

Introduction

THE DATE WAS OCTOBER 6, 1813. The place was Leeds Old Chapel. British Wesleyans were gathering to discuss the need for a Wesleyan Methodist society that would serve to channel Wesleyan missionary interests. The London Missionary Society, founded in 1794 and largely supported by Congregationalists, was also raising funds among Methodists, and Thomas Coke, the father of Wesleyan missions, was concerned.

“I am certain,” he wrote to his Missionary Committee in October, 1812, “that our competent people . . . will subscribe annually for Calvinistic Missions, if they do not subscribe to our own.”¹ In fact, Robert Smith, secretary of the (Wesleyan) Missionary Committee of London, admitted in a letter to the powerful Wesleyan leader, Jabez Bunting, in September, 1813, that “the Dissenters had recently preached and made collections in one of our chapels in Leeds for their Missions.”² The London committee had, however, failed to put forward a plan for creating a Wesleyan alternative. Into the vacuum the Wesleyan leadership in Leeds had stepped, however, and they presented their vision.

Three Wesleyan preachers had been selected to prepare people to act. James Buckley of Wakefield preached the preparatory sermon on October 5, taking his text from Isa 55:11. The next morning Richard Watson took his text from Ezek 37:9. In the evening Richard Reece preached from Ps 74:20. Three missionary sermons were delivered, each of them from an Old Testament text.

Methodist historian George Findlay commented that “it is remarkable that all three texts were taken from the Old Testament, and were in the

1. Findlay and Holdsworth, *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 37–38.

2. *Ibid.*, 43.

prophetic vein.” But those texts, he added, “admirably set forth the character of the missionary movement, in the Divine purpose behind it . . .”³

The question that is raised, however, is this: Was the fact that each of those sermons was from the Old Testament an anomaly, or has the Old Testament historically played a prominent role in a Wesleyan theology of mission? Answering that question is the purpose of this book. It will be argued in this study that Wesleyan writers in the period of the founding of the Wesleyan Missionary Society in England, nineteenth and early twentieth century leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, and leaders of the holiness movements that separated from Methodism in the last half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century all commonly appealed to the Old Testament in the development and support of a theology of mission.

Context of the Book

Current Old Testament Missiological Debate

The Wesleyan thinking to be examined can be viewed in the light of current Old Testament missiology literature, which suggests three specific issues as central components in the development of an Old Testament theology of mission. The first of these is “universalism,” which may be defined as “the belief that there is only one God, the maker of all things,”⁴ or the “universality” of God.⁵ In recently published Old Testament theologies of mission universalism is a common point of initiation. Kostenberger and O’Brien state that “any comprehensive treatment of mission in the Old Testament must begin with God’s creation and his purposes for humanity.”⁶ Their summary statement of creation seems to suggest that the universalism established in Gen 1 is their support for this claim. “Gen. 1 indicates that God’s lordship is over the whole creation including all humankind.”⁷

3. *Ibid.*, 45–46.

4. Le Grys, *Preaching to the Nations*, 6.

5. This second term might be the better one, if only to distinguish the definition just given from the belief denoted by the same term that teaches that all people everywhere will be saved, regardless of their response to the claims of Christ. While Wesleyans believe that in the rule of God over all creation, and also that the offer of salvation is made to all human beings, a traditional Wesleyan position has never accepted universalism in the sense that all people everywhere will be saved.

6. Kostenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 25.

7. *Ibid.*, 27.

Senior and Stuhlmüller begin theologically rather than exegetically by dealing with the apparent contradiction between “A Theology of Election and Signals of Universalism.”⁸ In Hedlund’s opening chapter, “The Gospel in the Garden,” he states that “the Old Testament gives no basis for isolation from the world . . . she (Israel) was responsible to see that there was active witness.”⁹ Kaiser states that Gen 1–11 “is one of the most universalistic sections of the Bible,” and is a necessary precursor to the promise/blessing theology upon which Kaiser bases his approach to Old Testament theology.¹⁰

A related issue is the apparent conflict between the inclusivism and exclusivism of God, or what Senior and Stuhlmüller call the tension between “election and world mission.”¹¹ Logically the election of Israel may imply the rejection of the nations. That is, the election of one means the exclusion of others. Election is thus seen in the context of privilege. But theologically, election may also be seen not in the context of privilege but in the context of responsibility. Both the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3) and the election of Israel (Exod 19:5–6) contain elements of responsibility to the nations. In this view, election, or exclusivism, is not just a gift to be received but a tool to be used to further the inclusive, universalistic claims of God.

If Israel did have a responsibility to the nations, a third issue is raised. What was the nature of that responsibility? Sundkler is credited with stating this issue by using the technical terms “centrifugal” and “centripetal.”¹² That is, was Israel sent to the nations as a witness to the nations (centrifugal), or was she to be a light that would draw the nations to observe her righteous character and learn of her God (centripetal)?

When looking at the Old Testament, therefore, modern missiologists look for answers to three questions:

1. Is the God of the Old Testament concerned about all nations or only about Israel?
2. If Israel is considered the chosen people of God, does that choice imply that God has rejected other nations?
3. If the answer to the second question is no and it is determined that God has not rejected the nations, what is the responsibility of Israel toward the nations?

8. Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 9.

9. Hedlund, *Mission of the Church in the World*, 26.

10. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 8.

11. Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 83.

12. Stated in Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols., 83.

Were Wesleyan writers in the time periods covered by this study concerned about these questions? Does a Wesleyan theology of mission include answers to these questions from the Old Testament? This book will argue that Wesleyan writers from the time of the founding of the Wesleyan Missionary Society have been aware of these questions, and have interpreted the Old Testament as providing adequate answers—that although the terminology of twenty-first century Old Testament missiologists was unknown to early Wesleyan writers, their attention to Scripture led them to address the same issues.

Toward a Wesleyan Biblical Theology of Mission

In an address to a Free Methodist Church mission conference in 2002, Howard Snyder argued that there are “four biblical themes that together constitute a dynamic theology of mission. These are the image of God in humankind (and to a lesser degree in all creation), God’s preceding (or prevenient) grace, salvation as healing, and the perfecting of Christian character (Christian perfection).”¹³ In the conclusion to this address Snyder acknowledged that these themes did not “exhaust Wesley’s theology and its implication for mission.”¹⁴ But in Snyder’s view these four are the most well-developed components of Wesley’s theology of mission.

It should be noted, however, that “free grace,” otherwise known as “universal redemption,” forms the foundation for each of these biblical themes. For Wesleyans the latter expression emphasized their view that the atonement of Christ is available to all who respond to the free grace available. According to Findlay, “the Wesleyan Revival was a reaction against narrowing conceptions of the Gospel and the Church of Christ, whether Calvinistic, sacerdotal, nationalist, or particularist of whatever kind. ‘Universal Redemption’ was the watchword of the Methodist Preacher. The logic of Free Grace admitted of no limits to its application within the human family.”¹⁵

13. Snyder, “What’s Unique about a Wesleyan Theology of Mission?” 3. This address has more recently been published in Whiteman and Anderson, *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 62–73, under the title “The Missional Flavor of John Wesley’s Theology.” In the published essay Snyder adds the distinctive of “the restoration of all things.” This distinctive was not included in the original address, and Snyder admits in the published essay that “for Wesley, salvation was all about and restoration healing.” I view this added distinctive as an extension of salvation as healing, and so this book does not include specific research on the added distinctive.

14. *Ibid.*, 11.

15. Findlay and Holdsworth, *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 1:31.

Wesleyan missionary historians Barclay and Coplestone concur, stating that “the missionary character of the Methodist Movement was a natural and almost inevitable outgrowth of its fundamental doctrine of universal redemption.”¹⁶

This book will engage with a range of Wesleyan material to reflect upon Snyder’s proposal concerning four distinctives in a Wesleyan theology of mission. The question that will be explored, however, will be very specific. Have Wesleyan writers supported these distinctives from Old Testament texts?

The Need for the Book

In 2009 Darrell Whiteman and Gerald Anderson published a series of essays under the title, *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*.¹⁷ Part One of that volume of essays is entitled, “Biblical Perspectives.” One of the three essays in this section is an essay by Sandra Richter. The essay deals with the Old Testament prophet Jonah, and is entitled, “When God Sends a Missionary: The Prophet Jonah.”¹⁸ The other two essays in the section deal with New Testament themes.¹⁹ Whereas the editors of this volume included a section of essays on biblical perspectives in mission, other recent publications on Wesleyans and mission do not. For example, *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, edited by W. Stephen Gunter and Elaine Robinson, while including one essay on “Jesus Christ: The Heart of the Great Commission,” deals almost exclusively with practical issues arising in mission but largely fails to address a biblical understanding of mission as a part of “the Wesleyan spirit.”²⁰ Similarly, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, by Cracknell and White, while dealing with the history, theology, and practice of “World Methodism,” largely leaves untouched the area of Wesleyan biblical perspectives. *Our Calling to Fulfill: Wesleyan Views of the Church in Mission*, edited by M. Douglas Meeks,²¹ while including mission in the title, is more about ecclesiology than mission.

In summary, it is difficult to find essays or books from a Wesleyan perspective that deal with mission in relation to the Bible in Wesleyan thought.

16. Barclay and Coplestone, *History of Methodist Missions*, xli.

17. Whiteman and Anderson, *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*.

18. *Ibid.*, 28–38.

19. “Jesus as Paradigm: An Asian Perspective,” and “Contextualization in a Wesleyan Spirit: A Case Study of Acts 15.” See *ibid.*, 3–27.

20. Gunter and Robinson, *Considering the Great Commission*.

21. Meeks, “Our Calling to Fulfill: Wesleyan Views of the Church in Mission.”

There are only two books in print that deal exclusively with that topic: *The Missionary Message of the Bible*,²² written by Edmund C. Cook of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and *Holiness and Missions*,²³ written by Susan N. Fitkin of the Church of the Nazarene. Both of those volumes, published before World War II, will be examined in depth in this book.

Additionally, while the life and theology of John Wesley has often been examined, the writings of the followers of Wesley have received much less attention. Specifically, almost nothing has been written that examines the views of Wesleyan founders and North American Wesleyan leaders on the theme of their theology of mission. For example, while John Vickers, in his book *Thomas Coke and World Methodism*, has detailed the debt Wesleyans owe to Thomas Coke for his untiring efforts to engage Wesleyans in world mission, Vickers does not examine Coke's writings to determine the way Coke used the Bible in constructing a theology of mission.²⁴ Wesley Tracy has examined in depth the pulpit ministry of Adam Clarke, but Clarke's biblical theology of mission was not included.²⁵ So while virtually all the Wesleyans who will be examined in this book have been the subject of research projects before, an examination of their biblical perspectives on mission is largely absent. A striking exception is the essay of Andrew Walls in *The Global Impact of the Wesleyan Traditions and Their Related Movements*, edited by Charles Yrigoyen, entitled "Wesleyan Missiological Theories: the Case of Richard Watson," which examines the millennial implications of Richard Watson on his theology of mission.²⁶

This book, therefore, is necessary because researchers up to now have failed to give due attention to the topic taken up here. This book, then, will seek to remedy that deficiency by providing a thorough examination of the way the Old Testament was used in thinking about mission by the founders of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, and North American Wesleyan leaders of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

22. Cook, *Missionary Message of the Bible*.

23. Fitkin, *Holiness and Missions*.

24. Vickers, *Thomas Coke and World Methodism*. See also Baker, *Thomas Coke, the St. Paul of Methodism*.

25. Tracy, *When Adam Clarke Preached, People Listened*.

26. Yrigoyen, *Global Impact of the Wesleyan Traditions and Their Related Movements*. 27–47. This essay will be examined as a part of this book.

Limitations of the Research

Definition of Wesleyan

While the term “Wesleyan” can refer simply to a person/organization that follows the teachings of John Wesley, the term is much broader, or more complex, than that approach suggests. During the lifetime of Wesley his followers were called “Methodists,” a form of ridicule for their disciplined approach to the Christian life. And around the world today the largest number of people whose Christian heritage can be traced to Wesley are still called Methodists: the United Methodist Church for those coming from the American tradition, and the Methodist Church for those from a British tradition.

“Wesleyanism,” however, was a term that was adopted after the death of Wesley and places the focus more upon following the theological teachings of Wesley rather than simply his methodology. R. G. Tuttle, Jr. has correctly pointed out that used in this manner the term can correctly be applied to a large number of denominations.²⁷ The first category includes denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, AME Zion Church, the Wesleyan Church, and the Free Methodist Church, which are North American groups that broke away from the Methodist Church in the 1800s—usually over the slavery issue, or later over differences of opinion regarding the holiness revival.²⁸ In a second category are denominations that were formed as a result of the holiness revival but adopted a theology that was consistent with the teachings of Wesley. Examples would be the Church of the Nazarene, the Church of God (Holiness), and the Church of God (Anderson). A third category, related to but not generally called Wesleyan, would be denominations such as the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. These groups, while holding generally to Wesleyan tenets, have added *glossolalia* as a proof of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. In this book “Wesleyan” applies to the first two categories proposed by Tuttle, but not to the third.

27. Tuttle, Jr., “The Wesleyan Tradition,” in Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1st British ed., 1165.

28. There is a third level of denominations that might be called “grandchildren” of the Methodist Church, who broke away in the latter half of the 20th century from the denominations that had been formed in the 19th century. Examples would be Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection and the Bible Methodist Church.

Limited to the Old Testament

In his excellent article on “Wesley’s Use of the Old Testament in Doctrinal Teachings,” John Oswalt comments that despite his obvious familiarity with the Old Testament Wesley was primarily a man of the New Testament.²⁹ What has not been investigated is whether his followers shared this tendency. This research will argue that Wesley’s followers have given considerably more attention to the Old Testament than did their teacher.

Group Selection Criteria

Given the breadth of the term “Wesleyan” it would be impossible to include all Wesleyan groups in this study. Consequently, the following criteria have been used to guide the group selection process. First, in this book the term “Wesleyan” and the related term “Wesleyanism” will be used to refer broadly not only to Methodists, but also to those denominations that have largely adopted the theological distinctives of Wesley yet have not added *glossolalia* as a proof of the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Second, given the North American context of the writer, this study will focus on the flow of Wesleyanism from Great Britain to North America. This decision, of necessity, means that the various groups in Great Britain who left Wesleyan Methodism and formed other denominations are not examined.³⁰

Third, the writer’s historical, theological roots are within the holiness trajectory of the Wesleyan movement. With this personal motivation in mind, the research will focus upon Wesleyan holiness groups once holiness became a dividing issue in the mid-nineteenth century.

Methodology and Development of the Argument

The book will be divided into three sections, each containing three chapters. The first section will consider Wesleyan writers who were involved in the formation of the original Wesleyan Missionary Society. Since, as mentioned above, researchers have largely ignored the theme of how the Old Testament has impacted the theology of mission of these writers, this book will deal largely with primary sources. Specifically an effort has been made to

29. Oswalt, “Wesley’s Use of the Old Testament in His Doctrinal Teachings,” 45.

30. These denominations would include the Primitive Methodists, the Calvinistic Methodists, the Bible Christian Society, Methodist New Connection, and others. It is hoped that other researchers would examine spokesmen from these groups.

examine all extant sermons, commentaries, theologies, and periodical articles to identify Old Testament texts that have contributed to the writers' understandings of mission.

In chapter 1 the writings of Thomas Coke and Jabez Bunting will be considered. Coke wrote a four-volume Bible commentary set that will be examined. Unfortunately, Coke's sermons, which were with him at the time of his death at sea, were not saved. In their place the sermons of Jabez Bunting, a contemporary and colleague, will be analyzed.

Chapter 2 will be devoted to the writings of Adam Clarke. In addition to his well known six-volume commentary set on the Bible, a four-volume set of sermons by Clarke also have been published and are available for analysis. Clarke also wrote a *Christian Theology* and various other essays which are helpful for determining the Old Testament texts from which his theology of mission was developed.

The writings of Richard Watson will be examined in chapter 3. In 1834 Thomas Jackson published a twelve-volume set of the works of Watson.³¹ That set, along with Watson's more well-known *Theological Institutes*,³² are examined in this chapter. There is also an additional book of sketches and sermons that have been included in the chapter.³³

In the second section of the book the context will shift from British Methodism to the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) of America. The section opens with a discussion of the theological tensions facing the MEC in the mid- to late nineteenth century: the tension over holiness; the tension over eschatology; and the tension that developed concerning divine (faith) healing. Each of these tensions will be shown to impact the perceived mission of the church. Chapter four is the only chapter where some likely spokesmen could not be considered due to a lack of written material. The writings of Francis Asbury, Daniel Whedon, and Bishop William Taylor were examined and found insufficient for investigating a theology of mission. Bangs was an apologist both for the distinctives of Wesleyanism and for the MEC. He published several books and pamphlets dealing with relevant themes which are examined in this chapter.

Chapter 5 will examine the only major Old Testament commentary set of the period, a work entitled *Whedon's Old Testament Commentary*. Daniel Whedon was the general editor of the series of nine volumes from eleven different authors, each of whom was a leader of the MEC. This commentary

31. Watson and Jackson, *Works of the Rev. Richard Watson*, 12 vols.

32. Watson, *Theological Institutes*.

33. Watson, *Sermons and Sketches of Sermons*, 2 vols.

series, therefore, provides a unique insight into the views the Old Testament held in the MEC in the period.

The focus in chapter 6 is the early twentieth century, and the volume entitled *The Missionary Message of the Bible* by Edmund Cook of the MEC South. This volume has been chosen because, as noted, it is one of two volumes from a Wesleyan perspective that attempts at any level to present a unified biblical theology of mission from a Wesleyan perspective. Cook's work will be examined both to determine his theology of mission and how he reflects the positions taken by previous spokesmen.

Section three shifts from the MEC to the Wesleyan holiness movements that developed as a separate movement due to a perceived lack of emphasis within the MEC on the doctrine of the perfecting of Christian character. The section opens with an examination of how holiness became a divisive issue within Wesleyanism. The writings of leaders from three denominations that separated from the MEC at least in part over the issue of holiness—the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Free Methodist Church, and the Church of the Nazarene—will be examined to determine their theologies of mission. Luther Lee, an early leader in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, published a theology and also a book of sermons that included many of his own. Benjamin T. Roberts, the founder of the Free Methodist Church, was the editor of *The Earnest Christian* periodical as well as the author of books on evangelism and holiness that are helpful in determining the Old Testament foundations of his theology of mission. The contributions from Hiram F. Reynolds of the Church of the Nazarene come largely from the archives of the Church of the Nazarene in Lenexa, Kansas.

The holiness movement, however, was not confined to organized denominations. Largely through the camp meeting movement, holiness became a uniting cry that went beyond denominational lines. Two perceived leaders within this interdenominational movement who were also heavily involved in world mission were Martin Wells Knapp and Oswald Chambers. Knapp edited the periodical *The Revivalist*, as well as various books largely dealing with the theme of holiness. Chambers is the author of the well-known devotional book *My Utmost for His Highest*. Books and essays from Chambers have been compiled in one volume under the title *The Complete Works of Oswald Chambers*.³⁴

The final chapter, like chapter 6, looks at the early twentieth century and has as its focus a publication that sought—in a limited way—to present a biblical theology of mission, this time from the perspective of someone within the Wesleyan holiness movement. The author is Susan N. Fitkin, a

34. Chambers, *Complete Works of Oswald Chambers*.

longtime president of the Women's Missionary Society of the Church of the Nazarene. The book, entitled *Holiness and Power*, brings together the missional task of the church with the spiritual preparation necessary to engage successfully in that task. As in chapter six, an effort will be made to not only show what Fitkin believed about mission, but how that may or may not have reflected the views of those considered before her.

SAMPLE