of their lives. The Christ-like changes in their daily practices led others to want to know the Savior they worshipped. Today, we can talk about evangelism strategy and reproduction, but we must never forget the witness of a Christ-shaped life.

Matthew Burden's *Missionary Motivations* unpacks the practice of the early church and challenges modern missions to let every aspect of the gospel propel our efforts. I highly recommend this book for all who want to see Christ exalted among all peoples.