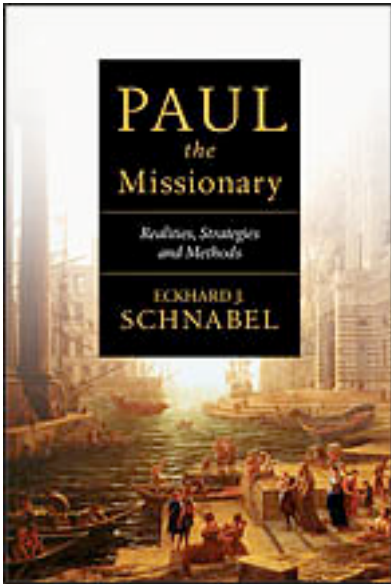


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Schnabel, Eckhard J.

Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods

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Torrey Seland
School of Mission and Theology
Stavanger, Norway

Eckhard J. Schnabel has long been established as a prolific writer on early Christian mission by his massive two-volume work *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004; originally published in German as a one-volume work in 2002). Volume 2 of that work deals extensively with Paul in chapters 24–28 (923–1485). Now he is out with another book on *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods*. Far from being a mere repetition of the former volume, this is intended to be a much more practical book, as he writes, “with a view to challenge pastors and missionaries, students and practitioners to read Paul again and to evaluate the goals and the methods of their pastoral and missionary ministry in the light of the missionary work of the apostle” (14). His agenda is thus stated to be a historical work, while at the same time he seeks to help readers move from the New Testament to practical applications.

The volume is designed thus: after an introduction, six chapters follow, dealing with “The Missionary Work of the Apostle Paul”; “The Missionary Task according to Paul’s Letters”; “The Missionary Message of the Apostle Paul”; “The Missionary Goals of the Apostle Paul”; “The Missionary Methods of the Apostle Paul”; and “The Task of Missionary Work in the Twenty-First Century.” Adopting the heuristic labels of Richard Hays (*The Moral Vision of the New Testament* [New York: HarperCollins, 1996]),

Schnabel characterizes the first three chapters to be descriptive, the fourth and fifth as synthetic, and the sixth as hermeneutical and pragmatic.

In the introduction (21–38), Schnabel presents a rather comprehensive definition of mission: “The term ‘mission’ or ‘missions’ refers to the activity of a community of faith that distinguishes itself from its environment in terms of both religious beliefs (theology) and social behavior (ethics), that is convinced of the truth claims of its faith, and that actively works to win other people to the content of faith and the way of life of whose truth and necessity the members of that community are convinced” (22). One might wonder if this definition is not much more influenced by modern and Western discussions of mission than historical studies influenced by Mediterranean values. Furthermore, when Schnabel explicitly states his agenda with this book, he expresses himself as follows: “to provide a close reading of the relevant New Testament texts that help us understand Paul’s missionary work—proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and establishing communities of believers—in terms of the goals that he had and in terms of the methods that he used” (30). He admits, however, that it is not possible to write a complete history of Paul’s missionary works because of the fragmentary nature of our sources.

In chapter 1, “The Missionary Work of the Apostle Paul” (39–122), Schnabel provides his description of the various phases of Paul’s missionary work. Instead of using the three travels–scheme from Acts, he suggests that Paul’s missionary works can be divided into fifteen phases or locations in the thirty-five years between his conversion in A.D. 31–32 and his death in Rome around A.D. 67. The fifteen phases are too many to be listed here, but it should be noted that Schnabel reckons with an extensive period of missionary activity, comprising also a trip to Spain, suggesting that Paul was released in A.D. 62, and a final phase of work, located to Crete (see Tit 1:5).

Schnabel here utilizes the works of the New Testament to the uttermost—and in a way that many would hesitate to follow. He fully adopts the traditions of Acts as reliable sources for Paul’s missionary activities as well as all the letters associated with Paul’s name; not only all the captivity letters but also the Pastoral letters are accepted and used as genuine. Sometimes Schnabel also falls into the trap of being too imaginative when he tries to substantiate his descriptions of Paul’s works, as when he suggests that Paul on entering Antioch “arrived in the city possibly with a letter of introduction written by the Roman governor of Cyprus” (82).

In chapter 2 he deals with “The Missionary Task according to Paul’s Letters” (123–54), by surveying the letters of Paul and highlighting what he thinks are the major emphases and principles regarding the missionary task that Paul conveyed. What Schnabel does in this

chapter is to have a look at each letter, selecting some passages from each, and presenting what he considers to be the major emphases and principles related to the “missionary task.” He starts out with Galatians, focusing on Gal 1:1, 15–16; then Thessalonians and Philippians, focusing especially on 1 Thess 1:4–10 and 2:3–8. Then in the letters to the Christians in Achaia, he focuses on 1 Cor 3:5–15; 9:19–23; and 2 Cor 2:14–16. From each passage he draws out a set of emphases, three to nine from each passages. The same procedure is followed throughout all the letters associated with Paul. At the end of the chapter he summarizes what he finds is the main aspects of Paul’s self-understanding as a missionary, pastor, and theological teacher.

In chapter 3 Schnabel proceeds by describing “The Missionary Message of the Apostle Paul” (155–208). In a brief introduction he admits that the missionary sermons of Paul are not preserved except for some summaries in the Lukan book of Acts. The content of Paul’s missionary preaching can, however, according to Schnabel, be reconstructed from Paul’s own writings, “with the help of succinct summaries of the gospel and of the process of conversion” (156). Hence he first deals with the Lukan summaries of Acts 13:16–41 (preaching before Jewish audiences); 14:15–17 (preaching before Gentile audiences), and 17:22–31 (explaining the gospel in civic settings). In each case he works out a rhetorical structure of the passage and its main theological emphases. In the rest of this chapter, he looks at aspects of Paul’s teaching in his letters under the following headings: “Ideological Confrontation: The Proclamation of Jesus as Messiah and Kyrios”; “Cultural Confrontation: The Explication of the Gospel”; “Pastoral Consolidation: Encouragement for the Followers of Jesus”; and Apologetic Confrontation: The Defense of the Gospel.”

The following chapters Schnabel calls the synthetic ones. In the first, chapter 4, he presents what he finds to be “The Missionary Goals of the Apostle Paul” (209–55); the next, chapter 5, then deals with “The Missionary Methods of the Apostle Paul” (256–373).

Schnabel’s description of Paul’s missionary goals is, as he himself admits, just as much a description of Paul’s strategies. Schnabel wants, however, to distinguish it from Paul’s methods. Paul’s main missionary goal is to preach the gospel. Schnabel then discusses the terms *euangelia* and *euangelizomai* as well as *katangelo* and *kerysso*. Schnabel also discusses the various suggestions set forth about a possible Old Testament background for the geographical scope of Paul’s work, but he concludes that there is no such Old Testament basis to be found. His main conclusion here is, in fact, that “Paul does not seem to have followed a ‘grand strategy’ with regard to his geographical movements. The available evidence indicates that Paul moved to geographically adjacent areas that were open for missionary work” (224). In this chapter Schnabel also discusses conversion and baptism, establishing communities, teaching of the converts, and training new missionaries as pivotal goals in Paul’s work.

The next chapter, about Paul's missionary methods, is the largest one in this book, covering almost 120 pages. Here Schnabel discusses various issues, such as how Paul selected the cities, regions, or provinces he went to. Schnabel's overall thesis is again that Paul did not have any grand strategy but moved to adjacent areas. With regard to what made him move, Schnabel discusses various theories but comes down on the theological ones: Paul's work was due to the holy Spirit and the power of God. The only strategy of Paul was utilizing all venues that allowed the spreading of the gospel. In section 5.3 of this chapter he also discusses the question of whether Paul was a cross-cultural missionary. This Schnabel finds to be a modern category; Paul is rather to be considered a bicultural person both in the cognitive and functional sense. Other issues discussed in this chapter are Paul and Greco-Roman rhetoric.

In the final chapter, "The Task of Missionary Work in the Twenty-First Century" (375–458), Schnabel clearly leaves the role of a historical investigator and turns into a theologian of missions. This is explicitly stated at the beginning of the chapter, as Schnabel takes up "the challenge of bridging the historical distance between Paul ... and the realities and challenges for missionary work in the twenty-first century" (375). Here again he turns to the hermeneutical model of Richard B. Hays as he tries to draw his lessons from Paul by looking for rules, principles, paradigms, and symbolic universes. In light of these heuristic categories, Schnabel discusses issues such as the calling of missionaries, preparatory training, the sending out of missionaries, the content of missionary proclamation, and the proclamation of the gospel and church planting. In the last-mentioned section Schnabel sometimes becomes rather polemical: he criticizes Peter Wagner's homogeneous unit principle, that is, targeting certain groups of people, and he is very critical of the newer seeker communities as well as the purpose-driven churches. Readers will here have no doubts about the views of Schnabel himself.

I found the volume challenging, sometimes provocative, sometimes convincing, a few times irritatingly unbalanced. Considered in light of the present research situation, Schnabel's view and use of the Lukan Acts and all the letters associated with the name of Paul may be somewhat surprising. There are also some other aspects that are surprisingly absent: I would have expected a more thorough dealing with how the emperor worship of Paul's days influenced his terminology and strategies, but also of the more recent ways of understanding Paul as being anti-empire, but such recent views are missing. The present volume, *Paul the Missionary*, contains a lot of viewpoints and opinions. Readers who do not want to deal with Schnabel's massive work on *Early Christian Mission* will here get a very good introduction to various aspects of Paul's work as a missionary and a condensed version of many issues discussed more fully in his larger work. Schnabel is very well versed in the various aspects of the Greco-Roman world of Paul's time and in much recent literature on the letters of Paul. A reader of this volume will also get a very

comprehensive introduction to the main aspects of Schnabel's theology of mission. Schnabel does not hide his own opinions and preferences. His book may thus be read as challenging to some and provocative to others.