

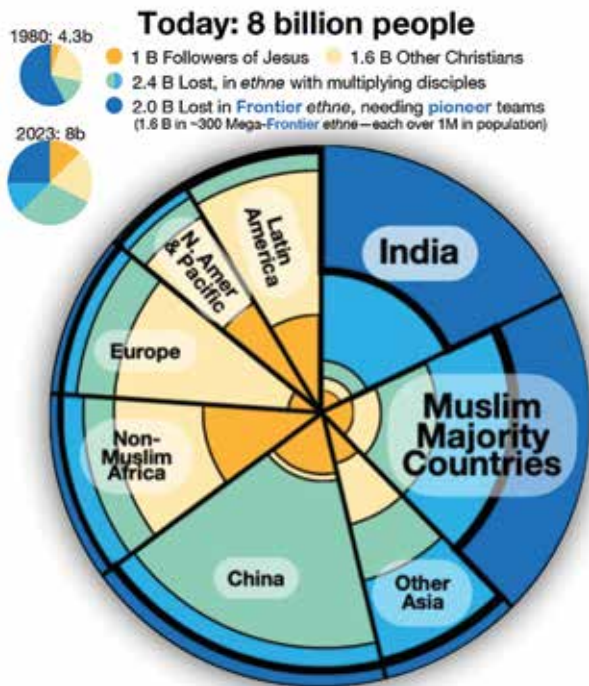
The Astonishing Power & Progress of God's Promise

(Part 2)

By **ROBBY BUTLER**

Robby Butler graduated from Caltech in 1980, shortly after joining the U.S. Center for World Mission. There he worked closely with Dr. Ralph Winter on understanding the barriers to and opportunities for movements to Jesus to fulfill God's ancient promise to bless all *ethne*. For more than a decade Robby has helped popularize and strategize for movements to Jesus, and most recently has worked closely with Dr. Winter's daughter, Becky Lewis, to clarify the remaining need for pioneering mission work among Frontier *ethne*—those Unreached People Groups with virtually no followers of Jesus and no sustained movements to Jesus. Robby and Jackie and their three adult children live in Mount Vernon, WA.

Recap of Part 1: Four thousand years ago, God told Abram—an elderly, childless man—that all of earth's family-lines would one day be blessed through his descendant. God even 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 an estimated 40% of humanity. Today—less than 50 years later—disciples are now multiplying among 75% of humanity. ...



Of the total Frontier *ethne* population (2 billion), 80% (1.6B) are concentrated in less than 300 large groups (over 1 million each). Many of these Frontier *ethne* have been fruitlessly “engaged” by Christianity for decades or centuries, providing case studies for how our intuitions and strategies can go wrong.¹

The Rise and Fall of Pioneer Work

In 1792, when William Carey published his *Enquiry*,² roughly three-fourths of humanity lived in *ethne* that still needed **pioneer** work to establish the first multiplying households of believers. Carey's *Enquiry* prompted the formation of many new teams,³ focused primarily on what today would be understood as **Frontier *ethne***. These teams were largely successful, shifting gradually from **pioneer** work to **partnership** with the church movements they started.

200 years later, followers of Jesus in these formerly-pioneer fields came to vastly outnumber followers of Jesus in historically “Christian” lands. And by the 1970s nearly all missionaries worked primarily in **partnership** with existing believers, while 60% of humanity still lived in *ethne* needing **pioneer** work.

Thus, by the 1970s, most *ethne* were again clearly divided between those with a strong Christian

1 Cont. from the July/Aug 2023 *MF*: MissionFrontiers.org/issue/article/the-astonishing-power-progress-of-gods-promise

2 WmCarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf

3 RobertBlincoe.blog/the-protestant-mission-ice-age-explained-in-eight-timelines-sixth-of-ten

presence and those still needing **pioneer** work. This time Ralph Winter's analysis and advocacy⁴ led to a new wave of workers to **Frontier ethne**.

By 2018 however, most **pioneer** work to "unreached" *ethne* was again shifting to **partnership** with new believers, just as Winter had foretold two decades earlier:

Frontier [pioneer] Mission outreach will dwindle to the extent that church-planting success is achieved within any one ethnic group. Missionary breakthroughs and the resulting marvelous, growing movements all around the world have diverted attention from additional frontier outreach just because the needs of a growing church do not diminish but seem to demand more and more help—dental work, education, medical attention, pastoral training, etc.

And, churches back home are so thrilled by the appearance of churches on the field that for a while this massive transition seems to be unavoidable. ... But if every mission that breaks through (and most of them have) sits down and attends the new national church rather than continuing its original pioneering function, we will suddenly discover a massive fall off of new cross-cultural outreach.⁵

Several additional factors further obscure the remaining pioneer task:

1. In 1975 the term "Unreached" shifted from "needing **pioneer** work" to less than 1 in 50 being "Evangelical." **This obscured the essential difference between:**
 - Tight-knit **Frontier ethne** still with virtually **NO** followers of Jesus and **NO** sustained movement to Jesus (where **pioneer** teams are still needed).
 - Other "**Unreached**" *ethne*, where believing families are less than 1 in 50, but multiplying and modeling how to follow Jesus in that *ethne*, such that teams can see rapid fruit working in **partnership** with local believers.

2. A subsequent focus on "Unengaged" UPGs further drew attention from very large UPGs with no movements to Jesus—where more **pioneer** teams were still needed—to smaller and smaller "Unengaged" UPGs (where followers of Jesus might be multiplying but still less than 2% of the population).
3. Many churches require the workers they fund to work with local believers, creating an additional barrier to missionaries doing **pioneer** work among **Frontier ethne**.

The Bulk of the Challenge: 300 Mega-FPGs

Dramatic changes have occurred since Carey's and Winter's appeals stirred prayer and **pioneering** teams to pursue God's promise. In less than 250 years, indigenous followers of Jesus have begun multiplying in thousands of *ethne*—establishing movements to Jesus among an *additional* 50% of humanity.

Today the bulk of the challenge is much more focused: 80% (1.6 B) of the global **Frontier ethne** population lives in less than 300 **Mega-FPGs**—each over one million in size. However, these **Mega-FPGs** aren't simply a blank slate waiting to hear about Jesus. Most of them have been offended or alienated from Christianity by historic contact with Christians—the Crusades, Western "Christian" culture, which is the primary global producer of pornography, evangelism aimed at separating individuals away from their families and community, etc. Most of these **Mega-FPGs** have thus demonstrated a determination to protect their families and community from what *they* perceive as a harmful, western influence.

Most **Mega-FPGs** have been fruitlessly "engaged" by Christianity for decades or centuries, providing case studies in how our strategies and efforts can go wrong. This history has resulted in distorted impressions of who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him. And these **Mega-FPGs** are also likely under greater oppression from powers of darkness that have fled the growing light among other *ethne*.

To make matters worse, some **Mega-FPGs** have badly outdated Bible translations, using an ancient script or offensive religious terms of other religious groups. And

⁴ Ralph Winter's 1980 Hidden Peoples poster: JoshuaProject.net/1980pie

⁵ March/April 1998 MF editorial: missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/editorial-comment58

yet updated translations are resisted by the economic interests of the publisher. For some **Mega-FPGs**, even the King James English Bible is more intelligible to the few believers than their own centuries-old translation.

Jesus movements are unlikely to be birthed among these **Mega-FPGs** through the traditional ministry strategies that have failed among them in the past. They thus need focused prayer, clear reflection on the challenges and opportunities, and new Spirit-led **pioneering** teams.

Fortunately, as this article goes to press a major consultation is being held on **Pursuing God for Movements among the ~300 Largest Frontier People Groups**. We welcome your retroactive prayers for this consultation to unite mission leaders in a new focus on prayer and collaboration toward the fulfillment of God's promise to bless these **Mega-FPGs**.

New Avenues for Effective Pioneer Work

In past centuries, missionaries fruitfully combined proclamation with practical strategies for blessing the *ethne* they served—with medicine, literacy, education,

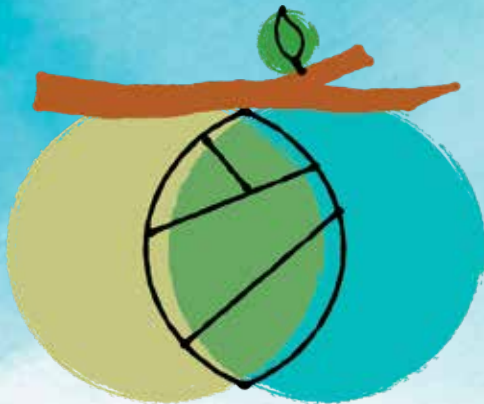
etc. However most **Mega-FPGs** today are based in countries where medicine, literacy, and education are run by the national government and where missionaries are no longer welcome.

Yet God's promise is sure, and He has confirmed it with an oath! The Holy Spirit is awakening many to new avenues for blessing *ethne* in **pioneer** work—through business, addiction treatment, regenerative agriculture, etc. Amidst the destructive agricultural practices and use of harmful chemicals that has swept the globe, and the global fear and challenges following recent lockdowns, microbiome science,⁶ orthomolecular medical science,⁷ and regenerative agriculture⁸ appear to be fruitful avenues for demonstrating the wisdom, goodness, and abundance of God, and equipping movement disciples to focus on multiplying God's blessing—among their own *ethne* and among Frontier *ethne*. ❏

6 OrthoMolecular.org/resources/omns/v19n30.shtml

7 OrthoMolecular.org

8 BackToEdenFilm.com and Farming-Gods-Way.org



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