1

2

Acts 15 3

1 Thessalonians 2 4

5

6

在多變的世界裡的宣教

Mission in a changing world

A series of six bible studies looking at mission in the Bible



PARTICIPATE



はじめに

Introduction

In this anniversary year we want to take the opportunity to encourage Christians to think about mission in a fresh way. The past centuries may have seen mission change, but we believe that God's mission is unchanged.





We live in a world where mission is on our doorstep – and not just because globalisation has brought many new cultures to the West. The rapidly changing culture of 21st century Western society increasingly widens the gap between our 'churched culture', and the unchurched culture. We need to put into practice those missional principles learned overseas into our inter-cultural evangelism with our neighbours.

With this conviction OMF International offers a series of six Bible studies in this year's anniversary Billions. Each looks at mission in the Bible and seeks to apply principles both to the local and the global context. You could introduce them to your church Bible study group, or invite a group of friends to form a new group and spend some time studying mission together.

This issue sees three and four studies, written by David Miller and Ray Porter, looking at Acts 15 and 1 Thessalonians 2 respectively.



文化的志向のある弟子作り

Culturally Minded Discipleship

Whenever the Gospel enters a new cultural context questions arise – How should new believers follow Jesus? What about the myriad of cultural practices which have until now been taken for granted? What can be kept and what needs to be given up? How can missionaries make sure they don't impose their own cultures on the new believers?



As the West increasingly becomes a post-Christian society we will face similar questions when we seek to make disciples here. So, before looking at this passage, think about these questions.

i. What are the risks if Christianity seems too foreign to a culture, and what are the risks if it seems to become too 'familiar' within one?

ii. What are the marks of a disciple of Jesus in contemporary Western culture? Are all of these universal, or are some specific to our context?

iii. Apart from ethnic minority communities, what other cultures and sub-cultures can you think of in the West? (Think about gender, class, geography and generations)

iv. From what you know of mission history, are there situations where western missionaries, maybe unwittingly, have imposed their own cultures on non-Western Christians?



Many of the early disciples of Jesus were Jews and for them Jesus was their long awaited Messiah. So they followed Jesus within their culture, going to the Temple, maintaining food laws and upholding Jewish prayer patterns. But when Gentiles started following Christ, questions arose amongst the Jewish believers – did Gentiles also need to be circumcised, give up pork and adopt Jewish ritual washing? Did Gentile believers need to adopt Jewish customs to truly follow Jesus?

The Church leaders gathered in Jerusalem to resolve this question. This passage raises deep questions about the relationship between Old Testament law and the grace of the Gospel, but it also provides a model for cross-cultural discipleship – the focus of this study. Let's see what we can learn.







Read Acts 15:1–21.

The debate – verses 1–12

The Judaisers, who are from the party of the Pharisees, are genuine believers in Jesus and deeply committed to the Old Testament law. They were convinced that all followers of Jesus, from whatever cultural background, needed to have the same commitment to the Old Testament law as them.

v. How would you summarise the contributions which the Judaisers, Peter, and Paul and Barnabas make to the discussion?

vi. Why do you think the Judaisers are so passionate about adhering to the Law of Moses?

vii. What are the evidences of God's activity which led Peter, Paul and Barnabas to realise that the Gentile believers didn't need to adopt Jewish culture in order to be saved?

The experience of Peter, Paul and Barnabas suggests that the Judaisers were going to have to re-read scripture. Have you ever had an experience of God's activity that challenged you to re-think an interpretation of scripture that you had taken for granted?



The decision: verses 13–21

James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, pronounces the decision of the leadership. Significantly, he first refers to other Old Testament scriptures (v. 16–18). The Gospel's encounter with Gentile culture caused a rediscovery of scriptural truth which had been forgotten, missed or ignored, in this case that salvation was offered to the Gentiles as well.

viii. Why do we sometimes miss or ignore things in Scripture? What can help us to avoid this?

ix. Can you think of examples, in the West or in Asia, of areas where the encounter between the Gospel and a cultural group has led to renewed discoveries of Scriptural truth?

x. Peter (v. 10) and James (v. 19) want to avoid burdening Gentile disciples. What do they think of as burdens?

xi. What does the leadership say that Gentile disciples have to do (v. 20)? Are there things about this which puzzle you?

Explanation

Eating food sacrificed to idols was one of the main ways that Gentiles would be involved in worship of other gods, so the first point is a call to undivided loyalty to Jesus. The second command is a call to sexual purity. But what about the meat of strangled animals and from blood – are Christians not free to eat anything? Yes, but Jewish Christians would not eat this sort of food. The Gentiles would be aware of this as 'the law of Moses' was widely known (v. 21). This compromise restriction would enable Jewish and Gentile believers to eat together – the highest expression of fellowship in the early Church.



Five key principles in cross-cultural discipleship

i. Listen to everyone involved in the discussion, understand the issues, and see what God is doing.

ii. Beware of imposing your own cultural patterns of Christianity on others, and instead help them follow Jesus within their own culture.

iii. Look for fresh truths in Scripture, which may challenge our cultural assumptions.

iv. There are universal Gospel truths which challenge every culture.

v. The Church is one, so be willing to make compromises to maintain unity across cultures, generations, classes, etc.

- *Can you think of ways in which Western churches risk imposing their own cultural patterns of Christianity on other cultural groups here?*
- *How should we pray for ourselves and for missionaries in Asia as we try to make disciples across cultures?*



奉仕活動での誠実心

Integrity in Ministry

Many missionaries have similar experiences to Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 17: 1–10). They have to leave the work before it is completed. CIM missionaries experienced that in 1951 when they had to leave China. Unlike Paul, they were not able to write letters to the Christians they had left behind. Many people questioned the value of the work they had done. The Communist government saw them as part of Western imperialism.



Read 1 Thessalonians 2: 1–6a.

Integrity in ministry is a major issue wherever we are serving God. Paul's description of his ministry in Thessalonica will help us think this through.

i. Paul was certain he was not using any trickery to persuade people to become Christians. Missionaries are sometimes accused of bribing people to faith if they give material help to them. How would you answer such an accusation? What steps would you take to ensure that people are not becoming 'rice Christians', but really turning to Christ because of his call? Are there aspects of your own ministry that might be less than honest?

ii. One reason that Hudson Taylor would not ask for donations to his work was that he did not wish to detract from the support of other Christian ministry. Paul says that he did not minister because of greed. How can a mission agency ensure that it is not so interested in gaining support for its own work, that it sees other agencies as rivals?

iii. Missionaries depend on church and individual supporters. How might they become 'men pleasers' rather than only seeking to serve God?

iv. Look at the whole of this section and ask whether your own work, or that of your church, could make the same defence as Paul.





Read 1 Thessalonians 2: 6b–12.

CIM/OMF have always prioritised long-term service where the missionaries can identify with the people they are called to serve. This section will help us to examine the manner and motives of our ministry.

v. Koos Fietje, a Canadian OMF worker who was killed as he preached the Gospel in Thailand in 1981 coined the formula for faithful Christian ministry: honest message, honest messenger and honest day's work. How does Paul demonstrate his 'honest day's work' both in secular and ministry terms? If you are in full-time Christian ministry, how do you organise your weekly work so that you are an honest labourer? If you are a 'normal' Christian, earning your money in a secular environment, like Paul, how do you ensure that you are serving Christ in both spheres?



vi. What do you understand by 'sharing lives' with those you are serving? What problems might a missionary face in doing that in a different culture?

vii. Paul uses the metaphors of mother and father to show how he worked. What do you think he meant by these descriptions? How far is your own work a combination of both patterns?

viii. Paul could say that he was 'holy, righteous and blameless' amongst the Thessalonians. How do you safeguard your own life and witness?



Read 1 Thessalonians 2: 13–20.

The aim of mission is that people should come to faith in Jesus Christ. When they respond to the Gospel it is a great source of joy to the missionary. Here we see Paul's appreciation of what God had done amongst the Thessalonians.

ix. Why do the Thessalonians come to faith? What is the evidence that they are truly converted?

x. What is the role of the Word of God in your ministry? How do you assess whether people have come to faith?

xi. What issues might a cross-cultural missionary face in both the use of scripture and in assessing the reality of conversion?

xii. One missionary was criticised by a member of his home church because in the country where he was serving evangelism was illegal and converts would suffer. How would you answer such criticism?





xiii. Is Paul guilty of anti-Semitism in these verses? Why should the Jews especially 'heap up their sins' by opposing the Gentiles' conversion? How may professing Christians become similar enemies of the Gospel?

xiv. Paul reckons that it is Satan who has stopped him revisiting the Thessalonians. What else does he think he has done (3. 5)? What role do you think Satan has in world mission today? Does Paul really think Satan is able to stop God's work?

xv. What brings joy to Paul? What joy have you had in seeing people come to faith in Christ?

If you have time you might like to read on to chapter 3 verse 5 and answer one more question.

xvi. Many new converts find that suffering comes to them when they first believe. How would you use these verses to encourage them?

About the Authors

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David and his wife Jeanette served with OMF in Japan for nearly ten years, mostly in student ministry. On returning to the UK David taught missiology at International Christian College. He currently pastors a church in Glasgow where he seeks to apply lessons learned in cross-cultural mission to ministry in Scotland. He also continues to do some freelance teaching in missiology.

Ray Porter

Ray and his wife Janice served with OMF in Indonesia from 1972–1986. He was Director of the UK East Region from 1991 until 2005 when he was seconded to set up a World Mission Course at Oak Hill College. Officially retired he still does some lectures there and serves OMF as a UK Trustee and as a member of the international Global Vision Council.



For further stimulating reading:

For Their Rock is not as Our Rock. An Evangelical Theology of Religions by Daniel Strange. IVP 2014, ISBN 9781783591000.

Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame, by Jackson Wu. William Carey International University Press 2013, ISBN 978-0865850477

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