

Finding Fourth-Soil People: A Movement Case Study from Galilee

Analyzing case studies typically represents one of the key learning activities at a missionary training program. Often overlooked as a case study is Jesus' work in pre-Pentecost Galilee, partly because He did not plant churches, but mainly because a handful of biblical scholars view Jesus' pre-Pentecost work in Galilee as a failed mission. William Kurz, for example, argues that Jesus' mission work failed to produce results. Kurz states, "Jesus never saw the results of His preaching in His lifetime on earth."¹

The intent of demonstrating that a movement ensued in pre-Pentecost Galilee within the ministry of Jesus aims at catching the attention of missionary-movement practitioners. Unless missionaries are convinced Jesus established a movement in pre-Pentecost Galilee, they may underestimate the value of Jesus' case study.

Before providing evidence of Jesus' movement, the definition of the word *movement* must be clarified. For this, I use David Garrison's definition of a movement as described in his latest book, *A Wind in the House of Islam*. Garrison writes, "For the sake of clarity and consistency, let's define a movement . . . to be at least 100 new church starts or 1,000 baptisms that occur over a two-decade period."² Using Garrison's parameters of a thousand baptisms (Jesus did not plant individual churches), few missionaries will doubt this number of baptisms constitutes a noteworthy movement.

¹ See William Kurz, *Following Jesus* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1984), 33.

² David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2014), 5.

³ Scripture quotations are from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, 2009.

Evidence of at Least a Thousand Baptisms

In John's discourse of Jesus leaving a region and traveling to another due to conflict, he mentions that Jesus' ministry accumulated more baptisms than the sum of John the Baptist's ministry; "When Jesus knew that the Pharisees heard He was making and baptizing more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were)" (John 4:1–2).³ Matthew describes the number of those baptized by John the Baptist, "Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were flocking to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins" (3:5–6). Luke explains that John the Baptist's followers gained the attention of governmental officials, Pharisees, and crowds that included tax collectors and soldiers, all coming to him for baptism (3:7–21).

Knowing that the Jewish tradition included the practice of baptism before the time of Jesus and that Jesus' disciples conducted baptisms in pre-Pentecost Galilee, it is not difficult to imagine that many from the large crowds, such as the five thousand (Luke 9:12–17) and the four thousand (Mark 8:1–9), received baptism in the presence of Jesus. Often Jesus preached on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, which served as a convenient environment for conducting baptisms.

BY **KEVIN GREESON**

email: kgreeson@globalgates.info website: <https://globalgates.info>

Kevin Greeson earned degrees from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He served with the International Mission Board, SBC (1993-2015), based in South Asia. He is the author of *Camel: How Muslims are Coming to Faith in Christ* (WIGTake, 2010). Kevin currently serves in Houston with Global Gates.

In fewer than ten days after Jesus' ascension, three thousand people in Jerusalem received baptism. Notice that the three thousand apparently knew what to do when Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized." No formal training on baptism is mentioned. For this occasion, the three thousand likely had seen or heard of Jesus' death and resurrection, witnessed the miracle of the disciples' speaking in tongues, and heard Peter's powerful sermon. If this is what it took to get three thousand baptisms, it should not be a stretch to suppose that for each miracle Jesus performed in front of crowds in Galilee at least fifty to one hundred people routinely came forward for baptism. See Matthew 4:17, 23–25:

From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" . . .

Jesus was going all over Galilee . . . preaching . . . healing. . . . Then the news about Him spread throughout Syria. . . . Large crowds followed Him from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

Historian Richard Horsley postulates that the Galilean movement was supported by first-generation believers; the movement did not depend on the Twelve or the seventy-two disciples once Jesus and the disciples left the region on their final journey to Jerusalem.⁴ Finally, to reach one thousand baptisms, the Twelve plus the seventy-two disciples only needed to baptize twelve of their *oikos* members.

Jesus' Pre-Pentecost Galilean Movement Case Study

There is more information in the gospel narratives regarding steps Jesus took to establish the pre-Pentecost Galilean movement than there is regarding steps taken by Paul—recorded in Acts and his letters—to establish the movements in Asia Minor. Paul wrote his letters to existing movements; very little information appears about how each movement began. The following represents basic actions Jesus implemented to produce a thousand baptisms in pre-Pentecost Galilee. To present the most accurate historical steps Jesus made to establish a movement, we will look to the narrative of Luke, who attempted to present events in chronological order.⁵

⁴ Richard A. Horsley, "Early Christian Movements: Jesus Movements and the Renewal of Israel," *Harvard Theological Studies* 62:4 (2006), 1222–23. The basis of Horsley's theory rests on the large number of historical records and the letters of Pliny.

⁵ See John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1–9:20* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 547. Nolland comments, "The consensus is as follows. Luke reproduces quite closely the original order and scope of the materials."

⁶ Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1:247. Schnabel writes, "If Jesus spent two days in each of the 138 settlements of Galilee that Mordechai Aviam mentions, he would have needed 276 days, or 46 weeks (not counting Sabbath days), to reach every single Galilean town or village—not an impossible task in view of the three years of Jesus' public ministry."



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A threefold-ministry-training periodization emerges in Luke's narrative: Jesus ministering as the disciples watch (chap. 4–7), Jesus training the disciples with the Parable of the Sower (8:4–15), and the disciples applying their training in the field (9:1–6; 10:1–24). Galilee, the size of Rhode Island with a population of more than two hundred thousand, represented Jesus' target mission field, and the lost house of Israel represented His primary target people group within His ministry field. All three Synoptic Gospel writers appear convinced that Jesus visited all 204 (according to Josephus) villages, towns, and cities in Galilee (see Matt 9:35, "Then Jesus went to all the towns and villages"; Mark 1:38–39, "Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. . . . So He went into all of Galilee"; Luke 8:1, "He was traveling from one town and village to another"). Eckhard Schnabel lays out the possibility that Jesus could have visited all towns and villages in Galilee in less than a year.⁶ Once the people tried to slow Jesus down, to spend more time with Him, He replied, "I must proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God to the other towns also" (Luke 4:43).

Jesus explained His secret of multiplication using the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:4–15). From a season of broad seed sowing, a certain number of new believers will in turn produce hundredfold new believers from among their *oikos*. The *oikos* factor (winning close friends and family) likely functioned as the key ingredient for the explosive growth coming from fourth-soil individuals.

Application from the Case Study

Taken from Luke's narrative, especially from 8:1–10:24, below is a list of lessons I learned from Jesus and how he established a pre-Pentecost movement in Galilee. I converted the lessons into action steps for missionaries preparing to launch ministries into new fields of service:


- Identify and adopt a specific geographic target area, like Galilee.
- Choose a people group within the target area.
- Develop a systematic plan for the gospel to be shared in every community.
- Model seed sowing for potential harvesters.
- Inform sowers of a pending harvest in the target ministry field.
- Enlist twelve sowers, train them with the Parable of the Sower, send them out.
- Enlist an additional seventy-two, train them with the Parable of the Sower, send them out.
- Warn sowers of dangers and teach them how to find Persons of Peace.
- Using the parable's description for each soil, look for fourth-soil individuals.
- When sowers return, discuss results using the four soil descriptions.
- Praise and thank God for fruit (souls won) coming from Fourth-Soil People.

The above activities represent a season of ministry, possibly lasting from one to two years. Upon completion of the sowing season, a new season of training leaders and forming churches emerges. Sowing season must not be rushed or filled with distractions.

Conclusion

Between 1999 and 2001, my ministry focused on a district (similar in land size to Jesus' Galilee) in a South Asian country with an estimated one million Muslims and no history of gospel sowing among the Muslim population. Over two years, with team members and volunteers, we sowed the gospel from village to village. Miracles, such as those occurring in the ministry of Jesus, did not take place. Our seed sowing came in the form of simple gospel sharing, distribution of Bibles in the local language, and multiple nighttime showings of the *JESUS* film. At the end of the two years, our work appeared fruitless, as fewer than a dozen Muslims professed Jesus as Savior.

But in one village of seven thousand Muslims, a young man heard the gospel from one of our sowing campaigns with volunteers from the United States. From this young fourth-soil man, a movement emerged as he shared the gospel with his *oikos*. Within two years, he established twenty-four house churches. Over the next 15 years, the movement, titled Way of Peace, added ten thousand baptized former Muslims. Today the movement actively sends missionaries from their movement into two neighboring countries.

Frank Beare believes the Luke 10:1–24 event of Jesus sending out the seventy-two (with the Twelve) likely took place in lower Galilee.⁷ Because Jesus sent them out to find Persons of Peace for housing purposes, the seventy-two likely came from the established movement in upper Galilee. By the time Jesus reached Jerusalem after leaving Galilee, Luke records 120 followers in the upper room (Acts 1:15). A principle emerges where Jesus uses believers from one movement to establish new movements in different locations. If missionaries will take the time to establish one movement, they can use “hot coals” (individuals from an existing movement) from the original movement to do as Jesus did to ignite movements in new areas. The next article demonstrates this strategy as I used “hot coals” from the Way of Peace movement to establish an emerging movement among a near-culture people group, pseudonymously called the Ro people. 

⁷ Frank Beare, *The Earliest Records of Jesus* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 214.