BOOKS I HAVE READ: EARLY CHRISTIAN MISSION VOLUME 1

Posted on August 14, 2015 by Eddie

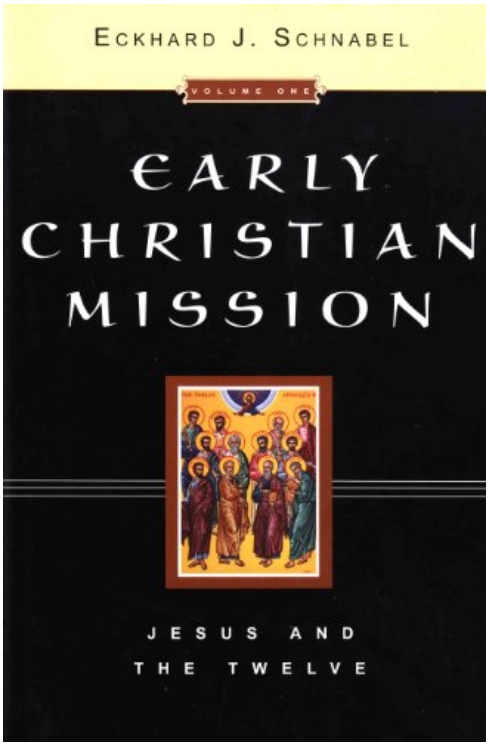
A short and rather inadequate review of a big and rather excellent book, with another volume to come.
Category: Observations

You can't write about the origin of life on earth without engaging in some fashion with Darwin's Origin of Species and the ideas which sprung from it and anyone who writes children's adventures about magic or boarding schools will find the shadow of Harry Potter looming over them. Some books are so influential that they shape the world around them; on a grand scale or in a more limited field.

The mission world has it's share of books which are game changers; ones you can't ignore if you are thinking seriously about what God is doing in the world today.

You simply can't write about the history of mission and what mission should look like in a enlightenment world without engaging with Bosch'sÂ Transforming MissionÂ and it is impossible to write about the impact of Bible translation without getting to grips withÂ Translating the MessageÂ by Lamin Sanneh. If you are writing about the Biblical basis of mission and you don't take on board what Chris Wright has to say inÂ The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand NarrativeÂ you simply aren't taking your job seriously. These books, among others, have set the agenda for the study of Christian mission.

Early Christian Mission Vol 1: Jesus and the TwelveÂ is another game changer. If you are interested in the origins of Christian mission, then you have to read this book. Mind you, it is a serious undertaking; this is a 900 page hardback (with another equally large volume on Paul, to follow).



The size makes it a daunting (and expensive) undertaking, but the breadth and depth of the material covered is stunning. The biblical exegesis is thorough and the background historical research is more detailed than anything I have ever seen. Other writers mention that Jesus travelled through the villages of Galilee; Schnabel lists the villages and what we know about them from the archeological record and what this implies about Jesus ministry. Writers normally just give a few lines to the

possibility that Thomas may (or may not) have travelled to India as a missionary. This book goes into great detail about Greek and Roman trade and travel through Asia and the evidence for Christian settlement in India.

I find it mind boggling that anyone has access to the amount of information stored in this book!

It might seem that this is all just academic and not very much practical use. However, lots of people write about 'the Great Commission' without ever really considering what Jesus disciples would have understood by the term 'all nations' and simply applying it to modern socio-cultural terms. Schnabel has a good deal to say on this and he needs to be read.

After a lengthy introduction, the book has four sections:

- Promise: Israel's eschatological expectations and Jewish expansion in the second temple period.
- Fulfillment: The mission of Jesus.
- Beginnings: The mission of the Apostles in Jerusalem
- Exodus: The mission of the Twelve from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

It isn't possible to do justice to a book like this in one short blog post, but if you are involved in studying the biblical background to mission, you need either to buy it or to find a good library! I have quoted from this book at length in earlier blog posts, you can find them here.