

DIASPORA MISSIONS: A VIABLE MISSION MODEL OF THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



Ebenezer Aryee

Diaspora is defined as any group of people who are scattered or dispersed from their original homeland.

God has always used the diaspora as an instrument for His global redemptive purpose. From the call of Abraham, through Joseph, Daniel, the Nation of Israel to the scattering of the believers in Jerusalem, the people on the move have been used as vessels to carry God's blessing of salvation to the Nations.

The Bible says in Galatians 3:8 – “Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” God revealed his global redemptive purpose to Abraham in the context of diaspora mission in Genesis chapter 12:1 – The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you”. Abraham had to move from his original homeland to fulfil God’s missionary call on his life.

We also find in the New Testament how some believers of the early church became vessels of taking the gospel to the Nations as a result of dispersion – “Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among the Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. (*Acts 11:19-21*)”

The rapid spread of Christianity in the then Roman Empire was due in part to the diaspora Jewish community spread throughout the empire from Jerusalem to Rome. These diaspora Jews became a catalyst for the Apostle Paul and his missionary band. The Acts of the Apostles shows how Paul and Barnabas ministered to Jews in the synagogues

before sharing the gospel with Gentiles (*Acts chapters 13 & 14*).

Missions means the transmission and confession of faith, and the church is called to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ throughout the whole world – “As the Father sent me, so I send you – John 20:21”. This model of missions with its implications of humble service, up-rootedness, vulnerability and the alienation that comes with being a stranger fits contemporary diaspora model of missions (*Hendrik Kraemer 1957*)

There are three dimensions to diaspora missiology. The first is Internal Missions - (missions through and to the diaspora) – this is where diaspora believers reach out to their cultural groups that are accessible in the nations where they are scattered.

The second is Cross-Cultural Missions - (missions beyond the diaspora, often referred to as reverse mission) – this involves intentional cross-cultural outreach beyond their ethnic groups to the formerly Christian nations of Europe and America.

The third is Common Missions - (missions with the diaspora often referred to as inter-cultural mission.) – this is where diaspora churches partner with indigenous European and American believers and churches to evangelize least-reached people groups.

With an estimated global diaspora population of over 300 million, globalization and migration present the church in the 21st century with an opportunity to fulfil her missionary mandate through the age-old instrument of diaspora mission.

People move and migrate for various reasons. They respond to the movement of capital and resources or their perceptions of opportunities for better living conditions available elsewhere.

It is estimated that there are over 140 million people of African descent living in the diaspora which

includes a new wave of African migrants to Europe and North America on the wings of globalization. In the new African immigrant Christian communities, we find attempts not just to affirm the supremacy of Christ but also their mission agenda within secularizing Western societies as far as Christian presence is concerned. **When mobilized, this vast army will provide a pool of resource for prayer, finance and workers to advance the completion of the Great Commission.**

According to Dr Enson Lwesya, the Church in Africa should intentionally train Christians to go abroad with a mission mindset. He adds that training members of the church to become missionaries of God begins with appreciating the philosophy of the church as a missionary community and the ministry of all believers.¹

According to Dr Lwesya, the basic foundation of such a philosophy is allowing the believer to know they have God-given gifts and that God rejoices in the careers they pursue. Therefore, every career, job, business, hobby, and life becomes an arena where God's grace interfaces with the needs of the community, with the believer as the point of contact.

He continues that God's providence is actively at work in the Diaspora and that majority of Africans only realize, after the fact that God controls their migrations. However, being aware that they drifted under the hand of God's sovereignty is not enough. He maintains the African Christian must be helped to understand that they are found in the diaspora for a purpose. They are like Esther in the ancient Diaspora of Israel – the unlikely person who saved people from calamity. They are like Daniel who served the purposes of God with integrity in a generation that enjoyed serving itself.

The present realities in most access-restricted nations demand new ways of doing things. Dr Lwesya concludes that churches across Africa should be influenced to deliberately set up activities to inform, train and commission their members going abroad as bi-vocational missionaries, or tentmakers.

Diaspora mission like the incarnational model is the mission model of the past, present and future. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen

Ebenezer Aryee was born in Ghana and now lives in the UK where he and six others planted Good Shepherd church in July 2007 in a deprived community to bring transformation through hope in Jesus Christ. He has a passion for mission and discipleship and is committed to inspiring and mentoring young people for mission and has led teams of young people on short term mission to Africa. Ebenezer has ministered in several countries in Africa and the Middle East helping to build teams for mission mobilisation. He currently serves on the leadership team of Simply Mobilising International in Europe and is a board member of Pioneers UK. He has a Masters degree in Missional Leadership and is a strong advocate of cross-cultural and intercultural mission. Ebenezer is the founder and director of African Diaspora Mission Network which aims at mobilising Africans in the diaspora for cross cultural mission and to partner with the church in Africa to advance God's global redemptive purpose. He is married to Celia and they have two daughters Elsa 17 and Selma 15.

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