



MARVIN J. NEWELL

CROSSING
CULTURES
IN
SCRIPTURE

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

FOR MISSION PRACTICE


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MARVIN J. NEWELL

Foreword by Patrick Fung


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To my children,
Nate and Marie Newell
and Rebekah and Brian Farber,
who serve crossculturally in distant lands,
Aaron and Sarah Newell,
who faithfully serve in the States
and Phil Newell,
who carefully edited this book
and encouraged me to persevere

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Foreword

REV. DR. PATRICK FUNG
GENERAL DIRECTOR, OMF INTERNATIONAL

As far back as I can remember I have used chopsticks. I don't admire them or abhor them—I don't think much about them either way. I just use them.

Eating with chopsticks is part of Chinese culture. It was not a problem until I went to the mission field and noticed the local people eating with their hands. I struggled with this, since I was taught that eating with one's hands is unhygienic, uncivilized, and uncultured. I was judging another culture through my own cultural lens.

Of course, culture comprises much more than just eating habits. Cultural differences cover political, economic, social, racial, and linguistic dimensions, along with many more. But all cultures dictate value judgments. To many from Western cultures, challenging an opinion may indicate trust, openness and result in a better outcome. To other cultures, it may result in shame and dishonor, broken relationships and loss of face. As global Christians, appreciating and understanding other cultures is an important Christian principle.

Anthropologists emphasize the need to take every culture seriously. For Christians, however, anthropology can never be the end in itself. It must be the means to Christian witness. We need to understand the cultures of other peoples so that we can present the truth of Christ in ways that respect their culture even as they challenge underlying cultural values when necessary. As people embrace the truth, uncritical rejection or acceptance of old ways is unwarranted. All cultures need to be judged, not only according to ethnic preferences but also according to God's unchanging character of truth, love, justice, and mercy.

The Lausanne Covenant helpfully describes the tension inherent in culture. "Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and

goodness. Because he is fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic.”¹

The Bible is rich in stories about culture—the good, the bad, and the ugly. In this book, Marvin Newell helps us look at the Scriptures from the lens of crosscultural encounters. As he puts it, the Bible is:

- A portrayer of cultures
- A sculptor of cultures
- An appraiser of cultures

First, the Bible often describes cultures uncritically. The narratives, including many of the prevalent immoral practices of the time, do not indicate God’s approval as much as his mercy and patience. Second, the Bible shapes cultures. Instead of deception, it honors truth; instead of sexual perverseness, it roots sexuality in faithfulness. Third, the Bible judges all cultures, without exception, against God’s standard.

Dr. Newell meticulously examines many of the major stories in Scripture from the perspective of cultural encounters in all their diversity. The wonderful story of Abraham and the Hittites in Genesis 23 shows how Abraham’s sensitivity in a crosscultural setting had far-reaching consequences, not only for himself but also for the generations that followed. The moving story of Ruth tells how its title character not only declares her crosscultural commitments but also becomes a true insider of her adopted culture and is highly valued by the community. The tragic story of King David and Uriah in 2 Samuel 11 shows the danger of high power distance when decision making becomes unchallenged and there is no accountability. The inspiring story of Nehemiah, who led a despised and displaced cultural minority, speaks powerfully to today’s persecuted minorities and migrant refugees. With these stories and many more, this book points us back to the biblical theology of culture.

Ultimately, our goal cannot only be to gain insights about a diversity of cultures. Rather, all cultures, with all their diversity—glorious and inglorious—need to be redeemed by the salvation of Christ, who is the Lord of all. For “in

him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col 1:19-20).

Crossing Cultures in Scripture helps us to both decode the Bible stories from the biblical cultures and to encode the Bible stories for different cultures today, so that God’s message remains relevant and universal. All the stories point to one greater story—the story of Jesus Christ. We have a great message to tell the culturally diverse peoples of the world!

Preface

The Bible should be the first and final authority for all that we believe and practice. This includes what it has to say about the phenomenon known as human culture. Not only does it guide us in understanding cultural origins and expressions, but it also goes a step further: it doubles as a guide to our experiences in crosscultural engagements. It's amazing how many of these engagements are found throughout Scripture. They are so numerous that the Bible itself is a textbook on cultural understanding.

There is also a place for the social sciences in understanding cultural dynamics. These we might miss if we solely refer to Scripture. The social sciences assist in uncovering blind spots, helping us gain a more authentic reading of Scripture. Anthropology, sociology, and the broad range of subjects found in the disciplines of intercultural studies (linguistics, world religions, communications, etc.) contribute to understanding scriptural texts written long ago in distant cultures. But these disciplines are imperfect and should never take precedence over the teaching of Scripture on any subject, including culture.

Thus the need for this book. I have yet to discover an entire text devoted to what may be called a biblical theology of culture. This book is an attempt to be just that. Although it doesn't examine every crosscultural encounter, it does bring to light the major biblical stories and events that are crosscultural in nature.

And there's no lack of material. Scripture is permeated with crosscultural accounts. Many of our favorite biblical narratives recount crosscultural encounters. Story after story can be found that are pregnant with principles and lessons on crosscultural engagement.

When we take a focused look at Scripture through the lens of cultural understanding, three realities emerge:

- *The Bible is a portrayer of cultures.* It unashamedly depicts and describes, many times uncritically, how separate communities and whole societies lived out their beliefs, values, and customs—the very elements that define culture. Some aligned closely with divine-sanctioned standards and ideals, and others did not.
- *The Bible is a sculptor of cultures.* It helped shape and influence numerous cultures for the better. And it still does this today. Where Scripture is regarded as authoritative, many social evils embedded in the customs of communities have been either discontinued or adjusted to reflect standards of morality and social well-being God always intended for humans to enjoy.
- *The Bible is an appraiser of cultures.* Its supracultural values are meant to be the accepted moral standard for all cultures found everywhere through all time. No culture is exempt; no community of humans is excused. The standards and values of Scripture stand in judgment on any cultural practice or expression that ignores or opposes the divine values given therein. The objective norms and standards of Scripture trump the subjective and selective opinions of humans.

Thus we can see why it's important to start with Scripture when seeking to understand the origin, nature, and dynamics of culture and crosscultural engagement. Crossing cultures is best experienced—and with a lot fewer embarrassing mistakes—when Scripture is acknowledged as the first and primary point of reference.

PART ONE



FOUNDATIONAL CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction to Culture

Culture is like air. Although air surrounds us, we don't pay much attention to it until it's absent or has a smell. The same can be said about culture. People are immersed in it but don't think a lot about it. They live their lives feeling that things are the way they are because that's the way they ought to be. Every "ethnic group" or community of individuals possesses something in common that's invisible but manifests itself in a group personality that we call culture.

Culture is an integral part of humanness. It is paradoxical in that, on the one hand, it thoroughly permeates our environment, but on the other hand it's intangible. It's like the story of two young fish swimming along who happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way. The older fish nods at them and says, "Morning, boys. How's the water?" The two young fish swim on for a bit. Then one asks the other, "What's water?"¹

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Have you ever stopped to consider what culture actually is—what comprises what we label as “culture”? Answering that question is a good starting point for a book focused on the phenomenon of culture found throughout the Bible. But before we plunge into Scripture and examine cultural accounts and anecdotes, a standard definition of culture is necessary. So, for our purposes, the term culture is used in this book in a rather uncomplicated way: *culture is the distinctive beliefs, values, and customs of a particular group of people that determine how they think, feel, and behave*. Although sophisticated definitions that capture nuances related to culture have been championed, this more basic definition is intended to help us understand the essence of culture.

Notice from the definition that culture envelops three manifestations common to humans: beliefs (thinking), values (feeling), and customs (behavior).² The intertwining of the three comprises what is commonly referred to as a worldview. Culture and worldview are inseparable; they go hand in hand.

CULTURE IS UNIVERSAL

Culture is a universal phenomenon. It's impossible for an individual to be cultureless. Most people are born and raised within a distinct cultural environment that is home to them. It dictates how to make sense of the world around them. This sensing relates to both the visible, empirical environment where they live and the invisible, spiritual world that they sense as also being around them.

On another level, there's no such thing as a people group or ethnic entity without a common culture. Every ethnic group in the world possesses its distinct culture. This is common to societies; whether among the inhabitants of a megacity like Tokyo or tribal people deep in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, all people groups possess culture.

But that wasn't always thought to be the case. Some during the era of Western exploration and imperialism, when pioneers, traders, and missionaries first encountered new and novel peoples, naively believed that those people had no culture. Furthermore, they felt it was incumbent upon them to teach those people culture. What they really meant was that they felt compelled to teach those strangers their own home culture. But what wasn't true then isn't true now: that other peoples do not possess culture simply because they think, feel, and behave differently.

CULTURE'S FUNCTION

Culture is innate to humanness. It acts as a road map to life. It guides members of a society as they travel through life to analyze and describe the world around them (how to think). It guides them in what conduct is virtuous and what is not (how to behave). It directs them in what to like or dislike, what to consider beautiful or ugly, what brings pleasure or pain, and what is good taste, good dress, and good food (how to feel). Culture is an invisible template for living that makes up a people's worldview.

In addition to functioning as a road map, culture doubles as the road signs to be obeyed along the way. These signs dictate what is considered excessive, what is taboo, and what is acceptable or commendable. If any member of the group exceeds the speed limit or takes a detour in regard to a particular societal belief or behavior, other members of the society rally to slow her down or bring her to a stop. This explains why there's community resistance when an individual or group of individuals takes the initiative to convert from the prevailing religious belief of the group to another belief system.

CULTURAL TRADITION

It's interesting how culture is something every person feels but few stop to think about. Take a typical cultural group—maybe even your own—and ask why the members do something the way they do. The usual answer is “because this is the way we've always done it.” They feel comfortable with that answer because it's based on group tradition. Cultural traditions give stability, momentum, and balance to a society. Because of this, people usually don't feel the need to justify why they do what they do.

The role of tradition in culture is essential to the well-being of its members. Tradition is to a cultural group what walls are to a house. Without well-defined structural traditions, community life falls apart. This is clearly illustrated in the musical and movie *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Take the story of Reb Tevya in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Tevya is a poor milkman who is also an important patriarchal figure in his hometown of Anatevka. An opening scene in the musical finds Tevya reflecting on the importance of tradition to everything precious in his small village. Tevya asks, “How do we keep our balance?” He then answers his own question with one bellowing word, “Tradition!” “Because of traditions,” he continues, “we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka, we have traditions for everything: how to sleep, how to eat, how to work, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered, and we always wear a little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, how did this tradition get started? I tell you . . . I don't know. But because of our tradition, every one of us knows who he is and,” he adds pointing emphatically upward, “what God expects him to do.”³

We encounter quite a few instances of cultural tradition in Scripture. Many of those traditions were good, stabilizing customs that kept societal balance. But when tradition turned into traditionalism,⁴ thus taking precedence over the clear command of God, it became a stumbling block to God's will and design for humankind. At times, Jewish religious leaders fell into that trap. That was precisely why Jesus took issue with the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23),⁵

constantly hammering home to them the importance of not putting traditionalism above the law and love of God.

Nearly every Thursday evening since the beginning of March the Kinodas have studied the Bible. Although their family religion is a mixture of Buddhism and Shinto (which includes the worship of their deceased ancestors and local deities), because the teachings of both of these religions are very nebulous, neither husband nor wife can delineate what they actually believe, *but are simply blindly following the traditions of their ancestors*. Both husband and wife are sincere in their study of the Bible, although on the part of Mr. Kinoda it is more of an intellectual pursuit whereas his wife seems to be seeking truth.

**JONATHAN LUETHY,
VETERAN MISSIONARY TO JAPAN**

CROSSING CULTURES IN SCRIPTURE

The Bible is a book rich in cultures. Think for a moment of some of the cultures that have expression in Scripture: Hebrew, Chaldean, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Hittite, Mesopotamian, Syrian, Assyrian, Philistine, Canaanite, Moabite, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman, to name most of them. Here's the amazing part: God worked in and through his servants crossing through these cultures to bring his grand story of redemption to us.

The Bible is full of crosscultural encounters that have lessons for us today. An astounding number of biblical characters grew in their understanding of God, the world, and themselves through, as Nelson Jennings puts it, “getting lost” in the wilderness wanderings of crosscultural experience.⁶ Notable persons such as Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Ruth, David, Daniel, Jonah, Nehemiah, Jesus, Philip, Peter, Barnabas, and Paul stand out as individuals who worked their way through crosscultural contacts and experiences. Some, like Joseph, Daniel, and Paul, had prolonged experiences.

Thus it's evident that there is much to learn from the cultural encounters found throughout Scripture and portrayed in the lives God used to unfold his redemptive story. The many accounts of individuals who crossed cultures as part of his design for their lives convey cultural lessons for us today that help inform our crosscultural encounters as well. The anecdotes and teachings throughout Scripture related to culture—from Genesis to Revelation, from Eden throughout eternity—should not be ignored. Indeed, they have an increasing value to us who live in an increasingly multicultural world and wish to study the art of crossing cultures as portrayed throughout Scripture.

Eden

The Beginning of Human Culture

GENESIS 1:26-27

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

In our day, there is much confusion and a plethora of wrong assumptions about the origin of human culture. Secular anthropologists would have us believe that as humankind evolved, more complex and developed cultures emerged. Therefore, cultural origins developed as humans evolved from their primate state into humanness. As humans continued in developmental ascent, they experienced progressive cultural ascent as well. This is the prevailing view of the majority of secularists, who would dismiss any reference to God in cultural consideration.

But that view is a far cry from what Scripture tells us about culture. For those who take the Bible seriously, it isn't difficult to discover the divine account of the origin of human culture. The book of Genesis is the book of origins. Explanation for the beginning of everything in the universe is found there—including humankind and culture.

Since, as we have already seen, culture is innate to human beings, and since there has never been a person who didn't possess culture, human culture had to have been an integral part of Adam and Eve's created makeup. But a question arises: “How is that so? How was culture ingrained in humankind's first parents? How is it that culture was part of Adam from the very moment he was created?” We don't need to look far in Scripture to discover how that came about. Genesis 1:26-27 gives us the answer.

THE PLURALITY OF GOD

Considering the plurality in the nature of God is the place to start, and God's plurality is unmistakable in this passage. It is first evident in the word used for God. In these two verses, Moses, the writer, refers to God with the name *Elohim* three times. *Elohim* is a plural form of the word for "God." Moses wanted the reader to know a basic truth about God's personhood, and that truth would eventually develop through Scripture into the fuller doctrine of the Trinity. He wanted his readers to know that God is one, yet there is plurality in his oneness.

A second evidence of God's plurality comes from the phrases "let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Again, these phrases are striking because of their reference to a divine plurality by the repeated use of the personal plural pronouns "us" and "our." The prestigious position of humans over the previously described created order can't be missed (Gen 1:1-25). The creation of humankind is of such importance that Moses portrays God as conferring in his plurality about this final and crowning creative act.

Although it defies full explanation, the plural unity of God is revealed throughout the Bible. Biblically based Christianity is unique in this view of monotheism. It sees God as a plural unity consisting of three distinct persons, yet one. Although it's a complex doctrine to understand, its origins come from Scripture, beginning with the very first verse at Genesis 1:1, where God is mentioned in the plural (*Elohim*) at the very outset of his creative work.

"So," you might wonder, "how does the plurality of God relate to the beginning of human culture?" The answer is that the origin of human culture is embedded in the reality of God's plurality by strong inference. God, who created humankind, is a plural unity comprising three distinct persons; therefore, it follows that there must exist a relationship among the three personalities in order for them to function perfectly in a community of unity. This relationship would comprise what can be considered a divine culture between them.

In the previous chapter, it was stated that human culture comprises *the distinctive beliefs, values, and customs of a particular group of people that determine how they think, feel, and behave*. Now, it would be presumptuous to think that, within his nature, God as plural unity must also contain distinctive beliefs, customs, and values. He is so utterly *other* from humans that we dare not limit him to those traits. But since a perfectly functioning relationship exists between the members of the godhead in a divine culture, it can be said that God had the capacity to bequeath culture upon humankind at the moment he created Adam.

FROM CAPACITY TO ACTUALITY

But just because God had the capacity to bequeath culture on humankind, how do we know that he did? As we look again at Genesis 1:26, it becomes clear. The double modifying phrase “in our image, after our likeness” signifies that he did. These two phrases aim to assert with emphasis that humans are closely patterned after their maker. The first word, “image,” has the root meaning “to carve” or “to cut from.” The second word, “likeness,” refers to “similarity.”¹ These two conjoining phrases are used, among other things, to show that a God who himself possessed culture created humankind with it as well.²

It can be asserted that the unseen spiritual and inner side of the image of God that was bestowed on humankind’s spirit, or immaterial part, included a degree of culture. God not only had the capacity in and of himself in keeping with his nature to impart culture to humans, but he also actually did it. He did it when he created humankind in his image and likeness. Humankind was endowed with a free, self-conscious personality, a creaturely copy of the divine life. This included a cultural component.

CULTURE AT ITS BEST AND ITS DETERIORATION

As a result of this divine act, it can be inferred that in their perfect, pre-fallen state, Adam and Eve lived in a harmonious, unadulterated culture (its highest form). Since their minds were permeated with truth, they had perfect beliefs. Since their pattern for living was modeled after God's, they practiced perfect values. And since they knew no evil, they exhibited perfect customs. Theirs was an unimaginably rich, full, and satisfying culture at its very finest. It was absolutely perfect! No humans since then have experienced the high degree of cultural perfection that Adam and Eve lived and practiced. The zenith of cultural perfection was theirs.

The Christian diagnosis of humanity's fatal flaw is radical. Sin has alienated us from God and we cannot put it right ourselves. But the solution is equally radical. God in Christ has taken the burden of sin upon himself on the cross, so that through repentance and faith in Christ we can receive a new, supernatural life as an unmerited gift.

**JOHN LENNOX,
*AGAINST THE FLOW***

But subsequently, humankind's concrete essence of divine likeness was shattered by sin. Genesis 3 relays how this tragic degradation came about. Adam and Eve's fall from perfection included a cultural degeneration and its subsequent sliding deterioration. Humankind's perfect, divinely given culture was shattered. This was by far the most far-reaching crossing of cultures in the history of humankind, and one from which Adam never recovered. It affected him physically, mentally, spiritually, and psychologically.

Perhaps up to 800 years³ of Adam's 930 (Gen 5:5) were spent watching human culture deteriorate from the perfection that he and Eve once enjoyed. He experienced the heartbreak of a murdered son and of another being a castaway (Gen 4:15-16). His heart was grieved as he witnessed his descendants sliding deeper into a culture of "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies" (Gal 5:19-21). What a contrast to that perfect pre-sin wholesome culture of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22-23)!

Consequently, perhaps the saddest omission in all of Scripture is found in Hebrews 11:4, where the writer begins his historical lineage of people of faith, not with Adam, whom we would have expected to be mentioned first, but with his son Abel. In his honesty, the writer had to pass over the first generation of humankind and move on to the second. Could it be that Adam's resultant disheartened mood and depressed state of mind after losing his unspoiled culture disqualified him as an example of a person of faith?

Regardless of the impact on Adam and Eve themselves, their sin had universal consequences. By their act of disobedience, all of human culture has become corrupt and has been in decline ever since. There is no place on earth ("under heaven") or any society anywhere ("given among men") where this is not the case (Acts 4:12). The myth of the "noble savage" tucked away somewhere in a remote corner of the earth, enjoying some kind of social utopia, is just that—a myth. Humankind's cultural degradation is universal and comprehensive.

I witnessed this firsthand during my fifteen years of ministry on the island of Papua, Indonesia. During those years, I never encountered people of a newly reached tribal group (several of which our mission pioneered) who were not anxious to free themselves from their degraded cultural practices. The light of the gospel brought them hope. It redeemed not only the individuals but also their community's beliefs, values, and customs. And they were grateful.

REDEEMING CULTURE

It is only through Christ, the representation of the glory of God and the expression of his holy essence, that through an individual's nature and his godly influence in his community culture can be transformed for the better (Heb 1:3; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).⁴ One of the beauties and benefits of the gospel is that degenerate human culture can be transformed. Wrong beliefs can be corrected. Misdirected values can be altered. Abhorrent customs can be changed. It has been demonstrated throughout history that a groundswell of redeemed believers in a society can have a transforming impact for the better on a deviant culture.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

So, contrary to modern cultural assertions and secular humanist assumptions, humankind is not in cultural ascent. Rather, it's just the opposite. We are in a downward spiral that is sadly taking us further away from the perfect beliefs, values, and customs that were once ours through Adam.

Those lost perfect cultural elements were God's original ideal for human existence—for Asians, Africans, Americans, Arabs, Europeans, and everyone else. Only by the light of the gospel penetrating into and transforming these cultures do humans gain a tiny glimpse into their perfect cultural past.

The Tower of Babel

The Beginning of Cultural Diversity

GENESIS 11

And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth. (Gen 11:6-9)

I grew up in South Jersey on a small farm halfway between Burlington and Mt. Holly. In the fifties and sixties, the semirural environment in which I was raised was almost totally monocultural. Most everyone around me was Caucasian. That's just the way it was back then, although it isn't anymore. All my associations were in my white community.

There was a tiny community of African Americans not far away that lived separately in an enclave called Bucktoe. The only place we intersected was at school, where they were clearly the minority. They mostly kept to themselves, and we to ours.

When it came to religion, most everyone was a member of one of the variegated expressions of Christianity. Churches of all flavors were everywhere. There were no Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, or any other "foreign" religious adherents. No temples, mosques, synagogues, or shrines of any sort were to be found. Those were somewhere overseas in distant countries that visiting missionaries told us about and showed in their slides.

When it came to communicating, everyone around me spoke English. Rarely, if ever, did I hear another language spoken in public places like malls, stores, or schools. There was no need for bilingual signs, because everyone, like me, was monolingual. In short, growing up I knew only a monocultural, monoreligious, monolingual way of life.

That all changed when, in our twenties, my wife and I boarded a plane to become missionaries in a country on the other side of the world. Thankfully we had some crosscultural training (but minimal cultural exposure) before arriving in Indonesia. Once there, we immersed ourselves in the ways and customs of the people. We gradually learned the richness of becoming bilingual and bicultural. Slowly but surely, we adjusted to a radically different worldview.



Your crosscultural sojourn means you will never again feel at home in a monocultural environment.



The tables were turned. We were now the ones in the minority, both racially and religiously. And we grew to appreciate that. Becoming bicultural and bilingual enriched our lives. Over time, we came to value the richness of cultural diversity. We would never be the same; our crosscultural sojourn meant we would never again feel at home in a monocultural environment.

GENESIS AND HUMAN UNITY

Since, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Scripture informs us that human culture began with Adam and Eve, the next logical question is “When did cultural diversity begin? When did human culture diversify?” The Scriptures are not silent on this important matter. Genesis 11 tells us when and how it happened. With the grand dispersion of the peoples after the divine judgment at the tower of Babel, cultural diversity followed. How do we know that? By looking at what Moses recorded about that pivotal event in human history.

Before the nations scattered across the globe, the entirety of humankind lived together in cultural unity and homogeneity. This certainly was true of humankind directly after the flood (Gen 6–9), and there’s no indication that it wasn’t true of civilization in the years leading up to that global deluge.

In Genesis 11 we read that humankind was living contrary to God’s purposes and plans. The command to humans was to “fill the earth” (Gen 1:28; 9:1), meaning to spread out over the entire globe to inhabit the lands God had created for them. Instead, in direct disobedience, all of humanity congregated in one locale. Humankind was united in one language (Gen 11:1, 6), one location (Gen 11:2), one city, one central reference point (the tower), one name for themselves (Gen 11:5), and one people (Gen 11:6). Taken together, it shows humankind in a comprehensive connectedness resulting in a strong monocultural, monolingual society. Humanly speaking, humanity was at its best and could achieve far more synergistically than it could if divided.

THE ABUSE OF UNITY

What was wrong with that ancient interconnectedness that forced God to step in and set it back for millennia? It wasn't the tower, contrary to colorful Sunday school lessons that focus on that part of the story. It was humankind's self-centeredness and selfish intent. Their self-centeredness is evidenced by the phrase "let us make a name for ourselves" (Gen 11:4). Their selfish intent is found in the sentence "And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them" (Gen 11:6). As a united people, they were gaining a capacity that rivaled their need for God. The whole enterprise of building that megacity reeked of arrogance, human pride, and independence from the Almighty. It was to be a civilization based on secular humanism, with achievements that excluded any thought, remembrance, or need of God. It was to be a one-world society with tolerance of anything non-divine as its core value.

GRACIOUS JUDGMENT

But God stepped in and brought an end to this human rebellion. This time his judgment didn't entail destroying humankind or its building project. It was a judgment of grace. Instead of destroying, he separated and scattered. He did this supernaturally by confusing "their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech" (Gen 11:7).

The result of this judgment was that, for the first time in human history, humankind spoke in many languages and dialects. This resulted in people clustering together in linguistic affinities, "so the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth" (Gen 11:8). But this wasn't a haphazard dispersion. The apostle Paul tells us that God's guiding hand superintended so as to make "mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place" (Acts 17:26).

Therefore God confused their language and scattered them all over the face of the earth, in essence creating the ethnic and linguistic divisions that we find today. Diversity entered in, and so did dissension.

**TODD JOHNSON AND CINDY WU,
OUR GLOBAL FAMILIES**

A corollary lesson is found in this commentary by Paul. God's providential guiding of people's movements meant that he superintended the direction of each resultant linguistic entity so that as they scattered, they ended up inhabiting the geographical territories that he willed for each. With that being the case, it can be deduced by extension that all people groups today ("allotted periods") dwell where they are ("boundaries of their dwelling place") because God has

placed them there. Consequently, all ethnicities should value the homeland they inhabit, since God has willed for them to dwell in their locale.

CULTURE FOLLOWS LANGUAGE

But a huge assumption is being made here that needs to be addressed: Did the multiplicity of languages have a direct correlation to the multiplicity of cultures? The answer must be yes. Once humans separated themselves from one another into distinct groups occupying distinct regions, over time they developed distinct cultures.

Ever since the pioneering work of Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941) in linguistic relativity, most scholars concede that language shapes culture and worldview.¹ Language is the audible expression of emotions, concepts, and thoughts of the mind. Over time, these audio expressions manifest themselves in distinctive beliefs, values, and customs—the very components that make up culture. A community affirms those beliefs, values, and customs by corporately living them out and transferring them to the next generation. A cultural identity develops. It can therefore be deduced that plurality of culture followed plurality of language. Multiculturalism emerged only after the dispersion of peoples throughout the world.

APPRECIATION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The rich variety of cultural expressions humankind enjoys today is of God. And since these expressions are of God, they should be appreciated. Duane Elmer put it this way:

Thus in the process of learning about other cultures, affirming our various ethnic heritages and honoring (if not celebrating) diversity, we enlarge our appreciation of God, who in authoring diversity was trying to tell us about himself. Perhaps we are most like God when we also look around and affirm as good peoples and traditions different from our own and diligently seek to appreciate the beauty God has chosen to express in others.²

The grandeur of God can't be captured adequately in one cultural expression. Through the many and various cultural expressions, we begin to grasp and more deeply appreciate the character, awesomeness, and multifaceted nature of God.

HUMAN DISPERSION

In Genesis 10, Moses gave a window into the direction of the dispersion of humans. This chapter, commonly called “The Table of the Nations,” chronologically transpires after the tower of Babel event described in chapter eleven. Somehow, Moses had access to the record of the post-Babel geographic locations of the descendants of Noah’s sons. He recorded in chapter ten what happened after the judgment of the tower of Babel.

Moses started with the peoples who are less relevant to the main story line of his history of the Hebrew people and then drew a progressively tighter circle until he got to the Jews. Notice how each descendent of Noah received a summary statement:

- *Sons of Japheth.* “From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations” (Gen 10:5). These peoples are primarily identified as the forefathers of the Indo-Europeans.
- *Sons of Ham.* “These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations” (Gen 10:20). These peoples are primarily identified as the forefathers of African peoples and original Arabian inhabitants who predated Ishmael and his descendants.
- *Sons of Shem.* “These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations” (Gen 10:31). These peoples are primarily identified as Middle Eastern peoples, including the Hebrews.
- *Synopsis of all three.* “These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood” (Gen 10:32).

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

In his graciousness, God has enriched humankind with cultural diversity that began after the Babel event. That judgment on humankind (speaking in multiple languages) became the avenue for cultural diversity. The races have been separated ever since.

We need to appreciate that the rich variety of cultural expressions we enjoy today is of God. Furthermore, it's exciting to see how God is orchestrating the present-day acceleration of the intermixing of cultures and races—through globalization and migration—for his divine purposes. Certainly the main reason is that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14).

Abraham

The Father of Blessing for All Cultures

GENESIS 12:1-3

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12 is fundamental to a biblical understanding of culture. It’s where Moses relayed how hope and blessing can come to every expression of human culture found on earth. The deep-seated need for personal and cultural redemption, common across all cultures, will not go unattended. The thousands of cultures that developed after the dispersion following Babel will not be subjected to perpetual deterioration. God has a strategy to renew (some would say “redeem”) them.

The central message of Genesis 12:1-3 is that the loving God who created humankind, endowed it with culture (Gen 1), and then instituted cultural diversity (Gen 11), planned to bring blessing to the varied and numerous ethnicities that would develop. Even as their core beliefs, values, and customs eroded, God was orchestrating a plan to redeem them and bring newness. What’s even more amazing is that, in the end times, God will bring these myriads of cultures to perfection in Christ while at the same time allowing them to maintain their unique cultural expressions. That thought will be elaborated on later, when we explore the book of Revelation.

In this passage, Moses told how the repair of cultures would come about. It would originate with one man, Abraham.¹ So, at this juncture in his historical account, Moses included information in reference to all the nations (Gen 10). He then narrowed his narrative to focus solely on one man and his descendants who, through a God-directed history, would bring hope and blessing to every culture found on earth. The bedrock of that plan is found in these three verses. Most

commentators call this passage “the call of Abraham.” It could just as readily be called “the hope of the nations.”

GOD'S GLOBAL RESCUE PLAN

Moses didn't want the reader to miss the main point of why Abraham was chosen and given the honor of this special call: to bring blessing to all nations (and thereby all cultures) by singling out this one man. This was the primary reason God called Abraham and, by extension, his biological offspring—and eventually the church. Help for humankind was on the way.

The global implications of God's promises to this one individual are astounding and truly unique. In all of human history, God hasn't given this promise to any other person. What he's saying to Abraham is this: each and every cultural grouping of humankind found in every corner of the earth will be blessed through him.

Stop and think for a moment about the extent of this promise. Missiological and linguistic research has discovered that there are approximately 16,770 “people groups” in the world today.² The meaning of the term “people group” was refined by the Lausanne Strategy Working Group in 1982 and hasn't been significantly changed since then. That statement defines a people group as

a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. or combinations of these . . . the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.³

In most every case, a people group has a distinct, stand-alone culture. That's why this promise to Abraham is so astonishing. Is it possible for one individual to bring blessing to more than 16,700 cultures? Humanly speaking, that seems unfeasible. If it weren't for God orchestrating world events, it would be.

How do we know this was God's intent when he called Abraham? By examining the final phrase of this passage: “And in you all the families of the

earth shall be blessed.”

Importance seen in repetition of the promise. God went to great lengths to make it clear to Abraham and his direct descendants that they were to be a blessing to all “families” on the earth. He did it by giving this commission five times over three generations: three times to Abraham, once to his son Isaac, and finally to his grandson Jacob. These almost identical statements can be called “the blessing passages.”

To Abraham:

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen 12:3)

The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?” (Gen 18:17-18)

And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice. (Gen 22:18)

To Isaac:

I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. (Gen 26:4-5)

To Jacob:

Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. (Gen 28:14)

By the repetition of his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it becomes clear that God doesn’t want the universal purpose of his calling of this one family to be missed. They were called and set apart to bring betterment and hope to all the world’s peoples and thereby to all cultures on the earth.

The ethnic perspective: universality shown by the word families. A question naturally arises: What did Moses mean to convey when he used the

word *families*? What size of grouping of humankind did he intend the reader to understand? Would it be as broad as geopolitical countries? Or was it to be smaller communities such as distinct ethnic groups? Or would his influence expand down even further into tribes, bands, clans, and even individual families?

The answer to these questions isn't difficult to discover when we examine the grammar. The Hebrew word for families in Genesis 12:3 is *mishpakhah*. This word can mean a family—that is, circle of relatives—and by extension a tribe or people. It's interesting to note how the different English versions translate this word.

- ESV: *families*
- KJV and NKJV: *families*
- NIV: *peoples*
- NASB: *families*
- HCSB: *peoples*, with a footnote saying it could also be *clans*

The Genesis 18:18 and 22:18 passages use a different word altogether: the Hebrew word *goy*. This word is used in the sense of massing—hence, a grouping of people (figuratively, a troop of animals or a swarm of locusts).⁴ The point is that these passages are referring to Abraham being a blessing to all the divisions of humankind: clans, families, and peoples, depicting individual cultural groupings. God was saying to Abraham that he would be a blessing to every cultural entity.

This conclusion is reaffirmed by the Greek words selected by Peter and Paul when each quoted this verse in Greek centuries later. Peter used the word *patriai* for “families” when he said in his sermon found in Acts 3:25: “You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’”

Patriai is a unique word in that it's found only here in the New Testament. The King James Version translates it as “kindreds” and the New American Standard and English Standard Version as “families.” The New International

Version translates it “peoples.” All of these English translations indicate individual cultural groupings.

Paul, on the other hand, used a different word when he quoted and translated Genesis 12:3, found in Galatians 3:7-9: “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

The word that Paul used for the Hebrew *mishpakhah* is the Greek *ethnē*. This is the word from which we get “ethnic” and “ethnicity.” All ethnic groups have their distinct cultural identity. It follows, then, that Abraham would be a blessing to each and every ethnic grouping of humankind. The blessing coming through him and his descendants would impact every ethnic group. It would be a universal blessing, available to peoples of all cultures.

The geographic perspective: Universality shown by the phrase “of the earth.” God told Abraham that he would be a blessing to “all the families of the earth.” In saying this, God was making it clear that every geographical region on earth would experience his blessing. His blessing wasn’t just local or regional, but global.

In these five blessing passages, Moses used two different words for “earth.” In Genesis 12:3 and 28:14, it’s the word *adamah*. This word generally means “soil” or “ground,” but can be expanded to mean “whole inhabited earth.”⁵ It’s interesting to note that it has its root in the word *adam*, meaning “man” and was the proper name of the very first man, Adam. It’s as if God was saying to Abraham that his influence would impact every other *adam* (man) found throughout the earth.

In the other three passages (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4) Moses used a different word for “earth.” It’s the Hebrew word *erets*, which translates to mean “the whole earth (as opposed to a part), the realm of earth’s inhabitants.”⁶ There’s no significant difference in the meaning of the two words. They’re meant to signify the global impact Abraham and his descendants would have on the rest of

humankind. Their blessing would be felt everywhere—permeating the entire inhabited world. Their influence would be universal.

THE BLESSING

Just what is the benefit or blessing that Abraham would universally impart, allowing every culture to have the potential of receiving? The Hebrew word *barak* is used in all five of these passages. At its root, it means to kneel in an act of adoration, carrying the idea of a benefit. Abraham has the high privilege of dispensing good on all others who in adoration humbly receive it.

So, just what is that good? All the families of the earth will be blessed by Abraham through his offspring (Gen 22:18). This can only be a reference to Jesus Christ, the promised messiah. Paul stated it plainly: “so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14).

That’s what Peter conveyed to the Jews in his sermon, and it’s recorded in Acts 3:25. Not every individual of all the families of earth will automatically receive the blessing. But those who will be so blessed are those who, because of faith in Christ, will receive spiritual blessings.

These blessings would include, among other things, redemption, forgiveness of sin, peace with God, a path to sanctification, the removal of shame, the gaining of honor, and ultimately eternal life. All these spiritual blessings would be showered on those who believe in the most important and unique offspring of Abraham, Jesus the Christ. They would be people of *barak*, the blessing, who live in adoration of God and in turn experience the benefits of being rightfully related to him.

How does that work? Well, when individuals in a given culture receive these spiritual blessings, they begin to impact and change their greater culture for the better. When that group of individuals becomes large enough, normative beliefs, values, and customs are challenged. Over time, many are either changed or discarded. This is a benefit of the blessings of the gospel—being countercultural

in a positive way. Stephen Bevans's revised version of *Models of Contextual Theology* describes "The Countercultural Model" as follows:

This is a model that takes context (experience, culture, social location and social change) with utmost seriousness. It recognizes that human beings and all theological expression only exist in historically and culturally conditioned situations. On the other hand, however, it warns that context always needs to be treated with a good deal of suspicion. If the gospel is to truly take root within a people's context, it needs to challenge and purify that context.⁷

Just what kind of degenerate cultural practices can the gospel challenge and change? Consider the following list of practices that are or have been culturally sanctioned at locales throughout the world:

- suttee (wife burning)
- infanticide
- foot binding
- body mutilation
- abortion
- human sacrifice
- voodoo
- black magic
- white magic
- evil eye
- polygamy
- polyandry
- wife swapping
- homosexuality
- religious prostitution

- child brides
- female circumcision
- honor killing
- punishment by amputation
- female suppression
- facial tattoos (to ward off evil spirits)
- creation worship
- slavery
- unbridled consumerism
- creation abuse
- exploitation
- incest
- genocide
- cohabitation
- forced child labor

The liberating effect of the gospel brings changed lifestyles that can promote peace and prosperity when a culture is freed from deviant practices. Thus there is both a personal-level blessing and a community-level blessing experienced by those who embrace new life in Christ, the fulfillment of Abraham's blessing.

Israel was to be God's missionary to the world—and so are we by virtue of our identity as Abraham's spiritual descendants! The mission has not changed.

WALTER KAISER

ABRAHAM'S HONORED ROLE

God called Abraham to be the father of blessing to all cultures. Werner Mischke, commenting on these verses, states, “God, as the ultimate source of all honor and glory, is sovereignly including Abraham in the honor-laden role of co-benefactor—to bless all nations through his family.”⁸ That co-benefactor role passed from one generation to another through the descendants of Abraham until the Savior, who was ethnically Jewish, accomplished his salvific work on behalf of all humankind.

In a sense, the channel of blessing to all nations was passed on to the church. Over time, that church has expanded to include ethnicities representing myriads of cultures. Following in Abraham’s train, we are now honored to bring blessing to the nations through our transmission of the good news of Jesus—the ultimate blessing to all peoples.

One of the best statements that sums up the message of this passage is found in *The Mission of God Study Bible*, which states:

From the very beginning of His interactions with Abraham, God had sought to bless not just Abraham’s direct descendants, but “all the peoples on earth.” Through Israel, Abraham’s descendants, God would allow the nations to see what it looked like to be Yahweh’s people. Through Christ, a descendant of Israel, God would extend Israel’s blessing to the whole world. Through the church, brought together and held together by Christ, God would continue to bless all people as the church would share Christ’s message of salvation everywhere.⁹

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

God's global intent is to redeem individuals and, by extension, bring blessing to every cultural expression found on earth. He orchestrated a plan rooted in one man, Abraham, and continued it through his descendants. He chose this man from among all the peoples on earth to be the father of blessing to all cultures. From Abraham's offspring would come a savior, the messiah, who would, through his death for the payment of sin, bring redemption to those who, like Abraham, believed. The spiritual blessings found in Christ would reach every cultural group on the face of the earth.

As individuals experienced biblically adjusted beliefs, values, and customs, so would the larger culture of which they are a part. Depraved cultural practices would be challenged. Some would be changed, others discarded. Individuals would experience life for the better and the assurance of eternal life in the hereafter. The blessings God intended all along for humankind would be experienced. All these are made possible through Abraham and his seed.

PART TWO



CROSSING CULTURES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Old Testament Cultural Overview

Beginning in Genesis 12, the Old Testament covers a period of nearly two thousand years. As one can imagine, the crosscultural encounters over such an extensive period of time are numerous. Though much is focused on the Israelites within their homeland, there were times when they were displaced to neighboring Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. These exiles conferred on them minority status and cultural vulnerability.

At times the Israelites struggled to retain their beliefs, values, and customs during their exiles outside their homeland, but also while they were established within it. Temptations from the surrounding peoples perpetually kept them struggling to remain true to Jehovah, who had set them apart from the degraded practices of the nations. The Israelites were to be a light for the nations (Isa 42:6), drawing Gentiles to belief in the one true God and his righteous ways, and so to become a catalyst for positive crosscultural change.

Israel was to function like a magnet, drawing the nations to itself by its fear of the Lord, manifest blessings, and godly living. That drawing, or attraction by example, defined their mission.

What was their missional advantage? It was primarily the location of their homeland. That strip of land, bordering the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea, was a strategic land bridge. The continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa converged on it. Jerusalem, the capital, was located smack in the middle of it: “This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her” (Ezek 5:5). Israel and her capital were so providentially located that

the Israelites had greater opportunity than any other people to impact other cultures. Sometimes they succeeded; other times they did not.

Sarah and Hagar

Honor and Shame

GENESIS 16 AND 21

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. (Gen 16:1-6; 21:9-14)

There are times, when engaging crossculturally, that it's difficult to distinguish between what is good and what is right. This was driven home to me one morning when I flew into Manokwari, a large coastal town on the island of West Papua, Indonesia. By that time, the town had been home to me and my family for many years. I knew quite a few people, and since our mission's church-planting efforts had yielded quite a few churches, many people knew me.

After disembarking from the plane, I stood waiting at the baggage counter for my suitcase, observing the variety of "stuff" coming off the plane. I never ceased to marvel at the wide range of things that would never be unloaded from planes in the States. While watching, I heard a sound that I knew from my

childhood days. It was the high-pitched cheeping and chirping of hundreds of newly hatched chicks in boxes being brought from the plane.

At that same moment, one of the baggage handlers, a member of one of our churches, came over to greet me. As we shook hands, I jokingly said that I would like to have a few of those chicks to take home. He promptly went over to the stack of chick boxes, opened the lid of one and pulled out two chicks. I stood aghast at what he was doing. Without a second thought, he had done what he thought was good. He was honoring me by fulfilling my request. Honor and shame were high values to him. He didn't want to shame me, a respected *pendeta* (reverend), by publicly ignoring my request.

He was obviously not doing what was right—at least not in my value system. To me, he was guilty of stealing—and at my request. Although he was doing what he considered good, he was not doing right. For me, this cultural exchange was being informed by the guilt/innocence paradigm. He, on the other hand, was being informed by his honor/shame cultural worldview.

THE SETTING

The fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12 was a long time coming—too long for Sarah to bear. For years she waited to conceive, but to no avail. The shame of not having a child weighed heavily on her, so she devised an alternate plan. She could become a mother by way of a surrogate. She got Abraham to agree to a plan whereby one of her servants, Hagar the Egyptian, would bear Abraham's child. The plan worked, and the following year, at age eighty-six (Gen 16:16), Abraham had a long-awaited son born to him by Hagar. He named him Ishmael.

However, Sarah and Abraham's plan was not God's plan. Tensions rose between Sarah and Hagar in the time between when Hagar got pregnant and when she gave birth. Taking advantage of her newly exalted position, Hagar dishonored Sarah. In return, Sarah treated Hagar so badly that she ran away. God met her in the wilderness and sent her back to her mistress so that she might deliver her son within the protection of Abraham's household.

But the story doesn't end there. Fourteen years later, the miraculous happened. Isaac was born to ninety-year old Sarah and one-hundred-year-old Abraham. Not long afterward, Sarah observed Ishmael dishonoring infant Isaac by mocking him. This offense so displeased Sarah that she persuaded Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael permanently from their community. Though reluctant to do so, Abraham acquiesced after God assured him that Ishmael would himself be a father of a nation in his own right (Gen 21:13). Though Hagar and Ishmael barely survived sojourning in the desert, God took notice of them and gave them relief (Gen 21:15-21). Eventually Ishmael became the father of a great nation through twelve sons born to him, who became twelve princes (Gen 25:12-18).

HONOR AND SHAME

A cursory reading of this account might have us conclude that Sarah was a mean, callous, jealous wife out to do harm to a powerless subordinate. Twice she pushed Hagar to the point of near death. Twice she didn't seem to care if Hagar and her child survived a scheme that she herself had orchestrated. It appears that they were nothing more than objects to be taken advantage of and then conveniently discarded when no longer of value. By the end of the story Sarah became an ungrateful, overprotective mother who heartlessly banished her rival.

That would be a typical Western interpretation of this ancient account. Through our cultural lens of guilt/innocence, it would appear that Sarah was guilty of mistreating an innocent inferior attendant. But there's another side to this story that we dare not miss.

We in the West too easily miss the importance of honor/shame, which was an underpinning value in biblical cultures. Yet honor/shame-orientated cultures are the very ones in which the stories found in Scriptures are encased. To understand the social contexts of these stories, we need to understand the dynamics of honor/shame. Werner Mischke sums it up this way: "The primary social value of the ancient Middle East in the Bible is the pivotal cultural value of honor and shame."¹

At this point, it's helpful to define what is meant by honor and shame. Honor is "the worth or value of persons both in their eyes and in the eyes of their village, neighborhood, or society . . . the public nature of respect and reputation."² Shame, on the other hand, is "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging . . . the fear of disconnection."³

Over this twenty-five-year period in Sarah's life, she experienced both honor and shame. As the wife of Abraham, she held a position of honor within the greater community. She was so honorable that two kings, Pharaoh in Egypt (Gen

12) and Abimelech in Canaan (Gen 20), attempted to take her as their wife. Fortunately, those two attempts were thwarted. But over time her inability to bear children brought shame. Not only was Sarah frustrated, she was also devastated. Finally, with the birth of her son Isaac, she was restored to a position of honor. Along the way, however, her very personhood and that of her son were attacked by the actions of Hagar and Ishmael. Looking deeper into the text reveals how.

SARAH'S CONFLICT

First it needs to be noted that Moses, the author, wanted to make it perfectly clear to the reader that this interaction between Sarah and Hagar was truly crosscultural. Moses repeatedly “tags” Hagar as an Egyptian; he seems to go out of his way to do so (Gen 16:1, 3; 21:9; 25:12). It could well be that when Abraham and Sarah visited Egypt (Gen 12:10-12), they acquired Hagar as Sarah’s personal servant.

Then it must be understood that Sarah was rightfully offended, even dishonored, by her servant Hagar. Hagar’s attacks were a direct assault on her worth, value, and personhood in the eyes of the community. Both her position and her reputation were at stake. If she permitted Hagar to persist in her actions, her own worth of belonging would be compromised—even to the extent of a possible disconnect with her husband, Abraham. Hagar put Sarah in quite a vulnerable position.

When you read the Bible with an awareness of this emotional landscape—the love of/longing for honor and fear of shame—God’s Word simply makes more sense and it has more impact. I contend that by incorporating the emotional variable in Scripture interpretation, you will come closer to understanding how the original authors and hearers of Scriptures would have experienced God’s Word.

**WERNER MISCHKE,
THE GLOBAL GOSPEL**

The Hebrew helps us see this tension in the phrase “she looked with contempt on her mistress” (Gen 16:4). “With contempt” (*qalal*) literally means “to be made light of.”⁴ The English Standard Version suggests an alternate reading of “her mistress was dishonorable in her eyes.” This was a grave cultural

faux pas on Hagar's part. By dishonoring Sarah, she was attacking her very being, causing her to feel flawed and unworthy. In that society, this was the highest form of offense that could be dished out upon another. Hagar was cunningly manipulative: Sarah was deeply humiliated.

Fourteen years later, Hagar's son brought a similar dishonor on Sarah's newborn son, Isaac. Moses recorded it: "But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing" (Gen 21:9). The word *laughing* (the intensified form of Hebrew *tsakhaq*) more precisely means "to mock" or "to jest at."⁵ The apostle Paul, when he referenced this verse in Galatians 4:29, used a stronger word: a Greek word that always means "persecuted" and is so translated in all English translations. Again, a shame is intended. Ishmael wanted Isaac to be seen as flawed and unworthy, hoping for a disconnect between Isaac and his father, Abraham, so that he would be seen as the undisputed son of blessing.

Although Isaac was far too young to understand the slight, Sarah certainly did. She knew the implications of such shame on the one who God had designated to inherit the line of blessing promised Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. The consequences to the family lineage and ultimately to the nations were too significant for Ishmael's slight to go unopposed. So she acted to preserve the honor that was rightfully Isaac's (Gen 21:8-21).

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Sarah's behavior toward Hagar throughout these chapters reveals principles related to guilt/innocence and honor/shame to keep in mind when engaging in crosscultural interaction today. Consider the following three.

Recognize that your cultural orientation is primarily guilt/innocence. A defining mark of Western culture is individualism. As such, Western people are primarily concerned about justifying their actions in a guilt/innocence framework. Western believers even prefer that paradigm when speaking about their salvation experience: becoming free of guilt and declared innocent before God. Guilt is about *what I've done*.

On the other hand, people in most non-Western cultures see life differently. They're mostly from collective societies that value group participation and affirmation. As such, they're more concerned about justifying their actions in an honor/shame framework. Believers in these cultures gravitate to that paradigm when speaking about their salvation experience: having shame erased and honor restored because of Christ's atoning work on their behalf that was done in public shame. Shame is about *who I am*.⁶

The first step for the Western crosscultural worker is to define her cultural reality. She must first understand that there's a difference between these two cultural paradigms. An excellent means for her to discover the depth of her orientation is by taking the Culture Test.⁷ This free assessment takes five minutes to complete, and results are received immediately via email.

Second, she knows that she must appropriately adjust her orientation to the cultural context in which she works. This leads to the next point.

Exegete the host culture. Begin by examining the host culture's depth in and value of honor/shame. Ask a lot of questions throughout the host community to be sure you have a thorough understanding of its honor/shame orientation. Information gathering should be uncritical and systematic. Consider using the

twenty-seven categories of subsurface values found in an excellent book by Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame and Fear Cultures*.⁸

Reinforce local believers when they approach spiritual issues from the honor/shame perspective. Assure them that the honor/shame dynamic is an appropriate lens for them to use in understanding the teaching of Scriptures.

Refocus your gospel presentation for the honor/shame paradigm. While not undermining the truth of guilt/innocence in the salvation experience, Western message bearers need to align their gospel presentations with people who have honor and shame as their pivotal cultural value. This will help make the gospel more palatable to those who are struggling with deep-seated loss of honor or a debilitating feeling of shame. Mischke puts it this way:

Imagine if the atonement of Jesus Christ was not only presented as the solution to the problem of guilt and condemnation from God, but also as the covering of our shame and the restoration of our honor before God. Is this not the basic message of the Parable of the Prodigal Son? Wouldn't this be more attractive? For persons and peoples who are saturated by the cultural value of honor and shame, wouldn't this more likely be a treasure worth dying for?⁹

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

The airport baggage handler mentioned earlier believed he was doing good by honoring my offhand request to grab some chicks. However, he wasn't doing right by a biblical standard, such as "You shall not steal" (Ex 20:15). Most non-Western peoples today have the same honor/shame value system that we read about in biblical cultures. In presenting the gospel, we need to be aware of the difference between that frame of reference and our Western guilt/innocence orientation. Such an awareness should lead to more sensitivity on our part and an adjustment of our gospel presentation.

Abraham and the Hittites

Needing a Favor in a Foreign Land

GENESIS 23:1-19

Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, "I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." The Hittites answered Abraham, "Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead." Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. And he said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place."

Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, "No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead." Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, "But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." Ephron answered Abraham, "My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead." Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites.

I can still see the face of the Indonesian immigration officer as vividly in my mind today as he was forty years ago. The encounter took place in Bandung, a city on the island of Java. My wife and I were newly arrived language students, just beginning our missionary career. Our visa for entry into the country needed to be converted to a resident card.

For over a month, I was daily shuttling back and forth from language school to the immigration office, hoping that one particular officer would simply sign and stamp one piece of paper. Each day I sat for hours, looking at him in silence, waiting for his official *cap* (stamp) on our papers. Daily he played the waiting game with me, passive-aggressively flaunting his authority by quietly busying himself with other papers while ignoring mine.

At closing time, he would look up at me and say, “*Kembali besok*” (“Return tomorrow”). Now, I had been taught in the little bit of language learning I’d had that *besok* could literally mean “tomorrow,” or it could mean some time in the future. I had no idea how the stone-faced officer was using the term. So I returned every afternoon, just in case he really meant “tomorrow.”

It was obvious I was being played. But I could do nothing about it. My few weeks in the country were insufficient to build crosscultural collateral. I needed a favor—the signing and stamping of a piece of paper—but had no leverage to get that done. I was at his mercy, and he was taking pleasure in my annoyance and the displeasure that I strove to keep inside.

My experience back then was little different from what many newly arrived crosscultural workers experience today when they enter a foreign country. The obtaining of official government documents such as visas, entry permits, work permits, resident cards, or even a driver’s license can be a drawn-out process. It isn’t unusual for government officials to drag out these processes intentionally and as long as they possibly can. They know that, as a foreigner, you have no recourse.

In times like these, we need favor in a foreign culture. As outsiders, we have yet to earn the right to or respect for expedition of services. How are we to behave in such circumstances? How are we to react? Abraham, of all people, demonstrated it for us.

THE SETTING

Genesis 23 records the first extended conversation in Scriptures between peoples of different cultures. Abraham's wife, Sarah, had just died. Since by intent he didn't own any land, Abraham was in need of a burial plot. But he didn't want just any piece of property. This parcel of real estate was to be the final resting place not only of his beloved Sarah, but also of himself and other family members of future generations. It had to be a significant piece of real estate.

The people with whom Abraham negotiated the purchase of the land were not the original inhabitants of the region. Many years previously, they had migrated south from what is present-day Turkey to the land of Canaan. Moses made it exceedingly clear that Abraham was making a land deal with a group of Hittites. He mentioned their race nine times in this short passage, driving home the point that this was a genuine crosscultural encounter.

Just who were the Hittites? They were a non-Semitic, Indo-European race that migrated into what is today central and eastern Turkey (commonly called Anatolia). They had set up an extensive kingdom there by the time of Abraham (2000 BC) and became a powerful political and military force that would eventually sack the mighty city of Babylon.¹ The southern-most reach of their kingdom stretched into central Canaan, where Abraham was residing. Thus, in this story we see a crosscultural encounter between Abraham, a Semite, and a group of Indo-Europeans.

ABRAHAM THE STRANGER

As a wanderer with no property rights of his own, Abraham was at a clear disadvantage when it came to purchasing a tract of land. By intent and the exercising of his faith (Heb 11:9-10), he lived among the inhabitants of the land but had not settled in. Although he possessed immense wealth, by choice he neither purchased land nor built houses or barns. He preferred tenting among the peoples, to remain as mobile as possible so God could move him on at any time.

How long had Abraham lived in the land of Canaan before this pressing circumstance forced him to make a land purchase? Well, actually quite a while. Sixty-two years, to be exact. This can be calculated by referring back to what Moses already told us about Abraham and Sarah in previous chapters.

Abraham was seventy-five years old when he entered the land of Canaan (Gen 12:4). Sarah, ten years his junior (Gen 17:17), was sixty-five when she entered with him. We are told at the beginning of this passage that she was 127 years old when she died (Gen 23:1),² which would mean that she and Abraham had lived in the land of Canaan for sixty-two years before she passed away. This length of time is important to note, as we will see in a moment.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

So, what crosscultural principles from this encounter between Abraham and the Hittites help us as crosscultural message bearers to be more culturally astute today? Several stand out.

Admit your vulnerability. “I am a sojourner and foreigner among you” (Gen 23:4). Just like Abraham, we need to recognize that living as guests in another culture makes us vulnerable. In a real sense, we’re at the mercy of the leaders of the host culture. They’re the ones with power to grant or deny requests. They’re the final decision makers.

We are on their turf as guests, not as equals and certainly not as superiors. Abraham recognized and even admitted to the Hittites his vulnerable position. Thus he didn’t approach them as a superior or even an equal, though he may have had more wealth and learning than any of them.

Remember who you are. “I am a sojourner and foreigner” (Gen 23:4). Like Abraham, crosscultural workers are sojourners and foreigners in a land other than their own. We dare not miss the meaning of the two words Abraham used to describe himself. Sojourner can be translated “squatter”—one who has a dwelling place yet possesses no property and has no fixed habitation.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

HEBREWS 11:8-10

A foreigner is one who isn't native to a place or community, even though he may have adapted to the customs of the native population. After more than sixty years in the land, Abraham would have been knowledgeable and competent in the culture of those around him. He seems to have spoken their language (as evidenced by this dialogue) and understood their customs. He had befriended them and even knew them by name (Gen 23:8). Yet, because he was a Semite, the Hittite community would have always considered him a stranger.

This must be the mindset of the crosscultural worker today. He should learn the ways of the people among whom he dwells. Yet he shouldn't be fixated on property ownership, which will always weigh him down. Instead, it's best to be free from property obligations so as to be mobile when God moves him on.

The words *sojourner* and *foreigner* carry deeper implications, as the writer of Hebrews tells us (Heb 11:13-16). That text informs us that Abraham acknowledged that he was a "stranger and exile on earth"; he was fixated on "a better country, that is, a heavenly one." The eternal perspective of owning a heavenly home should always be the crosscultural message bearer's reality. This will be seen in more depth when Abraham's perspective on earthly possessions is examined in chapter thirty-five.

Build crosscultural collateral. "My lord; you are a prince of God among us" (Gen 23:6). From the moment you set foot in a new culture, you acquire a reputation. It's likely that everyone around you is watching: your neighbors, government officials, those at the market, fellow believers, shopkeepers, and everyone else. A good reputation is indispensable, and Abraham had one. The Hittites addressed him as "lord" and "prince of God among us." They respected him.

Sixty-two years is time enough to gain a good, respectable reputation. That's what Abraham did. He used those years to build crosscultural collateral. He made deposits of trust through his interactions, from which he was now making a withdrawal. He had accrued a good amount of that collateral through the years, resulting in an unquestioned reputation and a measure of esteem. Thus these community leaders were willing to give him a hearing and then act favorably upon his request.

We need to realize that when we arrive in another culture, we start out with zero crosscultural collateral. Over time, as we build relationships, we're also building a reputation. Our hosts see us as either striving to become acceptable insiders in their community or staying aloof, making little effort to integrate into their way of life. People take note of how deeply a foreigner integrates into their culture. Does he try to master our language? Does he eat our food? Does he attend our events? Does he sympathize with our struggles? Does he learn our national anthem? All these aspects of cultural integration are being watched, weighed, and talked about.

So, when crossing into a different culture, be cognizant of the fact that people are observing you. Just as the Hittites knew a lot about Abraham before this encounter, so the host population knows of your presence and is watching to see who you really are. Abraham earned the right to approach the Hittite elders based on his track record of right living, right dealings, and right conduct among them.

Show respect. “Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites. . . . Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land” (Gen 23:7, 12). Abraham was a man of civility and courtesy. Twice it's recorded that he used body language to show his respect to these people. Rising and then bowing the first time showed that he honored their superior position. Bowing the second time showed that he honored the right given him to negotiate for the property. These acts of humility allowed Abraham to continue his pressing business transaction.

When crossing cultures, we must learn what's respectful and what isn't. A classic example of royal offense is a cultural blunder committed by President Lyndon B. Johnson while on a state visit to the king of Thailand in October of 1966, at the height of the Vietnam War. While sitting next to king Bhumibol Adulyadej, Johnson, in typical absent-minded Western fashion, put the ankle of one leg on the knee of the other, thus exposing the sole of his shoe to the monarch—something that should never be done. This was an insult of such magnitude that it appalled the Thai people.³

The crosscultural worker must quickly learn what is respectful and what is offensive behavior. For some cultures, it's disrespectful to wear short pants,

short-sleeved shirts, or sunglasses in government offices. In many Asian cultures, the slight ducking of the head when greeting someone of importance shows proper respect. The removal of shoes before entering a house is another sign of respect.

If we are to gain a hearing for the gospel in our host culture, we must show respect to the ones we're trying to reach. Only then do we gain a hearing and the people in return gain respect for our message.

Don't expect an exception. "Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named" (Gen 23:16; see also 12-16). Abraham didn't expect an exemption from either the laws or the customs of his hosts just because he was a foreigner. He was prepared to pay a premium price for the plot of land he desired. This was no time to be demanding, to undercut, or to barter for the best possible price. Out of respect, he actually paid more than the market value of the land. This was a moment, in the presence of the community leaders, to show his good faith and good character.

Get a record of the agreement. "The cave . . . [was] made over to Abraham as property" (Gen 23:20). Prudently, Abraham didn't leave the meeting until he had been given clear title to the land he had just purchased. The phrase "made over" is more accurately translated in the New King James Version "was deeded." The land was deeded to Abraham in due legal form. The validity of the sale was without question. No one of that or any future generation could contest the right of Abraham or his descendants to the ownership of the property.

When crossing cultures today, we also must make certain we have written records of official transactions. To avoid confusion and even accusation in the future, receipts should be obtained for any legal papers that have been issued. Evidence of legal transactions, especially immigration documents, needs to be kept to avoid possible contestation by those who might desire to remove you from the country or from the ministry property you've obtained.

Know your arrangement will have an effect on others. "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah—the field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites" (Gen 49:31-32). Abraham's land purchase had far-reaching

consequences for both him and his descendants. Three generations of patriarchs were eventually buried there. The first to be buried was Sarah, and then Abraham himself almost forty years later (Gen 25:7-10). Then his son Isaac, along with his wife Rebekah (Gen 35:27-29; 49:31). Finally his grandson's wife Leah and grandson Jacob were entombed there next to their forefathers (Gen 49:29-32; 50:12-13).

Three generations of patriarchs buried at the same place shows Abraham's success in his crosscultural negotiations. Had he not succeeded, there's no telling where the final resting places of the patriarchs would have been. Most likely they would have been scattered in various nondescript locations or maybe even cremated and left without a trace. Instead, the Scriptures make clear that they all were buried in a sacred family plot.

So it is with how we handle ourselves crossculturally in government offices and in public. It must be done with grace and integrity. You aren't representing just yourself. You're representing your nationality, your organization, and your family down to the third generation. But most importantly, you're representing the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your success or failure may affect how long you're permitted to stay in the country. There may be repercussions for your coworkers. Your words and actions may even have a bearing on your children's ability to enter the country, should they choose to return and work there as adults. In this digital age, when records are electronically stored, crosscultural arrangements in the present can have consequences far into the future.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

The Indonesian immigration official who stalled my family's paperwork eventually signed, stamped, and released it. Reflecting back, I'm glad I endured the process without losing my cool or showing outward disdain. In the end, it earned my family fifteen wonderful years of ministry in the country. That made it well worth the wait.

Are you in need of a favor in a foreign culture? Look to Abraham as a model of how to get it. Take the time to build crosscultural collateral. You'll be pleased with the dividends it pays back to you.

The Marriage of Jacob

*The Consequences of Crosscultural
Ignorance*

GENESIS 29

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. (Gen 29:15-30)

Alice Choi was baffled and a bit bewildered. She was at the end of her second week in Pusan, South Korea, visiting her mother's parents and other relatives, whom she previously had never met. Things weren't going as smoothly as she'd expected. As a Korean American, she was just not fitting in. Even though she was bilingual, having spoken Korean since she was a child, she was making cultural blunders. She couldn't count the times one relative or another had said to her over the past two weeks, "Alice, we don't do it that way here," or giggled and exclaimed, "You're too American!" Back in the States, she had always prided herself in her Korean roots. Now she wasn't so sure.

Twenty-five years previously, her newly married parents had immigrated to the United States in search of a better life. She was the first of three children in a home that spoke Korean with a smidgen of broken English. But after graduating

from a Big Ten university with honors, she spoke perfect English and was an accomplished pianist. At twenty-two, she had thought it the ideal time to visit her parents' homeland and reconnect with her ethnic roots before settling into a career. Little did she realize how much she would feel like a fish out of water. She wondered who she really was: a Korean American or an American Korean—or something else.

THE SETTING

The story of Jacob returning to his grandparents' homeland is an instance of a person crossing back into his original ethnic culture. So he could flee the wrath of Esau, his older brother, whom he had maliciously defrauded, Jacob's mother, Rebekah, sent him back to her relatives, who lived on the northwestern edge of Mesopotamia. It made sense that he would find refuge and a welcome there. After all, as their own flesh and blood, would he not be accepted and smoothly fit into a community from which his ancestors had originated? Would there not also be an eligible wife for him, permitting him to avoid taking one from among the Canaanites, as his older brother had grievously done?

Upon arrival, Jacob was readily accepted. Then the inevitable happened. His uncle Laban had a couple of eligible daughters, and Jacob quickly fell in love with the younger, Rachel. He decided she was worth the price of seven years of service to his uncle. Besides, it might take that long for the wrath of his brother back in Canaan to subside. So he worked the seven years, being so love-struck that they passed like a few days (Gen 29:20). Then he asked his uncle to fulfill his end of the agreement by giving his daughter Rachel to him as his bride.

But Jacob, the deceiver, had more than met his match with his uncle. Laban played one of the meanest pranks recorded in Scripture on an unsuspecting Jacob—and used a cultural custom to justify it. Instead of giving Rachel as his wife, he gave him his firstborn daughter, Leah, having switched the daughters after dark.

Stop and think for a moment about the circumstances. It would seem as if this bold deception of Laban's could never have succeeded. But if we consider that Jacob had absolutely no suspicion that a swap was in the works; that his wife was brought to him under the cover of darkness (Gen 29:23); that the bride was most likely veiled (see Gen 24:65); that since they were sisters, they likely had similar physiques; that it was no doubt a very dark bridal suite; and that

Jacob was under the spell of a strong infatuation, it becomes clear that it could easily have happened just as we are told.¹

When Jacob angrily confronted Laban the next morning, Laban used the excuse of a cultural norm to justify his deceit. He told Jacob, “It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one” (Gen 29:26 NIV).² Those words point out an uncontestable reality in crosscultural relations: traditional cultural norms of the host culture will always triumph, either as an excuse or as a reality. They will trump cultural ignorance. Accordingly, Jacob had no recourse but to submit grudgingly to his father-in-law’s marriage scheme.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Several crosscultural principles from this account are instructive to crosscultural message bearers today. These principles can be applied by anyone entering into a new culture, but even more readily by those who return to visit their cultural heritage a couple of generations removed from that original culture.

Understand your cultural generational status. Just as Alice Choi was a confused second-generation American-Korean visiting Korea, so Jacob was a confused third-generation Semite from Canaan visiting Mesopotamia. As a sojourner to the household of his uncle Laban, he was three generations removed from the culture of which his grandparents, Abraham and Sarah, had been fully a part. He was a visitor in a culture that he knew about through parental references and stories but did not know by experience.

Figure 7.1 helps explain Jacob's generational situation when he arrived back in Haran.³ As a third-generation immigrant, he was fully integrated into the culture of the peoples in Canaan. He probably knew little of his ancestors' original culture. Visiting Laban and his family must have felt more like visiting a foreign culture than he expected when he set off from his parents' home.

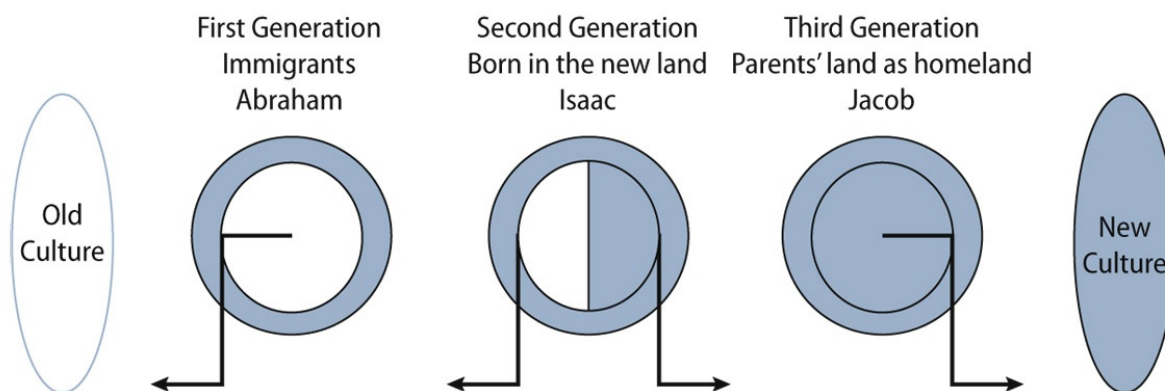


Figure 7.1. Jacob's generational status

Missionary kids today feel much the same. Depending on the amount of exposure to their parents' culture, they fall into either the second- or third-generation cultural experience diagrammed in figure 7.1. They also are very much navigating between two or more cultures, and even have a culture to themselves. That's why they're often referred to as third-culture kids, or TCKs.⁴

Ignorance of the law (customs) is no excuse. Jacob was unaware of the cultural norm of the region that stipulated that the older daughter must be married before the younger. If he'd been aware of it, he certainly would have taken measures before his wedding day or at least would have asked Laban about its implications for him. Was he naively oblivious to this custom because his mind was set on Rachel? That we do not know. But what we can deduce from his mistake is that he paid a high price for not making an effort to investigate more fully the norms of his host culture.

If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion, and avoid the people, you might better stay home. You are like a pebble thrown into water: you become wet on the surface but you are never part of the water.

JAMES A. MICHENER

“Cultural exceptions” do not apply. Never assume that, as a foreigner, the cultural norms of the host community do not apply to you. Let's cut Jacob a bit of slack and assume that over the first seven years he did learn a lot about the culture of his host community. Let's even suppose that he learned about this particular custom of proper marriage order. If that were the case, his mistake was presuming that he was exempt from that cultural expectation simply because he was a foreigner, a guest. Such an assumption would have turned out to be a huge mistake that had implications for the rest of his life. And because he had no rebuttal to Laban's cultural rationale for doing what he did, it appears that was exactly what Jacob had expected.

Far too many crosscultural messengers expect that same kind of preferential treatment. They think they deserve a “pass” on some aspect of the host culture that doesn’t favor them. They think their status as a foreigner gives them the right to commit cultural blunders without paying the consequences. They think they have a right to circumvent some of the customs. If they’re Americans, is it any wonder they get branded “ugly Americans”?

No one should ever assume that as a guest in a host culture, he has the right to ignore the norms of that culture. Granted, peoples the world over put up with it when ignorant tourists who temporarily drop in on them commit cultural blunders. They’re willing to be infringed upon by those who are just passing through. But more is expected of guests who dwell among them. Resident visitors are expected to pick up a degree of cultural awareness as a matter of respect to the locals they’re living among.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Whether a person is dropping in on her ancestral culture, like Alice Choi, or planning on residing in a host culture for an extended period of time, she shouldn't expect cultural exemptions, as Jacob did. She shouldn't expect to get a pass on adjusting to cultural norms. That expectation is rude, lazy, and demeaning to the host community's dearly held beliefs, values, and customs. There's no escaping the consequences. In the end, like Jacob, she'll pay dearly for such cultural snobbery.

There's an uncontested reality when it comes to crosscultural relations: traditional cultural norms of the host cultures always triumph, either as an excuse or as a reality. For workers who embed themselves in a new cultural environment, ignorance of the culture is no excuse for committing cultural blunders.

Joseph

*A Victim of Crosscultural
Human Trafficking*

GENESIS 37–50

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. (Gen 39:1-10)

In human societies, one of the most appalling blights that demonstrates the degraded condition of the heart is the vice of human trafficking. The mixed blessing of globalization—where transportation, trade, and information are open between countries—has fostered tremendous opportunities but also increased dangers for the world's most vulnerable citizens.¹ Worldwide, 800,000 people are trafficked each year. The largest portion (46 percent) are trafficked for prostitution, 27 percent are trafficked into domestic servitude, and the remaining are forced into working in agriculture, manufacturing, or other menial labor.²

Consider the plight of Nima. Even by Nepali standards, Nima's family was poor. Her father sold her to an "auntie" who wanted Nima to work for her in India. Nima's nightmare began shortly after she and her aunt crossed the border. She was handed over to men who drugged and raped her during a time of "seasoning." Within a few weeks, Nima was a compliant sex worker. She was

fourteen years old. By sixteen, she was learning to work the system for better treatment. Nima was sent back to Nepal to recruit new girls. There she was rescued, received restorative counseling, and is now working to prevent other young girls from being sold as she was.³

THE SETTING

Joseph was also an unsuspecting victim of human trafficking. At seventeen, his father, Jacob, asked him to hike into the fields to check on how his ten older brothers were faring as they cared for the family's flocks. Joseph had previously made some naive comments to his older brothers about a couple of dreams he had that implied that he would one day rule over them.

When Joseph finally met up with his brothers, they saw a golden opportunity: out of sight of their father, they would take advantage of his vulnerable situation. At first they intended to kill him, but instead ended up selling him to a passing caravan of traders.

After being trafficked for profit by his brothers (Gen 37:28), Joseph ended up in Egypt. He was purchased at the slave market by a man name Potiphar, a high-ranking Egyptian who was also the captain of Pharaoh's guard (Gen 39:1). In time, Joseph proved his competence and trustworthiness as a servant, and Potiphar made him the chief steward of his house and fields. But then Potiphar's seductive wife falsely accused Joseph of sexual misconduct and had him thrown into prison (Gen 39:11-20). He was eventually released, appointed to the position of prime minister, and saved all of Egypt from starvation during a great famine.

Eventually, the famine forced Joseph's brothers to come from the land of Canaan to purchase grain. Through a series of exchanges, Joseph, who was more culturally Egyptian than Hebrew, eventually revealed his true identity to his brothers. He had them bring his father to Egypt, where Pharaoh, out of appreciation to Joseph, gave the family a tract of prime real estate in the area of Goshen. There they lived in financial security the rest of their lives (Gen 44-47).

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

What lessons can we learn from Joseph's experience that are applicable when crossing cultures today? Several are important ingredients to a person's crosscultural success. These insights are pertinent whether she crosses cultures willingly while on mission with Jesus or as a victim of trafficking involuntarily forced across a national border into a different cultural setting. Also, in this day of regional unrest and turmoil, some are forced into foreign lands as refugees. Whatever the circumstance—whether as a trafficked victim, a refugee, or a message bearer—all can gain crosscultural insights from Joseph's life.

Maintain a strong relationship with God. This should be the primary goal of every believer who crosses into another culture. That crossing experience should never compromise a person's loyalty to God and his standards. It should never be seen as an excuse to live outside the bounds of God's precepts and morals. The narrator of Joseph's story makes clear the basis of his success: "The LORD was with him" (Gen 39:2, 21). The Lord was with Joseph in an obvious way to those who were watching his life, because he was with God. He was living out the divine promise "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (Jas 4:8), and people saw it happening in his life.

Everything that Joseph touched while serving Potiphar was successful because of his right relationship with God (Gen 39:3). The more he was entrusted with, the more he succeeded. The blessing of the Lord was on all that Joseph superintended, in both Potiphar's house and his fields. The same was true after he was thrown into prison and given oversight of the entire penal complex (Gen 39:21).

A young couple went to serve in Turkey. The first step in most cross-cultural ministry situations is learning the local language, so they began working with a male Turkish

language tutor together. After a few weeks, it proved difficult to continue together, as the two of them were developing in their language skill at different paces. They began to meet individually with the tutor for study. After some weeks, the wife began sleeping with the Turkish man, unbeknownst to her husband. This illicit relationship went on for several months. One day he returned home earlier than expected to find them together.

**RYAN SHAW,
SPIRITUAL EQUIPPING FOR MISSION**

Can the same be said of our reputation and work ethic when crossing into another culture, that the Lord is with us based on a strong connection to him that's observable by the people in that culture?

Take a moral stand. Joseph took his moral standard with him wherever he went. He no doubt had this standard ingrained in him by his parents, and he maintained it even in their absence. When repeatedly tempted by Potiphar's wife to indulge in sex with her, his firm reply was "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9). Stop and consider for a moment all the justifications Joseph could have given for yielding to this temptation: as a trafficked victim, he could have rationalized that he deserved this kind of pleasure as payback for injustice; his parents weren't there to answer to; his family was oblivious to his existence—even thinking him dead; there was no community restraint to contend with and there would be no family shame if he were caught. Joseph could have committed immorality, and no one would have been the wiser or even cared.

But he knew that even though his family was far away, God was very near. He would have to answer to God for any moral indiscretion. He also knew some moral standards are supracultural—applying to all cultures at all times. And committing adultery was one. He refused to allow his forced and prolonged crosscultural exile to mar his reputation.

Sadly, this is where so many fail when going crosscultural today. Moral standards become loose when homeland constraints are off. All too readily, ethical behavior is compromised when opportunity presents itself. This is especially noticeable when "Christian" tourists are overseas. Many consider their

step out of their homeland as a license for misbehavior, and it shows in their despicable conduct. But what an embarrassment it is to family, friends, supporters, churches, and sending organizations when God-sent message bearers fail in this area.

Intentionally acculturate. Although Joseph was involuntarily living in Egypt, he applied himself to learning the language and customs of the Egyptians. He didn't withdraw and live in a Hebrew cultural cocoon. The familiar axiom from Jim Elliot was Joseph's mantra too: "Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God."⁴ He took the time and effort to integrate into Egyptian culture. His acculturation stood out in two ways, which became clear when his brothers arrived in Egypt twenty years after they sold him to the traders.

First, Joseph had learned the Egyptian language (Gen 42:23). Although he could have spoken Hebrew, his heart language, to his brothers, to disguise his identity he made use of an interpreter when conversing with them. He had become fluent in the Egyptian language many years earlier when employed by Potiphar, had used it when in prison, had spoken it to Pharaoh, and no doubt had spoken it in his home with his Egyptian wife, Asenath (Gen 41:45).

This brings to mind a very important crosscultural principle related to language acquisition. One of the surest ways to show people of a host culture that a foreigner loves and values them is by taking the time to learn and properly speak their language. Language is the gateway to cultural acceptance. Learning the heart language of the people qualifies us to speak about heart issues with them.

A second indication of Joseph's acculturation was his practice of the Egyptians' customs. During his brothers' second visit to Egypt, Joseph arranged to have a meal with them. Continuing to conceal his identity and portray himself as a native Egyptian, he kept to the customs of the Egyptians: "They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians" (Gen 43:32). Joseph observed proper Egyptian

protocol. Unlike his father, Jacob, when he lived the first seven years with Laban, Joseph took the time to learn cultural norms and practice them.

Trust in God's sovereignty. Joseph believed that God was sovereign and had everything related to his well-being under his control. Even though his being in the center of God's will was not an easy path, he still believed that God had absolute control over his life, and so he put his circumstances in subjection to God's larger plan.

When Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers, he quickly added, "So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Gen 45:8). A few years later, when his father, Jacob, passed away, he reassured his brothers of God's good purposes by telling them, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen 50:20). For Joseph, crossing cultures meant keeping in step with God's sovereign plan.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Joseph used good judgment and was intelligent, responsible, and hard-working within his second culture. He made himself valuable by fully acculturating into his adopted society. His crosscultural expertise not only saved the lives of the people of his adopted culture, but also spilled over and brought relief to those around them, including his own family. Joseph didn't waste his life or let his life waste away. His strong relationship with God, his impeccable morality, his intentional acculturation, and his belief in God's sovereign purposes made him a valued member of the culture in which he lived.

Moses

A Multicultural Leader

ACTS 7:20-38

At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. . . . Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. . . .

This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge?"—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, "God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers." This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. (Acts 7:20-23, 29-30, 35-38)

My four children were raised triculturally as missionary kids on the island of Papua, Indonesia. While growing up, they were immersed in the surrounding Indonesian culture, enmeshed in the Western culture of their boarding school and mission community, and exposed every four years to the culture of their parents' homeland. They became bilingual when still young and somehow learned to balance the three cultures. They thought this was the norm for most people, and they accepted it as the natural way of life.

After fifteen years in Indonesia, our mission director asked me to return to the United States to join his administrative staff. My two oldest were in their midteens at the time. The thought of moving to the United States brought consternation and dismay on their part. I can still remember my distraught daughter (now a missionary in Thailand) kneeling on the floor in front of me and saying, "I always thought the best life was to be away in boarding school in the

Philippines and back home here in Papua on vacations. Now you're going to take that all away from me!"

Missionary kids know by experience that America isn't the only wonderful place in the world in which to live. No matter what nation they're in, they learn to be content—if not downright happy.¹ Crossing cultures has expanded their worldview, fracturing any one-country, national bias.

Today my kids and other MKs like them are labeled third-culture kids, or TCKs. Though they retain some aspects of their parents' home culture, TCKs mix in parts of the culture of their upbringing, forming a third culture.² They feel comfortable in at least two, if not more, distinct cultures, having learned to navigate between cultures smoothly—to their advantage.

THE SETTING

The story of Moses' life spans 120 years and three distinct cultures. It begins in the country of Egypt, moves on to Midian, goes back to Egypt, and then back to Midian and beyond. Moses was truly a multicultural sojourner, switching between cultures as he matured. He started from a position of great privilege, being brought up and educated in the high culture of the Egyptian royal palace. According to the Christian martyr Stephen and based on Jewish history, this lasted for forty years (Acts 7:23).

Then, as a fugitive from justice, Moses spent his next forty years embedded in the nomadic culture of the Midianites. What a huge cultural adjustment that must have been! There he married a Midianite woman, Zipporah, and raised his sons (Ex 2:21; 4:20). He was content to live out his days in an isolated culture on the fringe of a greater civilization, even recording that as his feeling (Ex 2:21) and evidenced by his reluctance to return to Egypt when eventually asked by God to do so.

When Moses was eighty (Ex 7:7), God called him in an extraordinary way to become a great leader with a daunting task. He was to return to Egypt and free the people of his origin, the Hebrews whom he hardly knew, from their bondage. Once freed, he was to lead them to the land of Canaan, which God had previously promised to them as a people. Thus Moses was forced to deal with people of a third culture to him. Even though they had a racial affinity, because of separation of distance and time, he knew little about the ways of the Hebrews—or they of his.

Yet for forty years he led them as a tricultural leader. He had to wean them off the lingering cultural influences of Egypt that they often cried to return to when times got rough. He had to confront the pagan influences of the desert peoples that often tempted them to compromise their allegiance to God. Additionally, he had the task of instilling into this vast community the beliefs,

values, and customs that God was now demanding of them through the giving of his law. One of the intents of the law was to mold a new cultural identity, which Moses was to champion as their leader. He spent the last forty years of his life inculcating new cultural standards, while at the same time juggling the influences of three different cultures within himself.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

The experience of Moses as a tricultural leader highlights several crosscultural principles that are relevant to crosscultural workers today.

It's possible for a person to master two or more cultures. When we're in a new culture, after the initial excitement of the "honeymoon" period, reality sets in. A message bearer begins to experience more deeply how different the host people are and how difficult it is to truly fit in to their way of life. The tasks ahead—of language acquisition, culture adaptation, and worldview familiarity—will be mastered only over an extended period. There are no shortcuts to the daily grind of progressing in these three essential tasks. The message bearer may begin to wonder if she will ever master the culture—or even has the ability to do so. Low scores on language aptitude tests back in the homeland may begin to cast doubts on her ability to acculturate at all. But Moses shows us that this need not be a debilitating fear.

As mentioned earlier, Moses was tricultural and most likely trilingual. He conversed fluently in Egyptian, Midian, and Hebrew. He was especially proficient in Hebrew, as evidenced by the fact that he authored more books of the Hebrew Scriptures than any other writer. This is noteworthy because Hebrew was the third language in which he was immersed.

Unlike other species in the animal world, human beings have the unique capability of effectively crossing into and mastering other cultures. This is because we have the ability to transfer concepts from one culture to another. And, in most cases, equivalent words can be translated from one language to another. Together, these are what make becoming bicultural possible. It's a part of the kinship of humanity, being created by one and the same God (Gen 1:26-27). These capabilities should bring encouragement to anyone attempting to master a new language and culture: it can be done based on our innate humanness. Moses is a prime example of someone who did it masterfully.

Crosscultural marriages are permissible. There was a time not that long ago when crosscultural marriages were frowned upon, if not outright condemned, in the United States. That was certainly the view of my parents' generation. I can remember hearing at church something to the effect that "the mixing of the races is not God's plan and does not have his blessing." Evidence for this position was cited from God's admonition to the Israelites not to intermarry with the Canaanites.

Yet Moses, God's chosen leader, shows us otherwise. He engaged in two crosscultural, or interracial, marriages. Somewhere around the age of forty, he married Zipporah, a Midianite (Ex 2:21). They seemed to have been very compatible, and they had children together (Ex 4:20). Then, sometime in his eighties, Moses took a Cushite wife (Num 12:1). Being from the land of Cush (north Africa), she likely had a darker complexion than the Hebrews. Although Moses' brother and sister took issue with him about this marriage, God came to his defense (Num 12:2-16).

What lessons are we to draw from Moses' crosscultural marriages? Simply this: God doesn't condemn interracial marriages, but he does condemn interreligious marriages. The reason God prohibited the Israelites from marrying Canaanites was a religious reason, not a racial one. He wanted to keep the Israelites and their offspring true to him. He wanted to protect them from the idolatry and syncretism that would have been a natural outcome of interreligious marriages. This principle is carried forward in the New Testament through the principle of not being unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14).

Attaining cultural proficiency should never be a source of pride. The Israelites must have admired Moses' ability to converse so freely within and between multiple cultures. Yet tucked away in his life story is a brief statement about his disposition: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3). That's quite a compliment! It tells us that Moses didn't take pride in his multicultural skills. He didn't flaunt the fact that he was a valuable and capable insider in several cultures. Neither should veteran crosscultural workers today, especially as they engage the task of orientating and mentoring newly arrived workers.

Leading crossculturally is inspiring people who come from two or more cultural traditions to participate with you in building a community of trust and then follow you and be empowered by you to achieve a compelling vision of faith.

**SHERWOOD LINGENFELTER,
LEADING CROSS-CULTURALLY**

Never let cultural acumen get in the way of your calling. In Deuteronomy 34:10-12, we find a summary statement of Moses' life. It seems to have been written as his obituary. In it we discover an amazing statement that isn't made of any other person in all of Scripture. It's a phrase describing the closeness of his relationship with God, which simply states, "whom the Lord knew face to face." His intimacy with God allowed him to see more of the glory of God than any other person. Moses' free and frequent access to God kept him balanced as he performed his multicultural calling.

Moses was a powerful (Deut 34:12), multitalented, multicultural leader. As a leader with unparalleled influence in his day, he never let his proficiency in crossculturalism take precedence over his intimate relationship with God. Ryan Shaw reminds us, "Perhaps no other factor contributes more to the ability to produce spiritual fruit than God's powerful presence in a life. A human life filled with the presence and power of God is one of God's choicest gifts to his church and the world."³

Moses understood that the mastery of God over his life was more important than his mastery of cultures. His close relationship with the Lord enabled him to be effective in his relationships with humans—no matter what their cultural identity.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Becoming bicultural is a skill that takes time to acquire. It entails language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and worldview familiarity with a host culture. Human beings have the innate capacity to do just that if they devote time and effort to it. Down the road of acculturation, a person becomes, like Moses, a valuable and accepted insider with the ability to be a respected influencer. That's exactly what the goal of God's message bearers should be as they endeavor to impart the truth of the gospel across cultures.

The Israelite Community

Tribes, Clans, and Families

NUMBERS 1:1-4, 16-19

The LORD spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. He said: “Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. You and Aaron are to count according to their divisions all the men in Israel who are twenty years old or more and able to serve in the army. One man from each tribe, each of them the head of his family, is to help you.

These were the men appointed from the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes. They were the heads of the clans of Israel. Moses and Aaron took these men whose names had been specified, and they called the whole community together on the first day of the second month. The people registered their ancestry by their clans and families, and the men twenty years old or more were listed by name, one by one, as the Lord commanded Moses. (NIV)¹

I can still remember the day our family arrived in the village of Sowi 3 on the Indonesian island of what was then called Irian Jaya.² The mission Bible school to which my wife and I were assigned was on the perimeter of the village. It was a picturesque location for the thirty-acre school; the waves of the Bay of Manokwari lapping up against the school’s shoreline in one direction, with the Arfak Mountains jutting up in the other.

Getting to know the people of the village involved a steep learning curve. It was clear from the outset that although they claimed to be Christians, the villagers clung to beliefs, values, and customs that were strange to me. It would take time to sort out their tribal social structure. I discovered that they were of the Hatam tribe. I further discovered that the majority was of the Mandacan clan—one of many clans within that tribe. Eventually, I discovered that distinct families made up the clan. There were also circles of relationships between the Hatamers that I would need to learn and negotiate.

The influential chief lived a mile away, over at Sowi 1. But across the road from me was Kepala Nikolus, the de facto leader of this side of the clan. His status was confirmed by his taking of four wives, each representing tribal ties. I

sure didn't recall trying to sort out those kinds of relationships when growing up in the States.

THE SETTING

The book of Numbers is so named because of the two censuses that are recorded in it (Num 1–3; 26). A year after the people of Israel fled from Egypt, they were encamped as a “community” at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The census recorded in chapter one took place one month after the new tabernacle was set up (Num 1–2; see Ex 40:2, 17).³

This census had a military purpose. It was intended to discover how many men were “able to go to war.” In a few months, the community would be on the move, heading to the Promised Land of Canaan. Military ventures lay in their immediate future. God commanded Moses to take the census so that, as supreme commander, he would know how many fighting men were available for conquest (Num 1:3). We receive another benefit from this passage: found therein are anthropological insights into how humans through the centuries have organized along relational lines.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Whether by intent or not, this passage serves as a window into the general makeup of societies the world over. In it we find a taxonomy of strata of society that's common in cultures outside the West. The passage serves as a template of how non-Western societies are structured. Notice in table 10.1 how each layer builds on the next.

Table 10.1. Common cultural taxonomy

Strata	Defining Characteristics/Parameters
Family	Same culture, language, creation myth, totem, blood relationship
Clan	Same culture, language, creation myth, totem
Tribe	Same culture, language (but with dialects)
Community	Same culture, language, leaders

We in the West, especially North Americans, have trouble seeing these levels because we're both geographically and genealogically removed from our ancestors and ancestral homelands. We long ago severed ties with our native lands, where strata matter and are preserved.

Israel as a paradigm. It's insightful to recall the progression of the people of Israel in their national development. They started out as a single *family* in Canaan at the time Abraham and Sarah migrated there. They went down into Egypt as *clans* in the time of Jacob and Joseph. Over a 430-year period, those clans developed into twelve distinct *tribes*. They left Egypt and gathered at Mt. Sinai under the leadership of Moses as a *community*. Finally, they became a legitimate *nation* at the time of King David's rule (2 Sam 7:23). By then they

had secure borders, a centralized government, a specialization of tasks, and surplus wealth. These are the elements needed for a nation to exist.

In the book of Numbers, the heart of Israel's social structure was the tribe. The Jews are repeatedly called "the twelve tribes of Israel" after their exodus from Egypt. A tribe is "a confederation of groups who recognize a relationship with one another, usually in the form of common ethnic origin, common language, or strong pattern of interaction based on intermarriage or presumed kinship."⁴ Together, the twelve tribes made up the larger Israelite "community." Notice that at this point in its history, Israel was not called a "nation." That appellation wasn't awarded until much later—after it had secure borders and a centralized government. For now, under the leadership of Moses and while in their nomadic state, it was referred to as a "community."

A tribe is comprised of a grouping of clans. Clans are a confederation of families who recognize a relationship with one another, having a common culture, language, creation myth, and totem. Those last two characteristics—creation myth and totem—most clearly define them as being of the same clan. Additionally, a clan is a group of lineages that claim descent from one mythical ancestor, often thought to be a superhuman being or something from the animal kingdom (eagle, lion, bear, crocodile, etc.).

The next level down is family. A family is a small group of individuals who are related to each other through a common bloodline. They have a line of common ancestors by which they trace their common lineage. They're the basic unit of what makes up a clan. Extended families support each other in times of crises, such as against attack, banding together for survival.⁵

One of the clearest examples of the composition of an ethnic community is seen in the methodology used by Joshua to discover who caused the community to be defeated at the battle of Ai. In Joshua 7:16-18, the entire community of Israel was summoned to meet together. Notice the process of elimination: out of the full community, the tribe of Judah was taken; out of the tribe of Judah, the clan of the Zerahites was taken; out of the clan of the Zerahites, the family of Zabdi was taken; out of the family of Zabdi, the person Achan was taken. The

elimination process began at the community level and then proceeded down the strata to pinpoint the guilty individual.

Societal taxonomy visualized. Figure 10.1 shows how these levels of a society interface with each other. Noting these distinctions of strata helps us better understand the inner workings of Israel. But more than that, it helps crosscultural workers better understand the non-Western societies in which they live and work. (In the final chapter of this book, these tiers of society will be related to the peoples around the throne of God.)

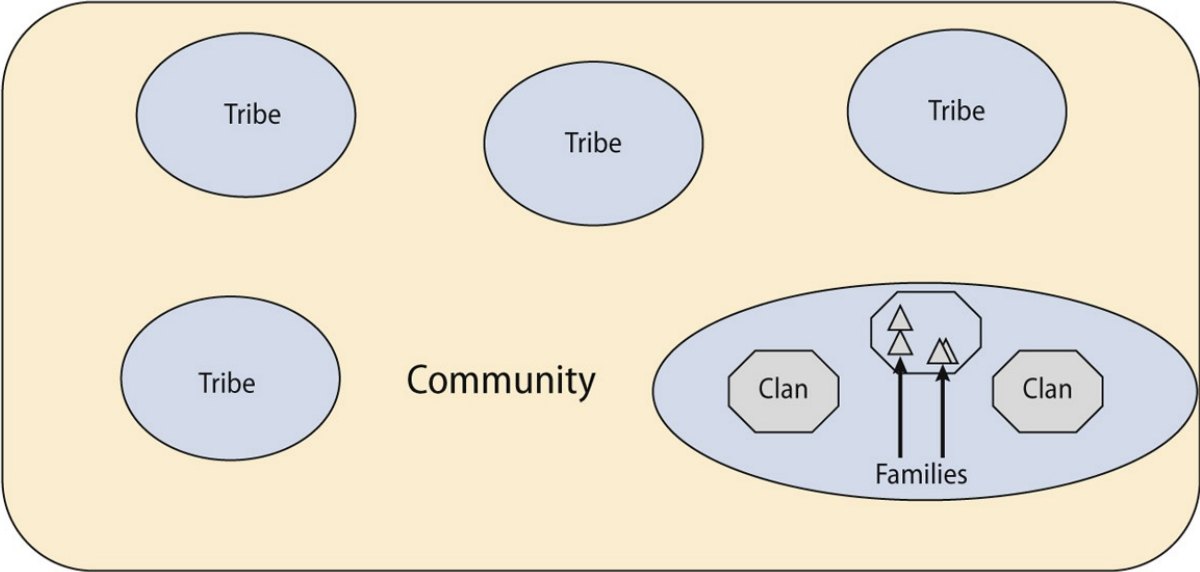


Figure 10.1. Israelite social taxonomy

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Societies aren't monolithic in their makeup. They have tiers, or strata relationships, that need to be understood if an outsider is to relate well with that community. Israel of old is a good example of the strata that comprise most non-Western societies.

Today's crosscultural workers need to be attuned to the same phenomenon and relate to people accordingly. They will be better accepted within a community and more astute in relationships if they do.

Rahab

The Informed Pagan Prostitute

JOSHUA 2:1-24

Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” And the men said to her, “Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.” (Josh 2:8-14)

For more than four years, Rob and Mindy Baker prepared to serve as missionaries in a highly restricted country in Southeast Asia. They followed all the prefield requirements of their mission, raised their support, and said farewell to their supporting churches. They had even taken the added precaution of not going out under the name of their mission agency. Instead they used an affiliated “company” name on their visa and work-permit applications. With their two children in tow—a six-year-old son and two-year-old daughter—they flew off on a journey that would take them halfway around the world.

After a thirteen-hour flight to Japan and then a connecting six-hour flight to their country of service, they arrived exhausted at eleven thirty at night. They were ready for a shower, a bed, and a welcome by eager coworkers, who had prayed them to the field. As they disembarked from the plane, all was going well until they reached the immigration booth. The immigration officer, who had expedited all the passengers in line ahead of them, seemed to be taking an inordinate amount of time processing them. He kept clicking on his computer keyboard, looking at the screen, and periodically glancing over at them.

They didn't get nervous until the officer requested that they leave the line and go to a room off to the side. By then the kids were whiny, and the couple was sweating with anxiety. After taking a seat on a hard bench by an antiquated desk, they were approached by a courteous higher-level immigration official. He asked some routine questions about them and what their reason was for entering the country. They were discreet in their answers, neither lying nor giving away their true missional motives. They had been coached well in orientation as to what to say when so questioned.

Finally, the officer's demeanor changed from soft-spoken and friendly to harsh and pointed. He explained that by using a search engine, they had discovered that the Bakers had ties to a church in Denver. On the church's website was an announcement about their departing for overseas. Although they weren't called missionaries, it was evident that they were, since they had this church connection. Furthermore, the congregation was asked to "remember" them as they went, an obvious code word for "pray" that the officers frequently encountered. The church connection was enough of a red flag, but the additional information made it clear that they were entering the country as missionaries, which was prohibited.

The official told the Bakers that they were denied entry into the country. They weren't even permitted to go beyond the immigration stalls to tell their waiting coworkers. They were to stay where they were until they boarded the next available flight out of the country, which would be in about nine hours.

Modern intelligence and information technology had done the Bakers in.

THE SETTING

The community of Israel had spent the past forty years wandering in the lands to the south and east of Canaan. They had begun that period when they miraculously crossed the Red Sea, barely escaping the pursuing Egyptian army. It had ended with the death of Moses, right after conquering the formidable Amorite kingdom ruled by kings Sihon and Og.

Before his death, Moses had commissioned Joshua to be his successor (Num 27:18-23). Under this new leadership, the Israelites camped on the eastern side of the Jordan River, poised to invade the Promised Land.

Joshua was a wise and seasoned military leader. He had commanded the Israelite forces against the Amalekites (Ex 17:8-16) and most likely against the recently defeated Amorites. As the new commander-in-chief prepared to bring his armies across the Jordan River for a full-scale invasion of the land, he sought some intelligence about his enemies.

There were no sophisticated means of surveillance in those days. Joshua needed feet on the ground, eyes and ears that could give him a firsthand report on the strength and disposition of his foes. Accordingly, he sent two young men on a reconnaissance mission to “view the land,” especially the city of Jericho (Josh 2:1). Under cover of darkness, the two entered the city. To avoid suspicion, they went to the house of a prostitute named Rahab. They couldn’t realize the impact their crosscultural encounter with this young woman of ill repute would have on them, their army, the future of Israel, and God’s redemption plan.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

If there's anything the story of Rahab teaches us as crosscultural message bearers, it's that the people we go to are more informed than we think. As a newly sent-out missionary, it's a mistake to assume that the people to whom you go are clueless about you, your mission, or your message.

In this Information Age, people the world over are more informed than ever before. They may be ignorant of the specifics of your message and methods, but most have a general idea of what you represent. They have viewed, heard, and read about your country, your culture, and your beliefs. If they didn't do so before they met you, they will quickly google you after they do.

What Rahab knew. The dialogue between Rahab and the two Israelite spies astounds the reader with how much information she already knew. This young woman, and most everyone else in the city, knew a lot about the Israelites. But there was a difference between Rahab and the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho. She had thoughtfully processed that information, which prepared her to become a person of faith. Take a look at what she knew:

- *She knew the identity of the Israelites' God.* “For the LORD your God, he is God” (Josh 2:11). Rahab used the covenant name “LORD” (Jehovah) and pinpoints him as “your God” (Elohim). This information pertaining to Jehovah could have come to her only by intelligence that had been gathered on the Israelites. The spies didn't need to tell her who their God was—she already knew!
- *She knew their God was a God of awesome power.* “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt” (Josh 2:10). That event took place forty years before this meeting. It isn't unreasonable to suppose Rahab to be about twenty years old at this time. That would mean that she referenced an event in Israel's

history that occurred twenty years before she was even born. How did she know about that miraculous event? By the intelligence that had been gathered on the Israelites.

- *She knew their God was the sovereign God.* “He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath” (Josh 2:11). She recognized that their Jehovah was the sovereign ruler of the universe. She must have done this by deduction—by thinking through for herself the reason for the Israelites’ unstoppable success. Here we see a pagan prostitute making a confession about the nature and character of God. The spies didn’t have to persuade her to believe this about their God; she already believed.
- *She knew their God was the God of destiny.* “I know that the LORD has given you the land” (Josh 2:9). How did she know this? They hadn’t even invaded the land yet! Their army was still camped on the opposite side of the Jordan River. But she affirmed to them that they would conquer the entire land, not just her city. This was Rahab exercising her faith—more faith than many of the invading Israelites had.
- *She knew their God was a God to be taken seriously—important enough to swear by.* “Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house” (Josh 2:12). Notice that her plea for deliverance wasn’t based on an appeal to their compassion or good favor. She hardly knew these two men. Nor did she offer a bribe or even herself. Instead, she appealed to the name of the very God they served. The oath between them couldn’t be any more strongly binding than being sealed by that name. That plea was all the two spies needed to hear. It was a promise based on the holy name of Jehovah. It was a promise of mutual trust guaranteed by the name of Jehovah. The spies responded with, “Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you” (Josh 2:14).

The spies were dumbfounded. How did she know so much? Kneeling before them was an attractive young girl with painted face and seductive perfume in provocative dress, conveying to them classified information. She knew about their history, about their God, and about their intent. How did she know the correct conclusions to draw based on that information? How was it that she, of all people, became a person of faith, after the faith of their forefather Abraham?

Hebrews 11:31 states, “By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.” James also referred to her good work of welcoming and protecting the spies (Jas 2:25). As the spies sat among the stalks of flax, listening to her, they marveled at what she knew and what she believed. Not only did Rahab know a lot about the spies and their mission, but she also knew a lot about the God and religion they represented.

Message bearers today need to be cognizant of the fact that God precedes them into their place of service, preparing hearts and minds in advance of their arrival. There is a lot of “intelligence” information on them, and residents have accessed their message before the gospel messengers ever reach their ministry area.

What Rahab did. Rahab is commended not for her lies but for her faith and deeds. What specifically did she give the spies?

- *Protection (Josh 2:4-7).* First, she allowed these men, her dreaded enemies, to enter her house, knowing full well who they were. When she was asked to bring them out, she hid them on her roof and then lied to the king’s messengers. She told them that the spies had left the city, and she diverted them from her house by telling them to pursue the spies in the open field. By so doing she showed her bravery.
- *Information (Josh 2:9, 11, 24).* Rahab said twice to the spies that their hearts “melt away before you.” The inhabitants of Jericho were living in dread of the Israelites. Having lost confidence in their ability to beat back the Israelite invaders, they were already defeated in spirit. That’s just the information the spies had sought. Upon return to their camp, they told

Joshua, “All the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us.” By so doing, Rahab showed her honesty.

- *A plan (Josh 2:15-17)*. First, Rahab let the spies down by a rope from her window on the city wall. Then she instructed them to go in the opposite direction of their camp and to hide out three days in the mountains to the west of the city “until the pursuers have returned” (Josh 2:16). By so doing, she showed her cunning.
- *A promise (Josh 2:18-21)*. She promised the spies that she would (1) gather her family in her house so that at the time of attack, they would be together to be kept from harm, and (2) keep her oath not to tell a single soul about their business. By so doing, she showed her integrity.

Rahab acted in faith. Message bearers today need to know that even when living in the midst of a resistant people, there are those in that community whom God has prepared. There are those who are sympathetic. There are those who will help them. They may be few, and they may seem to be the most unlikely persons, but they are there.

What Rahab received. Rahab was rewarded for her faith and good deeds. On the day of the attack on Jericho, the spies, under instructions from Joshua, went directly to the house of Rahab and rescued her and her family. True to their promise, the spies removed them to a place of safety outside of the city before it was burned to the ground (Josh 6:22-25).

Rahab was admitted among the people of God; she intermarried into a chief family of a chief tribe, and found a place amongst the best remembered ancestors of King David and of Christ; thus receiving the temporal blessings of the Covenant in the largest measure.

**J. M. FULLER,
THE BIBLE COMMENTARY: EXODUS–RUTH**

But the blessing on Rahab doesn't end with her being saved from harm. She and her family were granted permanent residence within the Israelite community. The writer stated that Rahab still lived in Israel at the time the book of Joshua was written (Josh 6:25). Additionally, we learn from Matthew 1:5 that she became the wife of Salmon. Together they bore a son that they named Boaz. Boaz became the husband of Ruth, and together they had Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:18-22). Rahab was the great-great-grandmother of King David, and thus in the lineage of the Christ (Mt 1). Certainly, that night meeting between a Canaanite prostitute and a couple of Jewish spies was very significant. It had long-term consequences for her, for the future of Israel and ultimately for the salvation of the world.

There's a fascinating aside in regard to Rahab's marriage. Could it be that one of the unnamed spies whose life she saved and who in turn saved her was Salmon? Could it be that, in that secret meeting, he became so attracted to her beauty, her cunning, her bravery, her knowledge of his people and God, and her integrity that he took her as his wife? That can only be left to conjecture, but it seems very possible.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

As a crosscultural worker living in a foreign land, don't assume that people are clueless as to who you are, why you are there, and the message you bear. They know at least bits and pieces of all three. In this age of modern communication technology, this is unavoidable. People around you may be ignorant of specifics, but most have a general idea of what you represent. If need be, they can google you and your organization at any time to learn more.

Like Rahab, they will discover a lot. It's your task to help them respond to what they learn in a positive way. If God is working in their hearts, you need to bring that to a commitment to and trust in God. You need to help them become, like Rahab, a person of faith. And like her, it may be that the most unlikely of persons will have such a response.

Ruth

A Crosscultural Conversion

RUTH 1:15-18

And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods: return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

Rick and Mindy were marvelously saved from a life of sin. By their late twenties, they had indulged in just about every vice imaginable. But that was before they found Christ. Freed from the enslavement of their past, they couldn't contain their zeal for Jesus. They boldly witnessed to the power of Christ in their lives among their shocked and amazed nonbelieving friends.

Less than a year after their conversion, they were drawn to a furloughing missionary family in their church that was forming a church-planting team for a city in Southeast Asia. They asked to join the team. The mission pastor agreed and had the church act as their sending agent. As the director of Asia for the established mission agency to which the other team members belonged, I had the unenviable task of denying Rick and Mindy for service in their unqualified state.

Rick and Mindy's mission pastor was determined to send them anyway. Everything went well for the first two months they were there. But then things began to unravel. The weight of learning the language and adapting to the new culture began to drag down their spirits. Their inability to communicate their love for Christ brought frustration. They began to take a critical posture toward everything foreign that surrounded them. They became overly protective of their home, to the point of isolating themselves from the culture around them. They became irritable first toward the nationals, then toward their coworkers, and finally toward each other.

When I visited them three months into their service, I found them a very frustrated and bewildered couple. They wanted little to do with the people they had come to serve. They hated the sights, sounds, and smells of their surroundings. They couldn't understand why the people did things the way they did, and they told them so. In short, Rick and Mindy withdrew, became critical, and made very little attempt to engage the culture they were in.

Two months later, I stood at the international terminal at Chicago O'Hare airport, waiting for Rick and Mindy to disembark from the plane that had brought them back to the States. Next to me was their dejected mission pastor, who in embarrassment would barely look at me, though I attempted to engage him in small talk. Rick and Mindy were returning permanently, having never acclimated to life overseas. Although they had been marvelously converted two years previously, they had made little attempt to experience a crosscultural conversion during their short time in their adopted country.

“Crosscultural conversion” is a phrase coined by Sherwood Lingenfelter, an expert in ministering crossculturally.¹ In essence, it means to become so incarnate in another culture that the crosscultural worker understands and adapts as much as possible to the beliefs, values, and customs of that culture. Ruth is a prime example of someone who did just that. Her sister-in-law, Orpah, on the other hand, was just the opposite.

THE SETTING

The story of Ruth is one of the most beautiful and endearing of all narratives found in Scripture. Ruth stands out like a red rose blooming in the midst of a thorny garden. The deeper we dig into her life, the more she impresses. The account of her life is brief, but the effects of her crosscultural determination were long lasting. Her story has the proverbial fairy-tale ending, “and they lived happily ever after.” Yet her story was no fairy tale.

Ruth was born and raised in the neighboring land of Moab, just east of the Jordan River, which divided the land of Moab and Israel. As a girl barely in her teens, she met and married Mahlon (Ruth 4:10), a young Jewish man who had migrated with his parents and brother to her land. All was going well for this promising young couple until tragedy struck. First her father-in-law unexpectedly died (Ruth 1:3). Then Mahlon died, as did her married brother-in-law, Chilion (Ruth 1:5).

Heartbroken, she decided to join her once pleasant but now bitter mother-in-law, Naomi, across the river in Judea to her hometown of Bethlehem (Ruth 1:20). Feeling the sting of death and the insecure future that it brought, Ruth determined to leave her homeland and launch into a life that included caring for Naomi.

It was at Bethlehem that, as a lowly gleaner of barley, Ruth met the dashing bachelor Boaz. He was the master of the fields where she was gleaning and quickly took note of her. After a series of cordial interactions, Boaz determined to marry Ruth. As a relative of Naomi and a qualified kinsman redeemer, Boaz purchased Naomi’s parcel of land, which, happily for him, included obtaining Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:1-13).

But the story doesn’t end there. Here is the really important part that we dare not miss. God so honored Ruth that he blessed her and Boaz with a son that they named Obed. Obed became the grandfather of David, the eventual monarch of

Israel (Ruth 4:18-22). God so orchestrated the events in the life of this foreign girl, who was willing to experience a crosscultural conversion, that he used her to bring the Messiah to Israel and to the world. This family connection put Ruth prominently in the lineage of Jesus (Mt 1:5).

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Ruth, as one willing to cross into and thrive in another culture, has much to teach us about crossing cultures. She did it successfully and with admirable determination. One mission writer, James Nelson, commenting on her experience, made this observation:

Ruth is a rich example of something every current missionary needs to be—a person who makes necessary crosscultural adjustments skillfully, because her trust in God is deep and practical. Her example also points to that of her descendant Jesus, also a crosscultural servant, who arrived as a newcomer in Bethlehem.²

What Nelson has observed about Ruth’s character and courage in changing cultures is absolutely true. The following are insights gleaned from her example that guide the way for crosscultural workers today.

Determine to leave your home culture behind. Being determined is a deeper commitment than simply being willing. Many would-be message bearers express willingness (in a moment of surrender) to go across culture on mission for Jesus, only to be dissuaded during their preparations. Many and various distractions deter an initially willing message bearer from the culture to which he or she felt called. We can rephrase Jesus’ well-known quote, “Many are called, but few are chosen,” to “Many felt called, but few were unfrozen.” They end up never going.

That wasn’t the case with Ruth. She was willing to transplant herself into a country she had never seen. She didn’t ask to first visit Judea to see if it was a suitable fit for her. Rather, cognizant of the need (of caring for Naomi), she committed to going. Notice her unconditional pledge: “Where you go I will go” (Ruth 1:16). Ruth was saying to Naomi that she was, without reservation, determined to be transient, even a sojourner. She was willing to move out of her familiar country, community, and surroundings to become known as a stranger in Naomi’s homeland.

But then she made an even deeper commitment that evidenced her determination: “And where you lodge I will lodge.” A step beyond her willingness to go was her willingness to stay. She was determined to reside permanently where she was going; hers was a long-term commitment. As it turned out, it was a commitment for life.

Ruth’s crosscultural determination brings to mind a quote from Jill Briscoe, who speaks of the commitment needed as effective message bearers:

Go where you’re sent,
Stay where you’re put,
And give what you’ve got.³

Ruth exemplified all three.

Determine to assimilate into your new culture. Assimilating is a deeper commitment than acclimatizing to a culture. Many message bearers today are to be commended for their efforts to acclimate to their new culture. But there’s a degree of commitment that goes a step further. To assimilate is to integrate so deeply that we become fully identified with the culture we’ve entered.

Ruth pledged to Naomi to do just that. She wasn’t tagging along with Naomi, all the while intending to retain her Moabite identity. Culturally, she was going all the way, determined to fully identify with Naomi’s people and culture. She was all in. She was committed to having a crosscultural conversion.

Lest there be any doubt, Ruth deliberately and carefully verbalized her crosscultural commitment to Naomi. She mentioned upfront four facets in her life related to her commitment so that Naomi would understand the depth of her determination. She was willing to take on the following:

- *A new racial identity.* “Your people shall be my people” (Ruth 1:16). She was willing to identify racially with the people to whom she was going. Now, this may have been easier for Ruth than it is for some of us. As a Semite, like the Jews, Ruth’s people were distant relatives through Lot, Abraham’s nephew (Gen 19:36-37). Nonetheless, Ruth still was racially

different and had to take the step of shedding much of her racial identity to become like Naomi's people.

- *A new religious identity.* “And your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). In Old Testament times, with the focus on Israel as a light among the nations, God's way of bringing other peoples to himself was just the opposite of what it is today. In those times, the nations discovered the true and living God by coming to Israel—a city on a hill, so to speak—and finding him there. Today, the task and mission of the church is the opposite: to take the light of the gospel to the nations. When Ruth said to Naomi, “And your God my God,” she was choosing a new religious identity. Of course, today's message bearers proclaim just the opposite. We offer people a relationship with our God. Our hope is that the people to whom we're sent will say to us, “Your God shall be my God.”
- *An enduring identity.* “Where you die I will die” (Ruth 1:17). With these words, Ruth was making it clear to Naomi that hers was a lifelong commitment. She was going to die in her adopted country and community. She was devoted for life.

The motto of every missionary whether preacher, printer or schoolmaster should be “Devoted for life.”

ADONIRAM JUDSON

- *A new geographic identity.* “There will I be buried” (Ruth 1:17). Even if conditions in Ruth's time had permitted, there would have been no thought of the repatriation of her body to her homeland. In her mind, her new country was her homeland. There she was to be buried. By so committing, Ruth was showing herself a true daughter of that soil.

Become a valued member of the host community. Ruth became a valued member of her host culture and of her adopted community. But that wasn't automatic. She first proved herself willing to become an insider of her adopted culture, and those efforts were noticed and appreciated by the greater Bethlehem community. After becoming Boaz's wife, she did what every wife in her day was most praised for: she bore a son. The women of the neighborhood gathered around her and Naomi, and in joy and admiration they helped name the child (Ruth 4:17). Obed means "serving," just as Ruth was doing to Naomi and the others. The name of her child was a commendation of her service to the community.

The reader can't help but believe that God honored Ruth's servant heart by blessing her with this ultimate reward. As mentioned earlier, her son wasn't just any son in Israel. In time he would become the grandfather of an even greater son, David, king of Israel.

Matthew recorded the additional interesting information (Mt 1:3-6) that the mother of Boaz was Rahab (Joshua 2, 6). Boaz wasn't averse to marrying a Moabitess, since he himself had a Canaanite mother. Additionally, the remarkable fact that Ruth entered into the line of the Jewish messiah isn't lost on Jewish historians. This is evidenced by the fact that her inclusion in the genealogy of Jesus is recorded four times in Scripture (Ruth 4:18-22; 1 Chron 2:10-12; Mt 1:3-6; Lk 3:32-33).⁴ The Jews valued Ruth. The Jews praised Ruth. The Jews prized Ruth. She was a valuable, contributing member of their society.

Ruth arrived in Bethlehem with very little, but she was anything but empty. Her kind, wholesome spirit coupled with her determination to fit in was observed by all and rewarded by God. Nelson observes, "Ultimately, Ruth becomes a crosscultural servant who partners with a redeemer to bring forth new life. This is one of the ways that Ruth serves as a powerful model for those who serve Christ crossculturally."⁵

This should be the goal of all crosscultural workers. They should become so effective in their crosscultural abilities—and willing to experience a crosscultural conversion—that they bring forth new life among the members of

the culture to which they are sent. That new life is none other than the glorious new birth of individuals into the kingdom of Christ.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

It takes determination to experience a crosscultural conversion. It involves long-term commitment to the people to whom we're sent. It means taking on a new identity by fully assimilating into a host culture. But the rewards are worth the effort. As we become valued insiders, we have an opportunity to bring new life to the spiritually dead members of a needy community.

When missionaries refuse to lose any of who they are or do not fully embrace the new country, they cannot identify with the people they seek to serve. Understanding their culture and worldview is essential for communicating the gospel in culturally appropriate ways and to be truly effective. An old saying teaches, "To sail to new worlds one must be willing to lose sight of shore." Those who never leave their home country—even in mind, desire, hopes or preferences—will never settle in and will always be marking time until the next visit back "home." Sadly, the nationals often know that before the missionary does.

**DAVID SILLS,
*CHANGING WORLD, UNCHANGING MISSION***

David and Uriah

The Interplay of Power-Distance

2 SAMUEL 11

It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. . . .

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die." And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died. Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting. . . .

So the messenger went and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David . . . "Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also."

When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD. (2 Sam 11:2-9, 14-18, 22-24, 26-27)

Pastor Ayomi was clearly upset. He had come to my house on the Bible school campus in the village of Sowi, just outside of the town of Manokwari on the island of Papua, Indonesia. Ayomi was the former headmaster of the school and now the respected pastor of the largest church in Manokwari and president of the church denomination. He had appealed to me, a junior missionary, for the rights to the banana trees he had planted years earlier on the school's campus. I

had sent word to him that since the trees were on the school's grounds, and he no longer lived there, the students had first rights to their fruit. Under my direction, they had harvested all the trees and were using the fruit to supplement their meager diet.

In no uncertain terms, Ayomi told me we were stealing his fruit. He further accused me of disrespecting his authority and distinguished position within the national church. Regardless, I adamantly maintained my position. Angrily, he said that we Western missionaries didn't know and respect the local culture. Only years later, after I became aware of power-distance dynamics in culture, I came to understand that he had a valid point.

THE SETTING

The account of David's infidelity with Bathsheba is the most well-known story of adultery in the Bible.¹ Over the course of a year, we see this man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22), this powerful monarch of Israel, engaging in despicable crimes against an innocent and loyal family.

Uriah was a Hittite, and the writer doesn't want that fact lost on the reader; four times in the passage, he mentions it (2 Sam 11:3, 6, 17, 24). David's sin against this non-Jewish warrior was all the more grievous considering that Mosaic law promised protection and equality for foreigners who lived among the Israelites (Num 15:15). There's strong evidence that Uriah was a follower of Jehovah (his name means "Flame of Jehovah"²) and that he was married to a Hebrew. David's heinous treatment of this Hittite stands in stark contrast with Abraham's honorable dealing with Ephron and his fellow Hittites (Gen 23).³

David's selfishness becomes increasingly grievous as the story progresses. He lives out what he had written in a psalm: "For the inward mind and heart of a man are deep" (Ps 64:6). The list of his wrongs in this chapter is long: he lusts after another man's wife; he takes that wife and commits adultery with her, which actually amounts to rape; he attempts a cover-up; he plots murder; he uses the clueless murder victim as a carrier of his own execution order; he brushes off his murderous deed as inconsequential; and finally he forces the man's widow to become his wife (2 Sam 11:2, 4, 6-13, 14-17, 14, 25). Sin compounded became sin unbounded.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

One may question how King David could get away with doing so much wrong. After all, the law stated, “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Lev 20:10). Part of the answer is that God was gracious. But another part of the answer relates to the phenomenon of power-distance.

Power-distance defined. Power-distance is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.”⁴ Generally, there are two kinds of power cultures. The first are high-power-distance cultures, where both leaders and followers assume that the leader has more authority and respect than others. The leader has the right to make unilateral decisions that are to be obeyed without question. The other are low-power-distant cultures. In these cultures, subordinates are invited to participate in decision-making processes. The leader generally makes decisions by consensus, or at least with input from those around him.⁵

Leaders in low-power-distance cultures prefer a consultative, participatory, democratic style of decision making. Power is delegated to team members, and many times a vote is expected. In high-power-distance cultures, people assume that their leaders have special privileges as governing authority. Most decisions are made unilaterally, with little or no input from subordinates.⁶

King David exemplifies a ruler in a high-power-distance culture. He had the position to make decisions and give commands that were not to be questioned. This is why he was able to manipulate the events surrounding his adultery as he did. This is why his commands and directives went unchallenged as he tried to justify his wrongs. This is why he could get away with all that he did. There was no accountability.

Studies have shown a strong correlation between high power-distance and the frequency of corruption. These cultures have fewer checks and balances, which leads to dishonesty.⁷ Again, the unchallenged power of his position gave David the latitude he needed to behave as he did.

The word sent. A word frequently encountered in this chapter is *sent*. David showed his unquestioned power by commanding the “sent” ones. In Hebrew, *shalakh* is actually a common word. It means “to send for, away or out.”⁸ In most cases, David voiced the word in the context of a command: he commanded someone or a thing to be sent.

Since as a high-power-distance monarch David had undisputed authority, his commands were obeyed without question. When in a state of lust he *sent* for Bathsheba, she obeyed; when he *sent* word to Joab, he obeyed; when Joab (as commander and representative of the king) *sent* Uriah back to Jerusalem, Uriah obeyed; when David *sent* Uriah back to the battlefield, Uriah obeyed; when Joab *sent* word of Uriah’s death to David, David was pleased; when David *sent* and brought Bathsheba to his house to be his wife, Bathsheba obeyed. There was no questioning his authority. Subordinates obeyed what was commanded them.

Symmetric parallel. With the word *sent* in this narrative, we can observe the employment of an ancient literary device called symmetric parallelism, also called an inverse parallel, or, more technically, a chiasm. This literary tool has been used in Eastern literature down through the centuries. In it, the primary point or emphasis comes in the center, with a secondary point most often coming at the beginning and end. The pattern of a chiasm is as follows:

- A1.
- B1.
- C1.
- C2.
- B2.
- A2.⁹

Notice the symmetric parallelism in the following when the word *sent* is followed within the symmetric pattern:

A1. (Bathsheba) “So David sent messengers and took her”

(2 Sam 11:4)

B1. (Joab) “So David sent word to Joab, ‘Send me Uriah the

Hittite.’” (2 Sam 11:6)

C1. (Uriah) “And Joab sent Uriah to David” (2 Sam 11:6)

C2. (Uriah) “Tomorrow I will send you back” (2 Sam 11:12)

B2. (Joab) “Then Joab sent and told David all the news”

(2 Sam 11:18)

A2. (Bathsheba) “David sent and brought her to his house, and she

became his wife and bore him a son. (2 Sam 11:27)

This literary pattern reveals that the primary character in the story is neither David nor Bathsheba, as most readers think. Rather the primary character and focus is Uriah the Hittite. He is the one most grievously wronged. He is the one who lost everything because of David’s impropriety. He, a foreigner, demonstrated the richest of virtues. He is the one person among them all who demonstrated integrity of heart. If there is a hero in this story, it is he! He is primary whereas his wife is secondary. Maybe this is why Uriah is mentioned by name in Matthew’s genealogical record of Jesus rather than Bathsheba, as would be expected (Mt 1:6). Maybe this is why he is due much more honor than is generally given.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

The phenomenon of power-distance in culture is real. In general, Asian, Eastern European, African, and some Latin American countries are high-power-distance cultures. Northern Europe, Great Britain, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and some Latin American countries primarily value low power-distance.¹⁰

David is not only vulnerable, he's unaccountable. . . . David was in bed, not in battle. Had he been where he belonged—with his troops—there would never have been the Bathsheba episode. Our greatest battles don't usually come when we're working hard; they come when we have some leisure, when we've got time on our hands, when we're bored.

**CHARLES SWINDOLL,
*DAVID: A MAN OF PASSION AND DESTINY***

Crosscultural workers need to recognize the kind of power-distance culture in which they work. Doing so prevents much frustration and resentment. It clarifies the choice of government the people prefer, the way decisions are made in churches and organizations, whether employees have license to give suggestions and so on. Power-distance values explain much about these preferences.

But another takeaway of David's misbehavior can't be ignored. Sin is wrong and hurtful in every culture. It destroys other people and damages relationships. The universal truth (supracultural principle) that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23) holds true in every culture. It may cause the death of a marriage, a family, a career, a dream, a relationship, or even a person. This is where the light of the gospel brings hope and help to every culture. This is why gospel message

bearers are so sorely needed and highly valued. This is what makes crossing cultures so important.

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

A Crosscultural Truth Seeker

1 KINGS 10:1-13

Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath in her.

And she said to the king, "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard. Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness." Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones. Never again came such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. . . .

And King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all that she desired, whatever she asked besides what was given her by the bounty of King Solomon. So she turned and went back to her own land with her servants. (1 Kings 10:1-10, 13)

The United States continues to be the world's undisputed higher-education superpower. More foreign students come to the United States to study than to any other country. Nearly 975,000 international students were enrolled at US colleges and universities in the 2014–2015 year, according to the Institute of International Education.¹ There are now 40 percent more international students studying in the United States than a decade ago, the institute found.

China is by far the leading source of foreign students in the United States (274,439 students, or 31.2 percent of the total), followed by India (13.6 percent), South Korea (6.5 percent), and Saudi Arabia (6.1 percent). These students come believing they'll acquire the best education in the world, so they're willing to cross great distances to get it. They perceive America as the source of

intellectual acumen, no matter what academic discipline they engage. There's a drawing power that brings them here: the draw of prestige, of intellectual advance, and of educational freedom.

However, today's international students aren't the first generation to seek wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in a distant country. The queen of Sheba of Old Testament times did the same. Although we don't know her name, we know much about her determination to seek after truth, from what has been recorded of her visit to Solomon, king of Israel. She was drawn to the land of Israel through Solomon's acclaim of wealth and wisdom.

THE SETTING

Just where was this queen from? Historians, archeologists and biblical scholars are uncertain exactly where the land of Sheba was located in bygone eras. We do know that it was south of the land of Israel, for Jesus praised this determined and inquisitive woman as “the queen of the South” (Mt 12:42; Lk 11:31). Whether her kingdom was in eastern Ethiopia, the southern tip of Arabia, or a kingdom that comprised both areas, one thing is certain: the queen of Sheba made an arduous thousand-mile-plus journey to meet King Solomon.

Normally, a monarch would have sent emissaries to another court to make an inquiry rather than undertake such a journey in person. Not the queen of Sheba. Solomon’s fame, fortune, and wisdom were of such magnitude—bordering on the incredible—that she determined to see for herself if such a wise and noble man really existed. Could the stories that filtered into her palace, especially of his abundant wealth, be true? Was it possible that such a man of intelligence and influence reigned in a tiny land far to the north?

The queen herself was no second-rate monarch. She too possessed splendor and intelligence, and she was also worth a fortune: “She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones” (1 Kings 10:2). If Solomon, like Bill Gates today, had topped an annual list of the world’s wealthiest people, she was probably not too far behind. She was one of the most powerful and wealthiest women in the world.

Yet what really drove her to meet with Solomon was her intellectual curiosity. She too was extremely intelligent. She wanted to test and see if Solomon’s mind matched her own. If it did, she aspired to learn even more from this man who knew more than she. So, after her welcome into Solomon’s court, she peppered him with hard questions. She asked him the most difficult questions she could think of, because she wanted to learn new things for herself.

Over the course of many meetings, the learning process went both ways; she also told him all that was on her mind (1 Kings 10:2-3). I have had African church leaders tell me that in all likelihood she imparted to Solomon things from an African worldview he didn't know and that Solomon took these to heart and recorded bits of African wisdom in the book of Proverbs. Whether this is simple conjecture or not, the fact remains that these two made an impression on each other.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Most of us will never have an opportunity to interact crossculturally at such a high social and political level as these wealthy monarchs. Nevertheless, we can learn lessons from their royal crosscultural interaction that are applicable today.

It's interesting to note that in this high-level crosscultural encounter, we see both similarities and differences between the two in table 14.1.

Table 14.1. Comparing Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

Similarities	Differences
Both of royalty	Gender
Both very wealthy	Language (probably used interpreters)
Both extremely intelligent	Ethnicity
Both wielded absolute power	Beliefs, values, and customs

From this encounter emerges a model that's helpful in understanding crosscultural visitors among us today. We also see a precursor to the drawing power of the gospel in today's globalized environment. The Scriptures contain truths that bring light to a dark and fallen world. The gospel acts like a magnet, drawing people, like this foreign queen, to a greater understanding of God, the world and life in general. Today, the unprecedented interconnectedness of the world presents opportunity for those who are distant to come and discover for themselves God's revelation and provision for salvation. Notice the progression that unfolds as this regal visitor meets with God's noble representative:

She made a remarkable effort to seek out truth (going). As mentioned earlier, this determined queen traveled at least a thousand miles or more (some believe 1,300 miles) to personally meet with Solomon. For her and her

entourage, this was a major expedition. The investment of time, effort, human resources, and money in such an arduous journey was enormous. She didn't journey light or alone. A very great retinue of soldiers, staff, slaves, and camels accompanied her (1 Kings 10:1-2). She arrived in Solomon's courts with an impressive display of the seriousness of her search as only royalty could muster. This crosscultural meeting cost her much.

She seriously engaged the learning process (engaging). Unlike some international students, who spend much of their time in other pursuits while away from their homeland, this queen fully engaged the task that brought her from afar. She asked penetrating, hard, probing questions of Solomon. She did this over the course of weeks, if not months. She took time to ask Solomon about everything ranging from the existence of God to the origin of the world to the meaning of life to the consummation of all things—and everything in between.

Solomon was prepared with ready answers. There was nothing he couldn't explain to her (1 Kings 10:3). Having been endowed with a wise and discerning mind as a gift from God (1 Kings 3:10-13), Solomon was a conveyer of wisdom, knowledge, and truth to her. She wasn't disappointed. She took delight in the depth of his answers. She learned much from the only person on earth divinely endowed to fulfill her quest for truth. She didn't regret that she had undertaken such extraordinary effort to seek out Solomon. He was uniquely prepared to give answers to others like her who had little if any access to divine revelation.

She witnessed firsthand the benefits of applied wisdom and truth (observing and absorbing). The queen of Sheba scrutinized all that Solomon possessed and had built. All that met her eyes stunned her. She saw firsthand the blessings and benefits that come with the application of godly wisdom. The extravagance surrounding Solomon and his court profoundly affected her. Her mind took in the number and quality of the buildings he had built, the delicate food on his table, the number of servants he owned, the quality of the clothes that all around him wore, the number of cupbearers that served him, and the quantity of animals used for burnt offerings. She was duly impressed.

Solomon's wisdom and prosperity surpassed all the secondhand reports that she'd heard (1 Kings 10:7). A parallel biblical truth is evident in the example of

Solomon: the residual benefits of obeying God’s Word and walking in his ways provide an avenue for prosperity. Followers of God’s law aren’t enslaved to evil practices that waste time and resources and break relationships. The Scriptures guide individuals in making life choices that yield concrete personal benefits.

She responded with wonder at what she experienced (responding). The totality of it all impacted her such that she was fully awestruck. She was completely “overwhelmed”; it literally took her breath away (1 Kings 10:5 NIV). She was astonished at the fullness of Solomon’s glory. While back in her homeland, she had heard reports of the wealth and wisdom of Solomon. Those reports seemed incredible to her at the time. She couldn’t and wouldn’t believe it all to be true until she had witnessed it herself. But now that she had witnessed it with her own eyes, her mind could only respond in awe and amazement.

But it didn’t stop there. She also had an emotional response. The reader can almost feel her elation as she blurted out to Solomon, “Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom” (1 Kings 10:8). She commended Solomon for his benevolent leadership. One of the marks of a good leader is having content underlings. Solomon had such subjects. Happy employees make for productive employees. Job satisfaction expressed by workers consistently ranks high on the lists of marks of a good leader.

She recognized that God was the ultimate source of all that she witnessed (acknowledging). The queen blessed God for his sovereign dealings in Solomon’s life to make him the kind of king who exercised two qualities that were a priority to her: justice and righteousness (1 Kings 10:9). She had come from afar to discover wisdom, but ultimately she discovered God. Now she acknowledged a God that she otherwise would not have known, saying, “Blessed be the LORD your God” (1 Kings 10:9). She used YHWH, the specially revealed, covenant name for God to the Hebrews. This was a name for God previously unknown to her.

She not only discovered YHWH, but believed in him, praised him, and worshiped him. Philip Ryken described her response this way: “Thus the queen of Sheba worshipped the king’s royal majesty. She rejoiced in the ruler of God’s

kingdom, and in that rejoicing, she worshiped the royal majesty of God himself—the King of all kings. The queen recognized that Solomon was God’s gift to his people—a gift of his everlasting love.”²

This foreign queen became one of the most notable fulfillments of the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) that through him all nations would be blessed by God’s saving grace. It also was a partial fulfillment of Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple just a few years earlier, when he prayed “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God” (1 Kings 8:60). Here we see in this foreign queen’s worship of God a foreshadowing of the drawing power of the gospel through believers today.

She expressed gratitude to Solomon (appreciating). Before she departed for her homeland, the queen bestowed lavish gifts of gold, spices, and precious stones on Solomon (1 Kings 10:10). Solomon reciprocated by granting her whatever she desired from his bounty (1 Kings 10:13). This mutual exchange of gifts demonstrated the high degree of respect and honor the two had for each another. No doubt she, now a wiser person, benefited from time spent with Solomon and expressed her indebtedness to him by lavishing costly gifts on him. As a foreign visitor and seeker of truth, she showed gratitude to him for all she had discovered for her mind and for her heart, for she had discovered God.

She went home a different person (returning). As a visitor who had come from afar, the queen of Sheba never intended to stay permanently. She had come seeking a benefit that would make her an even more judicious ruler. Once that end had been achieved, she departed, returning to her homeland a more astute queen. The cross-pollination of views and ideas between her and Solomon, resulting from her crosscultural learning experience, had made her trip well worth the effort.

LEARNING STAGES OF A CROSSCULTURAL SEEKER

When you meet a foreign student or perhaps a visiting businessperson who's in your country to learn, how do you view such a person? Do you see her simply as a foreigner on an intellectual quest, but nothing more? Or do you see her as an individual who is going through social, cultural, mental, emotional, and spiritual experiences that are opening her mind to the gospel? That would be the correct way to view such a person. She's in transition, experiencing disorientation in most areas of life. She's looking for answers. She's seeking what is true.

This visit of the queen of Sheba to the palace of Solomon demonstrates the stages a typical foreigner proceeds through as he comes to learn. Never look at him as someone who isn't being impacted by what he encounters. He isn't ambivalent to what he's encountering or closed off to the new cultural experiences in which he's enmeshed.

On the contrary, he's thinking through the new beliefs, values, and customs he's exposed to and is evaluating the validity of his own. He has come to your country aware that his experiences will be different from those in his home culture and will impact him. Whether he knows it or not, he is ripe for change. As believers, we have the unique opportunity to impact such people for Christ. A crosscultural seeker cycle emerges from this biblical narrative, revealing the normal stages such foreign seekers pass through. The cycle has seven stages, illustrated in figure 14.1.

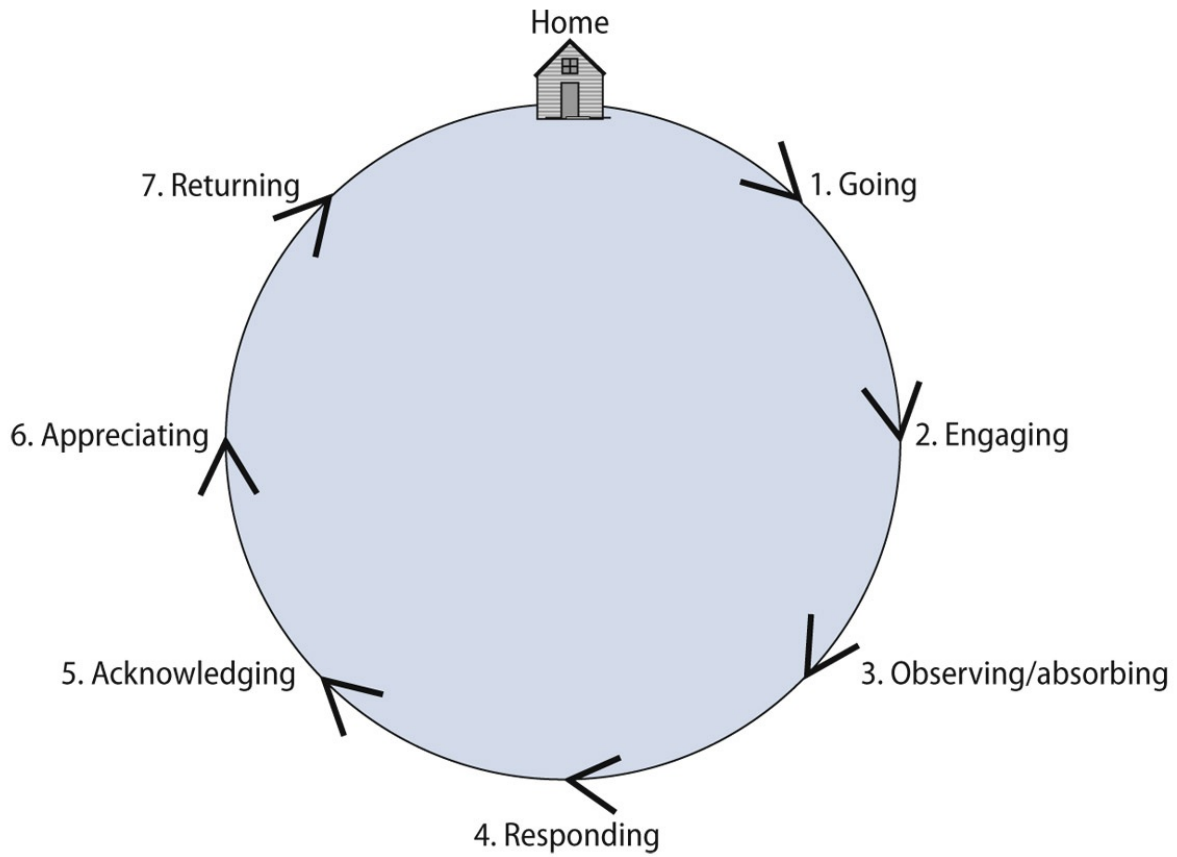


Figure 14.1. The crosscultural seeker cycle

The key for us as Great Commission Christians is to ascertain what stage a crosscultural guest is in when we meet her and then lead her through the remaining stages of the cycle. We help her through the cycle with the desired end of having her encounter Christ. Ideally, the goal is to have her come to an acknowledgement of the God of Scripture and to embrace Jesus in saving faith before returning to her homeland.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Like the queen of Sheba, countless internationals are living among us, seeking after truth. They're in our high schools, universities, or workplaces. Wherever they might be, they're experiencing cultural dissonance that has opened them to new ideas that have them evaluating and questioning their long-held beliefs, values, and customs. They are ripe for change.

God has providentially brought these international visitors to our doorsteps so that they might encounter God and the gospel through us. For many internationals, it's their first opportunity to hear such a message. We need to be perceptive, discovering where they are in their pilgrimage, then sensitive to meeting them at a point that will lead them to encounter Jesus.

As the King of all kings, Jesus now deserves and receives the worship and the praise of all nations. He is not the King of the Jews only but also of the Arabs, the Asians, the Africans, and the Americans. Jesus Christ is the savior of the world. This is why the queen of Sheba is so significant and why her journey to Jerusalem is one of the most important state visits in the history of the world. Her royal highness is a gospel sign pointing us to the global worship of Jesus Christ. The international fame of Solomon anticipates the attractive power of Jesus Christ, the worldwide scope of his kingdom.

**PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN,
*KING SOLOMON***

Naaman

*The Dilemma of Conflicting
Religious Obligation*

2 KINGS 5:1-19

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. . . .

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Then Naaman said, "If not, please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD. In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter." He said to him, Go in peace." (2 Kings 5:1-5, 15-19).

There's a hot and sandy, oil-rich kingdom in the heart of the Middle East where a US-based mission has for decades operated one of the largest state-of-the-art hospitals in the region. Back when this kingdom was poor and struggling to modernize, the royal family granted permission to the mission to open and operate the hospital. Ever since, the hospital has had the reputation of being the best in the region.

Over the years, many members of the royal family have been served at the hospital. Their babies have been delivered and sicknesses treated. Long-term encounters between mission medical staff and royal family members have developed into friendships so deep that they've given opportunity for the gospel to be shared. Some in that family—just a handful—have become secret followers of Christ.

Yet if these believers were to make their faith known publicly, it would be both politically devastating and life threatening. These few profess their faith in private to a trusted few, while maintaining all the outward appearances of following Islam. They secretly maintain their faith but publicly attend the mosque. Their conversion to Christ has brought about a dilemma of conflicting religious obligation.

THE SETTING

Naaman's miraculous healing is an amazing crosscultural account of God's guidance, God's power, and God's breaking of a haughty man's pride to bring him to repentance. It's also an instance of a new believer's dilemma of conflicting religious obligation.

Naaman, a general and commander of the armies of the king of Syria, was a man of power, position, and prestige. All those advantages puffed up this distinguished though unregenerate man with an air of superiority and pride. Yet, as he had with the apostle Paul centuries later, God broke this arrogant, self-willed man's heart. In the end, he became a trophy of God's grace.

The handsome Naaman had contracted the dreaded disease of leprosy.¹ He was compelled to cross over into another culture to find the physical (and eventually spiritual) healing he so desperately needed. Just as years earlier the queen of Sheba had been brought to a knowledge of God through the drawing power of a blessed Israel under King Solomon, so Naaman was drawn to that knowledge, beginning with the testimony of a captive Jewish servant girl. As events unfolded, he realized that if he were to experience healing, he would have to journey across the border to the neighboring country of Israel. His desperate state and the stigma of his physical condition prompted him to do so.

[The Thai sufferer's] face was lumpy and flushed. Partial paralysis in his eyelids prevented him from closing them completely. The conjunctive above his lower lids was red with inflammation, the outer edges holding beads of pus. Leprosy had taken his eyebrows and the bridge of his nose. His thumbs could no longer move, but the leprosy had not quite reduced his fingers to stumps.

**ROSE DOWSETT AND CHAD BERRY,
GOD'S FAITHFULNESS: STORIES FROM THE
CHINA INLAND MISSION AND OMF INTERNATIONAL**

Naaman's road to recovery became a series of humbling experiences. They were a direct attack on his arrogance, steadily chipping away at his pride. It started with him first having to believe the word of one of the most insignificant people in his household: a captive servant, and a young girl at that. Next he had to take a journey to the place of healing, rather than have the healer summoned to him.

Then, once in a foreign land, he was sent from the palace of the king of Israel to the dwelling of the lowly prophet Elisha. Adding insult to injury, that prophet showed complete disrespect and disregard of his personhood by refusing even to come out to speak with him. Last, he was sent without display or notice to wash in the muddy Jordan River—not once, but seven times. Naaman's road to recovery became a journey of progressive humiliation. He was forced to cross over class distinction, country border, and cultural bias.

Yet in the end he obeyed—just barely—and recovered his health. Naaman was miraculously and completely healed of leprosy. A changed man, he returned to Elisha to thank him before setting off for his homeland. While speaking to Elisha, he made some telling statements that proved he had also experienced a spiritual healing, the conversion of his soul. He returned to Syria a different man, both physically and spiritually.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

This account of the healing of Naaman brings to the fore several questions related to crosscultural ministry.

Does God direct events to bring the lost to himself? The answer is a resounding yes! Naaman was the most improbable candidate of that era to experience God's grace. He was a belligerent commander of enemy forces. Yet the hand of God orchestrating events pops out clearly in this story. Represented in the account is a balance between ordinary events and human instrumentality. God used both to bring about his greater purpose and Naaman's personal good.

Recently SAT-7 Channel 5 interviewed 10-year-old Myriam from Mosul, Iraq. Her family fled their home last July with hundreds of thousands of other Christians, finding safety in Kurdistan's Irbil. Asked about her feelings toward those who drove her from her home, Myriam wondered why they did this. Then she said: "I will only ask God to forgive them. Why should they be killed?" Pan-Arabic *al-Arabia* praised Myriam for confronting ISIS with love. "Everyone who listens to her is astounded," echoed the Egyptian. Leading Lebanese daily *al-Nahar* called for the clip to be shown in the nation's schools as a lesson in humanity.

**FROM "FORGIVING ISIS: CHRISTIAN
'RESISTANCE' VIDEOS GO VIRAL IN ARAB WORLD,"
CHRISTIANITY TODAY, MARCH 17, 2015**

First, there is an offer of hope from the most unlikely of sources—a foreign young girl who "happened" to be at the right place at the right time. This unnamed Jewish maid had been carried off from her homeland in one of his raids and was now a servant in his household. As Daniel Bacon stated, "What an amazing set of circumstances was set in motion by very ordinary means—one person offering pertinent information and then another taking action on it."²

Stop and think about it. That exploited servant girl could have become so bitter about her situation that she could have wished for her master to rot to death—literally. But she didn't. Her enemy became the focus of her compassion; her master's well-being became her concern.

Second, God superintended Naaman's steps so he could discover the source of healing information: Elisha. Although he mistakenly thought the source of healing would be found at the royal court of Israel, Naaman grudgingly condescended to meet a lowly prophet some distance away from the palace. Often today people are brought to the knowledge of God by the most unimpressive messengers.

Third, although God miraculously healed, he provided normal, ordinary steps to follow. Naaman wanted something spectacular to happen: the waving of Elisha's hand over his body to cure him (2 Kings 5:11). In the end, God brought healing and wholeness to Naaman through his simple act of following instructions. Again Bacon observed, "God led Naaman to that place of help and healing, but used a whole series of 'ordinary' things before the 'extraordinary' act of healing took place."³

So, back to our question. Does God direct events to bring lost people, notably those of another culture, to himself? Yes, he certainly does. This assurance should prompt crosscultural message bearers today to persist in their place of witness. Naaman's healing bears out the fact that God uses ordinary means coupled with human instruments to bring about his good purposes.

Was Naaman truly "converted"? All indications point to the fact that Naaman became a genuine believer in and lifelong follower of the Most High God. This is evident from what he said to Elisha, what he did before leaving Israel, and what he intended to do after his arrival home.

1. Naaman confesses a genuine belief in the true God. Amazed at his complete recovery, he states: "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (5:15). Naaman uses the word *Elohim* for God, mentioned specifically in the plural with the article, indicating that it is the supreme

God he is referring to. Naaman confesses to Elisha that he now believes that there is no God in all the earth but the God of Israel.

2. Naaman takes his profession of faith a step further. He requests that enough soil from Israel be given him (5:17) that upon return to Syria he could make an altar. It appears that somewhere along the way, following his dipping in the Jordan River and before meeting with Elisha, Naaman was made aware that true followers of God worship on altars not of hewn stone, but of natural stone and dirt. This was in keeping with instructions given to Israel in Exodus 20:24-25. Naaman's request for "two mule loads of earth" was for correctly worshiping God after he returned home. On that altar he could regularly offer sacrifices as evidence of his determination to forsake all other gods.
3. Naaman publicly commits to Elisha that he will not worship any other God. "Your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD" (5:17). Here we see Naaman making a stronger commitment to God than that in verse 15. When he states, "to any god but the LORD," he uses the word *Yahweh* for God, the exclusive God of Israel, the Self Existent One. Naaman's pledge shows that his switch of divine allegiance is complete.
4. Naaman was looking ahead. He knew that upon his return to Syria he would be obligated as the high commander of the Syrian forces to participate in the worship of the Syrian god Rimmon. On his way to Elisha, he had thought through the implications of his heart decision. He was being realistic—knowing that his high profile position demanded a show of allegiance to the king and his god. He needed counsel and assurance from a seasoned, godly leader in this matter of spiritual integrity. His struggle with an outward display of perceived syncretism shows the depth of his understanding of the implications of his new allegiance.

Did Naaman compromise his newfound faith by bowing in the temple of Rimmon? Naaman was astute enough to understand that his new belief would have social and religious implications upon his return home. It could even

disqualify him from his prestigious position. Persecution awaited, “I bow myself in the house of Rimmon” (2 Kings 5:18), something he no longer had the heart to do. He was concerned about compromising his faith on the one hand and losing his position on the other. Naaman knew that going back into his polytheistic world and facing the evil of the day would be a test of his resolve.

Believers in highly restrictive religious environments today feel this tension acutely. Most Muslim contexts immediately come to mind. Many Hindu and Buddhist contexts are resistant to members leaving their religion as well. Naaman’s situation was not unlike that of many believers today.

Was Naaman’s syncretistic dilemma representative of a strand of today’s “insider movement,” in which true followers of Jesus, out of intense pressure, opt to attend the religious services of the dominant surrounding religion because of social repercussions if they don’t? Would the attitude of Naaman’s heart and his internal commitment to God override his nominal, half-hearted display of participating in the rituals of another religion? Would the Lord “pardon your servant?” as he asked Elisha (2 Kings 5:18).

The answers to these questions are difficult to discover. Elisha gave a seemingly ambiguous “Go in peace” answer. That response seemed to give assurance that God understood the predicament and that the deeper issue was the attitude of Naaman’s heart. His outward display was not as crucial as his inward condition.

But there’s another consideration to take into account. “Pioneer” believers in a hostile culture need to infiltrate or penetrate their community, bringing the first ray of gospel light. As the firstfruits of a future harvest, their presence, no matter how it appears outwardly to be compromised, is virtually unavoidable for that initial period. It may be that their transformed behavior will be all the witness that’s feasible during that period. Their new set of values (remember our definition) lived out in their home community is their only course of witness. But even that minimal witness will be noticed by some and have a positive impact. God’s truth always does.

Ideally, that seed will germinate and have increasing influence as additional light bearers affect an ever greater circle of people until the emergence of a

critical mass of Christ followers is realized. Sometimes patience over time is the most prudent way of establishing a permanent witness in a historically resistant environment, even if it's an imperfect witness. Sometimes a "Go in peace" is the only encouragement that can be offered in such situations.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

God is at work, drawing people to himself through ordinary means coupled with human instruments he has placed as strategic witnesses. Unbelievers, no matter what their cultural heritage, are experiencing saving grace and becoming genuine believers in Christ. They evidence their faith by the outward display of commitments that are undeniably genuine. Yet some who return to resistant environments face a dilemma of conflicting religious obligations in their home communities. We need to exercise patience with new believers who are caught in such a quandary as they struggle to live out their faith. Like Elisha, there are times when all we can offer is a blessing of peace.

Jonah

Ethnocentrism to a Fault

JONAH 1–4

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. . . .

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God. . . .

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.” (Jon 1:1-3; 3:1-5; 4:1-2)

I had been serving on the island of Papua, Indonesia, for nearly ten years and should have known better. My reaction to a poor Javanese Muslim family was inexcusable. Allow me to give the backdrop of my encounter with them, so you can understand.

The island of New Guinea, located just north of Australia, is politically divided in two. In the 1800s, the Australians and the Dutch drew a line directly down the middle of the island and declared the western half (where I lived) Dutch New Guinea. In the mid-1960s, the Dutch relinquished control of their side to Indonesia; for years they had been claiming rights to it. Subsequently, the Indonesians named their new province West Irian, then Irian Jaya, and now West Papua.

Within a few years, the Indonesian government began a huge transmigration project, relocating hundreds of thousands of predominately Javanese Muslims onto the island. The predominately Christian native people, among whom our mission worked, were being pushed off their homeland and were quickly

becoming a minority in their own land. The situation mirrored closely what European settlers did to Native Americans across the United States. Obviously, tensions between the native Papuans and the newly arrived Javanese were high. First the Papuans had been oppressed by the Dutch; now they were being overrun by the Javanese. We in the mission community felt it our duty to protect the rights and livelihoods of the native Papuans.

One morning, as I was working at the mission office as field leader in the coastal town of Manokwari, a family arrived at the door. My Papuan assistant escorted a poor Javanese transmigrated family into the office. They kindly asked for assistance, since they were newly off the government boat and had no funds. I looked at the family with disdain. Here was another family that was going to take away the land and livelihood of “my” Papuan friends.

So instead of lending the little help they requested, I lectured them. I told them that they were part of a larger government project that was well funded by the World Bank. They, I added, were part of a system that promised them a house, a plot of ground, and food until their first year’s crop was harvested. They, I insisted, needed to go across town to the local transmigration office and ask for assistance from the authorities who brought them there. With that, they were escorted out of the office and to the street to find their way to the transmigration office.

I was wrong—completely wrong—in not helping that poor Javanese family. I had turned away “the stranger” among us. I had been curt, unsympathetic, and unhelpful. Instead of seeing this family as an opportunity to show Jesus’ love, I did just the opposite. If they hate me till this day, I don’t blame them. In my zeal to protect “my” native Papuans, I reacted with unhealthy paternalism toward them, personal bias, ethnocentrism, and even racism. I was no better than Jonah.

THE SETTING

The story of Jonah, when taken literally, as I believe it should be, stands as one of the most extraordinary crosscultural accounts in all of Scripture. Many of the elements of the story are counterintuitive. The incredible rescue of Jonah by a large fish in a raging sea and other features are hard to fathom. Why would a descendant of Abraham so adamantly shirk his mission to a Gentile nation when asked? What is the likelihood of an entire city of 120,000 people repenting through one call to repentance? Once that outcome was achieved, how could a true messenger of God stew and fume in anger at the results? Much in this short account is baffling.

Jonah lived during the reign of King Jeroboam II, between 793 and 753 BC. He was from Galilee, a region in the northern kingdom (2 Kings 14:25). He witnessed Jeroboam restore much of its past greatness to Israel by extending Israel's borders. But an enemy loomed large to the east that threatened recent national gains: the expanding, evil empire of the dreaded Assyrians.

The Assyrians were known for their cruelty, and Nineveh was their capital city. God sent Jonah on a crosscultural mission to preach a message of imminent destruction to the Ninevites if they did not repent. But that judgment was exactly what Jonah wished upon them. So he chose to run in the opposite direction. He knew that his compassionate God would show grace to those vile enemies if they were to listen to his message. He wasn't afraid that the Assyrians would reject his message; he was afraid that they would accept it.

But God intervened and turned Jonah around. While onboard ship, a terrifying storm threatened to sink the vessel. Jonah told the ship's crew that he was the cause of the mighty storm, and at his insistence they reluctantly threw him overboard. The storm stopped, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, and three days later he was vomited on shore, alive.

God told him a second time to go to Nineveh, and this time he obeyed. He passed through Nineveh on a preaching tour, fulfilled his mission, and then sat outside the city, pouting because of the results.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Before looking at what was wrong with Jonah in relation to his crosscultural assignment, it's only fair to point out what he did right. Seldom does a failed crosscultural messenger do everything wrong. Matter of fact, he usually is only partially wrong, but wrong in matters that matter most.

Here is what Jonah got right: First, he was willing to leave his homeland and cross over into another culture. In disobedience he headed off in the wrong direction to the wrong people, but at least he was willing to go. Second, he had a correct theology about the spiritual condition of humanity. He confessed, "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD!" (Jon 2:8-9). Third, he recovered well. After all the trauma of his experience at sea and in the belly of the fish, he was obedient to God's second call. He went to Nineveh, though not with a heart of genuine concern, like God's heart (Jon 3:1-3, 10). So he can be applauded for his willingness, his theology, and his recovery.

The three mountains. However, within the story we discover three obstacles that stood in the way of Jonah becoming an effective crosscultural message bearer. Metaphorically, Jonah had to climb over three mountains in succession if he was to reach the hearts of the people of Nineveh. These were not mountains made of rock, dirt, and trees, but mountains that loomed high within his heart. Until he was willing and able to surmount them, he would never become a complete and competent crosscultural servant.

First, there was the mountain of egocentrism. Egocentric means to be "limited in outlook or concern to one's own activities and needs; self-centered; selfish."¹ It's the manifestation of arrogance. Jonah was profoundly self-centered. In chapter one, he went his own way, contrary to God's specific call. In

his prayer in chapter two, in just ten short verses, we read an astounding twenty-five personal pronouns in reference to himself.

Arrogance and self-pity will be the major barriers to pursuing world evangelization. Arrogance with ethno-superiority can be hidden within the justified vision for world evangelization. Self-pity undermines God's work in us and through us.

**PATRICK FUNG,
GENERAL DIRECTOR, OMF INTERNATIONAL**

Now, I lived in Asia long enough to know that the modest way to refer to oneself in an account is in the passive voice. It's humbler, and it's the norm. Not so for Jonah. He seemed to go out of his way to place himself at the center of attention. His prayer is full of I, me, and my. Granted, if one of us were swallowed by a fish and lived inside its belly for three days, we might do the same when telling about it. Jonah certainly did so in this prayer.

Additionally, Jonah's temper tantrum in chapter four reveals his self-centeredness. He is bitter, boastful, and boisterous toward God. It's all about him, not about God's mission.

The second mountain Jonah needed to cross was ethnocentrism. To be *ethnocentric* is to be characterized by or based on the attitude that my ethnic group is superior. It is action based on the belief that my culture is better or more important than others. Jonah needed to get beyond the conviction that his Jewish culture and ethnicity were supremely better than the Gentiles'.

He said outright that he was racially different from everyone else on ship. "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven" (Jon 1:9). It comes across as boastful—of being of singular importance because he was a Jew. Then he segregated himself from the city and its people (Jon 4:5). Instead of engaging in helpful follow-up, he shut himself up, away from any possible interaction with the populous. Was he being snobbish, based on a sense of superiority, to prevent

becoming “tainted” by those dreadful “others” of Nineveh? Only he knew for sure.

The third mountain Jonah needed to surmount was—allow me to coin a new term—punicentrism. Punicentrism is a compound word combining punitive and centric. It’s a fixation on punishment that wishes judgment or the very worst on someone. It takes ethnocentrism a step further, moving from a judgmental attitude to the infliction of deliberate, harmful action. It’s seen in violent forms of racism, dishing out poor treatment or violence against other people because of their race.

My heart is worse than Jonah’s. Jonah hated the Ninevites and I hate the communists because of the way they’ve persecuted my brothers and sisters. I actually have found myself hoping that they are condemned to hell. Now I realize how hard my heart is. . . . I repent . . . please pray for me.

**PASTOR JAMES,
UGANDA**

How did Jonah manifest punicentrism? By wishing the worst on the people of Nineveh. He hoped God would pour out judgment on the people right before his eyes. He even sat outside the city to watch from a distance what would happen to the city (Jon 4:5), hoping for the worst. Instead of wishing the *barak* (blessing), consistent with the mandate to his forefather Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), he wished the worst. He hoped for God’s total annihilation of the city, thinking that maybe God would repeat the judgment of fire and brimstone poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah centuries earlier (Gen 19).

Three interrelated attitudes. Notice that the three attitudes displayed by Jonah toward the Ninevites are not mutually exclusive. They are interrelated, building on each other.

At the core of Jonah’s disobedience was the foundational mindset of egocentrism. Being egotistic prevented Jonah from looking beyond himself and

from having genuine concern for others. For him, it was all about me, myself, and I.

This core attitude led to his further display of ethnocentrism. He could not rise above himself and his own people to demonstrate any compassion toward those of another ethnicity. He didn't see the need to give of himself for the benefit of those of another race—especially when that race was an enemy of his people.

And because that threatening neighbor was mercilessly cruel and hateful, Jonah became cruel and hateful in return. He progressed to the next level of selfishness, desiring the very worst judgment on those to whom he was sent. Once he had groveled in egocentrism and ethnocentrism, he naturally ended with punicentrism. The integral relationship of these three attitudes is illustrated in figure 16.1.

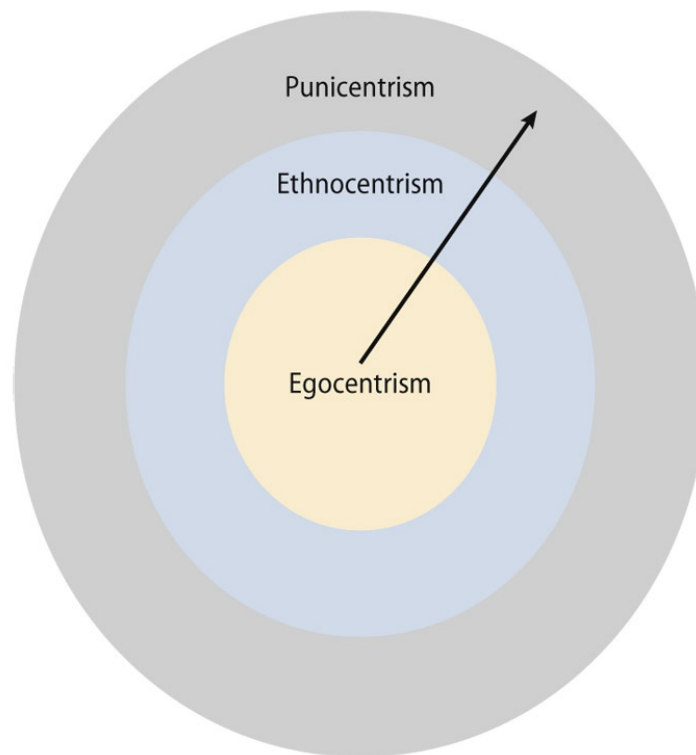


Figure 16.1 Jonah's three attitudes toward the Ninevites

The needed change. Jonah needed to change. He needed a change of heart along with a change of action. He needed spiritual renewal. He needed to conform himself to the image of another prophet who, like him, would come from Galilee seven centuries later. He needed to allow God to do a work in his life as God was attempting to do a work through his life. Ryan Shaw put it this way:

His greatest priority is conforming us into Jesus' likeness, so his ministry to a person is more important than his ministry through that person. In Jonah, God is as concerned with the change he wants to bring in Jonah as the change he desires in Nineveh. In his dealings with Jonah, God prepares Jonah's life for his purposes just as he prepares us. We often misunderstand or resist a process God uses to develop us (as Jonah did), simply because we aren't aware of his strategies.²

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Many of us are more like Jonah than we wish to admit. In the busyness of our crosscultural encounters, we need to remind ourselves not to fall back into the sinful habit of being egocentric, ethnocentric, and punicentric. We need to remember these are wrong and guard against them. Yet, when we look into our hearts, we realize to our horror that these previously conquered mountains tend to reassert themselves. At times, we are no better than Jonah.

Jeremiah

Instructions for Living in a Foreign Land

JEREMIAH 29:1-11

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said: “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD.

“For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Statistics bear out the fact that every year a lot of missionaries cross cultures into foreign lands on long-term assignments. When I say “long term,” I mean years—sometimes a lifetime. If you wonder just how many, consider this report based on professional research:

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary calculates that Christians sent out approximately 400,000 international missionaries in 2010. And nearly half of the world’s top missionary-sending countries are now located in the global South. The CSGC reports that “of the ten countries sending the most missionaries in 2010, three were in the global South: Brazil, South Korea, and India.” Other notable missionary senders included South Africa, the Philippines, Mexico, China, Colombia, and Nigeria. However, the United States still tops the chart by far in terms of total missionaries, sending 127,000 in 2010 compared to the 34,000 sent by No. 2-ranked Brazil.¹

As Great Commission Christians, we applaud the many message bearers from so many countries who are willing to leave their homelands to minister crossculturally for years on end. It just isn't true that the age of the professional missionary is over.

But many of these don't stay as long as they had originally intended. When the glamor, idealism, and romanticism of going to a foreign country wear off, some return to their homeland prematurely. One of the reasons is their inability to adjust to the cultural environment in which they find themselves. They aren't prepared to face the many crosscultural challenges that await them.

THE SETTING

The prophet Jeremiah addressed such a situation. The people of Judah had fallen from God's favor. They had rejected the moral principles upon which their nation had been founded. They had turned from solely worshiping their covenant God to worshiping many gods. Syncretism was so enmeshed in their worship practices that the God of their fathers and forefathers was no longer honored. They ignored the unceasing attempts of prophets and special messengers to call them back to the worship of the one true God.

As promised, God withdrew his hand of protection. He had repeatedly warned that if they did not repent and return to him, he would return them to a state of oppression such as their forefathers had experienced in Egypt nine hundred years before. However, this time they would be taken captive to a distant country in the east, to the land of Babylon.

But they refused to believe such calamity would befall them. They ridiculed the prophet Jeremiah as he warned of the devastation that awaited them. Even as the armies of the Babylonians laid siege to their city, they didn't believe they would be defeated. Obviously, they were mistaken; destruction and devastation did come.

The first conquest of Jerusalem, with its resultant wave of deportation, took place in 605 BC. That was the time when Daniel and his three friends were taken captive, which we read about in the book of Daniel. A second deportation took place in 597 BC, followed by the final, devastating destruction of Jerusalem and deportation in 586 BC. Only a remnant of Jews remained in the homeland. These were mainly old, sick, and useless people who could not have survived an arduous journey to Babylon.

The vast majority of the Jews were herded off to Babylon, called Mesopotamia in Greek, meaning "the country between two rivers." It corresponded most closely with the modern country of Iraq. The Jews were back

to where the father of their nation, Abraham, had originated 1,500 years earlier. But this time they were a captive and displaced people. They arrived distraught and broken, having lost everything: homes, possessions, family members, and freedom. They were condemned to live in a strange land, surrounded by strange beliefs, values, and customs. If they were to survive, they needed to adapt to a new language, a new culture, and a new way of life.

The prophet Jeremiah, who remained in Jerusalem, took pity on these hundreds of thousands of deported captives. He knew it was going to be a long, excruciating experience for all of them. Out of concern for their well-being, he wrote a pastoral letter to help them cope with their new surroundings. That entire first generation was destined to spend the rest of their lives in that foreign land (Jer 29:10). Seventy years meant that at least three generations would live there. Jeremiah recognized that they needed some basic principles for enduring that long-term crosscultural experience, so he wrote instructions on how to survive and thrive in a foreign land.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

These instructions from Jeremiah are timeless; they comprise directives that are applicable for crosscultural living in any age. So from this letter we can extract principles on successfully living long-term in a foreign environment that are helpful to expatriate message bearers, even in this day of globalization.

For the uninformed and uninitiated, there's a tendency to romanticize crosscultural living. This is especially true for those who have been outside their country only as tourists or short-term workers. The day in and day out realities of living in a foreign environment are felt only once a person has been immersed in it for an extended period. Only then do the issues involved in becoming bicultural become real. The following issues that Jeremiah addressed are applicable for the crossing of cultures today.

Crosscultural adjustment. “Build . . . plant . . . eat” (Jer 29:5). It seems that some of the Jewish captives believed that their time in Babylon would be short, so they need not settle in as permanent residents. Some were living in makeshift houses and even refusing to unpack. Jeremiah told them that the reality was just the opposite. Their exile was to last for a long time, possibly the rest of their lives. They needed to settle in as permanent residents.

Jeremiah thus encouraged them to engage in three activities, writing these commands in the imperative. They were to (1) establish places of permanent residence (“build houses”); (2) establish livelihoods (“plant gardens”); and (3) identify with the people by existing on the local diet (“eat what they produce”).

These ancient instructions are still applicable today. Those who engage in long-term mission service do these things, and more. They establish residence by gaining permanent visas and resident papers. They establish a livelihood by obtaining work permits that grant permission to conduct the ministry or work to which they are called. They identify with the people by learning to eat and enjoy the local food. (Nothing shows friendship more than a willingness to eat and

enjoy a meal together.) To these behaviors of integration should be added language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and worldview familiarity. Together, these actions demonstrate an intent to settle in and become an accepted member of the adopted community.

Family. “Take wives . . . have sons . . . multiply” (Jer 29:6). Once again, the Hebrew verbs are imperatives. Jeremiah commanded the people to establish and maintain normal family life in their new country.

There’s a compelling lesson here for expat message bearers today. They are not only to settle into their country of service, but also to raise their families there gladly. They are to establish and maintain a normal family life in their country of service. Challenges related to raising children in another culture and country—and there are many—shouldn’t deter a parent from his or her calling. Children’s schooling is a disconcerting challenge for some. For others, their children’s exposure to the surrounding culture is a concern—not wanting them to be “tainted” by another cultural expression.

In times of stress, it’s easy to rationalize and think that the parents’ calling is having a detrimental effect on their family. But the reality is usually just the opposite. Children can and do thrive in a different cultural environment if parents are positive influencers in their formative crosscultural years. In some cases, children come to love and feel a part of the adopted culture more deeply than their parents ever do.

But let’s take this cultural reality a step further. Notice the related command “and give your daughters in marriage” (Jer 29:6). A possible scenario for expat parents is that of their adult children marrying into the adopted culture in which they were raised. Are you willing to have your sons and daughters marry an eligible resident, whom they (having grown up in that culture) see as little different from themselves? Have you as a missionary parent so integrated into the country and culture that this is something you can accept and bless? Take time to ponder that possibility. It is very real.

Identifying with the host country. “Seek the welfare of the city” (Jer 29:7). It’s interesting to note the depth of identity message bearers are to have with their host county. The “welfare” they are to seek comes from the Hebrew word

shalom, which covers all aspects of peace and plenty and well-being that you could wish on another. It conveys not only the absence of conflict and turmoil but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God.²

Mark Labberton, in his book *Called*, states that this was the point of the exile for Israel: “They were to seek the shalom of the city in which they were oppressed, for in its shalom they would find their shalom. This is the irony that bears the marks of the God of Israel, which is later revealed in Jesus Christ and is now meant to be embodied in the life of the church.”³

Here’s the point: expatriate crosscultural workers aren’t merely to take up residence in their country of service. They are also to become responsible and concerned members of their communities. They should desire the very best for the country in which they reside. Instead of being critical of the country’s politics, form of government, or regulations, which frustrate and hamper them, they should wish the very best—shalom—upon the nation.

Cultivating a spirituality for exile means learning to live inside-out. It isn’t a mere interior spirituality, and the endpoint isn’t just spiritual survival. Living as faithful strangers in a strange land means providing an essential good for the benefit of the surrounding people or context.

**MARK LABBERTON,
*CALLED***

Jeremiah instructed the captives to “pray to the LORD on its behalf” (Jer 29:7). This is the only instance in the Old Testament when the Jews were commanded to pray for a Gentile city.⁴ Here we see the precursor of the New Testament admonition to pray for civil government (Mt 22:21; Rom 13:1).

Expatriate message bearers, as New Testament believers, should do the same. They should take time to pray deliberately for the welfare of their adopted country. They should do so in public—in churches and public meetings—and

thereby set an example to the country's citizens of what it is to be a loyal member of that nation.

A benefit awaits those foreigners who sincerely seek the well-being of their city. Jeremiah said, "For in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:7). The benefit is obvious. If the city or country is free from economic depression, political instability, corruption, crime, and racial and religious tension, expat message bearers are able to conduct their ministry with a minimal of external hindrances. They have a higher likelihood of experiencing progress and success in their ministries. They're able to focus on the task at hand, fully throwing themselves into their calling, rather than being drained by the many dangers and inconveniences that come with social disruption and national instability.

Other belief systems. "Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you . . . for it is a lie" (Jer. 29:8-9). In the context of the letter, Jeremiah referred to the false prophets living among the exiles. They were giving advice and prophecies to the exiles that were the opposite of Jeremiah's. He told the exiles that they must disregard false hopes coming from false prophets.

Today, crosscultural message bearers need to be just as spiritually discerning. They need to speak out against and reject competing revelations. Some may come from competing world religions; others may come from cults that imitate the gospel but are contrary to the essential message of the gospel. One of the tools Satan uses to defeat God's message bearers is deception. It's disheartening when a missionary quits and returns to his homeland because he no longer believes in the exclusive message he was sent out to proclaim.

I can recall a time when, as the Asian regional director for a major mission, I visited our large missionary force in Japan. While visiting around the country, I was told by a veteran missionary that one of the short-term missionaries that I'd orientated the previous year didn't want to meet with me. This short-term worker had left his city of service the day I was to be there. When I asked why, the missionary said that his encounter with Buddhism had led him to believe that it was a kinder, gentler religion than Christianity. He no longer believed that the Buddhists to whom he had been sent needed the gospel, since they were better

people than most Christians he knew. This message bearer had become deceived and lost the focus of the message he was sent to proclaim. One of the most important prayers you can offer for a missionary is that he not be deceived by other belief systems.

Homeland relationships. “When seventy years are completed . . . I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place” (Jer 29:10). Through Jeremiah, God told the captives that they were to live in that foreign land for seventy years. The downside of that prophecy was that they were destined to be there longer than they had anticipated. The upside was the promise that their near descendants would return to their homeland. At least the captivity wouldn’t be as long as the four hundred years their forefathers had experienced in Egypt. God promised that he would bring them home. They were to remember their roots by maintaining their identity until they were back in their homeland.

With modern technologies in transportation and communications, it isn’t difficult for today’s message bearers to visit often and communicate consistently with the country of their roots. Frankly, it’s a growing expectation. A very small percentage prefer to retire and die in their country of service. The overwhelming majority will return home, so maintaining strong relationships with family, friends, churches, and supporters back in the homeland is imperative.

Trust in God’s providential care. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer 29:11). I recently visited the home of a retired missionary couple that had faithfully served in Kenya for forty years. Upon entering their home, I couldn’t help but notice this verse on their wall, nicely framed. Next to Matthew 28:20, this verse is probably the most comforting and reassuring expression of God’s providential care in all of Scripture. But it’s also the most misapplied when divorced from its original intent. Numerous hermeneutical purists insist this was a promise that God gave solely to the deported Jews whom Jeremiah was addressing in his letter. They bewail the fact that present-day believers claim it.

Strictly speaking, this is indeed God’s wonderful promise to the captive Jews, assuring them that he would be with them throughout the trials and

hardships of their captivity and that he would eventually return them to their homeland. He promised them “welfare” (shalom). This is the same shalom mentioned in Jeremiah 29:7, which they were to wish upon the foreign cities to which they were taken. Again, the rich derivative meanings of shalom pertain to everything good: safety, happiness, friendliness, health, prosperity, and peace. These are all parts of the “plans” God had for them while they lived far from their native land.

“A future and a hope” speaks of God’s reassurance of good things yet to come, which includes the promise of their return to their country within seventy years (Jer 29:10). God hadn’t permanently abandoned them. He hadn’t discarded them forever. Their descendants would once again enjoy his presence and blessing back in their homeland.

So this question arises: Can message bearers working in distant lands today apply this promise to their lives and ministries as well? Yes, I believe they can. Although the specific promise was given to the Jews, the general promise of God’s providential care holds true for his obedient people in all ages. Let me explain why I believe crosscultural message bearers, like the retired couple from Kenya, can claim this promise.

The God who sent captive Israel into a foreign country because of disobedience is the same God who sends workers, in obedience to his call, into distant nations today. Since he is the God of shalom, his peace and welfare go with his emissaries. Jesus verbalized that peace in his first post-resurrection commissioning statement to the disciples,⁵ when he said to them, “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:21). Reassurance was so important that Jesus made it a point to bestow peace on the disciples at the very front of his commissioning process.

These words of calm and peace are as heartening to missionaries in this age as they were to the disciples back then. In a world full of uncertainty, messengers of Christ are to possess the peace of Christ, for their very task is to present to the world the Prince of Peace. Those who have experienced peace with God also have peace within themselves. The inner peace of a pardoned sinner grounds the heart for service and witness, even in the midst of disconcerting circumstances.

Additionally, the assurances found in this verse from Jeremiah are the essence of what Jesus meant as he commissioned his disciples three weeks later on a mountain in Galilee. It's reiterated in the final sentence of that commission: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). That would have been a hollow promise on Jesus' part if it didn't include the essence of shalom promised to Israel years before, through Jeremiah. So, by extension and as a general rule, this promise of shalom can fortify and reassure crosscultural workers today who obediently follow God's guidance.

Granted, it doesn't guarantee to each a blessed, smooth-sailing experience. Tragic situations do arise. Harm does befall some who go. Bad things can and do happen. This verse isn't a blank check of guaranteed perpetual safety. But the overriding promise is something all message bearers can cling to as they venture out on mission. God's presence goes with them in difficulty and danger, through difficulty and danger, and at times will even keep them out of difficulty and danger. God knows the plans he has for them—and that is reassuring enough.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

It isn't easy to live and thrive in a foreign country. Crosscultural adjustments are necessary if we are to live and minister successfully in a foreign land. But God, through a letter written by the prophet Jeremiah, has given instructions on how to do just that. It's uncanny how many of the issues faced by expatriate message bearers today are addressed. Living in another country to where we have been sent can be a successful experience when these principles are valued and applied.

Daniel

*Staying True to God as a Transnational
Student*

DANIEL 1:1-21

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. . . .

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. . . .

As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers that were in all his kingdom. And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. (Dan 1:1-4, 8, 17-21)

The movement of students between countries today is massive. It's an unstoppable phenomenon, with the numbers continuing to climb annually. Transnational education is big business all around the globe. Pull factors such as higher-quality education, better living conditions, and stronger labor markets have driven the expansion of international student mobility since the 2008 financial crisis. The United States is their leading destination.

Again, from 2000 to 2011, the global population of international students more than doubled to 4.5 million. It reached over 5 million in 2015. China, India, and South Korea are the leading countries from which international students originate; about 55 percent of international students come from them. European students are on the move as well. They account for close to 25 percent of international students in the United States.

These students contributed almost \$27 billion to the US economy in 2014.¹ About 975,000 were enrolled in higher education programs, with Chinese students comprising the largest block.² The campus of the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) sits next to Chicago's center. There are so many Indian and Chinese students enrolled, some have whimsically reinterpreted UIC to mean University of India China.

Due to the large number of Christians in Korea, China, and Europe, many of today's international students claim Christianity as their religious affiliation. Although there is no firm supporting data, we can conjecture that if 10 percent of international students are Christian (by either tradition or conviction), they comprise close to 450,000 students studying abroad. Also, since Christians make up 33 percent of the world's population, that estimate might be on the conservative side.

That being the case, Christian students represent a significant pool of individuals in need of guidance at a formative time of their lives. They need guidance on how to live out their faith crossculturally in both hostile educational environments and compromising social settings. They need direction on staying true to their biblically based beliefs, values, and customs as they cross borders and cultures to study.

The marks of a God-honoring crosscultural student found in the first chapter of Daniel can apply to three categories of students today. The first is the increasingly numerous high school students who study abroad as exchange students. Second, and the most common category, is young people straight out of secondary schools who are pursuing a bachelor's degree and beyond. A third category is ministry professionals who enroll in schools abroad to gain student visas, but with the intent of doing ministry in their host country. Many of these use this educational platform to enter restricted-access countries.

Although the term "international student" is a modern contrivance, Daniel and his three friends (and other unnamed Jewish youth) functioned as such while enrolled in the royal education system in Babylon two and a half millennia ago. Young Daniel, along with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, serve as models of how to stay true to God while studying abroad.

THE SETTING

In 605 BC, the armies of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in the first of three waves of conquest. Under a program of deportation, a large segment of captive Jews was carried off to Babylon for permanent resettlement. Among the deportees were some whom King Nebuchadnezzar saw as valuable to his kingdom's welfare. Contrary to the practice of the Assyrian empire before him, as general policy Nebuchadnezzar reeducated and then utilized the best of the best of captive peoples.

He established a three-year educational program, and some of the choice Jewish youth were educated in the literature, language, and customs of the Babylonians. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were among those selected. At the end of their three-year study program, there would be a further selection. Those who excelled would be chosen to serve the king and his kingdom. The most outstanding of these would serve at the heart of his kingdom—right in the capital city.

The Jewish youths entered into a huge cultural adjustment upon arrival in Babylon. John Lennox described it this way:

As part of his policy for dealing with conquered nations, Nebuchadnezzar took the best of their young men to Babylon in order to have them trained to serve in his administration. Daniel and his friends were judged to be suitable material for that training, and so they were taken from their families, society, and culture, and transported to a strange and unfamiliar land many miles away. They had to cope not only with the emotional trauma of forcible removal from their parents, but also with the sheer strangeness of their new surroundings—new language, new customs, new political system, new laws, new education system, new beliefs. It must have been overwhelming.³

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

The events of Daniel 1 relate closely to what international students experience today. While the queen of Sheba was drawn to the land of Israel as a seeker after truth, Daniel tells the story of God-fearing Jews already saturated in truth. Daniel serves as a prototype of the ideal “believing student,” leaving his homeland but remaining rooted in truth and living out that truth.

That’s why Daniel can be compared to Christ followers today who cross national boundaries as transnational students. Granted, Daniel didn’t go of his own free will (Dan 1:3). He was one of the privileged captives placed into a three-year study program instituted by the conquering king of Babylon (Dan 1:5).

Nonetheless, the dynamics of Daniel being uprooted from the Jewish culture and homeland, then transported to Babylon for formal education, align with what Christ-following international students experience today. In this account, Daniel, along with his three companions, exhibits marks of God-honoring crosscultural astuteness that are applicable even today.

Competency and potential in their home country beforehand (Dan 1:4). An academically poor student at home can’t expect to fare well studying abroad. The discipline and habits developed in a home environment must continue to be practiced in the foreign environment. A jet ride across borders and emersion into a different environment won’t change that.

Minimal academic criteria, especially in language, need to be met for a person to be accepted into a foreign educational institution. But many schools pride themselves in the number of international students represented in their student body and/or (more commonly in the United States) see foreign students as a strong revenue stream, so they too often accept marginally qualified students from abroad.

On the contrary, Daniel was scrutinized and credentialed before being admitted into a rigorous study program. He met six royally decreed standards for admission. These standards were physical, mental, and social in nature (Dan 1:4). Take a look at those rigorous standards: “youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace.” There were physical requirements (“without blemish, of good appearance”), mental requirements (“skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning”), and social requirements (“competent to stand in the king’s palace”).

Their Hebrew names were to be replaced by Babylonian names. This may sound quite innocuous to us, but it clearly represented a move to eradicate any outward distinctiveness that their foreign-sounding names might signify. . . . This name-changing was no innocent action. It was an early attempt at social engineering, with the objective of obliterating inconvenient distinctions and homogenizing people, so that they would be easier to control.

**JOHN LENNOX,
AGAINST THE FLOW**

Daniel and his companions qualified on all counts. They demonstrated potential and capacity by having disciplined themselves beforehand.

Take on a name that will not be awkward in your host environment (Dan 1:7). At their arrival in Babylon, Daniel’s name and those of his fellow students were changed. There were political and religious motives tied to their newly adopted names, intended to homogenize them into Babylonian society.

Their new names also helped them to achieve better acceptance in their new environment. It may seem like a minor matter, but a socially acceptable name has social advantages. To show solidarity with an adopted culture means not only learning the language well, but also having a name that identifies well. It helps those surrounding you—your roommate, professors, school administrators—accept you more readily.

I noticed the advantage of this in the years I was a professor at a theological seminary. The school had a good number of international students, especially from Asian countries. Hard-to-pronounce names that had little meaning in the American context made for difficult and slow relationship building. Many times I mispronounced them.

However, the students who arranged to be known by a common American first name seemed to gain acceptance more readily. Kwan-su became known as Mark. Yun-en became known as Julie. It made student identification and interaction easier and less awkward.

Maintain biblical standards by not defiling yourself (Dan 1:8). Daniel purposed in his heart not to “defile” himself. The meaning behind defile in Hebrew is “to desecrate by repudiating one’s standards.”⁴ Daniel and his three friends were given the opportunity and even the permission to do just that. They could have left their religious heritage behind and easily violated their morals and consciences. They were even encouraged to do so by royal decree. It would have been easy for them to rationalize that, since they were enrolled in this elite training program far removed from their homeland, they could throw off past restraints and accept another standard. After all, that was the expectation, and each student was required to follow the program uniformly.

But Daniel was the model of a God-honoring international student. He was determined to stay true to God, regardless of what was stipulated. He refused to capitulate. He refused to take the easy path of the social status quo. He knew God and coveted his approval more than the approval of the king. He and his companions took a stand even to an apparent academic disadvantage. They didn’t allow the norms of their new environment to desecrate their high moral standards.

Gain the favor and trust of those to whom you are responsible (Dan 1:9). For Daniel and his friends to request an exception to normal protocol, they first had to gain trust. They gained that trust through their exemplary conduct. Instead of being rebellious, mischievous, or carefree, they were model students. They were exemplars of integrity. As such, Daniel earned favor and compassion from the chief eunuch. This most likely included cultural adaptation to the degree that

the chief eunuch was pleased with his progress. The foundation of trust was laid before the request for an extraordinary favor was made.

Follow a path that avoids compromising standards (Dan 1:10-16). For Daniel, who was involuntarily obligated to a mandatory program, this meant suggesting a way forward that appeared to disadvantage him and his companions gravely. His suggested plan was baffling and illogical to those who had oversight. Yet he persisted in having his plan tried. For him, it was important to avoid compromising his biblically based standards.

There are times today when God-honoring international students need to take such a stand to avoid compromising beliefs and standards. This may mean taking a position against teachings and assumptions based on secular humanism, then suffering academically for doing so. It may mean refusing to join in certain behaviors that are prevalent in student life, thus disadvantaging herself socially. It may even mean inadvertently disqualifying herself from future employment opportunities (based on references). Yet, like Daniel and his companions, the God-honoring student would rather be humanly disadvantaged than spiritually disqualified by dishonoring God.

Immerse yourself in your studies (Dan 1:17-20). At the conclusion of the three-year study program, among all students, “none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah” (Dan 1:19). Because these four youths honored God, God honored them by helping them excel in literature, in learning, and in skill. Not that they had not done their part. They had diligently applied themselves to the disciplines that were taught them. They had immersed themselves in their study. In the end, they proved themselves competent and became valuable to the king (Dan 1:19-20).

Likewise, an international student today must do his part by being a studious learner. Learn the language, literature, and worldview of your host country. Immerse yourself in the discipline that you’re studying. Master it fully. Strive for excellence, even as God grants his favor in the process. You too will become a valuable contributing member of society, which leads to the final point.

Prove yourself a useful, valued member of your host country (Dan 1:20). A large number of international students remain in their host country after

graduation. They've grown so accustomed to the ways and life of their host culture that they prefer to stay and make their livelihood there. Indeed, for various reasons, many US corporations and businesses focus their recruiting efforts on "cream of the crop" international students.

Upon graduation, Daniel and his friends were honored in receiving prestigious positions in the capital city, rather than being sent to a distant corner of the kingdom. These positions were reserved for the very best. They had honored God during their course of study, and God honored them in return. Other graduates were sent back to their homelands or other distant places to serve the king in choice positions. As the book of Daniel unfolds, it's noteworthy how many kings—across two kingdoms—Daniel served. He certainly became a valued minister in those administrations.

Today, many competent and valued international students remain in their host countries and excel in a similar fashion. How strategic it is when strong, God-honoring Christ followers are put into important positions and use their professions and influence for the betterment of their adopted country. This too can be an effective crosscultural mission and witness. As our world becomes more globalized, this type of witness becomes all the more strategic.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

International students who are Christ followers can have a spiritual impact on their host countries, but they need to shun the temptations that permeate their host environment. Being away from home can easily take them away from their convictions, which can seriously compromise their witness. Daniel and his companions are examples of how to live out beliefs in a different and hostile environment. With intention, they didn't waver from the standards of their upbringing. They proved that by following God's moral standards, a person can excel physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually as a crosscultural, transnational student.

Esther

Saving Her People from Genocide

ESTHER 1–13

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. . . .

And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:1-3, 12-16)

Sadly, there is a very dark side to crosscultural relationships. All too often one ethnic group attempts to exterminate another. Genocide, the deliberate and systematic annihilation of an entire group of people, is just as real today as in ages past. Consider this report the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission issued on July 3, 2015, "Saving Christians from Islamic State in the Middle East."

Christians are one of the primary civilian targets of the Islamic State terror group, which has threatened to eradicate minorities from within the territories it controls and beyond, even as the Christian population in the Middle East has been on a steep decline.

Most recently, Islamic State, which is also known as ISIS or ISIL, vowed to slaughter Christian Arabs in Jerusalem, saying its militants will "clean this country and the Muslim Quarter from these Christians during this holy Ramadan." Although the Sunni terror group doesn't have a known official branch in Israel, the threat issued points to its agenda, ambition, and targets.

Christians in the Middle East accounted for about 20 percent at the start of the 20th century, and their number has reduced to about 5 percent. And many of those who remain are now facing the jihadists' "convert-or-die" policy, especially in Iraq and Syria.

Syria had about 1.1 million Christians before 2011, and more than 700,000 of them have fled the country due to attacks by ISIS and other groups. Iraq had over 1 million Christians prior to the 2003 U.S. invasion, and now their number has come down to less than 200,000. And most of them have fled to regions in the north under Kurdish control, which, too, is now facing a serious threat from ISIS as it has captured Mosul.

Last week, the U.S.-based think tank Council on Foreign Relations invited experts to discuss “The Future of Religious Pluralism in the Middle East.” One of the questions they explored was whether minorities, including Christians, are on the brink of extinction in some parts of the region.¹

THE SETTING

The story of Esther centers in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire during the reign of Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes I,² who ruled from 485 to 465 BC. It covers a period of ten years and is a story full of drama and intrigue, as the Jewish people came within a hair's breadth of being exterminated. But it's also a story of the protective, sovereign hand of God in the affairs of his people.

Haman, the newly appointed prime minister of Persia (Esther 3:1-2), held a private grudge against Mordecai, a respected Jew. In his hatred for Mordecai, he plotted the total destruction of the Jewish community living throughout the entire Persian Empire. Such was the extent of the empire, from India to Ethiopia (Esther 1:1), that the whole race would have been wiped out.

But God, though not mentioned by name in the book, intervened on behalf of his people through a beautiful young Jewish girl named Esther. She was drop-dead gorgeous, "had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at" (Esther 2:7). After some palace intrigue, she had been chosen to become the queen by King Ahasuerus. Through a series of cunning events bravely orchestrated by Esther and her uncle Mordecai, Haman fell victim to his own plot. In the end, Haman was hanged on the gallows he had intended for Mordecai, the Jews were delivered, their enemies were liquidated, and Mordecai was rewarded by being appointed to the position next to the king (Esther 8:15).

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

In most instances, those who are bent on the destruction of another race are in a position of advantage to so act. Emboldened and empowered, they generally leave little time or opportunity for the oppressed minority to arm themselves, defend themselves, or flee. That was the situation with the Jews in the time of Esther. But God's timely intervention through those close to the king prevented that disaster from befalling the Jews.

My people are few. They resemble the scattering trees of a storm-swept plain. . . . There was a time when our people covered the land as the waves of a wind-ruffled sea cover its shell-paved floor, but that time long since passed away with the greatness of tribes that are now but a mournful memory.

**CHIEF SEATTLE,
THE CHIEF SEATTLE'S SPEECH**

Today there's no guarantee of deliverance for any ethnic group that experiences diabolical brutality at the hands of another ethnic group. Usually the opportunity for crosscultural dialogue has passed by the time it gets to the point of mass killings. However, it's instructive to see how such a situation unfolded against the Jews in the time of Esther.

Critical placement. God orchestrated events so that the right people were in the right place at the right time. What is the likelihood that a teenage Jewish virgin would end up in the palace of the king? What is the likelihood that she would be a favored member of the preparatory harem (Esther 2:9-10)? What is the likelihood that she would be given special instruction on how to gain the king's favor (Esther 2:15)? What is the likelihood that she would win the king's heart when they finally met (Esther 2:17)? What is the likelihood that she,

among the many viable candidates, would be selected as the next queen (Esther 2:17)?

As for Mordecai, what is the likelihood that he would become privy to information that would save the king's life (Esther 2:21-23)? What is the likelihood that his deed would so impact the king that it would be recorded in the official records for future reference (Esther 2:23)? What is the likelihood that Ahasuerus would read that record and bestow upon Mordecai honor just hours before Haman purposed to execute him? Surely God orchestrated events by putting the right people in the right place at the right time.

Concealment. When Esther entered the palace, Mordecai wisely urged her to conceal her ethnic identity. She didn't make known "her people or kindred" (Esther 2:10, 20) to anyone. Mordecai knew the vulnerable position the Jews were in, especially with Haman, a descendent of Israel's long-time enemies, in a place of high favor with the king. He understood the advantage of keeping Esther's ethnic identity a secret for a time, so that it might be used for the Jews' advantage when needed. This was a kind of fifth-column strategy. (A fifth column is any group of people that undermines a larger group—such as a nation or a besieged city—from within, usually in favor of an enemy group or nation.)

A related crosscultural principle is applicable today. When living in a foreign land as a message bearer, it's most prudent not to give out to anyone—government officials, immigration personnel, local police, neighbors, etc.—more information about yourself than is asked for or required. Giving too much information can lead to suspicion, questions, accusations, and even to deportation.

Crisis. The crisis for the Jews was very real. They were going to be slaughtered—every last one of them. Haman's disdain for the Jews knew no bounds: "Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus" (Esther 3:6). His actions were deliberate and systematic. He wanted to ensure that not one single Jew would survive the onslaught of destruction. The writer of Esther put it this way: "Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children,

in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods” (Esther 3:13).

Notice that one of the reasons Haman gave to the king to justify such a drastic action was cultural: “There is a certain people dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom . . . their customs³ are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws” (Esther 3:8 NIV). Besides singling out the Jews for being culturally “other,” he also falsely accused them of insubordination. Since Haman was his trusted adviser, Ahasuerus believed his report of threat to the kingdom and sanctioned the killing.

Courage. The situation had now become critical. When he caught wind of what was brewing in the palace, Mordecai knew it was time to act. He knew that desperate matters demanded desperate measures. It was no time to hold back; it was time for Esther to step forward courageously. No one but she could stem the tide of pending doom.

Mordecai urged Esther to reveal her true ethnic identity to the king and plead for her people’s survival (Esther 4:8), offering one of the most familiar phrases from the book: “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

But there was a major risk in Esther doing this. It was against royal custom and court etiquette to approach the king without being summoned, and to attempt such an act was punishable by death, since it was against the law (Esther 4:11, 16). It would take extraordinary courage on Esther’s part to attempt such a meeting. She hadn’t been in the king’s presence for thirty days, and entering his presence at that moment would be premature and might infuriate him. Depending on his mood, she could lose her life.

But, understanding the desperate plight her people were in, she resolved to place her life in jeopardy. Wisely, she put into action a twofold plan. First, she prepared her people. She asked all the Jews of Susa to fast on her behalf for three days (Esther 4:16). By so doing, she let it be known throughout the Jewish community what was transpiring at the seat of power, and she mobilized that community to appeal to God on her behalf. The second part of her plan was to

prepare her own heart. She, along with her attending young women, joined in the fast (Esther 4:16). Engaging in a total fast over three days demonstrated the seriousness of the risk she was about to take.

Her resolve to act was total. She was all in—and she understood the possible consequences. But she refused to waver. She uttered her most well-known phrase, one that has encouraged oppressed believers through the ages: “If I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16).

Climax. At the opportune moment, Esther made her approach to the king and was cordially received (Esther 5:1-4). Then she put into play a culturally acceptable and appropriate plan. Rather than forthrightly blurting out her request, she softened up the king by asking that he and Haman join her at a preliminary meal (Esther 5:4). The king and Haman were delighted to do so. But that was just the start of trust building. At that meal, she next asked Ahasuerus and Haman to join her at a more elaborate two-day feast the following day, to which both agreed (Esther 4:8). “So the king and Haman went to the feast with Queen Esther” (Esther 7:1).

At that meal, the king asked Esther for the third time what wish he could grant her. This was precisely the opening she was looking for. At that moment, Esther revealed her true ethnic identity and that of her people as well as the plot to slaughter her and her people (Esther 7:2-6). When the enraged king discovered that it was none other than Haman who had hatched such a scheme, he had Haman hung on the very gallows that Haman had intended for Mordecai (Esther 7:7-10).

Conclusion. The outcome of Esther’s courage couldn’t have been more advantageous to the Jews. Mordecai was given the esteemed position of Haman, second only to the king (Esther 8:1-2, 15). The Jews throughout the empire were given legal permission to defend themselves on the day designated for the slaughter (Esther 8:9-13), and revenge was taken on the perpetrators (Esther 9:1-19). Not only that, but in gratitude for their deliverance, the Jews inaugurated a new yearly feast—the Feast of Purim (Esther 9:20-29)—which is still observed today.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

We live in an imperfect world; nation rises against nation and ethnic group against ethnic group. Of all the species within the animal kingdom, only human beings kill their own on a massive scale. Humanity's inhuman treatment of humanity never ceases to amaze.

This is an outcome of the sinful fall that has placed self-centeredness and ethnocentrism at the core of the human heart. These give birth to hatred and mistrust and eventually result in violence toward others. The second recorded sin in Scripture is murder: Cain killing his brother Abel (Gen 4). Humankind has been justifying individual and corporate murder ever since.

Nehemiah

Leading a Despised Cultural Minority

NEHEMIAH 2; 4; 6

And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.” And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel. . . .

Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!” . . .

Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm. And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. (Neh 2:5-10; 4:1-3; 6:1-4)

Ethnic, or “cultural,” minorities are found the world over. Every large society contains them. Generally, their minority status is defined by a smaller numerical relationship to the larger dominant community. Sociologist Louis Wirth defined a minority group as “a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore

regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.”¹ Their style of life, language, culture, and origin differentiate them from the majority. In this age of globalization that permits unbounded international migrations, minorities are increasingly made up of migrants, refugees, or landless nomadic communities.

There is no legal definition of ethnic minorities in international law. However, national minorities can be defined as a group of people within a given nation

- that is numerically smaller than the rest of the population of the state or a part of the state
- that is not in a dominant position
- that has a culture, language, religion, race, etc., distinct from that of the majority of the population
- whose members have a will to preserve their specificity
- whose members are citizens of the state where they have the status of a minority
- which has a long-term presence on the territory where it has lived.²

Ethnic minorities are easy targets for oppression, maltreatment, and persecution. Among minorities being persecuted today are the Rohingya and Karen of Burma, the Kurds and Turkmens of northern Iraq, the Hmong of Vietnam, the Romani of Europe, and the First Nations of North America. Many others could be cited.

The Jews in the time of Nehemiah were such a people. Stateless and without official protection, several thousand returned to their demolished country only to discover that other peoples had encroached on their land in the years since their deportation to Babylon. For the first time in a thousand years, they were a minority in their homeland.

THE SETTING

Cyrus, the Persian king, overthrew Babylon in October of 539 BC, and in accord with his policy of encouraging captive peoples to return to their native lands, he issued a decree in 538 that permitted the Jews to return to their homeland.³ A very small percentage, about fifty thousand, returned to the land of Israel at that time.⁴ Just over one hundred years later, in 444 BC, Nehemiah received word about the desperate plight of the returnees (Neh 1:2-3).

Nehemiah (years of service, 445–425 BC) was a high official in the court of the Persian king Artaxerxes I (464–424 BC). The fact that he was cupbearer to Artaxerxes shows that he was a man in whom extraordinary trust was put. After all, the father of Artaxerxes I had been assassinated in the court, and Artaxerxes I himself had gained the throne by a palace revolution.⁵ Only the most trusted were permitted to be anywhere near the king.

It grieved Nehemiah exceedingly to know that his countrymen were faring so badly back in the homeland. The king noticed his dejected spirit and asked what was troubling him. Nehemiah explained his concern for his countrymen and then requested a leave of absence to become governor of Jerusalem (Neh 2:5-6). The king granted his request (Neh 2:8). Additionally, he gave Nehemiah letters of safe conduct and authority to request materials for rebuilding the city (Neh 2:7-8). Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah surveyed the city and then successfully mobilized and organized its inhabitants to begin rebuilding the walls (Neh 2:11-20).

When word of Nehemiah's purpose reached the governors of adjacent provinces, they embarked on a course of opposition. The ringleader was Sanballat, governor of Samaria, who was supported by two other governors.⁶ This put into play a crosscultural confrontation that threatened the very existence of Jerusalem and the Jews. Nehemiah would need to exercise extraordinary

crosscultural leadership skills to thwart the outside threat while simultaneously overseeing the rebuilding of the city walls.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Today ethnic minorities the world over can identify with the biased and prejudicial actions leveled against the Jews at the time of Nehemiah. Take a look at how this threatening situation unfolded.

The attitude behind ethnic oppression. What is the underlying attitude that drives a majority people to oppose and oppress minorities? It can be summed up in one word: *anger*. Nehemiah makes mention of this twice: “Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged” (Neh 4:1); “but when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry” (Neh 4:7). Anger is the outward expression of inward hate, and hatred is a reaction to being threatened.

Uncontrolled anger has been the hardened heart’s emotional response to God’s people, the Jews, through the ages. Why is this so? Because the presence of God’s people is a threat to the preferred lifestyles and orientations of unenlightened people. Humankind hates both the light and the source of light (Jn 3:20; 15:20)—thus their ongoing disdain for representatives of that light.

Opposition manifests itself in a variety of forms. Over the course of the book, Nehemiah relays seven instances of hostility that oppressors from the surrounding majority communities brought against him and his people.

1. *Opposition by intimidation (Neh 2:19).* Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, the governors of the three adjoining provinces, attempted to intimidate Nehemiah by “jeering” at him and the Jews. Additionally, they intimidated by insinuating that the Jews were rebelling against the king.
2. *Opposition by ridicule (Neh 4:1-6).* Sanballat again “jeered” at the Jews, but this time ridiculed with five rhetorical questions intended to humiliate

them. Cundall has noted that “ridicule, far from being an innocuous weapon, often succeeds in discouraging an enterprise where more direct methods fail.”⁷

3. *Opposition by threat of armed conflict (Neh 4:7-23)*. “And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it” (Neh 4:8). Although direct conflict was probably out of the question, since Artaxerxes had authorized the rebuilding of the walls, most likely a strategy of infiltration and terrorism was planned against the city.
4. *Opposition by intrigue (Neh 6:1-4)*. After the strategy of outright confrontation failed, Sanballat and his accomplices tried a very different tactic. This time they attempted to lure Nehemiah away from the city, either to assassinate him or to attack the city in his absence. The place they proposed for the meeting was about nineteen miles from Jerusalem—far enough away to accomplish their devious goals.
5. *Opposition by a smear campaign (Neh 6:5-9)*. Next Nehemiah was falsely accused of inciting a rebellion against the king, a very serious charge. Persia would be very sensitive to any suggestion of a distant rebellion, and these enemies knew it. Nehemiah answered with integrity. He probably knew that his friend the king would not believe such a report.
6. *Opposition by character assassination (Neh 6:10-14)*. This time Tobiah, the other major antagonist, took the lead. He hatched a plan to have Nehemiah meet a false prophet in the inner part of the temple (rebuilt in 515 BC), the place only priests were permitted to enter. If Nehemiah had agreed to meet there, he would have crossed the line of his authority. It would have marred his reputation and given the priests reason to discredit his leadership.
7. *Opposition by stealth (Neh 13:4-9)*. Tobiah attempted one final tactic to influence the Jews against Nehemiah. This time he tried it from within—at the temple, the very heart of the Jewish religion. In a quiet, clever way, while Nehemiah was back in Persia, conferring with the king, he convinced the high priest, a distant relative, to allow him to occupy a chamber in the courts of the house of God (Neh 13:7). One of Nehemiah’s staunchest enemies was able, by stealth, to reside right at the hub of religious life—

with the blessing of the high priest. By this shrewd move, Tobiah either thought that Nehemiah wouldn't be returning from Persia or that, upon Nehemiah's return, he would be so entrenched and have so gained the trust of the people that Nehemiah couldn't remove him.

Oppression against ethnic minorities today manifests itself in exactly the same ways. At times it goes even further; unmentionable things are done against minorities. Those that were leveled against Nehemiah, including the core attitude of anger, are visualized in figure 20.1.

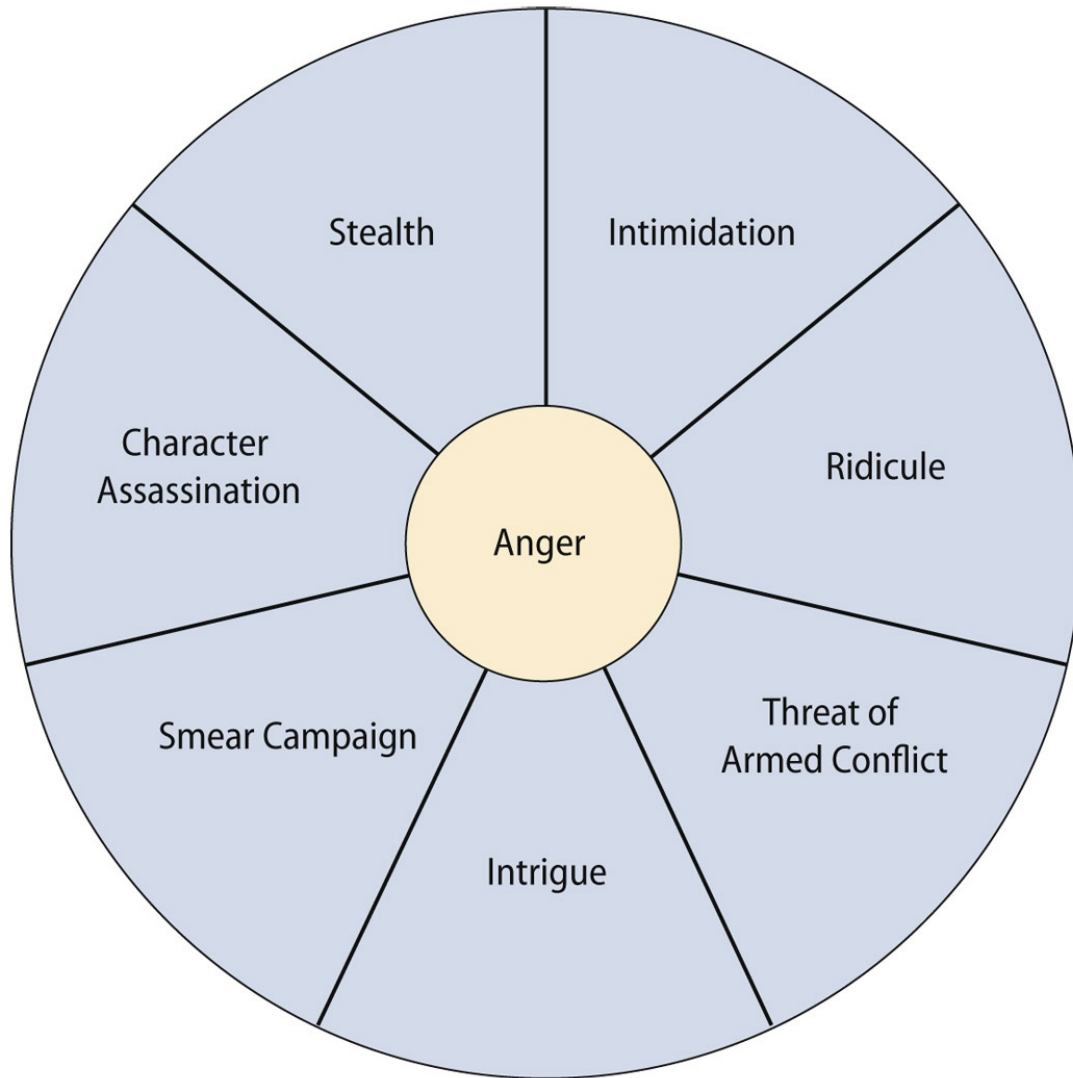


Figure 20.1. Forms of opposition Nehemiah faced

Nehemiah showed himself a competent crosscultural leader. Nehemiah proved himself as a competent crosscultural leader by his sterling character, his skill and competence, and his appropriate responses.

His character. The character of a leader is just as important as his competencies. Here's a simple leadership equation: character + competence = confidence.

When the two components of character and competence are in balance and uncompromised, it makes for a confident leader. When the two are in balance, the leader has confidence in himself; others have confidence in him as their

leader; and God has confidence enough in him to entrust him with greater responsibility. Exhibiting confidence in these three realms is important for a leader to be successful.

Such was the case with Nehemiah. His character was flawless throughout the entire crosscultural ordeal. He didn't capitulate to the demands of the surrounding ethnic majorities that opposed the rebuilding of the city's walls.

Moreover, Nehemiah's disposition was revealed throughout the crosscultural tension. He exhibited wisdom, foresight, determination, and indomitable courage. The narrative is punctuated with his spontaneous prayers, showing him to be a man who communed with God (Neh 1:4-11; 4:4-5; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). He had a strong belief in the sovereignty of God, mentioning "the good hand of my God" governing the affairs of what was transpiring (Neh 2:8, 18). He was unshakeable in his belief that "the God of heaven will make us prosper" (Neh 2:20).

Leading, then, is inspiring people who participate with you in a community of trust to follow you and be empowered by you to achieve a compelling vision of faith.

**SHERWOOD G. LINGENFELTER,
LEADING CROSS-CULTURALLY**

His competency. Nehemiah proved loyal in the palace while holding one of the most trusted of positions. Based on trust and Nehemiah's competency, the king promoted him from cupbearer to governor of Israel. Moreover, Nehemiah courageously faced his foes head-on, not yielding an inch to their disruptive demands. He organized the building crews in a manner that made all want to build to their best ability (Neh 3). He organized the workers into a militia while they simultaneously built the wall (Neh 4:15-23). He dealt with interpersonal conflicts in a just manner (Neh 5), keeping morale high. Nehemiah was a competent manager as well as an exemplary leader.

His response to opposition. As Nehemiah communicated crossculturally with those bent on stopping him, his responses to their threats are noteworthy:

- *Intimidation (Neh 2:19).* He appealed to the God of heaven, who had ultimate authority to permit the building.
- *Ridicule (Neh 4:1-6).* He responded that God was in control and reiterated his determination to continue the project.
- *Threat of armed conflict (Neh 4:7-23).* On the one hand, he committed the situation to God; on the other, he armed the workers and demanded vigilance.
- *Intrigue (Neh 6:1-4).* He didn't capitulate to their luring request, and he affirmed the importance of his task: "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" (Neh 6:3).
- *Smear campaign (Neh 6:5-9).* He refuted their false claims. He refused to be frightened, and he appealed to God of the "good hand" to strengthen his own hands (Neh 2:8, 18; 6:9).
- *Character assassination (Neh 6:10-14).* He discerned that a false prophet was enticing him, attempting to give him "a bad name in order to taunt me" (Neh 6:13), and he asked God to remember the acts of these foreign enemies against him.
- *Stealth (Neh 13:4-9).* Upon his return, in righteous anger, he threw "all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber" (Neh 13:8). He then had the chambers cleansed and restocked with provisions for the priests, which was the intended use of the chambers (Neh 13:10-14). He gave no quarter to his avowed enemy.

Also notice what Nehemiah did not do in response to their threats. He did not jeer or mock them back; did not speak badly of them; did not threaten them; did not retaliate. Nor did he launch a preemptive attack. His was a nonoffensive

posture. Nehemiah was content to let God superintend the entire threatening situation, and he joined in by doing his part as well.

Principles gleaned from the leadership of Nehemiah. Several crosscultural leadership principles emerge from this account of crosscultural opposition. How does a person lead a “despised” (Neh 2:19) cultural minority through a period of hostility? The pyramid in figure 20.2 helps illustrate how.

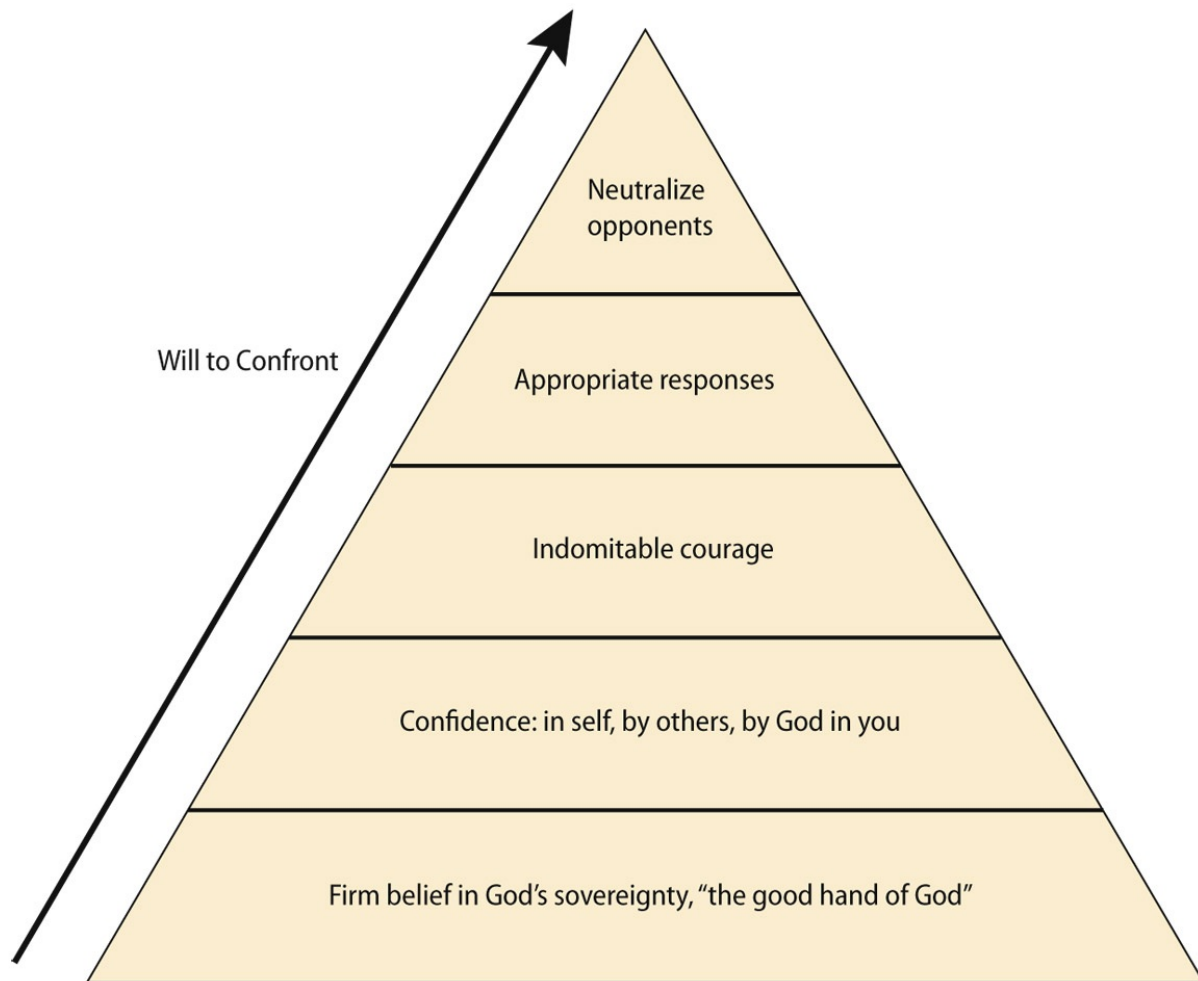


Figure 20.2. Leadership principles from Nehemiah

Nehemiah had the will to confront. He didn't allow his adversaries to run over him and his people at will. He took action, just as oppressed minorities should today. Injustice should always be confronted, even at a cost.

In the end, the Jews were able to complete the wall in an astonishingly short period; it was finished in fifty-two days (Neh 6:15). The outcome was what every ethnic minority would hope for: "And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem" (Neh 6:16). In other words, the minority earned something they didn't previously have: legitimacy and esteem. Honor had been restored. The majority population had a greater respect for the minority.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Oppressed ethnic minorities need not automatically acquiesce to oppression and subjugation by a dominant majority culture. They can and should take a stand to ensure their ethnic security. But they need willpower to preserve their identity and cultural specificity.

It takes competent and trusted leadership, built on good character, to gain the confidence necessary for others to join in enacting change. Nehemiah stood as a model of such a leader. His courage, coupled with his crosscultural acumen in the face of oppression, enabled the Jews to reestablish themselves in their homeland.⁸ Ethnic minorities can do the same today.

PART THREE



CROSSING CULTURES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

New Testament Cultural Overview

The New Testament covers a period of nearly a hundred years. Though a much shorter time than the Old Testament, crosscultural encounters are no less frequent. This era was the breakout period—the time when God’s dealings with humans expanded from being mainly confined to one people and culture (the Hebrews), to a multiplicity of peoples and cultures. By the time we reach the end of the New Testament the gospel is poised to reach to the ends of the earth.

Most of the New Testament is focused on the advance of the gospel in the eastern and northeastern Mediterranean basin. After its start in Jerusalem and its environs, the New Testament focuses primarily on the ministry of the apostle Paul. Paul encountered numerous cultures as he journeyed through what is present-day Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, and eventually Italy.

Although there was a veneer of Greco-Roman culture on top, digging deeper reveals that Paul and other early Christian missionaries encountered beliefs, values, and customs of diverse parochial cultures. The ethnics of Galatia, residing in the Taurus Mountains of central Turkey, are one example. The islanders of Malta (Acts 28:1-10) are another.

Throughout the New Testament the church was constantly on the move. It was both marching forward into new cultures and simultaneously watching for the Lord’s return. Lesslie Newbigin, in his book *The Household of God*, puts it this way:

The Church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move—hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all men to be reconciled to God, and hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord who

will gather all into one. . . . It cannot be understood rightly except in a perspective which is at once missionary and eschatological.¹

Jesus

His Crosscultural Encounters

MATTHEW 15:24

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Jesus’ reply to the Syrophenician woman)

During the thirty-three years when Jesus, the Son of God, dwelled among humankind, his life was punctuated with crosscultural experiences. In the flesh, Jesus was born a Jew, raised a Jew, and died a Jew. However, the four Gospel accounts reveal that although he was always prepared for—and even seemed to delight in—crosscultural encounters, non-Jews were not his main ministry focus. His primary mission was to offer himself legitimately as the Jewish messiah to the Jewish people. With that in mind, he focused his ministry almost exclusively on that one race.

Every ministry must have priorities, and Jesus’ ministry was no exception. We shouldn’t understand Jesus’ words to the Syrophenician woman as a rebuke or a rejection of the Gentiles. Neither was it an excuse to segregate himself from them. After all, moments later, he miraculously healed the woman’s daughter (Mt 15:28). Jesus’ statement to her wasn’t one of exclusivity, but of priority. That priority was directly linked to the fulfillment of prophecy concerning himself.

In Jeremiah 50:6, God calls Israel, his people, “lost sheep.” The messiah, spoken of throughout the Old Testament, was seen as the one who would gather these sheep (Ezek 34:20-24; Mic 5:4-5). When Jesus presented himself as a shepherd to Israel, he was claiming to be the fulfillment of messianic prophecy (Mk 6:34; 14:27; Jn 10:11-16).

But, even though the Jews were his primary ministry focus, he took time to help those outside the Jewish race when the opportunity presented itself. Not only that, but after his resurrection, he made a point to declare to the disciples that, after his permanent departure from them, their ministries were to include

and eventually focus on peoples of all nations (*panta ta ethnē*; Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:47). They were to cross cultures to a larger extent and a far greater degree than he ever did.

JESUS' CROSSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

The Gospel of Matthew. Matthew appeared to address his gospel specifically to the Jewish audience. In it, he presented Jesus as the Jewish messiah who came specifically on their behalf. But it's noteworthy that he intentionally tied in crosscultural links. He did this by the way he wove information together as he unfolded the story of Christ's birth (Mt 1–2). He deliberately included two crosscultural connections that the other Gospel writers omitted: genealogy and geography.

Genealogy. Matthew began his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus. He knew that his primary audience, the Hebrew people, would want the legitimacy of Jesus' claim as messiah proven from the genealogical records, since Jewish people determined identity by ancestry.

Matthew included crosscultural links in this, the most important of all Jewish genealogies. Although he didn't have to, he cited three individuals in the genealogy that were non-Jewish, so he didn't "sanitize" the genealogy. His apparent intent was to show Jesus' link to all nations, not just the Jewish race. He mentioned a Canaanite and a Moabite (Rahab and Ruth, Mt 1:5), and a Hittite (Uriah, Mt 1:6).¹ The genealogy could have been constructed to avoid mention of these Gentiles, as Luke did (Lk 3:23-38), but it wasn't.

Geography. Matthew was the only Gospel writer to mention the flight of Joseph, Mary, and the newborn Jesus into Egypt (Mt 2:13-15). They remained there until the death of Herod and then returned to the Galilean town of Nazareth (Mt 2:15, 22-23). In order to tie the messiah to the nations, Matthew made sure this event didn't go unnoticed. He wanted the readers to know that at an early age, Jesus experienced crosscultural exposure.

Other crosscultural references in the Gospel of Matthew fall into two categories: encounters and references by Jesus.

Crosscultural encounters:

- Encounter with the Roman centurion (Mt 8:5-13)
- Encounter with the Syrophenician Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28)
- Encounter with the Roman governor, Pilate (Mt 27:11-26)
- Encounter with the Roman cohort that crucified him (Mt 27:27-56)
- Encounter with Simon of Cyrene, who carried his cross (Mt 27:32)

Crosscultural references by Jesus:

- Jesus said that, at his next appearing, “all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 24:30).
- Jesus said that in the last days, when on his throne, “Before him will be gathered all the nations” (Mt 25:32).
- He made historical references to Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt 10:15; 11:23-24).
- He commanded his disciples to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19).

The Gospel of Mark. Jesus’ crosscultural experiences in the Gospel of Mark are just one fewer than mentioned in Matthew. Only the first one is unique to Mark.

Crosscultural encounters:

- Exposure to some in the crowd that came “from around Tyre and Sidon” (Mk 3:8)
- Encounter with the Syrophenician Canaanite woman (Mk 7:24-30)
- Encounter with the Roman governor, Pilate (Mk 15:1-15)
- Encounter with the Roman cohort that crucified him (Mk 15:16-41)

- Encounter with Simon of Cyrene, who carried his cross (Mk 15:21)

Crosscultural references by Jesus:

- He commanded his disciples to “go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15).

The Gospel of Luke. The number of references to Jesus’ crosscultural experiences in the Gospel of Luke is only slightly more than that found in Mark. This is surprising, given the fact that Luke was the only writer among the four who was a Gentile. We would have expected more crosscultural references—especially since his Gospel was addressed to Theophilus, who was a Gentile (Lk 1:1-4).

Crosscultural encounters:

- Encounter with the Roman centurion (Lk 7:1-10)
- Encounter with the Roman cohort that crucified him (Lk 23:26-50)
- Encounter with Simon of Cyrene, who carried his cross (Lk 23:26)

Crosscultural references by Jesus:

- Parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37).
- Historical reference to the “queen of the South” and the people of Nineveh (Lk 11:29-36).
- Historical reference to Sodom (Lk 10:12; 17:28-30).
- He commanded his disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations (Lk 24:47).

The Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is the least crosscultural of the four. John didn’t include any teaching or referencing of Jesus to other peoples/nations. In this gospel, Jesus’ crosscultural encounters are four:

- Encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:1-42).
- A group of Greeks desired to meet with Jesus (Jn 12:20-26). We are left hanging on this one, since John does not go on to relate if this encounter took place or not.
- Encounter with the Roman governor, Pilate (Jn 18:28–19:16).
- Encounter with the Roman cohort who crucify him (Jn 19:17-37).

A SUMMARY OF JESUS' CROSSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Table 21.1 helps visualize the fact that over a three-year span of public ministry, only eight different crosscultural encounters are recorded by the Gospel writers. Three of those encounters (before Pilate, the Roman cohort, and Simon of Cyrene on the day of his crucifixion) were involuntary. Luke mentioned that Simon of Cyrene carried the cross behind Jesus (Lk 23:26) as they walked the Delarosa, so most likely they didn't engage in conversation. Setting these three aside, only five distinct crosscultural encounters from Jesus' ministry years are recorded.

Table 21.1. Jesus' crosscultural encounters

Encounter	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
The Roman centurion	✓		✓	
The Syrophenician Canaanite woman	✓	✓		
The crowd from around Tyre and Sidon		✓		
The Samaritan woman at the well				✓
Group of Greeks desiring to meet Jesus				✓
The Roman governor, Pilate	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Roman cohort that crucified him	✓	✓	✓	✓
Encounter with Simon of Cyrene	✓	✓	✓	

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

A survey of the four Gospel accounts reveals that although Jesus was always prepared for and even seemed to delight in crosscultural encounters, non-Jewish people were not his main ministry focus. His primary mission was to offer himself legitimately as the Jewish messiah to the Jewish people. In other words, for the fulfillment of prophecy and as a focused ministry priority, Jesus' main mission was to present himself as the messiah to the Jews. In doing so, he wasn't being exclusive but focused.

Yet he took time to interact cordially with Gentiles and to help those outside the Jewish race. Perhaps Jesus' most well-known and beloved parable is the parable of the good Samaritan, and his most endearing encounter is with the Samaritan woman at the well. Together, these two narratives may have irked the Jews, but they give hope to Gentile believers the world over. They give hope that Jesus, the Jewish messiah, is our messiah too.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

Contrasting Worldviews

JOHN 4:1-43

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." (Jn 4:7-12)

Every ethnic community contains those who are deemed outcasts. For any number of reasons, the larger community shuns individuals. It might be because of an offensive behavior, a physical stigma or a disease, or nonalignment with the prevailing beliefs, values, or customs of the community.

Take Osama bin Laden, for example. In 1994, long before he became infamous as the world's number-one terrorist, Osama's wealthy Saudi Arabian family disowned him. His beliefs, values, and behavior no longer aligned with those of the conservative Sunni family of which he was a part.¹ His radical ideas and increasingly violent behavior became so extreme that they had no choice but to sever all ties with him.

Or consider a custom of the Rejang people, who live in central Sumatra, Indonesia. The Rejang don't permit those who commit adultery to continue to live in the community where the wrong is committed. Last year, when a group of us visited their area, the story was relayed to us of a couple that had recently been banished from the village for committing that very offense. In a public ceremony, the couple was brought before the gathered villagers. To atone for the wrong, an animal was slain, and its blood was sprinkled on the fence posts all along the village's main street. The couple was then brought before the village elders and publicly reprimanded. Afterward, they were escorted with their few possessions to the edge of the village and told to leave and not return.

THE SETTING

Jesus' visit to Samaria is one of the few instances where we see him intentionally going crosscultural. Out of all the Gospel accounts, Jesus' longest one-on-one encounter is reserved for a woman, someone who was completely different from him. Instead of skirting around the territory of Samaria on his way back to Galilee from Jerusalem, as was customary for Galilean Jews, Jesus had to pass through their territory. By divine appointment, he entered a Samaritan town named Sychar (Jn 4:5). He wanted to influence an ethnically "close-by" people who were largely despised by the Jews.

According to Jewish history, the Samaritans were descendants of Gentile colonists that the Assyrians had planted in central Israel. These intermarried with the Israelite population that the Assyrians had left in the land after they conquered it in the early sixth century BC. Subsequently, these interracial Samaritans built a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim that Jesus and the Samaritan woman could view as they talked. When the Jews under Zerubbabel built a new temple in Jerusalem in 515 BC, they disallowed the not fully Jewish Samaritans from joining in (Ezra 4). When Nehemiah rebuilt the city walls seventy years later, Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, was his staunchest opponent.

There was bad blood between the two groups from then on. The Jews ostracized the Samaritans during the entire intertestament period.² This carried over into the time of Jesus. John gave commentary on how complete the separation was, "for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (Jn 4:9).

However, there's a double dose of ostracism in this story. The Samaritan woman whom Jesus met seems to have been an undesirable, possibly even a social outcast from her community. Notice that she went to the well to draw water at the hottest point of the day—noon—when others wouldn't be there (Jn 4:6). She wanted to avoid the ridicule and finger pointing of the townswomen. After all, she may have slept with some of their husbands.

Unexpectedly, she found an exhausted Jewish man sitting next to the well. There were just the two of them: she and this stranger. This was no doubt an awkward situation for her. Though she tried to ignore him, she couldn't avoid contact. She may have kept her eyes to the ground and attempted to be nonexistent as she approached the well. But, surprisingly, the man appealed to her for a drink of water. Little did she know how life changing this encounter with Jesus would be.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Jesus' strategy. By custom, Jesus could have entered the town of Sychar directly and taken a seat at the gate with the elders. His status as a rabbi would have gained him acceptance among the town leaders. However, he must have known that it would be more difficult to convince a gathering of leading citizens of his identity as messiah than a solitary outcast on the outskirts of town. So he strategically placed himself at the place of best reception for what he wanted to share: he took a seat next to the well.

The nature of his request to the woman was also intentional. Appealing to her sympathy, he asked her for a drink (Jn 4:7). William Hendriksen rightfully points out that this was

a manifestation of divine strategy and of psychological insight, for if you wish to gain entrance into the heart of another person two methods can be employed: a. do that person a favor; b. give that person an opportunity to do you a favor. Often b. is more effective than a. Rightly considered, however, Jesus combined the two (a. and b.)!³

Christ had every traditional and religious advantage on this woman. He wasn't a Samaritan, He wasn't a Samaritan, and He wasn't an adulterous outcast. But in spite of His societal superiority, He puts Himself into her debt by asking for a drink. It's a beautiful condescension, as He breaks traditional and ethnic etiquette to engage this woman in a conversation that will transform her life.

JOHN MACARTHUR

Barriers to communication. Jesus and this unnamed Samaritan woman were polar opposites. They had nothing in common—except a need for water. She

was completely different from him. Consider the barriers Jesus crossed so that meaningful conversation might ensue:

- Gender barrier: she a female, he a male (Jn 4:7, 9, 27)
- Class barrier: she a lowly outcast among her people, he a respected rabbi among the disciples (Jn 4:31)
- Religious barrier: she a nominal worshiper at a pagan temple, he an obedient adherent to the Jewish religion centered in Jerusalem (Jn 4:20)
- Ethnic barrier: she a mixed-raced Samaritan (Jn 4:7), he a pure Jew with an impeccable pedigree
- Cultural barrier: she immersed in the Samaritan worldview, he of the Jewish worldview (Jn 4:9)

Contrasting worldviews. Different cultures hold different worldviews. The intermixing and intertwining of three basic cultural elements—beliefs, values, and customs—make up what is commonly referred to as a group’s worldview. Culture and worldview are inseparable.

Throughout this book, culture has been defined as *the distinctive beliefs, values, and customs of a particular group of people that determine how they think, feel, and behave*. Utilizing this definition, notice the contrasting worldviews as the conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus unfolded (see [table 22.1](#)).

Table 22.1. Contrasting worldviews

	Samaritan Woman	Jesus
Beliefs (thinking)	Appealed to the person of Jacob, her forefather, as authoritative (Jn 4:12)	Appealed to “the gift of God,” as himself, as authoritative (Jn 4:10)
	Believed worship at a designated place is important	Said worship in Spirit and truth was important (Jn 4:23)

	(Jn 4:20) Was waiting for a coming Messiah (Jn 4:25) Never mentioned God	He was the Messiah (Jn 4:26) “God is Spirit” and “Father” (Jn 4:21-24)
Values (feelings)	Natural water was important (Jn 4:11,13) Outward act of worship at a historical location was important (Jn 4:20) Future teaching of Messiah was valued (Jn 4:25)	Living (eternal) water was more important (Jn 4:10, 11) Inward attitude of worshiping in Spirit and truth was vital (Jn 4:24) Present teaching of Messiah was paramount (Jn 4:26)
Customs (behavior)	Sexuality: polyandry and adultery (Jn 4:18) Religious: worshiped on the mountain (Jn 4:20)	Sexuality: Single and chaste Religious: worshiped in Jerusalem (Jn 4:20)

Transformed worldview. The testimony of the woman coupled with the witness of Jesus brought about an amazing change to the community of Sychar (Jn 4:39, 41-42). Lives were transformed. The change took place along the three elements of culture that made up their worldview:

- *Belief.* Their thinking about Jesus changed: “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him” (Jn 4:39).
- *Values.* Their feelings about Jesus changed: “This is indeed the Savior of the world” (Jn 4:42).
- *Customs.* Their behavior changed: “They asked him to stay with them, so he stayed there two days [the custom of hospitality]” (Jn 4:40).

These are the responses and ideal outcomes that today’s message bearers hope for as they take the gospel across cultures. As we work through conversations that are much like the one between Jesus and the Samaritan

woman, differences in worldviews can be discussed, with the gospel message likely having a fair hearing. But this encounter shows that it takes personal initiative, a congenial spirit, an intelligent conversation, and satisfactory answers for lost people to receive a message that will be transformational.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Principles extracted from this story of Jesus taking the gospel crossculturally to the Samaritans can be helpful to message bearers today. Taking initiative, like Jesus did, is the very first and most important step of crosscultural outreach. But there must be a strategy coupled with initiative. That strategy may be putting yourself in the place of vulnerability, of first being served by the people you go to serve. This is difficult for those who feel they have a superior culture, personal status, education, technical expertise, or income level to those they go to serve. This attitude must be put aside if message bearers are to identify with the people of the culture that they enter.

After those initial steps are taken, the hard work of learning and then working through the worldview of the culture begins. Only after mastering its dominant beliefs, values, and customs do we have the right to speak into it and bring people to an understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Once achieved, transformation of the heart can be realized.

The Lord's Prayer
for Missionaries

MATTHEW 6:9-13

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Have you ever pondered The Lord's Prayer in light of the missionary's crosscultural task? We can extract eleven core issues related to our task from this model prayer given by Jesus: three related to God's person, three to God's program, and the remaining five to God's crosscultural messenger. Read, ponder, and pray the following.

Our Father. You are the transcendent, omnipotent God, the one and only true God. Yet, as sons and daughters, you have sent us out as your ambassadors to proclaim you as a loving, caring Father who controls all that is in the universe by your good hand. The gods we encounter in this world don't compare to you and your greatness, and those who worship them would never claim a familial relationship with them. I reverently proclaim you as a loving, caring Father who is worthy of all praise.

In heaven. You are totally other than your creation. You exist outside and above all that you've made. Though all is within your presence, your eternal abode is beyond this visible universe. I declare to the uninformed around me the paradox that you reside in unapproachable light yet make yourself approachable to the lowest of people through your son, Jesus Christ.

Hallowed be your name. The ultimate end of every person, and certainly my labor as your messenger, is to bring unadulterated worship to you. All praise and honor and glory are due you and you alone. This is the core message I'm proclaiming to a corrupt and clueless people who ignore your majesty and violate the standards of your holiness.

Your kingdom come. You have sent me and others like me to other kingdoms of this world—kingdoms where people languish in spiritual darkness. Whether they are kingdoms to the north, to the south, to the east, or to the west, all are in rebellion against your kingdom. Wrongs won't be righted, justice won't be fully served, wars won't cease, and the intentional flaunting of your righteous standards won't end until you come and establish your eternal kingdom. You are the king of all, and yours is the dominion forever and ever.

Your will be done. As your servant, I have enfolded my will into yours. And in following your will for my life, you have sent me to this far and distant land and to a people much different from me. This has been good, and the longer I'm here, the longer I see the goodness of your will being done through my life, as my presence here is part of your purposeful design for these people. Keep me valuing your will for my life.

Obviously, Christ's model prayer follows the right order. And it stands not only as a model for our personal prayer but for our ministries as well. It's only when my heart is captured by the awe of God that I will view my identity rightly. And it's only when I view my identity rightly that I will have a proper sense of need and a willingness to abandon my plan for the greater and more glorious plan of God.

**PAUL DAVID TRIPP,
AWE**

On earth as it is in heaven. I'm learning more and more about your heavenly plan for those living across the span of this vast earth. There still remain so many unengaged people groups. There still remain hordes of unreached peoples. You aren't willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance. Use me to help make your heavenly will become a reality in this corner of the earth where you have sent me.

Give us this day our daily bread. Father, my daily bread is supplied through the generosity of your people. I never seem to have a lot, but I always have enough. Help me to be satisfied with your daily provision and not be envious of

the affluence of the support team back home that has so much more. You have richly blessed them so they might be a blessing to these people through my presence here. They have been generous. Thank you for supplying all my daily needs.

And forgive our debts. I'm indebted to a lot of people that make my ministry possible: supporting churches and individuals, the support staff at the home office, and most of all my colleagues here on the field. At times I have friction with these coworkers and even with my national brethren. Sometimes hurtful words are exchanged. Help me, and them, learn to forgive each other and to continue going forward together in harmony and oneness of spirit.

As we also have forgiven our debtors. I have learned to forgive quite a few people who have either opposed or offended me here:

- government officials who have purposefully stalled my paperwork
- well-meaning short-term teams who think after five days they know this ministry better than I do
- coworkers whom I mentioned previously
- local pastors who selfishly jockey for influence, power, and position
- hostile locals who feel threatened by your life-changing gospel

But most hurtful at times have been those closest to me that do not understand why I'm on mission with you.

Help me to continue to forgive, for tension with others will always be my lot as long as I am on mission with you.

And lead us not into temptation. I am embarrassed to admit, but even as a missionary I'm tempted to sin on a daily basis. The longer I'm here, the more cognizant I become that, like everyone else, I'm a sinner by nature and by choice. The same temptations that vied for my heart and mind in the homeland are here too, but more accentuated. There's no such thing as sanctification by aviation; my old nature flew over here with me! I was hoping that wouldn't have

been the case, but it is. Help me to be a champion over besetting sins and ongoing temptation.

But deliver us from evil. I have found that the apostle Peter wasn't exaggerating when he wrote that Satan "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). That evil prince of this world hates you, your work, and your workers—and that includes me. I'm engaged in spiritual warfare against him, his evil schemes, and his evil minions. But thanks be to you who give me—your frail yet willing ambassador—the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

The beautiful Lord's Prayer was offered by Jesus as a pattern for all believers. It is intended to help us identify and focus on aspects of our relationships with God, others, and self that are most important. But as seen in this chapter, Jesus' message bearers in particular can readily apply the features of this prayer to their experiences as they carry out their crosscultural task. When we step back from the throes of ministry immersion and reflect on the bigger picture—on God, his missional program, and our personal involvement—there comes a reassurance of purposefulness in our crosscultural engagements.

Jesus' Seven Marks of Crosscultural Success

JOHN 17

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. . . .

“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. . . . For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. . . . While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. . . . As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. . . .

“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one. . . . I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (Jn 17:1-4, 6, 8, 12, 18, 22, 26)

David Livingstone once said, “God had only one Son and He made that Son a missionary.”¹ Every crosscultural missionary follows in the footsteps of Jesus, the first “Christian missionary,” the Son of God himself, who on mission visited this planet two thousand years ago. He came to seek and to save and to “give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). At the end of his “ministry term,” he gave a “ministry report” to God the Father, who had sent him, and it’s found in John 17. In it, Jesus summed up his mission on earth. John 17 is chock full of theological themes, but one that we dare not miss is this mission report.

It’s quite appropriate to call Jesus a missionary, or sent one. Jesus uses the word *apostellō* (to be sent on an official mission) six times in John 17 in reference to the Father’s sending him to earth (Jn 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25).

THE SETTING

On the evening prior to the day of his crucifixion, Jesus took time to reflect upon what he had accomplished during his three years of public ministry. In what is commonly called the High Priestly Prayer, he rehearsed to the Father in a candid report the essence of what he had accomplished as a crosscultural message bearer. He did so using verbs in the first person singular aorist active indicative. But don't let that lose you; it's easy to explain.

Briefly, the aorist active indicative can be understood as follows. The aorist tense indicates action in the past—something that's completely done, thoroughly finished. The active voice indicates the relationship of the subject (here being Jesus) to the action. In other words, he did it! The indicative mood is the mood of certainty. It indicates that something indisputably took place. When the three are put together, they mean, "This is a done deal," or put another way, "I have completed this and have done it fully." That's what Jesus is reporting to the Father throughout his prayer. From these verbs, we discover the marks of a competent crosscultural messenger.

The seven marks. In his prayer, Jesus made seven such verb-related statements. It's easiest to see these statements in the English by following the "I haves":

1. "I [have] glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work you gave me to do" (Jn 17:4). This statement speaks of completion, of finishing well. It can be seen as an overview statement of the six that follow.
2. "I have manifested your name to the people" (Jn 17:6). This statement speaks of incarnating himself among humankind. He had presented himself well. He didn't stick out like some kind of misfit. He fit right in with the beliefs, values, and customs of the people. This related to Jesus' winsome and impeccable interpersonal/relational skills.

3. “I have given them the words that you gave me” (Jn 17:8). This statement speaks of declaring. He proclaimed well, or correctly, the very words that the Father wanted people to hear through him. This related to Jesus’ teaching ministry skills.
4. “I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost” (Jn 17:12). This statement speaks of protecting. He cared well, guarding so that no true follower became lost, especially to other competing beliefs. This related to Jesus’ protective ministry, or skills.
5. “I have sent them into the world” (Jn 17:18). This statement speaks of commissioning. He effectively passed the baton to his followers. Jesus may have been speaking prophetically of the Great Commission statements he still needed to give his disciples after his resurrection. But that obviously needed inclusion in his report at this time, before the events of his suffering took place. This related to the transferring part of his ministry, or skills.
6. “The glory that you have given me I have given them” (Jn 17:22). This statement speaks of authorizing; he empowered his followers well. This is related to Jesus’ willingness and ability to empower others, his empowering skills.
7. “I [have] made known to them your name” (Jn 17:26). This statement speaks of revealing. He transmitted understanding about the Father well. He was successful in what the writer of Hebrews stated: “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb 1:3). This related to Jesus’ communication ministry, or skills.

The interrelatedness and balance of his ministry marks and skills are illustrated in figure 24.1.

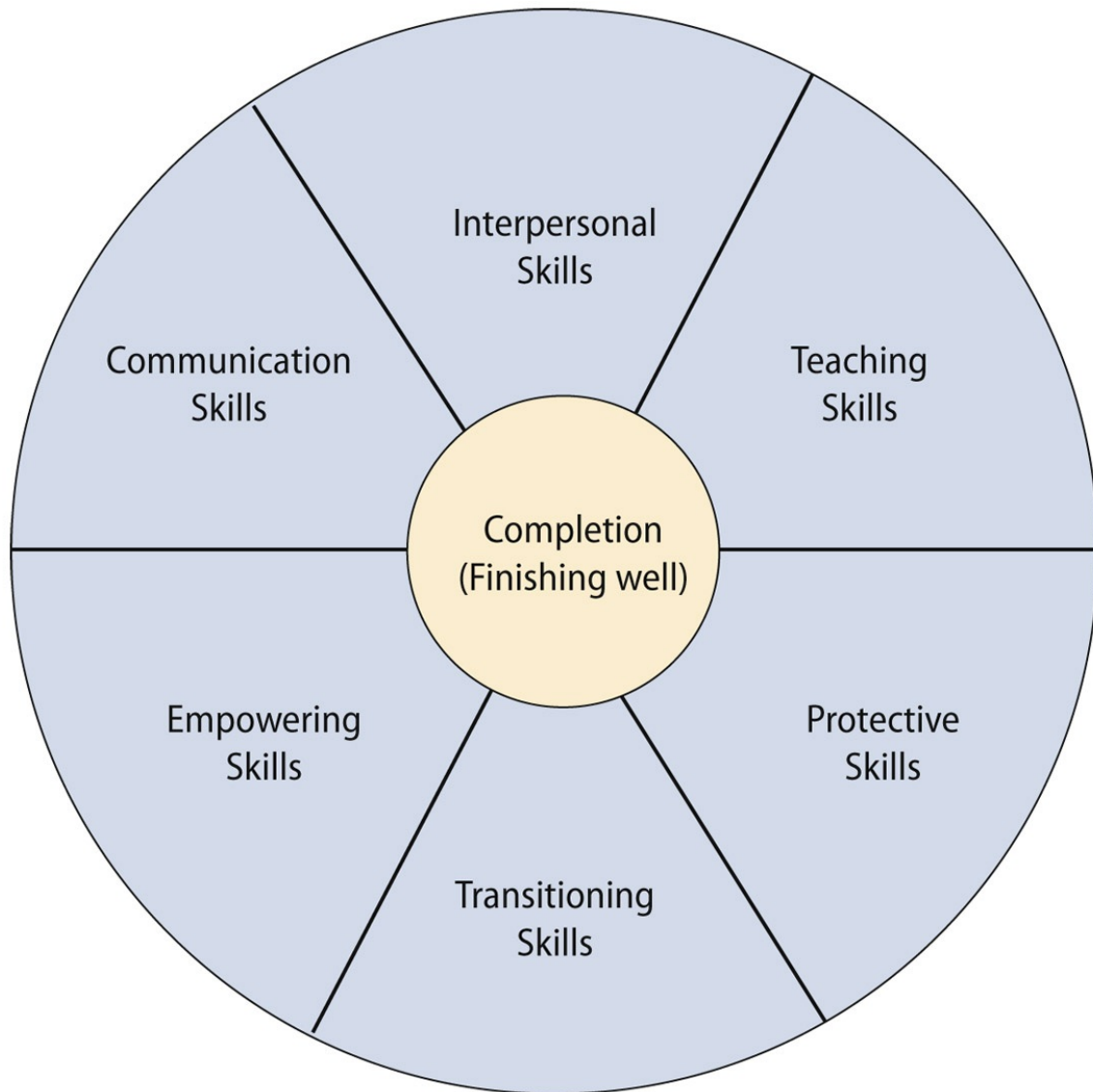


Figure 24.1. Seven marks of Jesus' ministry

Jesus didn't brag about his accomplishments in this crosscultural ministry report. He reflected, vocalizing to the one who sent him about his three years of public ministry. Observe what came out of his report:

- He didn't focus as much on tasks completed as on his influence. These statements didn't center on his fame, but on his impact.
- He didn't give metrics or rehearse miracles, but rather highlighted meaningful expressions of himself.

We should be as much surprised by what is not included in his report (miracles, teachings, etc.) as what is. Notice that he also didn't use the points mentioned in Luke 4:18-20, commonly referred to as the Nazareth Manifesto ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . ."), which some mission thinkers say defined his mission. He skipped reference to that supposedly mission-defining passage altogether. Rather, he mentioned the big-picture, overriding values that truly defined his influence. *The kingdom path*. Looking forward to the next day, Jesus didn't like what he saw lying ahead of him: beating, mocking, and crucifixion. Yet that too was part of God's mission and will, and it would bring him glory. William Barclay, commenting on this passage, said, "We find our glory, not in doing as we like, but in doing as God wills."²

Jesus' perfect obedience to the will of God was his glory. We find our glory, not in doing as we like, but in doing as God wills. When we try to do as we like—as many of us have done—we find nothing but sorrow and disaster both for ourselves and for others. We find real glory of life in doing God's will; the greater the obedience, the greater the joy.

**WILLIAM BARCLAY,
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

Jesus embraced the kingdom path. This choice shaped his life's mission and shows in his ministry-end report. This should also be our choice when ministering crossculturally. This kingdom mindset and disposition should influence every aspect of ministry and the fruitfulness that follows. As has been correctly noted,

when we embrace the kingdom path, everything changes: the questions change, the metrics change, the focus changes, the strategies change, the culture changes. The full attention shifts to God's bigger picture, because obedience is the bigger picture. Can we make a case for why we would have any other definition?³

The priority of love. With this kingdom path in mind, the final words of Jesus' prayer should not be missed. If they are, the whole report amounts to nothing. Jesus ended his prayer by saying, "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn 17:26).

As crosscultural workers, we are to be known by the demonstration of our love. We aren't to ignore the broken and hurting. We are to be filled with compassion that comes from walking close to a compassionate God. The prospect of anyone experiencing eternal suffering as well as temporal suffering should break us. Let us be message bearers that mirror the love of Jesus. (See [figure 24.2.](#))

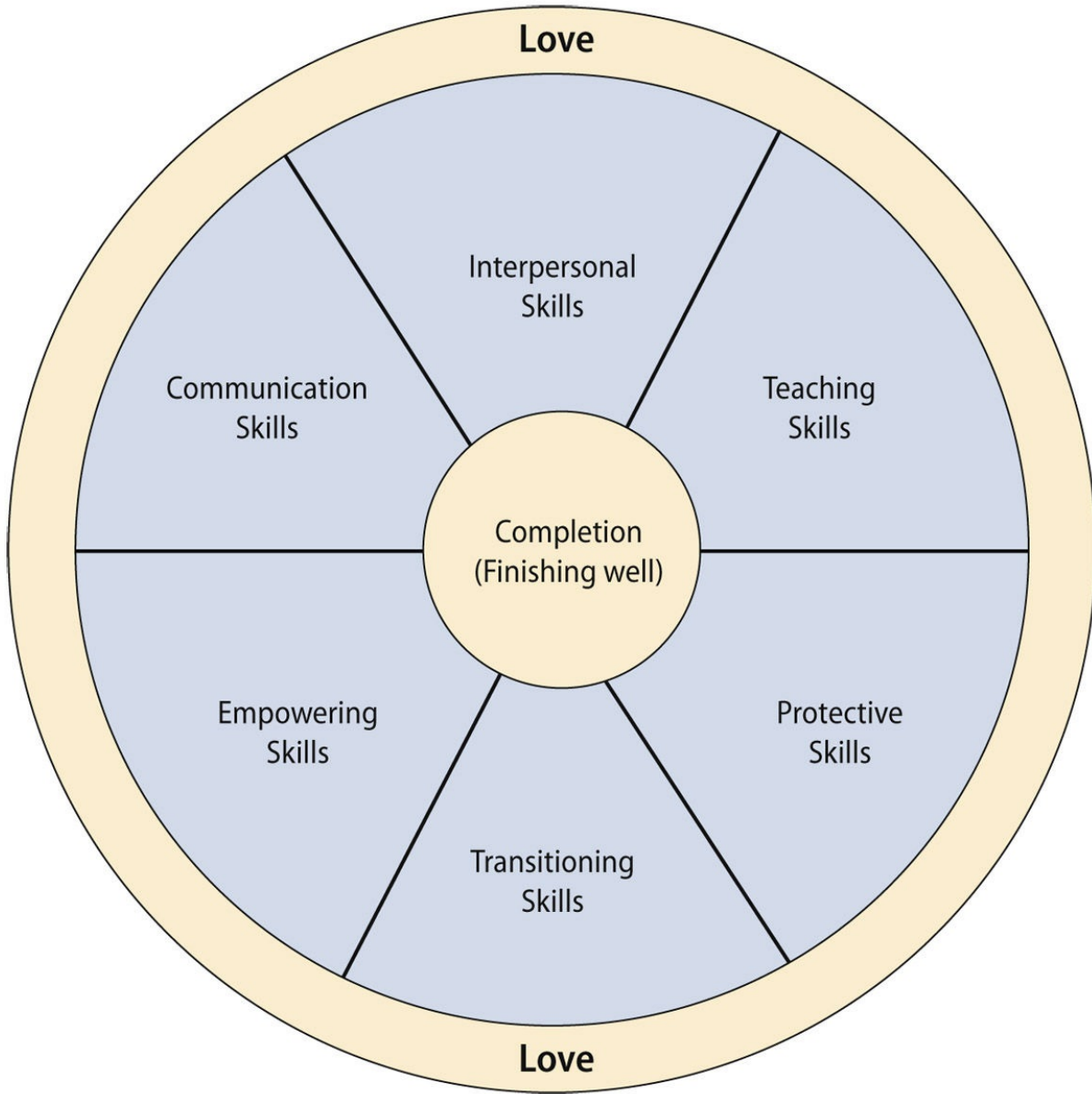


Figure 24.2. The priority of love in Jesus' ministry

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Do our year-end ministry reports focus on personal accomplishments or on what demonstrates godly influence? Do they tend to emphasize what we like or what God wills and does through us? Taking a cue from Jesus' report, let's ensure that there is balance. But in all that we do, let's make our final goal a ministry of love and compassion that leads people to know and believe that "this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3).

Pontius Pilate

The Clueless Crosscultural Interrogator

JOHN 18:28–19:16

Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. . . . So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." . . .

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" (Jn 18:28-31, 33-38)

It was a hot and humid afternoon in Hanoi, Vietnam. I and three other mission leaders were walking the downtown area to get a grasp on the way of life of the six million people who made up the metropolis. We were surveying with the thought of beginning ministry in this largely unreached city. Following us every step of the way was a small band of shoeshine boys, waiting for the opportunity to make a few *dong* off us foreigners. The trouble was, we were all wearing tennis shoes. But that didn't seem to matter to them. They followed anyway.

We took seats at an outdoor café and ordered sodas. For the boys' futile efforts, we bought drinks for them too. Then, through our translator, we posed a question to them: "Have you ever heard of Jesus?" Puzzled, they answered that they never had—would he be another foreign tourist passing through soon? They were clueless about the person and work of Jesus Christ. They had never heard his name.

THE SETTING

The Passion Week began triumphantly for Jesus when he entered Jerusalem, enthusiastically hailed by the masses as the king of Israel (Mt 21:1-11; Mk 11:1-11, 14-17; Lk 19:29-44; Jn 12:12-19). But it ended with his crucifixion five days later. In short order, Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples, arrested, and put through a series of trials by the religious authorities (Mt 26:47-75; Mk 14:43-72; Lk 22:47-71; Jn 18:2-27). Declaring him guilty of blasphemy, they condemned him to death. They then escorted him to the Roman governor's palace to have their sentence carried out by the highest civil authority. The adoring masses from the beginning of the week had turned into a murderous mob by Friday.

All four Gospel accounts depict Pilate as advocating for Jesus' release and attempting to avert his execution. He acquiesced to the Jewish mob only when they wouldn't budge from their demand for Jesus' death. In Matthew's Gospel, Pilate washed his hands to show that he wasn't responsible for Jesus' execution, and he only reluctantly agreed to send Jesus to his death.

Mark's Gospel depicts Jesus as innocent of plotting against Rome and again portrays Pilate as unwilling to have him put to death. In Luke, Pilate forcefully argued that Jesus didn't conspire against Rome and found nothing treasonous in his actions. Finally, in John's Gospel, Pilate stated three times, "I find no guilt in him" (Jn 18:38; 19:4, 6). Yet under unrelenting pressure from the Jews and against his conscience and sense of justice, in the end "he delivered him over to them to be crucified" (Jn 19:16).

Pilate was an Italian, probably originating from central Italy. According to tradition, he was a Roman equestrian (knight) of the Samnite clan (central southern Italy) of Pontii, hence his name, Pontius. He was the Roman procurator (governor) of Judea AD 26 to 36. Jesus' three years of public ministry fell squarely in the middle of those ten years.

Pontius Pilate's encounter with Jesus was a genuine crosscultural one. Here is where East met West; the Jewish worldview collided with the Roman; the Jewish religion butted up against European paganism. Jesus was probably in Pilate's presence for less than an hour. They had never met before, and from Pilate's questioning we can deduce that before this encounter, Pilate had never even heard of Jesus. Yet the meeting between the two would change the course of history.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

The best way to describe Pilate would be as a clueless foreign pagan, ignorant of the person and work of Jesus. That assessment may seem harsh at first, but judging by his litany of questions to Jesus, it's obvious that he didn't have a clue to whom he was speaking.

Jesus answered that Pilate had no power at all, except what had been given him by God. The crucifixion of Jesus never, from beginning to end, reads like the story of a man caught up in an inexorable web of circumstances over which he had no control; it never reads like the story of a man who was hounded to his death; it is the story of a man whose last days were a triumphant procession towards the goal of the Cross.

**WILLIAM BARCLAY,
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

Jackson Wu, in his book *One Gospel for All Nations*, states that the gospel generally answers four key questions: (1) Who is Christ? (2) What has Christ done? (3) Why is Christ important? (4) How should we respond?¹ In a roundabout way, the uninformed Pilate asked these and a few other questions of Jesus.

Of the Gospel writers, John gave the most extended account of Jesus' trial before Pilate. Here, as recounted by John, are the seven questions Pilate put to Jesus during his interrogation:

- "Are you the King of the Jews" (Jn 18:33)
- "Am I a Jew?" (Jn 18:35)
- "What have you done?" (Jn 18:35)

- “So you are a king?” (Jn 18:37)
- “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38)
- “Where are you from?” (Jn 19:9)
- And two questions tied together: “You will not speak to me?” and “Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” (Jn 19:10)

A second look at these questions shows that Pilate deals with the following:

- the question of Jesus’ identity: “Are you the King of the Jews?” (Jn 18:33)
- the question of Pilate’s identity: “Am I a Jew?” (Jn 18:35)
- the question of Jesus’ conduct: “What have you done?” (Jn 18:35)
- the question of Jesus’ position: “So you are a king?” (Jn 18:37)
- the question of reality: “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38)
- the question of Jesus’ origin: “Where are you from?” (Jn 19:9)
- the question of authority: “Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” (Jn 19:10)

Three of the four questions posited by Wu (minus number three, “Why is Christ important?”) are directly answered by Jesus. First, he affirms that he is king. He could legitimately make that claim because he is, according to the flesh, a descendent of David (and thus entitled to the Jewish throne).

Second, the object of his incarnation is to testify to the truth, to bear witness to it. When he said, “For this purpose I was born,” he stated his true humanity. But when he added, “For this purpose I have come into the world” (Jn 18:37), it’s not a vain repetition of his birth; it shows that he preexisted and came from above.

Third, in regard to response, only those who are of the truth receive him: “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (Jn 18:37). Those proceeding

from the truth, who are born again by the power of the truth and Spirit of truth, listen to and obey him.²

Jesus answered the questions of who he is, what he has done, and how we should respond to him. These three elements of the gospel are mandatory in all gospel presentations, being always relevant crossculturally and cross-temporally. In other words, this is the essence of the gospel message that is to be conveyed across all cultures at all times in all ethnic settings. To be true to their calling, message bearers today need to include this content in the message they proclaim.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the pinnacle of redemptive history. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died a substitutionary death on behalf of humankind, as a propitiation and atonement for sins before a holy God. By his death, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14).

It was imperative that Jesus die a bloody and gruesome death on our behalf. He took our sins upon himself so we might live in newness of life. This is the gospel. This is the good news that all people in every culture in every age in every place need to hear, accept, and believe.

Acts 1:8

The Crosscultural Mission of the Church

ACTS 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The time had finally arrived for Jesus to leave his disciples permanently.¹ One last meeting was all he needed to relay his final instruction. Over the past forty days since his resurrection, he had been progressively leading them into an understanding of what he was asking of them when it came to his global mission. Now one last piece of vital information would complete all he needed them to know before they got started.

His farewell address recorded in Acts 1 is really a continuation of what he had told them earlier in the day in an upper room in Jerusalem. With that session completed, Jesus now had them join him on a two-mile trek outside the city to the slopes of the Mount of Olives (Lk 24:50). The town of Bethany lay at the foot of that mount. After he clarified some teaching about the timing of the kingdom, his final words were brief: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

That was it! With that he vanished into the air right before their eyes, never to be seen face to face again. No wonder they lingered, gazing intently upward until interrupted by “two men . . . in white robes” (Acts 1:10).

If those parting words had been stand-alone instructions unattached to the previous four commission statements, the disciples would have been left standing dumbfounded. Instead, since they had been recipients of a succession of instructions, they clearly grasped what Jesus meant.

In this final instruction, Jesus relayed three means by which the mission was to be carried out: Holy Spirit empowerment, a strategic plan, and human instrumentality.

THE MEANS OF EMPOWERMENT

The Holy Spirit is the divine empowerer of missions. His coming imparted divine enabling to every aspect of the mission enterprise. As Robert Glover said, “Christian missions are no human undertaking, but a supernatural and divine enterprise for which God has provided supernatural power and leadership.”²

The human heart tends to rely on its own self-confidence and abilities for success in ministry. We easily mislead ourselves into thinking that human achievement can bring about spiritual results. But Jesus knew otherwise. He knew the spiritual battle that would ensue with the propagation of the gospel story going across to other cultures. He also knew that the apostles were in no way equal to the task without being empowered from on high. They would wrestle not only against flesh and blood, “but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). That’s why he told the disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

An important principle in missions is clear: spiritual work takes spiritual power to achieve spiritual ends. In light of this principle, it’s imperative that we, like the disciples, be assured of where the source of power for mission originates.

Enablement implies that we have no ability whatsoever. We’re entirely powerless. We can do nothing. But when by faith we renounce self-sufficiency and embrace reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit, we receive divine empowerment, enablement, and strength for personal transformation and ministry.

JERRY BRIDGES

Management and technology? In this highly pragmatic and secular-humanistic age, it's easy to rely on managerial missiology to achieve missional goals.³ The mission endeavor often deteriorates into a solely human endeavor with superficial results. It becomes a purely human achievement and humanistic when based on self-sufficiency. All too often, organizational efficiency replaces spiritual efficacy, resulting in a flurry of activity lacking genuine results. Back in the 1970s, John Stott, cognizant of this propensity of the human heart, looked ahead to our present day and insightfully wrote,

Some people seem to look forward with relish to the time when the evangelistic work of the church will be computerized, the whole job will be done by machines instead of people, and the evangelization of the world will be the ultimate triumph of human technology.⁴

Stott was a prophet! How often have we heard it said that now that we have mastered the Internet, cable TV, computer programs, text messaging, and whatever else, we finally have the ability to evangelize the world. Granted, these technologies do assist in the task, but they can never replace the place and power of the Holy Spirit in world evangelization.

Holy Spirit power. Jesus had already assured the apostles about the authority they had been granted for mission (Mt 28:18). That overarching authority gave them the right to go anywhere and at any time to engage in world evangelization. Now he informed them of the power available to them through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Christians will faithfully fulfill their missionary calling only if they do God's mission in God's way. Such mission has its origin in God the Father. Jesus knows that if His disciples are ever going to faithfully carry out the demands of mission, they cannot depend merely on themselves. . . . We need the Holy Spirit. Our own personal resources are valuable, but they are not sufficient.

NEVILLE CALLAM

The disciples knew they would be at a disadvantage without Jesus physically present by their side. Therefore, his words were an assurance to them that another divine member of the Trinity would be with them and do for them what they couldn't do in and of themselves. By the Holy Spirit's power, they would have the courage to preach the gospel effectively and to work miracles that would confirm the gospel message.

In the midst of the modern climate of self-confidence built on technological achievement and corporate managerial acumen applied to missions, it's refreshing to hearken back to the disciples' humble reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit. They believed that humanity, being dead in the trespasses of sins, blinded to spiritual truth, and enslaved to unrighteousness, could never save itself out of the clutches of Satan. They knew that only the Holy Spirit could liberate humanity from the bondage of sin, bringing us from death into life.⁵ Only by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit can the task of taking redemption to a sin-sick world be achieved. Like us, the disciples needed that empowerment.

Throughout the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit's empowerment was repeatedly manifested in relation to the mission of the church. He was so intricately involved in empowering the apostles throughout every aspect of their missional journey that his presence can't be missed. As they and others engaged their own and other cultures, we see the Holy Spirit directly cited for empowering in the following:

- clear public proclamation of the gospel (Peter in Acts 2:14-41)
- bold defense before authorities (Peter in Acts 4:8-22)
- direction to prepare their hearts (Philip meeting the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-40; Peter meeting Cornelius in Acts 10:19-23)
- the selection of new missionaries (Church of Antioch in Acts 13:1-4)
- confronting spiritual forces (Paul confronting Elymas in Acts 13:8-12)
- settling theological issues resulting from the advance of the gospel into virgin territory (Jerusalem Council, Acts 15:23-29)

- directing the steps of missionaries—guidance as to where *not* to go (Paul in Asia, Acts 16:6) and guidance as to where to go (Paul compelled by Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem, Acts 20:22)
- guidance in the selection of leaders for mission churches (Acts 20:28)
- insight concerning future experiences a missionary would encounter (Paul told in advance about being taken captive in Jerusalem, Acts 21:4-11)

The empowerment of the Holy Spirit is such a dominant theme in the book of Acts, some have proposed that the better title for the book would be “Acts of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ In the apostolic church, as it should be today, the power of the Holy Spirit in mission was at the center of every endeavor.

George Peters said it well when reflecting on the importance of the Holy Spirit in missions:

It is clearly implied and understood from the context and the general tenor of the Bible that such a task can be carried through only in the power of the Holy Spirit. He is the great Superintendent, the Energizer and Sustainer of His church. The church’s task, in the final end, is a supernatural task which demands supernatural resources. Because these are available in the Holy Spirit we must lean hard upon him.⁷

THE MEANS OF A STRATEGIC PLAN

The book of Acts is a historical record of the geographic, linguistic, and ethnic expansion of the gospel. Acts 1:8 doubles as a table of contents for the book. The gospel was first preached among the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 1–8), then to the mixed-Jews of Samaria (Acts 8–12), and finally to the Gentiles everywhere else (Acts 13–28). However, there are other aspects of missions that Jesus teaches in this command.

No one center. The nature of the global mission of the church demands that it should never establish one geographic center or be dominated by one culture. Jesus, wanting to make sure the disciples didn't establish Jerusalem as its center, explicitly told them to go out from that city. The Old Testament version of centripetal mission, where Israel welcomed all nations streaming to it, was to be replaced by the centrifugal mission of going out to the nations. Christianity was not to be an ethnically Jewish-centric religion, a linguistically Hebrew-centric religion, or a geographically Jerusalem-centric religion. The straitjacket of one culture was not to be imposed upon it.

As such, Christianity wasn't designed to be a Jewish *axis mundi* (center from which everything revolves) religion. This would permit it to flourish anywhere in the world and in any culture in which humankind lives. The idea of a holy, centralized center of religion was not to be part of this new faith.

The genius of Christianity is that God can genuinely be worshiped in ways culturally appropriate to believers wherever they are found. The concept of Christianity having a multitude of centers throughout the world became the model that would permit this new belief to thrive.⁸ Jerusalem initially did become a center of Christianity, but that had a short life span by design. This may be an extenuating reason God allowed its destruction in AD 70. There was to be no permanent center!⁹

Three places at once. Another thing Jesus made clear was that the witness of the apostles was to take place in three arenas simultaneously. They were to have a witness in their capital city, in Jerusalem, and in the immediate environs of Judea. This would subsequently radiate to the half-foreigners in Samaria and then go far beyond Palestine to the end of the earth.

Some assume the spread of the gospel was to be a three-step process: first to Jerusalem and Judea, then to Samaria, and finally stretching to the end of the earth. But the language of the text points to a simultaneous witness in all three areas. The verse literally reads, “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”

The ands don’t mean “then to” or “next,” as though Jesus were advocating a strategy of successive steps. All regions are to have our attention and efforts simultaneously. This same strategy is important in today’s globalized age with its exponential international migration, causing people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to crisscross the world right up to our doorsteps. Our witness needs to be right here where we are, it needs to be nearby, and it needs to be over there at the same time.

A missiological parsing of Acts 1:8. This verse also gives a glimpse into the dynamics involved when the gospel travels from place to place and culture to culture. Starting out from the city of Jerusalem, the paradigm is portrayed in table 26.1. For us involved in crosscultural missions today, notice the dynamics that all crosscultural workers need to pay close attention to in regard to ethnicity, geography, language, and culture as the gospel goes forth.

Table 26.1. Dynamics in Acts 1:8

Dynamic	Jerusalem and all Judea	and Samaria	and to the end of the earth
Ethnicity	Their own people	Mixture of Jew and Gentile	Other peoples altogether
Geography	Their own capital city and regional identity	Neighboring region	Faraway places
Language	Their native language	Different dialect	Completely

Language	Their native language (difference in accent only)	Different dialect	Completely different language
Culture	Their own culture	Slightly different culture	Totally different cultures

Three types of evangelism. Ralph Winter, in his historic address at the 1974 Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization, did more than any other in this generation to help believers understand the missiological paradigm Jesus gave in Acts 1:8. In that address, Winter pinpointed the three types of evangelism needed to reach the world today. He labeled them E-1, E-2, and E-3 evangelism.¹⁰

E-1 evangelism takes place when a person stays within her own people group, own geographic area, and own language and culture to win people to Christ. This typically happens when a Caucasian American witnesses to another Caucasian American living just down the street. With most everything in common between them, the task of communicating is relatively easy and without barriers.

In E-2 evangelism, the task is not as simple and requires different techniques. The bearer of the gospel crosses into a different but usually nearby geographical area to reach people who speak a different yet understandable dialect and who are living within a slightly different culture. The cultural and linguistic barriers crossed are relatively simple to navigate. A believing Navajo going to the Apache would be an example.

E-3 evangelism requires a more complicated communication skill set because of higher barriers that need to be crossed. In this instance, a person goes to an altogether different people, who are usually in a distant place, who speak a completely different language and who operate in a completely foreign culture. The missionary must engage in language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and worldview comprehension before he is able to present the gospel with clarity and effectiveness. The task is considerably more difficult than E-1 or E-2 evangelism

and demands special training. A Canadian going to the Lisu people of southern China would be an example.

Although there are differences in the complexity of task, E-1, E-2, and E-3 are equal in value. Table 26.2 gives us a look at Acts 1:8 in relation to these three types.

Table 26.2. Three types of evangelism in Acts 1:8

Dynamic	Jerusalem and all Judea	and Samaria	and to the end of the earth
Ethnicity	Their own people	Mixture of Jew and Gentile	Other peoples altogether
Geography	Their own capital city and regional identity	Neighboring region	Faraway places
Language	Their native language (difference in accent only)	Different dialect	Completely different language
Culture	Their own culture	Slightly different culture	Significantly different culture
Type of evangelism	E-1 Evangelism	E-2 Evangelism	E-3 Evangelism

E-1 evangelism is powerful, but E-2 and E-3 evangelism are essential to completing the task of world evangelization. Fully one-third of the world’s 7.2 billion people can’t be reached unless the church engages in E-3 evangelism. Another third that are “close by” cannot be reached without E-2 evangelism. Winter has aptly said, “We are forced to believe that until every tribe and tongue has a strong, powerfully evangelizing church in it, and thus E-1 witness within it, E-2 and E-3 efforts coming from outside are still essential and highly urgent.”¹¹

THE MEANS OF HUMAN INSTRUMENTALITY

One last comment needs to be made about the disciples' (and our) personal involvement. Jesus put at the heart of this command the phrase "and you will be my witnesses." Human instrumentality is the God-ordained means of reaching out to humans. God enlisted no other way, avenue, or being to do this task. It must be humans evangelizing other humans for this mission to be most successful.

British missionary William Carey, often called the father of modern missions, had to convince a denomination of reluctant Baptists to get involved in world evangelization. To convince them of its importance, he wrote a pamphlet that had the word *means* in its title. After discussing the importance of the means of prayer, he wrote:

We must not be contented however with praying, without exerting ourselves in the use of means for the obtaining of those things we pray for. Were the children of light but as wise in their generation as the children of this world they would stretch every nerve to gain so glorious a prize, nor ever imagine that it was to be obtained in any other way.¹²

The disciples had been eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and ministry from the very start. These men had spent three full years with him that allowed them to observe him under every conceivable circumstance. They witnessed every miracle he performed and heard every address he gave. They saw his concern for the lost, his compassion for the unfortunate, and his care of the needy. They listened to his beautifully crafted parables and saw him dumbfound his critics by his wisdom. And in the end they watched as he suffered and died, and they met him several times after he victoriously rose from the dead. For them, it was indisputable that Jesus was the Son of God.¹³

Thus the disciples needed no persuasion that Jesus' words and works were of God. They had witnessed every aspect of his life and ministry. They were there as eyewitnesses when all those marvelous things transpired. Indeed, he was that "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands" (1 Jn 1:1). As eyewitnesses, they could testify to the veracity of all of Jesus' mighty acts.

When Jesus told them that they would now be his witnesses, he was saying that they were to proclaim what they had personally experienced with him. Their story was linked to their identification with him. Their firsthand experiences would lend credence to their message.

Over the centuries, the meaning of the word witness (*martureō*) has evolved in Christian circles. It has moved from its original generic meaning of "somebody who saw or heard something happen and gave evidence about it" to the more specific meaning of "a public statement of strong personal Christian beliefs." Because so many believers have died doing that very thing, the word eventually took on the meaning of "martyr." A martyr is a believer who has lost her life prematurely in a situation of witness, as a result of human hostility.¹⁴ All but one of the disciples would die a martyr's death.

This is the kind of witness Jesus would have us practice today. Christ's mission to the nations can go forward only as believers proclaim what they themselves have personally experienced with Christ. Those believers boldly give public affirmation about their salvation experience and believe in it so strongly that they're prepared to die a martyr's death to push crosscultural missions forward. This is what Jesus' disciples ended up spending the rest of their lives doing. This is what believers in every age should be willing to do as well.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

The daunting task of world evangelization that lay before the disciples would take more muscle than they could muster in and of themselves. As well trained as they were after spending three years with Jesus, they lacked the one important ingredient that would enable them to go on mission with confidence: the supernatural empowerment from a higher source, the Holy Spirit. He alone would enable them to carry on their crosscultural task. Jesus was now ready to send the Holy Spirit to them as he left them permanently.

Just before his final departure, he told them about the strategic means in which the gospel was to go forth from Jerusalem. They were to proclaim it within their own general environs; they were to take it across ethnic barriers to nearby peoples; and they were to cross over into foreign cultures and peoples who were vastly different from themselves. But as they went farther and farther, they were not to forget the previous evangelized areas. These were to have their simultaneous attention as well.

The gospel message is applicable to all peoples everywhere at all times. It is a supracultural message that finds meaningful acceptance wherever it's proclaimed. Therefore, the disciples' task wasn't complete until they had carried it to the uttermost parts of the earth. And if they failed to complete that task in their lifetime, those who followed after them were to pick up where they left off.

It takes individuals with firsthand experience with Christ to proclaim with passion his salvation to the nations. This is why only genuine believers qualify for the task. It's also why we find that the most mission-minded churches today that are committed to world evangelization are comprised of those who have experienced new life in Christ for themselves. They are witnesses in the true sense of the word.



The person who doesn't believe in taking the message of Jesus Christ to the nations, in the end, does not believe in Jesus Christ. No interest in missions means no interest for that particular thing for which Jesus was content to be born and to live and to die.

**ADDRESS FROM THE STUDENT
VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT CONVENTION, 1898**



The Jerusalem Church

Crosscultural Conflict Management

ACTS 6:1-7

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

I, along with a hired professional mediator, sat at the large table between the leaders of two respected mission agencies. One was using forums and media to publically condemn the other for heresy and ministry misrepresentation. The accused agency was reeling from lost revenue that was directly tied to the public accusations. The two were at an impasse, and I, representing a mission network, had been called in to mediate. If resolution wasn't achieved, there would be dire consequences and major setbacks for both ministries.

It was clear to me from the start that there were crosscultural dynamics involved in the dispute. On one side were two seasoned Caucasian American male leaders, who were longtime believers in Christ. On the other were two influential Middle Eastern brothers, now living in the States, who were converts from Islam. Not only was this going to be a theological and missiological hashing out of meticulous issues, it was also to be an exercise in working through different worldviews.

With emotions running high, the discussions started out heated and pointed. Both sides presented justifications for their positions. Neither was prepared to back down. However, after two full days together, negotiations brought a

breakthrough. It was good to know that disputing American and Middle Eastern believers could work through points of conflict and eventually agree to disagree in a spirit of grace.

THE SETTING

The crosscultural conflict described in Acts 6 occurred early in the life of the church. That infant church, still centralized in Jerusalem, was comprised of two culturally different strands of Jewish believers. One strand was the Hebrew-background believers. These were Jews who were native to Palestine and spoke Aramaic. Since they were “the home team,” the widows among them were being given preferential treatment in the distribution of food (Acts 6:1).

The second strand was Hellenistic Jews. Ethnically they were Jewish, but they were of the diaspora, having been born in foreign lands and enmeshed in Greco-Roman culture. They had grown up in the Greek culture and spoke Greek as their primary language. They thought and behaved more like Greeks than Jews.¹

The tension that came to a head between them seems at first glance to be over a petty matter. Daily allocations were made to the poor from a common pool to which wealthier members contributed. Complaints of discrimination came from the poorest of the poor—Hellenistic widows. It seems that the distribution of charity was in the hands of the Hebrew majority.² Dissonance arose between the two groups.

To their credit, the apostles were proactive in dealing with this tension within the church. They understood that if the problem wasn’t addressed, a schism based on cultural distinction could erupt. The newborn church could ill afford such a split.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Conflict is a state of disharmony that results from differing beliefs, values, and customs or being discriminated against. Interpersonal conflict, even among believers, isn't unusual. It occurs whenever and wherever human beings live, work, and commune together. Bill Hybels put it this way:

The popular concept of unity is a fantasyland where disagreements never surface and contrary opinions are never stated with force. We expect disagreement, forceful disagreement. . . . Let's not pretend we never disagree. . . . Let's not have people hiding their concerns to protect a false notion of unity. Let's face the disagreement and deal with it in a godly way. . . . The mark of community—true biblical unity—is not the absence of conflict. It's the presence of a reconciling spirit.³

If that's true in monocultural communities, it's more so in multicultural ones. Oneness and harmony are formed on the anvil of repeated interpersonal interaction. Dissonance is created where there is a state of conflict. Commenting on this passage, Young Lee Hertig said, "The cost of unresolved conflict can be enormous. When accumulated, conflict brews to a boiling point and results in violent eruptions. Therefore, dealing with conflict openly and in an orderly way is significant, as demonstrated by the apostles and the Hellenists."⁴

On the one hand, community conflict has the potential to cause serious damage to a community and its influence. On the other hand, it has the potential to move the community and its influence into growth and positive influence. Figure 27.1, slightly modified from Evelyn and Richard Hibbert,⁵ illustrates the two alternative outcomes of interpersonal conflict.

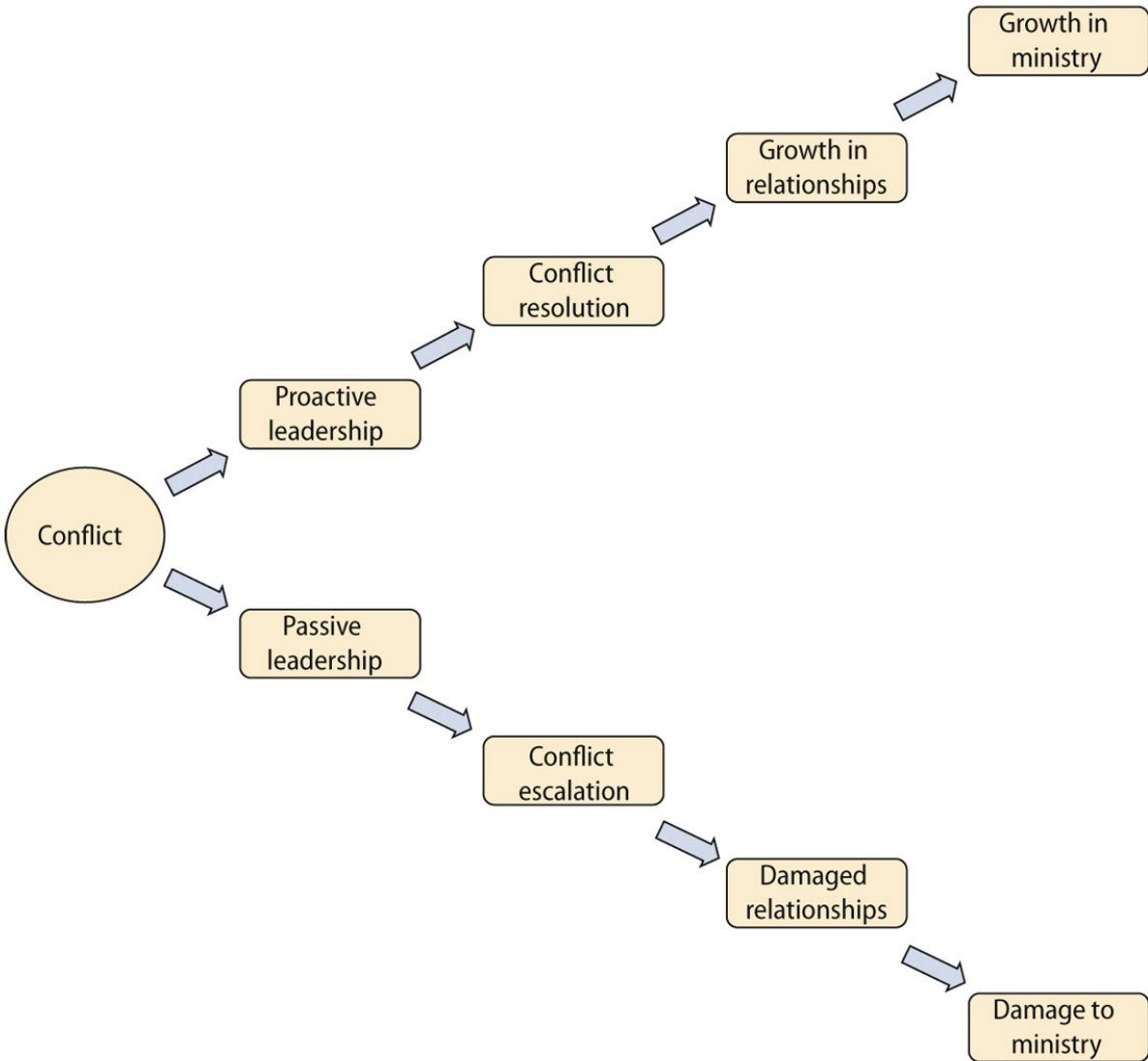


Figure 27.1. Alternative paths of conflict management

Crosscultural conflict management. The apostles dealt with this conflict in an admirable manner; the entire corrective process is coated with spirituality. Their devotion to prayer and the Word (Acts 6:4) empowered them to act wisely and provides us with basic principles for crosscultural conflict management.

- *Equality.* Though people are different, none are superior and none are inferior—all are of equal value and should be treated equally. In the body of Christ, there is no distinction of class and importance. There should not be

ethnic discrimination, “neither Jew nor Greek”; class discrimination, “slave nor free”; nor gender discrimination, “male and female” (Gal 3:28). The church learned this principle early on by way of this internal conflict.

- *Sensitivity*. Be sensitive to the needs of others, especially those who are disadvantaged. It appears that the Hebrew faction was clueless of the hurt they were causing the Hellenistic widows. They seemed to be insensitive to the offense until it was brought to their attention.
- *Discovery*. In times of crosscultural tension, become knowledgeable. The twelve apostles brought everyone together to discover the core problem (Acts 6:2). No doubt there was a lengthy discussion about the issue. They took time to search out the particulars, separating fact from fiction. Many times at this stage of information gathering, a lot of emotion is vented. Good leaders wade through and wait through the time of emotional expression without getting caught up in the moment themselves. This written account is devoid of emotional excitement, though there surely must have been plenty.

Most conflicts that disrupt our lives grow out of innocent misunderstandings, unmet expectations, failure to get all the facts, or minor irritations that fester and become problems. If this is true, then we need to remind ourselves how important it is to deal effectively with conflict, since neglect brings pain and potential separation from those we love.

**DUANE ELMER,
CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT**

- *Ability*. Be helpful according to your ability and understanding. The apostles understood both their authority and their limitations, and balanced them with their primary focus: spiritual ministry. They didn’t micromanage the situation, but handed it over to others who could manage it for them.

- *Mediation.* As a mediator, don't take a side and don't take offense. Graciously mediate from a position of authority, and once the problem is pinpointed, don't feel insulted. Some leaders think that interpersonal tension in an organization is a reflection of their weak leadership skills. After all, they reason, if they were competent leaders, problems like that wouldn't arise. That's just not true. As the earlier quote from Hybels makes clear, wherever you have people gathered, there you will have conflict. The apostles weren't offended that this problem emerged under their leadership. Rather, they took control of the situation and led the group through a corrective process.
- *Participation.* Attempt to solve the conflict in conjunction with those involved. The apostles didn't make a unilateral decision. Rather, they backed off and delegated the matter to others more knowledgeable and closer to the situation (Acts 6:3).
- *Agreement.* Make sure both sides agree to the terms of the solution and the means of rectification. Notice that their plan of action "pleased the whole gathering" (Acts 6:5). They achieved buy-in from everyone. Thus it was easy to get both sides to agree on the solution. In this instance, judging by their names, the ones chosen to manage the process from then onward were all Hellenistic Jewish believers. This solution seemed to please everyone, especially the apostles, who "prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6) as official confirmation of agreement.

Benefits of conflict resolution. When interpersonal conflict gets resolved, good things happen. Disharmony turns into accord, and discontent into satisfaction. People get along with each other and together shoulder responsibilities that make the community stronger. In this case, "the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Increased influence and multiplication of numbers were the outcome

of the resolved conflict. Rather than a schism fragmenting the church, solidarity propelled it forward.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Interpersonal conflict is unavoidable. Whether from differences of opinion based on beliefs, values, and customs or as a result of unwarranted discrimination, dissonance happens. This is all the more true when people of different ethnic backgrounds attempt to work together. However, there are biblically based principles for resolution. The apostles modeled these principles through the leadership they exercised, managing a seething undercurrent in a church divided along cultural lines.

Working through conflict is stressful, but the joy of bringing people, especially of two cultural backgrounds, to understanding and agreement makes the effort rewarding. In most instances, ministry is enhanced and growth results. Conflict resolution results in restoration of relationships, which in turn produces multiplication.

Philip

Reaching the “Second-Class”

ACTS 8

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:4-8, 26-31, 35-39)

China, still ruled by the Communist Party, is technically a classless society. Anything that's government controlled (which is most) has an air of classlessness to it. Officially, there are no upper-, middle-, or lower-class people. There remains a concerted attempt to keep the populous believing that egalitarianism is the social norm. Yet this Marxian principle has become more and more elusive in recent years because of economic advances that have propelled the country forward.

Take for instance the typical experience of riding a train. A few years back, a group of American graduate students and I took the night train from the northeastern city of Harbin to Beijing, a fourteen-hour ride, mainly in the dark. When we went to purchase our tickets, there were no first-, second-, third-, or fourth-class ones. But we quickly discovered that there were indeed distinctions

between the kinds of ride we could have. Instead of first class, we could have “soft berth”; instead of second class, we could be in “hard berth”; instead of third class, we could have “soft chair”; instead of fourth class, we could purchase “hard chair.” Although technically there was no class distinction, in reality there clearly was.

Class distinctions are found in all societies. A tiered social structure is unavoidable; it has been the human experience since time immemorial. People relegated to the status of second class feel acutely the disadvantages of being discriminated against.

THE SETTING

In Acts 6, one of those chosen to assist the apostles in the distribution of food to widows was Philip (Acts 6:5). He was known for his evangelistic fervor, for later in Acts he is called “Philip the evangelist” (Acts 21:8). Since he had a Greek name, he most likely was a Hellenistic Jew. His Hellenistic background likely accounted for his willingness to take the gospel to those outside of Hebrew circles, to those on the fringe who were considered second class by the greater Jewish community.

We see this on two counts in this chapter. First, he was willing to go to the most marginal group of Jewish connectedness: the hybrid Samaritans. On his own initiative, he went down to Samaria and “proclaimed to them the Christ” (Acts 8:5). The second-class status of the Samaritans among the Jews is legendary.¹

Second, after showing himself to be a person with a passion and a capacity for relating to the second class, “an angel of the Lord” sent him to the eunuch from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26). That man, traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, represented another sort of second class, as we will see. The exciting thing about Philip’s endeavors is that in both instances the gospel was believed, and converts were made.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

The structure of Acts. To best understand where these two stories intersect with the metanarrative of the book of Acts, we need to understand Luke's structure for the book.

Acts is comprised of twenty short stories. Luke, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, compiled and wove these stories together to create the larger volume addressed to Theophilus (Acts 1:1). Two of those short stories are the ones found in Acts 8, centering on the ministry of Philip. Before Luke transitioned from primarily focusing on the ministry of the apostle Peter (Acts 1–12) to the apostle Paul (Acts 13–28), he included these two important incidents in the ministry of Philip.

One of Luke's goals was to show the advancement of the gospel. He took the reader on a geographic tour, recounting the propagation of the gospel from the insignificant provincial town of Jerusalem to the megacity of Rome, political capital of the Mediterranean world. To do that, he traced the ministry of the main characters who carried the gospel from Judea (Acts 1–7) to Samaria (Acts 8), onward to Syrian Antioch (Acts 11–13), through Cyprus (Acts 13), into Asia Minor (Acts 13–14), bridging over to Europe (Acts 16–18), and ultimately reaching Rome (Acts 28).

He also traced in ever-expanding circles the advance of the gospel culturally. Its crosscultural advance can't be missed. He began with devout, Aramaic-speaking Jewish people (Acts 2:5) and then moved to Greek-speaking Jewish people (Acts 6:1). Next he covered those on the fringe of Judaism: the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-25) and the eunuch from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-40). Finally, the gospel was believed by the Gentiles (Acts 10:1–11:18).²

The person Philip. As discussed in the previous chapter, helpers to the apostles were chosen in Acts 6. Luke had just finished describing the fate of one

of them, Stephen, in Acts 6:8–8:3. Now he included the turnkey ministry of another: Philip.

Philip was impeccable in character. He was a man “of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). He had a heart of compassion for the disadvantaged, the second class. We see this first in his advocacy for the Hellenistic widows who were unfairly treated (Acts 6:5). We see it a second time when he took the initiative to evangelize the Samaritans (Acts 8:5). He didn’t have to go down to their city, but he felt compelled to do so. When God saw his willing spirit, his adaptability and his evangelizing efforts among those considered second-rate, he orchestrated events to get him to another sector of the second class who needed the gospel.

The eunuch from Ethiopia. God sent Philip in the opposite direction from Samaria, so he could have a face-to-face encounter with a eunuch from Ethiopia. Philip was the most likely candidate for this special assignment.

Just who was this distinguished person who traveled to Jerusalem all the way from Ethiopia? Was he an African, an ethnic Ethiopian who converted to Judaism, as is most easy for the reader to deduce? Or was he actually an ethnic Jew, living as part of the diaspora in faraway Ethiopia? Although his ethnicity may not be immediately evident, there are certain descriptions of the man that help narrow it down.

First, in Acts 8:27, Luke identified him as a “court official.” This term, usually meaning “minister,” is often used to refer to a high government official. Luke gave the added information that he was in charge of the queen’s treasury (Acts 8:27). He was indeed a trusted and important man.

Second, Luke mentioned that he was a eunuch. He didn’t want this fact to go unnoticed; he mentioned it five times (Acts 8:27, 34, 36, 38, 39). The term usually refers to a castrated male. Indeed, Luke’s repeated mention of this fact emphasized the man’s physical defect. The man had been to Jerusalem to worship, but by law he was prohibited from entering the temple because of this physical impairment (Deut 23:1).³ Though he had high status in the Ethiopian court, he was considered second class when in Jerusalem.

“Bapak Newell, you have been here many years. Why do you spend your life working with the lowly tribal people of this island when you can live more comfortably here in the city among us, or even back in your homeland?” asked the inquisitive wealthy Chinese storeowner I regularly purchased supplies from.

“Because,” I replied, “if I did not help them, no one else would.”

Third, the man utilized the Scriptures, and probably in the Hebrew language. He was reading a portion from a scroll written by the prophet Isaiah (Acts 8:28). Having been absent from the land of Israel, he had no comprehension that the portion he was reading—Isaiah 53—could refer to the recent life and death of Jesus, the messiah. It took the accompaniment of Philip for that to be explained.

Fourth, he was most likely a diaspora Jew and not a Gentile, as evidenced by his effort to visit Jerusalem. This would have been a long and arduous journey, most likely a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to the land of his ancestor’s origin. “He had come to Jerusalem to worship” (Acts 8:27). Although it wasn’t unheard of for proselytes to Judaism to make such a journey, it’s more likely that only a true Jew would undertake such an endeavor.

We also know that at the time of the dispersion of the Jews by the Babylonians, some went as far away as Ethiopia. Isaiah 11:11 refers to scattered Jews living there. Years later, the Persian King Ahasuerus issued a decree “to the Jews, to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia” (Esther 8:9).

But the strongest evidence that he was a Jew and not Gentile is that Luke later presented Cornelius, a Roman, as the first Gentile convert (Acts 10:1–11:18). Luke went to great lengths to tell of the vision that prepared Peter’s heart to preach to Cornelius’s Gentile household. Then, after the gathering of Romans listened and believed, those who accompanied Peter “were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles” (Acts 10:45), as if this was a first-time event. The Roman centurion Cornelius, not the treasurer from Ethiopia, was the first Gentile believer.

Therefore, in all probability the eunuch from Ethiopia was Jewish, not Gentile. As a diaspora Jew, his place of residence put him on the periphery of Judaism, as did his physical impediment. Acts 8:27 can best be understood to read, “There was an Ethiopian” (reference to his country of residence), “a eunuch” (reference to his physical handicap), “a court official of Candace” (reference to his employment), “who was in charge of all her treasure” (reference to his esteemed position), who “had come to Jerusalem to worship” (reference to his religious affiliation—Judaism). The most probable profile of this man was not that of a burly black African, as is commonly depicted, but rather as a distinguished-looking Jew, much on the order of Nicodemus.

Putting the two encounters in perspective. Philip was a sensitive person with a compassionate heart. He had broad social concern that extended to the downtrodden. He advocated for the underdog, for those whom he saw as disadvantaged because of their lower status in the social order.

Philip was known as an evangelist (Acts 21:8). But he also had a heart for those on the fringe, who normally wouldn’t have had a chance to hear the gospel. In Acts 8 we see him going to two who would have been bypassed by the gospel if he had not taken the initiative to take the gospel to them. One of the best summaries of these two Philip encounters comes from Keith Reeves, who stated, “The story of the Samaritans leads directly into the story of the eunuch, who, I would argue, is a similar condition to the Samaritans. Though he was a Jew, he is unfit to worship in the Temple. He too is a second-class citizen. The stories of the Samaritans and the eunuch function as transitions from the Hellenists to the Gentiles.”⁴

Philip’s ministry to the two was resoundingly successful. Both the Samaritans and the eunuch believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12, 38), and both stories conclude on a note of rejoicing (Acts 8:8, 39).

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

No one in any society should be considered too lowly or insignificant to have the gospel proclaimed to him. Many times it's the humble and downtrodden who are most receptive to the gospel, and those of the second class many times become first-rate followers of Christ. The history of missions is replete with instances where the gospel has taken hold among those on the fringe of societies. We shouldn't exclude people from the kingdom due to their ethnic origin, lower status in society, or physical defects.

I look on all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.

JOHN WESLEY

Peter's Encounter with Cornelius

Crossing the Great Divide

ACTS 10:1–11:18

So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” . . .

And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. . . .

And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. (Acts 10:34-35; 11:12; 15:8-9)

Tofik trained to become an imam for twenty-four years at a madrasa (a school attached to a mosque) in Africa. “In school, I only learned about Islam,” he said. “Parts of our teaching were about destroying Christianity. So we did what we learned by attacking Christians once we finished our training.” Tofik was one of fourteen students selected by the local mosque to be trained in Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia.

After finishing his education, he became an imam. He led the construction of sixteen mosques in his area. He also imposed a rule: No village leaders or visitors could preach Christianity in his town. Tofik began working with Christians when a church in a neighboring village started a project and appointed him as a coordinator for the area’s social work.

Then he became a Christian. “There was an incident in 2002 where I had a vision from the Lord early in the morning around three,” he said. “In the vision, I saw Jesus very clearly telling me to follow him.

“My wife asked me what happened in my dream, because I woke up very startled, and when I explained it to her, she was scared and said, ‘We are going to be infidels, so we need to pray.’” He told her which Quranic verses Jesus told him to read in his dream; they all specifically instruct the reader to follow and believe in Jesus. Tofik said that after he fell back to sleep, he immediately had another vision of Jesus. “Jesus appeared, saying, ‘It’s me, follow me. When you

follow me, you will pay a price. There will be persecution in your life, but in the end you will be victorious. I am with you.”

After attending his first church service, Tofik asked to meet the leaders. Initially they were suspicious of his motives, because they knew him to be one of the most influential Islamic leaders in the area. “I told them about my dreams and everything else, so they accepted me and prayed for me,” he said.

News of Tofik’s conversion spread quickly. His tribe was especially angry. “They reacted by coming to my home, saying, ‘This brother is dead.’ In our culture, when someone dies, their property is shared. So they destroyed my house, setting it on fire, and they took my cattle and the remainder of my property,” he said. “They then falsely accused me of burning another house, so I was jailed and taken to court. It was only in the court process that the witnesses proved their dishonesty by having contradicting testimonies.”

After being released from jail, Tofik inspired more than two hundred people to faith in Jesus. “The Bible became my weapon. I traveled many places to preach and teach about the Christian faith. . . . I planted a church right in the compound where I live, and many people decided to follow Christ—and as a result local villagers were upset. So again they attacked me physically and burned my house.”

Tofik said initially he wanted to retaliate. His dreams told him otherwise. “The voice of Jesus himself spoke to me in my dreams about persecution, so I knew it was going to come and was ready,” Tofik said. “For those who destroyed my household, I was initially involved in prosecuting them at court, but later I said no and chose to forgive them and leave it in the hands of the Lord, so the people were released.”¹

THE SETTING

Luke had reached the focal point of his book. He now reported the crosscultural advance of the gospel to the final ethnic frontier: the Gentiles. Imagine the book of Acts as a gigantic mountain. The steep climb up one side is Acts 1–8, the summit is Acts 10–11 (the first outreach to the Gentiles), followed by Acts 13–28, the mountain’s downward side, showing the deeper penetration of the gospel to the Gentiles. Two parenthetical chapters on the dramatic rescue of the book’s two main characters are sandwiched in between.

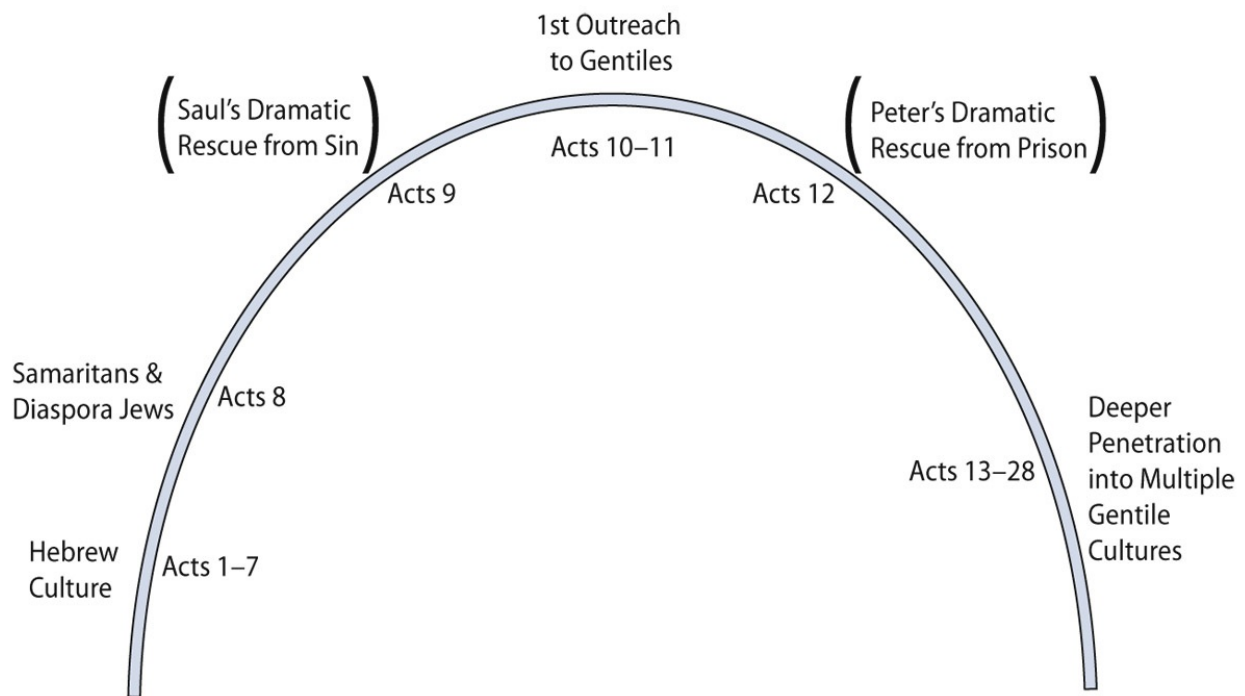


Figure 29.1. Crossing cultures in the book of Acts

In line with his “table of contents” of the book (Acts 1:8), Luke first reported on the gospel’s presentation to the Jews (Acts 2), then to the Samaritans (Acts 8), and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10–11). And the convert was no ordinary

Gentile. He was none other than a Roman centurion, a representative of the race, the military and the government that oppressed the Jews. His conversion was indeed a giant crosscultural leap forward for the gospel.

It's remarkable how God superintended circumstances to bring about this momentous gospel advance. It began when an angel encountered the God-fearing Cornelius, stationed in the coastal city of Caesarea. The angel told him how to make contact with Peter, who would share important news with him. Providentially, Peter was only thirty miles down the coast, visiting a friend in Joppa.

The following day at noon, Peter was relaxing on the flat rooftop of his friend's house, waiting for his dinner, when he fell into a trance. In a vision he saw a great sheet descend from heaven, filled with all kinds of animals, both clean and unclean. A heavenly voice commanded him to kill and eat. This happened three times.

This is the moment that becomes the hermeneutical, theological, and missiological key to the eventual acceptance by the Jewish Christians of the Gentile Christians in their midst. Peter's vision on the rooftop of the tanner's house is the springboard from which the Gentile mission will be launched.

**CHARLES E. VAN ENGEN,
*MISSION IN ACTS***

As Peter was pondering the meaning of this vision, Cornelius's messengers arrived at the house and requested Peter to accompany them to Caesarea to meet with their master, Cornelius. Impacted by the heavenly vision, Peter obliged and, along with six others, walked the day's journey to Caesarea.

Upon arrival, he found Cornelius's home filled with friends and relatives, anticipating what he had to say to them. Peter presented the gospel. As he was finishing, the Holy Spirit was poured out on those gathered, causing them to extol God while speaking in tongues. Evidence of their entrance into salvation

was so undeniable, Peter baptized them. He then stayed with them a few more days, nurturing them in their newfound faith, before returning to Jerusalem.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

Crossing the great divide. Some commentators see in this account the conversion of Peter as much as the conversion of Cornelius.² The conversion of Peter isn't from unbelief to belief in Christ, but from a prejudicial heart to an accepting heart toward the Gentiles. Peter, along with the other Jewish believers, needed an altered perspective toward the non-Jewish. Until then, they just didn't think that the gospel was for those outside their own ethnicity. Jesus was a Jewish messiah for Jewish people who believed in a Jewish-orientated gospel. Why would the Gentiles be interested? they wondered.

What Peter and his fellow believers needed to understand, and what all Christ followers today need to grasp as well, is that the gospel has no ethnic bounds. God has no ethnic favorites or preferred nationalities upon which he showers his grace. The gospel is for all peoples in all places at all times.

Peter evolved in his thinking and became a strong advocate for admitting Gentiles into the fold as fellow believers. His progression on this critical issue was quite clear as the episode unfolded. First, he told Cornelius upon arrival at his house, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). The "every nation" phrase is important. Having had time to reflect on his vision, he now understood what Jesus meant when he told the disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). In both the Matthew passage and here, the word translated as "nations" comes from *ethnē*, from which we get "ethnic group." Cornelius, as a Roman, was the first believer from the many ethnic groups who would believe in the gospel of Christ Jesus.

Next, back in Jerusalem, Peter defended his crosscultural evangelism. Upon his arrival there, he was criticized for going to the Gentiles. He responded to that criticism by saying that God makes "no distinction" between Jews and other peoples (Acts 11:12). The Greek word he used for "distinction" is *diakrinō*, a

compound that literally means “to pass judgment on.” God doesn’t pass judgment on or disqualify persons from receiving the gospel on the basis of ethnicity or nationality.

Finally, several years later at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), Peter defended the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles and their inclusion into the church without any trappings of Judaism, using the same fundamental argument of “no distinction.” Harkening back to his witness to Cornelius, he said nicely and precisely, “He made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). Peter’s journey of understanding the universality of the gospel is complete. He became a strong advocate for the spread of the gospel across any and all cultural boundaries.

Principles for crosscultural evangelism. The ministry of Peter to Cornelius stands out as an ideal example of how message bearers would wish witnessing opportunities to unfold. Because Acts is a historical and transitional book, caution needs to be exercised in advocating for ironclad universal patterns that must be followed today. Instead, it’s better to glean from the book flexible principles to be applied. Some noteworthy principles for evangelism emerge from this encounter.

The alliteration that follows falls naturally into place and is intended as a way of remembering the points. In this evangelistic encounter, we see the following:

A prepared heart. Cornelius’s heart was prepared in advance. He wasn’t a hard-hearted pagan with a disregard for God or spiritual matters. To the contrary, he was presented as a “devout man who feared God . . . gave alms generously . . . and prayed continually to God” (Acts 10:2). His spiritual disciplines didn’t go unnoticed; God took note of his spiritual disposition. The principle “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (Jas 4:8) is played out in his life. God found in Cornelius a sensitive heart, which would be an appropriate channel by which to introduce the gospel to the greater Gentile community. Some mission strategists advocate that, as a prepared person, Cornelius was a “person of peace.”³

A pre-ordained engagement. In midafternoon on a certain day, an angel of God spoke to Cornelius in a vision. In that vision he instructed Cornelius in how to obtain information that would be life changing. God had arranged events and circumstances so that the perfect person, the apostle Peter himself, was available to engage him and his household with the message they needed to hear. He told Cornelius exactly where to send messengers and what they were to say to convince Peter to come to his house.

A prepared mind. As mentioned earlier, Peter also needed to be prepared for this unusual encounter. At midday, the day after Cornelius's vision, Peter had a vision too. In it Peter was instructed to do something he would have considered appalling: eat animals that were declared unclean by Mosaic law. A large sheet filled with animals came down in front of him three times (Acts 10:11, 16). Each time, he was instructed to kill and eat. Perhaps the repetition of three is connected to Jesus' three-fold post-resurrection instruction to "feed my sheep" (Jn 21:15-19). Peter was "inwardly perplexed" about what he saw until Cornelius's messengers appeared with their request to accompany them to their master's home (Acts 10:17, 22). Through the vision, God had prepared Peter to accept the invitation, because Jews considered Gentiles unworthy of their company.

A prescribed location. The seaside city of Caesarea was the seat of the Roman government for Judea. As such, it was a very influential center, equipped with a major harbor, an amphitheater, and an impressive hippodrome. Being stationed in that port city put Cornelius at the hub of political, commercial, and military influence for the region. Once he and his household believed, word of his newfound faith could spread rapidly to other influential Gentiles, especially among the elite. Hence the city was strategically better positioned than Jerusalem for the ongoing Gentile mission.

A precise message. Peter contextualized his message to Cornelius and the other Gentiles gathered in his house. His message is the first in the book of Acts not related to Jewish Scriptures and history. This was appropriate, given the makeup of his audience. Peter's message was no doubt longer than the condensed version Luke recorded (Acts 10:34-43), but what is recorded contains

the essence of what non-Jews needed to understand: a brief survey of the life of Christ, starting at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, summarizing his mighty works, moving on to his death and resurrection, and concluding with his present role as judge. Peter finished with an appeal to believe on Jesus. If they would, the benefit of receiving forgiveness of sin would be theirs. This was a Christocentric message, focusing on the person and work of Jesus, whom Peter knew personally.

A preferred response. The response of Cornelius and the others was likely not what Peter expected but may have hoped for. The gift of the Holy Spirit, that undeniable sign of God's favor, fell on all (Acts 10:44-48). As a result, the outward signs of speaking in tongues, of extolling God, and of water baptism followed. Peter secured the fruit of witness by baptizing all who believed.

This tiny cluster became the first fruit of the greater harvest of myriads of Gentiles who through the centuries would follow in their train. Peter, sensing the sincerity and genuineness of their response, stayed on for several days (Acts 10:48). He wanted to nurture these new believers in their newfound faith. He didn't just make converts and then leave; he stayed on to help them become informed disciples. These believers probably formed the nucleus of the first Gentile church. What's more, the strategic locale of Caesarea made it the ideal center for lay witnesses to be launched to other Gentiles across the wider Mediterranean basin.

Was it necessary for Peter to go to Cornelius? A fundamental question that emerges from this account is "Why was it necessary for Peter to share the gospel with Cornelius?" Couldn't the angel who appeared to Cornelius have outright led him to saving faith in Christ? More precisely, since God at times brings unbelievers to himself through visions and dreams, is human instrumentality always necessary? The story of the conversion of Tofik at the beginning of this chapter is a case in point. Why did he seek out Christians after an angel appeared to him? Doesn't God save people through dreams and visions?

There's a fundamental flaw with that final question and the reasoning behind it. The mistake is to suggest that at times God saves people through visions, dreams, or other extraordinary means outside of a human witness. If that were

true, it follows that—at least sometimes—message bearers like Peter aren't required to win lost humanity. God can do it all by himself.

It's true that God on occasion uses unusual circumstances to get an unbeliever's attention, as he did with Cornelius and Tofik. Accounts abound of spiritually sensitive Muslims unexpectedly seeing Jesus in dreams, beckoning them to come to him, or preliterate tribal people encountering angels in visions. Seekers after God are at times rewarded through God revealing himself to them in unusual ways. This can happen extraordinarily through visions, dreams, and visitations by angels or even by the more common channel of natural revelation.

However, in each of those instances, the out-of-the-ordinary revelation by God is inadequate to bring the person to saving faith in Christ. Instead, it points that person in the right direction, to a Christ follower who can share the gospel with her, resulting in her salvation. In every instance, that initial unusual encounter is the first step of linking the person to a human witness who is positioned to share the gospel. Ultimately, it takes human instrumentality to relate the necessary details for belief in Christ. Today, that human instrumentality may come by way of a person-to-person encounter, a broadcast, printed material (including the written Scriptures), email, Internet evangelism, or any other means crafted by believers as a channel of witness.

There's another account in the book of Acts that reinforces this reality. In the previous chapter (Acts 9), zealous Saul encountered a blinding light and heard the very voice of Jesus on the Damascus road, but it took Ananias to inform him of what he needed to do to be saved (Acts 9:10-19). God-fearing Cornelius had the same experience. Although initially he had a vision, it took the person of Peter to proclaim how he was to become a follower of Jesus. Human witness, generated from obedience to the Great Commission, is necessary to win people to Christ at all times.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

With the reach of the gospel extending to the Gentiles, we finally see the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and the purpose for his special calling in that seminal statement "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). The family of Cornelius, and by extension his race, was blessed because of their belief in the good news of Jesus. The Gentiles now had access to the blessing of the good news of Jesus Christ, Savior of the world.

The gospel message is a universal message. It was never intended to be encased within the confines of one particular culture or restricted to one ethnic group. Peter, along with others in the early church, came to understand that the gospel has no bounds. God has no ethnic favorites and no preferred nationalities upon which he showers his grace. When Peter realized that, he confessed that there is "no distinction between us and them" (Acts 15:9). Christ followers today need to take to heart this fundamental crosscultural truth if they are serious about Christ's mission. The gospel is for all peoples in all places at all times.

Paul in Athens

Contextualizing the Message

ACTS 17:16-34

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” (Acts 17:22-28)

In the 1960s, Don and Carol Richardson began working with the Sawi tribe on the south coast of Papua, Indonesia, as pioneer missionaries. Although they worked hard to learn the language and customs of the people, they were frustrated that they couldn't get the people to understand the gospel story. They prayed that God would show them how to convey the gospel in a way the people would understand. But the Sawi remained indifferent.

Then one day the opportunity came in an unexpected way. A neighboring tribe upriver attacked the Sawi. For weeks, the two tribes fought back and forth, and many were killed. Finally, Don said to leaders of the Sawi, “If you don't stop fighting, we will leave.” That was a serious threat to them; they liked Carol's medical care and Don's steel implements. Plus, the presence of the foreign family gave them status. The chief realized that he had to pay the price of peace if the missionaries were to stay.

One day Don watched as the warriors of the warring tribes formed lines opposite each other. Then, surprisingly, the Sawi chief took his newborn son from the arms of his wife and walked down the line of his warriors. Each of them placed their hands on his firstborn child. Next the chief walked across the

open space between the two warring tribes. He stood face to face with the enemy chief, then placed his son in the man's arms.

With the baby in his arms, the enemy chief walked down the line of his warriors. In full view of the father and the father's tribe, each enemy warrior placed his hands on the baby. The warriors then turned and disappeared into the bush with the infant. The baby was gone, never to return to his grieving parents.

The chief then said to Don and Carol, "I offered my son as the peace-child for our tribe. As long as my son lives, there will be peace between us. If he dies, war will resume. Anyone who kills the peace-child will himself be killed."

After some thought, Don realized the chief had given him a contextual key that would open these Stone Age people to the truth about Jesus Christ. He gathered the tribal elders together and told them the story of God's peace-child. He spoke of the war that rages between the kingdom of evil and the kingdom of God. Don shared how God sent Jesus to earth as his Peace Child to make peace between God and man. The gospel finally made sense to the Sawi. The entire tribe turned to Christ and remains a strong Christian community to this day.¹

THE SETTING

In the midst of his second missionary journey, Paul arrived in the city of Athens. A month or so earlier, in the port city of Troas in western Asia Minor, he had been led in a vision to cross over the Aegean Sea to enter Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). After introducing the gospel to those in the cities of Philippi (Acts 16:11-40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), and Berea (Acts 17:10-14), he continued southward to the city of Athens (Acts 17:15).

While waiting for his team to catch up with him, Paul began witnessing in the synagogue and marketplace (Acts 17:16-17). But what he observed around the city appalled him. It was steeped in both paganism and sophisticated philosophies. It was full of idols and also secular philosophers who loved to spend their time discussing existential matters (Acts 17:16, 18, 21).

His experience in Athens was one of the few instances in Acts where Luke mentioned Paul's emotional response: "his spirit was provoked within him" (Acts 17:16). As a missionary, Paul had met his match in Athens. He was distressed over the spiritual darkness that pervaded the city. He was determined to find a way to relate the gospel to the Athenians, steeped in superstition and heavily influenced by Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (Acts 17:18).

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

The importance of contextualization. Each time the gospel enters a society, it needs to be presented in a way that is true to itself but also speaks to the hearts and minds of the people. The crosscultural message bearer needs to avoid two responses that can distort the message's reception. On the one hand, he needs to guard against presenting the gospel in a way that doesn't relate to the worldview of the audience. On the other, he needs to guard against the insidious tendency of syncretism.

This is difficult because the message bearer stands at the crossroads of three cultures. First, he is presenting a message couched in the cultures of Scripture. As such, he needs to have a good grasp of the biblical cultures from where the message originated.

Second, he needs to be aware of his own cultural biases and worldview. Many times, it's difficult for a crosscultural worker to distinguish between his own cultural preferences and the plain truth of Scripture. He needs to know how to explain the gospel without mixing that message with his own cultural trappings. It's unavoidable yet true that whenever the gospel is presented, it's presented in cultural clothing.

Third, he needs an adequate grasp of the receptors' culture. Every word he uses, especially biblical ideas and theological terms, is loaded with meaning as it's filtered through the audience's long-entrenched worldview. Will the gospel come across as relevant in the minds of those listening? Will the gospel be given a fair hearing without being rejected or compromised? Those questions need to be paramount in the mind of every crosscultural message bearer. Figure 30.1² helps visualize the three cultural dynamics.

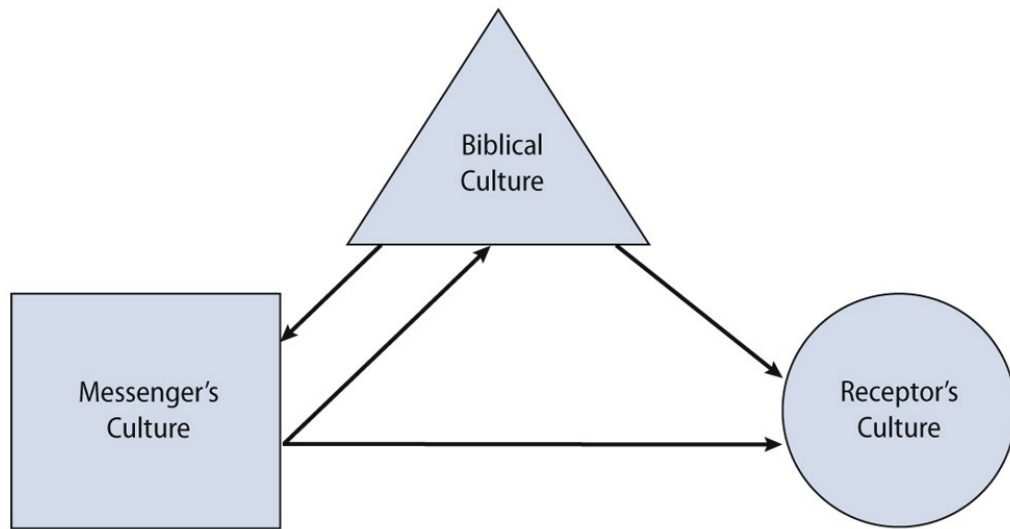


Figure 30.1. Contextualization: A three-culture model

Contextualization described. Contextualization is a difficult term to define. In recent years, many mission writers have proposed various definitions but with no consensus.³ For our purposes, we'll use the term to mean the translation of the unchanging content of the gospel into verbal forms meaningful to a group of people in their particular cultural context. It involves knowledge of both a message and an audience.⁴

Contextualization involves engaging a culture in all its dimensions with biblical truth. Appropriate contextualization shapes the presentation of the gospel so that its transforming power affects beliefs, values, and customs in such a way as to produce worldview adjustment and social change in the receptive culture. It guides believers as they live out their newfound faith in ways that are both faithful to biblical truth and relevant to their specific cultural context.⁵

The gospel is always understood and lived out *within* a culture, but it stands apart from and is distinguished from all cultures. It can be comprehended and applied from within every culture. But because all cultures are human, they are all corrupted by sin. So the gospel must also *challenge* every culture to change and more deeply conform to the will of God.

**STEVE STRAUSS,
ENCOUNTERING THEOLOGY OF MISSION**

Paul's contextualized message. The address by Paul to the Athenians serves as a sample of his approach to uninformed pagans who didn't have the slightest understanding of the Jewish worldview. Instead of quoting biblical texts and history, Paul quoted Greek poets. Instead of outright referencing Jesus, he referenced the sovereign God. (But he certainly had already mentioned Jesus many times leading up to his formal speech, see Acts 17:18.)

There's little doubt that Luke recorded a summary of Paul's speech. Even so, this condensed version is a helpful introduction to basic Christian beliefs that are tailored to "cultured pagans."⁶ The speech is fashioned to build a bridge to the audience while at the same time challenging their religious assumptions. Paul's address can be divided into four parts:

1. He began with a cordial reference to the religious interest of his audience (Acts 17:22-23). The extraordinary religious nature of the Athenians, based on what he had observed around the city, impressed him, and he told them so. He wasn't condoning their practice or complimenting them. He was using their religiosity as a touch point to gain their attention and build momentum for what he was going to say next.
2. He referenced their altar to the Unknown God, using it to bridge over into an explanation of who that God was. He went on to give them five descriptions of the person and attributes of the God that they needed to know about.⁷
 - God is the Creator of the universe (Acts 17:24). The Epicureans believed in chance, whereas the Stoics believed in pantheism and self-sufficiency. Paul's statement was in stark contrast to their view of divinity and God's part in creating all that exists.

- God is the sustainer of life (Acts 17:25). God continues to be involved in and to sustain all that he created, so it is absurd to suppose he needs to be sustained by those whom he himself has created.
 - God is the ruler of the nations (Acts 17:26-28). God orchestrates the epochs and territories of humankind so that people will seek him. Though he is distant, he's actually not far away from anyone who seeks him.
 - God is the Father of humankind (Acts 17:28-29). Here Paul quoted two poets (Epimenides of Crete and Aratus of Cilicia) to bolster his argument. Paul was making the point that even within their own literary context, the truth that God is the Father of all humankind and that all people are his offspring is evident. Therefore, idolatry is an inappropriate response to this God.
 - God is the judge of the world (Acts 17:30-31). In the past, God overlooked their worship of the Unknown God, but no longer. Since Jesus has come, died, and resurrected, such ignorance can no longer be overlooked. God's judgment will be universal ("will judge the world," Acts 17:31), righteous (with justice), and definite, based on Jesus already being raised from the dead. The Epicureans in the crowd believed that pleasure was the chief end of life and so would have felt quite uneasy with Paul's reference to judgment.
3. He told of the need for a response: "Now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). A gospel presentation is never complete without a call to repentance. Repentance is a supracultural action—required of all people in all ages—in order to receive God's forgiveness. Repentance wasn't a response asked only of the Athenians. The call to repentance is a call to all people, everywhere. It has no ethnic or geographical bounds: Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, animists, nominal Christians, and everyone else resident anywhere in the world needs to repent in order to avoid God's righteous judgment. Paul told the Athenians

that repentance is mandatory based on the fact that someday God will judge everyone by Jesus, whom he raised from the dead (Acts 17:31).

4. He left the results to God (Acts 17:32-34). In the end, there were three responses to Paul's message. These three represent the responses expected whenever the gospel is presented in a culture for the first time.

- There were those who outright rejected what Paul said: “some mocked.” Mocking is an outward expression of the heart. Those who mocked Paul rejected something they felt was fanciful—the miraculous resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Earlier in the marketplace, Paul's preaching of Jesus and the resurrection was “strange things to our ears” (Acts 17:20). Some who heard Paul never got beyond the strangeness of this message.
- Some were ambivalent. “We will hear you again about this” (Acts 17:32) was a polite way of dismissing Paul without commitment one way or another. These people were indecisive and unsure of what to make of what they had just heard. Although they didn't mock him, neither did they offer any indication of belief. They were politely dismissive.
- Some believed. Of the likely dozens who listened to his speech, two who were convinced are mentioned by name. But there were also “others with them” (Acts 17:34).

The bedrock of cultural understanding. One statement in Paul's address insightful to culture shouldn't be missed. He uttered something profound in regard to the twin realities of human interconnectedness and cultural diversity. It can be considered the biblical bedrock of cultural understanding. He stated, “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him” (Acts 17:26-27).

In that sentence, Paul conveyed to his clueless yet curious Greek audience the biblical worldview of humans and their culture. In Acts 17:26-27, he affirmed the following:

- *The origin of humankind: “He made.”* All humans have a common origin that can be traced back to God, the creator of the entire human race. This truth refutes the Greek creation mythology believed in that age as well as the wide range of creation myths that are encountered today, especially in preliterate societies. This statement was counter to the creation stories connected to their polytheism.
- *The unity of the human race: “From one man.”* All humans come from one common ancestor. Paul was no doubt making reference to Adam and the creation account found in Genesis 1–2. All of humankind descended from one common ancestor and are therefore equal in value. This statement was counter to their sense of Greek cultural superiority.
- *The diversity of ethnicities: “Every nation of mankind.”* Paul built his third observation on the previous two. He recognized the undeniable fact of human diversity. But in that diversity there is an underpinning unity, since all are of common origin. Therefore, all humans have the ability to relate to one another. Humans can cross linguistic boundaries with concepts that they have in common. The word translated as *nation* is the familiar word *ethnos*, from which we get our word *ethnic*. Paul was making reference to ethnic, or people-group, clusters as much as national-level diversity. This statement was counter to their smug exclusiveness.
- *The diversity of human habitation: “To live on all the face of the earth.”* It was God’s good intent that humans would disperse across the earth and occupy all habitable places. Adam, the father of the human race, was given that mandate (Gen 1:28), as was Noah after him, the patriarch who survived the universal flood (Gen 9:1). God has given humankind the whole earth on which to dwell. The spread of all ethnic groups throughout all the earth is a fulfillment of that mandate. In generations past, their Greek ancestors had

migrated to where they presently were and claimed those lands for themselves because God so permitted. This statement was counter to their claim of being indigenous to that soil.

- *The right to terrain:* “*Having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.*” Although they now had residential rights to their lands, ultimately it was God who allowed them to reside there. Paul affirmed the Old Testament truth that God “gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind” (Deut 32:8). They live where they do, in the cultural context of which they are part, because of the guiding hand of God. God has providentially orchestrated events over time to allow ethnic entities to engage in nation building and national defense within specific geopolitical borders. Under his guidance, even they, the Greeks, had been able to carve out their nation and establish their national boundaries. But in the end, it is God who has so permitted. This statement was counter to their sense of self-determination.
- *God’s purpose:* “*That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.*” God has arranged the time and place of human existence. This was for their well-being, done so that they might observe and consider all that surrounded them (Rom 1:20) and discover the sovereign God behind it. God didn’t leave them or any people without a witness; they were immersed in a created order that pointed toward him. Ever since Jesus’ ascension, he has been providing special witness through his message bearers (like Paul). This statement was counter to their sense of self-sufficiency.

The holy boldness of Paul’s witness in this address was commendable. The comprehensiveness of his line of reasoning was impressive. The contextualization of his message was clear-cut. Paul’s address to the Athenians is a textbook example of the need and importance of contextualization.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Message bearers stand at the crossroads of three cultures: biblical culture, their own culture, and the receptor's culture. Many times it's difficult for a crosscultural worker to distinguish between her own cultural preferences and the plain truth of Scripture. It's her responsibility to learn how to best explain the gospel without mixing the biblical message with her own cultural trappings.

This passage gives the message bearer the biblical worldview of humans and their culture. The origin of humankind, the unity of the human race, the diversity of ethnicities and human habitation, with the right to terrain as well as God's purpose for it all are made clear. In one sentence, Paul gave us the bedrock of cultural understanding.

Paul's address to the Athenians at the Areopagus is a classic example of how we can contextualize the gospel. The speech was shaped both to build a bridge to his audience and to challenge their religious assumptions. He masterfully wove the gospel message around concepts to which they could relate. In the end, some outright rejected what he said, some were passive, and some believed. When we convey a contextualized message, we shouldn't expect the results to be any different.

The key tension of contextualization is the relationship between the universal absolutes of Scripture and the peculiarities of cultural differences. But the tension can be creative and fruitful. An overemphasis on absolutes leads to irrelevant application, while an overemphasis on culture can lead to relativistic absurdity.

**JAMES E. PLUEDDEMANN,
LEADING ACROSS CULTURES**

Crosscultural Advance

Luke's One Last Word

ACTS 28:30-31

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Have you ever noticed the very final word in the book of Acts? It's hard to see in the English texts, but in the original Greek, it's the word *unhindered*. Most English translations use two words "without hindrance" when translating it (ESV, HCSB, NIV). But Luke, the writer, wanted readers to see it as a pivotal, stand-alone word, summarizing the astounding crosscultural gospel advance throughout the book of Acts and then looking forward to its continued advance into the future.

But wait, you may be thinking, there are a lot of hindrances to crosscultural ministry. You have to be out of touch with reality to think that God's mission goes unhindered. I don't blame mission workers for thinking that. After all, they face a multitude of hindrances from many different directions: national governments that refuse or complicate visa processes, local authorities that restrict outreach events, religious leaders that see Christian missions as a threat, jealous/ambitious local church leaders that see the missionary as a barrier to their desired place of prominence/control, family members that don't understand why their loved ones are "wasting their lives" in a faraway country, not to mention lack of adequate funds, lack of adequate help, lack of adequate resources, cool interest in churches back home, sickness in the family, dangers on every side, and occasional out-of-touch directives from the home office. Yes, there seem to be many hindrances to the missionary calling.

Luke, however, asks us to step back and look at the bigger picture. "The kingdom of God," which bookends his book, is continuing to advance through the "teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 1:3; 28:31). Though Paul was restricted, he wasn't silenced. He still found a way to proclaim the gospel. Paul took to writing (that is, the Prison Epistles) and to meeting with people who

became believers (that is, the runaway slave Onesimus). He found ways to keep the gospel moving forward “without hindrance.”

Commenting on being unhindered, John Stott wrote,

Although military surveillance continued, there was no ban by the authorities on Paul’s speaking. Though his hand was still bound, his mouth was open for Christ Jesus. Though he was chained, the Word of God was not. . . . [It] described the freedom which the gospel enjoyed, having neither internal nor external restraint.”¹

Paul didn’t allow his constrained circumstances to keep him from using other creative means for advancing the gospel. Over the course of his two years of confinement, he didn’t shut up or give up. Though in the least desirable of circumstances, he kept working “with all boldness” (Acts 4:29).

Luke was closing his historical account on the spread of the gospel. He had accomplished his purpose of telling of its propagation from Jerusalem, a provincial center, to the capital of the empire: Rome. The gospel had successfully crossed geographical, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic boundaries. The embryonic Jewish church had grown and morphed into a multicultural movement.

Notice that Luke didn’t choose another word to end the book. He didn’t say that the work was unopposed—for it was. He didn’t say that it was unrestricted—for it was. He didn’t say that it was undisturbed—for it was. He penned the word *unhindered*—for he saw the bigger picture, as should we. The gospel is unstoppable.

“Unhindered” closes the book of Acts on a high note of optimism. As Stott pointed out, it related to God’s providence, which “works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Eph 1:11 NIV).² It reminds us that no opposing grand scheme, no ambitions, no devious plan, and no amount of resistance can prevail. It encourages us to keep on keeping on, even in the face of opposition. “Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” continues onward until every culture is crossed and every ethnic group is reached.

There are grave difficulties on every hand, and more are looming ahead—therefore, we must go forward.

WILLIAM CAREY

The Self-Contextualizing of the Messenger

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

The missionary most known for identifying closely with the people he served was J. Hudson Taylor (1832–1905). Taylor, a pioneer missionary to China, was known for his sensitivity to Chinese culture and dress. For example, he wore Chinese clothing, which was rare for Westerners at that time, and even wore the customary pigtail with shaven forehead.

After an initial six years of service in China while in his twenties, Taylor returned to England for a needed health break. While in his homeland, he founded the China Inland Mission (CIM). He was successful in recruiting quite a few missionaries into this new “faith mission.” Upon their arrival in China, along with Taylor, the group donned Chinese clothing and hairstyles. Even the women participated, which was somewhat scandalous at the time.

While other missionaries were attempting to preserve British dress and customs, Taylor took the opposite approach. He was convinced that the gospel would take root on Chinese soil only if missionaries were willing to affirm and join the culture of the people. He argued from the example of the apostle Paul, “Let us in everything un sinful become Chinese, that by all means we may save some. Let us adopt their costume, acquire their language, study to imitate their habits . . . live in their houses.”¹

Taylor was also forward-looking about Christians and their churches. He asked a rhetorical question, then answered it: “Why should a foreign aspect be given to Christianity? We want to see churches of such believers presided over

by pastors and officers of their own countrymen, worshipping God in their own tongue, in edifices of a thoroughly native style.”² Taylor understood that not only the message but also the messenger needed to undergo contextualization to make a positive impact in a foreign culture.

THE SETTING

Paul first preached the gospel in Corinth on his second missionary journey. He remained in the city for eighteen months (Acts 18:1-17) before returning to his sending church in Antioch, Syria. On his next journey, Paul ministered for quite some time in the city of Ephesus. While there, he wrote the book of 1 Corinthians, addressing various problems within that church. In chapter nine, he diverted from addressing church problems to focus on his philosophy of ministry. Within that context, he spoke of his readiness to adapt himself to whatever social situation God put him in.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

In this passage, Paul conveyed his method of crosscultural communication via a personalized contextualization. He brought to fore the inculturalization of himself as a crosscultural missionary. Paul's *modus operandi* is stated in 1 Corinthians 9:19. For clarity, I paraphrase it to read like this: "Though I am free to live any way I want, I live like these people in order to win as many as possible."

The key for Paul was his willingness to adapt himself to the customs of people so that he would be able to live alongside anyone. William Barclay said, "The man who can never see anything but his own point of view and who never makes an attempt to understand the mind and heart of others, will never make a pastor or an evangelist or even a friend."³

Self-contextualizing statements. The adaptation of the messenger to another culture can be considered a matter of self-contextualizing, though some prefer terms such as indigenization or inculturalization.⁴ All three terms refer to the crosscultural worker's integration into a cultural environment other than his own.

Paul mentioned four religious contexts where he adapted himself to his audience: (1) to the Jews, (2) to those under the law, (3) to those outside the law, and (4) to the weak (1 Cor 9:20-22). He encountered all of these in his points of travel as he presented the gospel throughout the eastern Mediterranean Basin. Because of his mobility and need for adaptation to so many cultural settings, it seems that self-contextualization is the most accurate term to describe his experience.

Paul saw the adapting process as imperative in order for him to relate properly to those he served. Therefore, he stated emphatically in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some."

In that one sentence, Paul made four statements that relate to contextualizing himself. Since Paul was an Asian Jew writing this assertion to European Greeks, his crosscultural intent can't be missed. He stated that in his self-contextualizing he was flexible, accepting, accommodating, and realistic.

Flexible: "I have become all things." He used the perfect tense for "I have become" to show permanent results of past action. Simply put, his was an ongoing flexibility. Paul was saying that whenever he entered a new cultural setting, he became malleable to the customs and way of life of those within that culture. He conducted himself in culturally acceptable ways in regard to the new cultural context.

We can never attain to any kind of evangelism or friendship without speaking the same language and thinking the same thoughts as the other man. Someone once described teaching, medicine and ministry as "the three patronizing professions." So long as we patronize people and make no effort to understand them we can never get anywhere with them. Paul, the master missionary, who won more men for Christ than any other man, saw how essential it was to become all things to all men. One of our greatest necessities is to learn the art of getting alongside people; and the trouble so often is that we do not even try.

**WILLIAM BARCLAY,
THE LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS**

Workers today must do the same. In concrete terms, they especially need to engage in language acquisition, culture adaptation, and worldview familiarity. By doing so, they follow Paul's example as they integrate to become "all things." Being flexible within the host culture's values and customs, they slowly become trusted outsiders who eventually become full participants in the society, with potential to make an impact on the religious beliefs of their host culture.

Accepting: "All people." Paul was tolerant of and accommodating to every class of people found within the societies he entered. He excluded no one, no matter what his or her social status. None occupied too low a standing or too high a position for him not to share the gospel with him or her. A case in point

was his ministry in the city of Philippi. He was able to relate to wealthy Lydia on the one hand, but also with the lowly jailor on the other. Neither was given preferential treatment nor were they prejudiced against. Paul was accepting of both.

On another level, every ethnic or racial group that Paul encountered on his travels was worthy of his attention and ministry. He didn't bypass any people group based on their ethnicity. He was apostle to all peoples. As such he qualified for difficult crosscultural assignments.

Accommodating: "By all means." Paul was practical enough to use whatever ethical means it took to reach the hearts of his listeners. He acclimated his methods to give gospel presentations that were relevant to the worldview of his audience. Hudson Taylor adjusted his dress and methodology so as not to be offensive to the Chinese, and Paul did the same many centuries earlier among the Gentiles. Taylor once said, "The use of means ought not to lessen our faith in GOD; and our faith in GOD ought not to hinder our using whatever means He has given us for the accomplishment of His own purposes."⁵ Like Paul, he didn't limit himself to one methodology or prescribed means of ministry.

Realistic: "Save some." Here Paul was making reference to his crosscultural ministry goal. He was pragmatic enough to know that not everyone would believe the gospel message. There seldom is a 100 percent positive response to the good news. But he knew that some would respond favorably. Through his efforts, the way was paved for all to have a hearing of the gospel, with the consequent conversion of some. As he was writing this, Paul may have been recalling the three responses to his message on Mars Hill. But he was more likely reflecting on the various places he had proclaimed the gospel. Wherever he went, he encountered the resistant, the dismissive, and the accepting.

Goal of self-contextualizing. Continuing his philosophy of crosscultural ministry, Paul gave the "why" of self-contextualizing: "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" (1 Cor 9:23). Paul's ultimate goal was that the gospel might go forward and gain a hearing. It was for the gospel's sake, not his own, that he so ardently persevered in self-

contextualization. Yet he also shared in the gospel's blessing by being its messenger.

It should be noted what Paul's goal was not. He wasn't a crosscultural gospel messenger for his own sake. He wasn't doing it for self-fulfillment or self-esteem. He wasn't ministering for the sake of a remarkable reputation, status among the other apostles, or personal gain. He wasn't even doing it for the sake of promoting cordial intercultural relationships. Those things were secondary, if thought of at all. He was doing it for the advancement of the gospel. One mission writer put the goal in proper perspective:

What is the result of the gospel? Surely something more than every person having a chance to pass verdict on the message. God has promised to get obedient glory for Himself from every tribe and tongue. He yearns for the unique outpouring of love, righteousness, wisdom and worship that can come from every people. This would be the best rationale for planting indigenous churches. Such a vantage point elevates the distinctive wonder of each people group, and at the same time, enhances the value of extending the gospel breakthrough to every place.⁶

This was the outcome Paul was seeking in self-contextualization and should be ours as well.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

Paul was willing to adapt himself to the customs of peoples he encountered anywhere so that he would be able to get along with anyone, no matter who they were. In so doing, he was flexible (malleable to the way of life of those he encountered); accepting (tolerant of and accommodating to every class of people found within the societies he entered); accommodating (practical enough to use whatever ethical means it took to reach the hearts of his hearers); and realistic (pragmatic enough to know that not everyone he preached to would believe and accept his message).

Paul's goal in crosscultural proclamation was that the gospel might go forward. It was for the gospel's sake, not his own, that he so diligently persevered in self-contextualization. That should be our goal as well.

1 Corinthians 13

A Guide to Crosscultural Awareness

If I speak with the tongue of a national, but have not love,
I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I wear the national dress and understand their beliefs, values, and
customs,

and if I copy all their mannerisms so that I could pass for one of
them,

but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I possess to the poor, and if I spend my energy
without reserve,

but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love endures long hours of language study and is kind to those who
mock his accent;

love does not envy those more eloquent than he;

love does not exalt in the home culture; does not boast in his
national upbringing.

It does not laud the way it is done back home;

does not seek to do things his own way;

is not easily provoked into telling about the advantages of his home
country;

does not think evil about his host culture.

Love bears all criticism about his homeland;

believes all good things about his new one;

confidently anticipates being at home in this place; endures all

comfortably anticipates being at home in this place, endures all inconveniences.

Love never ends. As for cultural anthropology, it will be deficient; as for contextualization, it will be challenged; as for methodologies and strategies, they will need updating.

For we know only in part and minister only to part.

But when Christ is reproduced in this culture, then our inadequateness will seem insignificant.

When I was in North America, I spoke as a North American, I understood as a North American, I thought as a North American; but since I left North America, I have put away North American things.

For now I adapt to this culture awkwardly; but He will live in it intimately.

Now I speak with a foreign accent, but He will somehow speak to the heart.

And now these three remain: language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and love.

But the greatest of these is love.¹

The Incarnational Missionary

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

THE SETTING

Paul first visited the city of Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts 16). He was successful in bringing some to Christ and left behind a small body of believers. Years later, while imprisoned in Rome, he wrote a letter to the Philippians to encourage them in their faith. This is also a missionary thank-you letter expressing appreciation to the church for the gift they had sent upon hearing he was imprisoned in Rome (Phil 4:10-20).

Philippians 2:1-4 reminds the believers to live in harmony and to humbly put others' interests in front of their own. Then the passage above is one of the most profound christological passages in Paul's writings. The poetic character of the passage is apparent. Some scholars believe that it was an early Christian hymn that Paul modified for his purposes. In it, he exhorted the Philippians to follow the example of Jesus by having an attitude of love and humility toward each other.

CROSSCULTURAL INSIGHTS

The incarnation of Jesus, as described by Paul in this passage, serves as an incarnational model for missionaries in any era. The premier Christian anthropologist/missiologist Paul Hiebert had this to say regarding what he called incarnational ministry: “Christ provides us with God’s model for ministry. In Christ, God became fully human to save us. But, in doing so, he remained fully God (Phil 2:5-8). We, too, must identify ourselves as closely as we can with the people without compromising our Christian identity.”¹ In other words, it’s incumbent on missionaries to incarnate themselves into the focus culture of their ministry.

In spite of all that’s unique and radically different about the person and work of Christ, his incarnational ministry serves as a model of the appropriate attitude and action message bearers should have as they minister in crosscultural settings.

Overriding principle. The overriding attitude of a missionary should be “in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Phil 2:3). When this is our posture, we treat others (in this context fellow believers) with love, respect, and oneness of spirit. This doesn’t mean that others are superior in personhood. Rather, because of his humble attitude in service, the missionary sees others as worthy of preferential treatment. He thus is willing to unselfishly forego his own interests, rights, and comfort to serve others effectively.

This may mean living in substandard housing, eating different foods, adjusting to local transportation, or operating on a different schedule or even concept of time. The living environment may be difficult and the people hard to understand. Any number of conditions or circumstances may tax our ability to display love and respect for those who are served.

Where the church already exists, it’s important that missionaries willingly serve alongside of, and even under, existing national leadership. Additionally, in today’s world of a global mission force, with missionaries sent from anywhere in

the world, it's even more imperative that North American missionaries serve alongside and under Majority World missionary leaders. The exceptional mark of the modern missionary is his posture of willing and humble subordination to message bearers of other nationalities. Mary Slessor, a pioneer missionary to Calabar (Nigeria today), said, "Blessed the man and woman who is able to serve cheerfully in the second rank—a big test."² This is the missionary mindset needed in today's global realities.

Six incarnational principles. Without doing injustice to the original purpose of the passage (that is, of magnifying Christ's humility and exaltation), six incarnational principles can be extracted from this text to guide missionaries as they humbly incarnate themselves in crosscultural service.

Do not tightly grasp your home culture/customs: "did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself." In regard to Jesus: He didn't tightly hold to the glory he had before his incarnation. He didn't see his high position as something he could not give up. He was willing to release it by emptying himself of it.

In regard to missionaries: Don't hold on to your own customs and culture. Be willing to release them for the sake of your calling. Too many missionaries try to retain as much of their home culture as possible, obstructing the process of becoming bicultural. Modern technology, especially the Internet, has made this possible. But part of the incarnating process is *outcarnating* from the home culture. Emptying oneself of cultural baggage is preliminary to assimilation into a new culture.

You are never more like Christ than when you cross cultures. How can I say that? Because Jesus crossed the greatest cultural gulf of all time. You are never more like him than when you are willing to empty yourself of your home culture—no matter how amazing and honorable that culture—and love those within another culture for the purpose of bringing life.

**JAMES NELSON,
CROSSING CULTURES WITH RUTH**

Be a servant: “By taking the form of a servant.” In regard to Jesus: As a servant of God, he was continually subservient to the will of his Father (Lk 22:42). As a servant to humankind, he served their needs in a multitude of helpful ways, ultimately giving “his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28).

In regard to missionaries: Don’t overestimate your importance. You aren’t in your place of ministry so that others might serve you. You aren’t superior to the people to whom you minister; neither are you inferior. All are equal in value in God’s economy, but you have been given the advantages of gifting, training, ability, and opportunity to serve those to whom you have been sent. If that privilege is abused, God can take it away in a moment.

Take on the customs of the people: “Being born in the likeness of men.” In regard to Jesus: Jesus wasn’t just like men; he took on the actual characteristics of a man. John wrote that Jesus “became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). As a man born into and raised in Jewish culture, Jesus was ingrained in the beliefs, values, and customs of his people. He was a full member of that society and social order.

In regard to missionaries: Previously it was noted that a missionary needs to release himself from his native culture. This then allows him to take on the ways and customs of his adopted culture. Lingenfelter and Mayers call this becoming “the 150% person.”³ It’s impossible to let go of all that is our native culture, and it’s impossible to take on 100 percent of an adoptive culture. Being human, that just isn’t possible. Only Jesus could attain 100 percent of both humanity and divinity, culturally becoming the 200 percent person. But missionaries have the ability to juggle much of two cultures.

Humble yourself: “He humbled himself.” In regard to Jesus: This entire passage is centered on Christ’s example of condescending to serve humanity. Jesus served humankind with meekness and self-effacement. His gentle touch was so apparent that it drew crowds; his disposition was so contrary to that of the religious leaders.

In regard to missionaries: The overriding principle of humility, seen in Philippians 2:3, has been noted. Suffice it to say that the missionary’s humble

and gentle disposition should be in stark contrast with the haughty, brash and arrogant posture that is too often exhibited by secular leaders.

Be totally committed—whatever the cost: “Becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” In relation to Jesus: His voluntary death stresses both the totality and the climax of Jesus’ obedience. His death was not unplanned or accidental. He gave himself over to a cruel death in an act of obedience. He allowed himself to die on a cross as a heightened form of his humility.

When I go to the cross . . . and enter into His passion, then my passion is revived and my vision is renewed. . . . Our calling as evangelists is not to silver or satin or silk or stones precious, but to blood, toil, tears, and sweat. May our commitment be so complete that we will make hell gasp for breath. Yes, our commitment needs to be that complete.

**GEORGE SWEETING,
PAST PRESIDENT, MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE**

In relation to missionaries: Within your calling, be obedient, whatever the cost. It may not be that you will die in your place of service; most missionaries don’t. However, serve obediently in your place of calling, knowing that God is expecting full commitment. When James Calvert went as a missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji islands, the ship captain tried to turn him back, saying, “You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages.” To that Calvert replied, “We died before we came here.”⁴ That’s total commitment.

You will be rewarded: “Therefore God has highly exalted him.” In relation to Jesus: The glorious exaltation of Jesus is something reserved only for him. He fully deserves all laud, honor, and praise for the redemptive work he performed on the cross. Rightfully, every knee will bow and tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of the Father (Phil 2:11).

In relation to missionaries: God will reward you for following his calling in your life. He sees and cares about your efforts to live in a different and difficult context. Jesus once told his disciples, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29).

His reward may be bestowed only in part in this present life, but certainly in full in eternity. God honors those who honor him. In the parable of the talents, Jesus commended two of his servants by saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:21). Commendation was given based on character (“good”) and perseverance (“faithful”). Every missionary has the potential to receive such praise. The amount we receive is up to us.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

The overriding attitude of successful crosscultural workers is humility. Message bearers are most valued and accepted when they treat those among whom they minister with love and respect. To effectively do so, they intentionally incarnate themselves into the host culture's values and customs. They are willing to forego their own lifestyle preferences, rights, and comfort, so that people clearly see that they are there for others' well-being.

By emulating the incarnation model of Jesus, missionaries can effectively integrate into the culture to which they're called. To do so, they need to release their own cultural biases and then willingly take on the manners and customs of the people they serve. Additionally, like Jesus, they need to be committed to their calling whatever the cost. In the end, God, who sees their selfless crosscultural service, will reward them for their obedience.

Crosscultural Pilgrimage

Sojourning Like Abraham

HEBREWS 11:8-16

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. . . .

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Heb 11:8-10, 13-16)

Missionaries are those who, in practice, live out their lives in the here and now as sojourners in the truest sense of the word. Like Abraham, they are called to go out of their home environment. Stop and think about that for a moment. To accomplish their uprooted calling, missionaries become the following:

- *Geographic sojourners* willing to leave their homeland and all that is familiar to live anywhere God so leads.
- *Cultural sojourners* willing to live in a strange and different culture, among people with a different worldview, speaking another language, for the sake of making the gospel known.
- *Monetary sojourners* willing to deny themselves the accumulation of wealth and even to be impoverished for the sake of identifying with the people among whom they minister. Trophy homes, expensive cars, children's elite education, and exotic vacations are willingly forfeited.
- *Relational sojourners* willing to leave loved ones behind—parents, siblings, friends, and at times even children—in order to befriend and relate to

“others” in spiritual darkness. It might even mean placing young children in a distant boarding school, as my wife and I (and many others) have done.

To be a mission sojourner means to hold everything loosely. But that’s okay, because mission sojourners have come to realize that what is of the present is temporal, whereas everything waiting in the next life is eternal. A missionary willingly sojourns because of this eternal perspective.

James Gilmour in Mongolia, David Livingstone in Central Africa, Grenfell on the Congo, Keith Falconer in Arabia, Dr. Rijnhart and Miss Annie Taylor in Tibet, Chalmers in New Guinea, Morrison in China, Henry Martyn in Persia, and all the others like them had this “inverted home-sickness,” this passion to call that country their home which was most in need of the Gospel. In this passion all other passions died; before this vision all other visions faded; this call drowned all other voices. They were the pioneers of the Kingdom, the forelopers of God, eager to cross the border-marches and discover new lands or win new empires.

**SAMUEL M. ZWEMER,
*THE GLORY OF THE IMPOSSIBLE***

Like Abraham, the missionary is looking forward to the “fullness of joy” of that eternal city “whose designer and builder is God” (Ps 16:11; Heb 11:10). Self-denial in this life makes for satisfaction in the next. Foregoing things in the present makes for fulfillment in the future. Heaven will be an eternal experience that transcends all that was forfeited while serving as crosscultural sojourners in the here and now.

I don’t know where I am from or to what people group I belong! Born in the United States, I spent seven years with the Kootenai Indians in northern Montana, six years in Canada, thirteen years with the Quechua and Aymara in Bolivia, twelve years on the border of Mexico and Texas, and the rest moving from place to place. I have lived in tents, mud huts, houses of every description, and even in a palace. I feel comfortable in each group, but I belong to none. I am a follower of Christ. I am a missionary.

**LARRY WINDLE, PRESIDENT,
RIO GRANDE BIBLE INSTITUTE**

A good reminder for all mission sojourners comes from Pastor Steve Berger in his book *Between Heaven and Earth*. Having lost his teenage son suddenly in a tragic accident, Berger wrote,

God wants us to see our lives through the lens of being strangers, sojourners, pilgrims, and foreigners on this earth. Simultaneously, He wants us to know that we are not strangers, pilgrims, and foreigners in the household of God. There, we are fellow citizens. That is where we belong.¹

ABRAHAM'S PILGRIM LIFE

The life of Abraham is a model of the eternal perspective of life. Notice how he lived out his pilgrim experience.

Hebrews 11:8. “And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Abraham was willing to go anywhere. He even went on his way not knowing where he was going. God must have given him a direction without a destination. He didn't first need a “vision trip” or a short-term stint to see if it was a fit, as many say they must do. Instead, he went by faith, knowing that God had in mind good purposes for him and would not make a mistake as to where those good purposes would work out.

Hebrews 11:9. “By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents.” Abraham resided in the land God led him to, but he didn't settle down. He remained mobile. He didn't build houses, carve out a farm, or establish a city. He, by choice, lived in tents. That kept him mobile. That made it possible for God to move him whenever he so chose. For Abraham, a permanent dwelling wasn't as important as God's presence. He wanted to be wherever God wanted him to be. He kept shallow roots.

My soul longs to feel more of a pilgrim and stranger here below, that nothing may divert me from pressing through the lonely desert, till I arrive at my Father's house.

DAVID BRAINERD

Hebrews 11:10. “For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” Abraham didn't have a city in which to dwell or a foundation on which to build. He knew that permanency would come in the future. He looked forward to that, denying himself the

security a permanent home would bring. Why? Because he had a view of what really mattered. For him, eternity was in view, “having seen them and greeted them from afar” (Heb 11:13).

Hebrews 11:15. “If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.” Abraham and Sarah didn’t let their minds dwell on things back in their homeland. They no doubt had fond memories of their years there; it’s where they grew up, where they met, where they married. They probably reminisced about family, friends, and experiences. But they didn’t let those thoughts nullify their calling to a new land. It didn’t hold them back. For them, the issue was settled: they were to live a pilgrim life, with little regard for what was happening back in the homeland.

Today’s crosscultural pilgrims need that same focus. It’s easy to get caught up with things that are happening back home. Constantly referencing Facebook, Twitter, ESPN, and other media causes us to long for home. Yes, those forms of media can be useful and have their place. But they can have a detrimental effect on our calling if they incessantly tug at the heart. All too often they prematurely pull us back to our homeland.

Hebrews 11:16. “Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.” For their willingness to be sojourners who lived by faith, Abraham and Sarah gained both God’s approval and God’s preparation. God prepared for them a right they waived while living as pilgrims: a home in a city. God “was not ashamed” of their mobility, of their pilgrim lifestyle and desire for “a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Heb 11:16). It was just the opposite: he was well pleased.

Abraham possessed phenomenal wealth. Yet to accomplish God’s will, he and Sarah put aside the right to permanent residence and the accumulation of worldly possessions. God liked that. God approved of that. God wasn’t ashamed to be their God. He was honored. They had the eternal on their minds while they were camping out in the open country on land they didn’t own. They knew their eternal state would be better. They knew it would be truly permanent. Why should they spend their energies on the impermanence of the temporal?

ABRAHAM'S WORLDVIEW

There is one last observation to be made. Abraham's nonrooted lifestyle was anchored in his worldview. His beliefs, values, and customs were defined by that worldview.

As for beliefs, he was a man of faith in God. As such, he believed that God was the bestower of future eternal blessings. He therefore considered himself and Sarah temporal "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb 11:13). What really mattered and was of lasting value was what was coming in the future.

As the Lord calls us out of our comfort zone to follow Him, sometimes we are led away from places and people we love. We're inundated with contrasting emotions of sadness as we leave the known and excitement as we adventure into God's unfolding plan for our lives.

A MISSIONARY TO CENTRAL ASIA, FROM THE FRONT LINES

This belief had a direct impact on his values. In contrast to those around him, Abraham valued what was invisible and future more than what was visible in the present. He valued and looked forward to "a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Heb 11:16).

Consequently, he had no desire to follow the prevailing custom of purchasing land and building a permanent residence (Heb 11:10). Accruing a lot of fixed assets was of little interest to him. Another custom—that of acquiring status through land ownership—wasn't important to him either. Abraham's worldview—his beliefs, values, and customs—was shaped not by cultural norms, but by his unwavering faith in God's promise of eternal rewards.

CROSSING TAKEAWAY

God is most pleased with missionaries when they are most dependent upon him. Missionaries show their dependence on God when, by faith, they live the pilgrim life. The lure of all that the present world has to offer doesn't distract them from the hope of eternal future rewards. But it's not easy to be a missionary pilgrim. They give up a lot. They deny themselves many things that would normally be theirs as they live out their crosscultural calling as geographical, cultural, monetary, and relational sojourners. Like Abraham and Sarah, they willingly forego all those things by fixating on God's future blessings.

Eternity

Doxological Diversity

REVELATION 7:9-12

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."*¹

Starting with the book of Genesis and making our way through to the book of Revelation, we have found the Bible to be permeated with crosscultural encounters. We have now arrived at the concluding chapter of this book. Our careful look at Scripture with crosscultural eyes has demonstrated that it is interwoven with crosscultural material. Indeed the Bible serves as a textbook on cultural comprehension, teaching us how to understand cultural origins, multicultural development, and unique cultural expressions. The Bible is also a guide to crosscultural engagements today, because it examines what others through the ages encountered as they juggled two or more cultures. Up to this point, we've looked at over thirty of these most prominent crosscultural narratives.

But as rich and full as these cultural accounts are, *they are not the main storyline of Scripture*. Rather, the Bible is preoccupied with a more important narrative: the relationship between God and humanity. Scripture is more concerned with humankind's all-important vertical relationship with Almighty God than with our horizontal relationship with others.

That metanarrative can be compared to the backing of a quilt: a single sheet of cloth that holds all the separate squares of the front together. The numerous crosscultural stories found throughout Scripture can be compared to the diverse patches on the front side of the quilt. Although they appear to be stand-alone,

self-contained stories, in reality they aren't. They're interwoven, presenting a cohesive, full picture of God's amazing provision for humankind's redemption. Therefore, it's only appropriate that this book conclude with a future scene—a doxological scene—somewhere and someplace in eternity. It is there that the grandest of all multicultural gatherings will take place. That glorious event will be a gathering of representatives of all peoples, tribes, and nations into corporate, reverent worship before the throne of God.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To be fully appreciated, this celestial scene needs to be put in historical and missiological perspective. We start by going all the way back to God's promise to Abraham that through him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). The presence of people at the foot of the throne of God from *every nation, all tribes, and people and languages* is the definitive fulfillment of that promise.

All those mentioned are experiencing the ultimate blessing that comes through Abraham—the privilege and honor and right to stand before the majestic throne of the Most High God, clothed in white robes. The white robes signify victory and purity²—the two attributes imputed to this throng of people because of their belief in the redemptive work of Christ for their sins. These are the *panta ta ethnē* (all ethnic groups) Abraham indirectly blessed through the ages, down to the smallest groupings of people groups, as referenced by the apostle Paul in Galatians 3:6-8.

Fast-forward from Abraham to Jesus. His post-resurrection commissioning statements to his disciples pick up this theme. Both in Matthew 28:19 and Luke 24:47, Jesus commanded them to make disciples of, once again, *panta ta ethnē*. Jesus instructed them to evangelize and make disciples of all people groups on earth. A paraphrase of Matthew 28:19 could easily read, "Go and disciple all the ethnic groups found throughout the entire earth."

And since the time of Jesus' commissioning, the church has been engaged in that very endeavor. Emerging from Revelation 7:9 is a heavenly vision that assumes that the central missional task of reaching every people group will ultimately be achieved. Representatives from every ethnic group on earth will be praising God in eternity. This is the doxological diversity God has always intended. It started with the faithfulness of Abraham, proceeded through the global incentives of the disciples and those after them, and ends sometime in the

future by means of the successful crosscultural evangelistic endeavors of the church on mission.

By way of this Revelation passage, John gives us a glimpse into eternity. Here we encounter a magnificent praise service unparalleled in all of history. John no doubt wrote about it to assure us that all-inclusive ethnic evangelism will bear fruit and someday be accomplished.

ALL-INCLUSIVE WORSHIP

The apostle John made it crystal clear that in eternity there will be representatives at the throne of God from every people group on earth. John’s favorite way of expressing universality and comprehensiveness of humankind in the book of Revelation was the frequent combining of four terms in a quadruplet arrangement.³

In this passage, the word order is “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9). There are two observations on this gathering that make it remarkably inclusive.

Inclusive in scope of attendees. The words *nation*, *tribes*, *peoples*, and *languages* show both the inclusiveness and the extent of peoples who will be before the throne. These words aren’t simply synonyms, as some suggest, indicating that all racial groups will be represent there. They are more than that. They are terms showing the depth within societies of those who will be at the throne. Back in chapter ten (a consideration of Numbers 1), we looked at the composition of societies illustrated by the Israelite “community.” We saw from that passage that there were exacting terms indicating strata and composition within distinct societies. Harkening back to that is important in helping to understand this passage.

Because the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, making exact comparisons of the terms would be like comparing apples to oranges. However, utilizing the descriptions given for the various strata in the Numbers passage, the terms could be juxtaposed as in table 36.1.

Table 36.1. Comparing terms in Revelation 7 and Numbers 1

<i>Revelation 7:9</i>	<i>Numbers 1:1-4</i>
Nation	Community

Tribes	Tribes
Peoples	Clans
Languages	Family

What does this mean? Without pushing the meaning of the text too far, the comparison seems to show that not only will every ethnic group (*ethnos* is used for “nations” in this passage) be represented in heaven, but even representatives of those further down in the societal strata will be there too. Tribes are subdivisions of nations, clans are subdivisions of tribes, etc. In other words, the mention of “all tribes” would indicate a very inclusive gathering before the throne.

Inclusive in scope of appreciated outcomes. What humankind has passionately longed for all along will finally be realized. Note what these words (nation, tribes, people, languages) taken together convey.

- ***Diversity.*** The inhabitants of heaven aren’t portrayed as a homogenous mass of a single global culture. Rather, they display the ethnic diversity that they had while on earth.⁴ The diversity of each people group will be preserved. Christopher Wright, commenting on their maintained ethnic identity, stated, “The image we might prefer for the Bible’s portrait of the nations is not a melting pot (in which all differences are blended together into a single alloy), but a salad bowl (in which all ingredients preserve their distinctive color, texture, and taste). The new creation will preserve the rich diversity of the original creation, but purged of the sin-laden effects of the Fall.”⁵ It’s clear that our ethnic identity will remain throughout all eternity.
- ***Equality.*** The peoples gathered around the throne are on equal footing. No one is more important than another. Neither is there any discrimination. Werner Mischke stated, “No peoples will ever be marginalized again. . . . No ethnic group or race will ever again be discriminated against or fear for its place in the larger community. . . . No ethnic group or social strata will ever again lord it over another.”⁶ At the foot of the cross and at the foot of

the throne, all peoples are equal in value and in personhood. None will feel degraded, and no one person will be exalted above any other. This will be egalitarianism in its grandest and finest manifestation; it will be classless, fair, and impartial.

- *Harmony*. The multitudes, so numerous that “no one can number” (Rev 7:9) are (1) all standing together, (2) all wearing the same glorious outfit, and (3) all harmoniously worshiping both God the Father and the Son (“the Lamb”). No one is out of step or out of tune. All are contributing to the adoration rightfully due their God.
- *Unity*. The people aren’t separated into ethnic enclaves; there is not a hint of segregation into ethnic groups. They are all mixed together. I’d like to think that standing beside a worshiping German is a praising Jew; next to a palm-raising Saudi is a jumping Zulu; in front of a shouting Asmat is an adoring Aztec; behind a bowing Han Chinese is an extolling Sioux. Everyone is mixed together in a unity unthinkable, if not deemed impossible, while living on earth.

From Genesis 12 onward, a subplot is at work in the unfolding story of redemption. God is not only bringing sinners back to himself, but is also bringing together the divergent ethnic peoples of the earth that sin has separated. J. D. Greear has explained it this way:

When you become a Christian, you don’t cease to be your first race, nor do you assimilate into the second race of the people who brought you to Christ (if they were different from you). Instead, you become a part of a new race, a third race, though still maintaining your first race. In that third race you find a unity with other believers that supersedes any differences that come from distinctions in your first races.⁷

- *Doxology*. All cry out with a loud voice, shouting, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:10). But it doesn’t stop there. The angels join these jubilant humans, and in blended harmony they praise: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and

thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen” (Rev 7:12). Representatives from every people group are so filled with awe that joyously and spontaneously they blurt out seven doxological terms of divine significance: blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might. The number seven is noteworthy: it’s the number of perfection. Only God perfectly exhibits these attributes.

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. . . . Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It’s the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God’s glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the people in the greatness of God.

**JOHN PIPER,
LET THE NATIONS BE GLAD!**

This glorious display of worship from the nations is the fulfillment of Psalm 86:9: “All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.” The honor of God is recognized and praised. The unadulterated fellowship between God and humankind, lost in the Garden of Eden, is restored.

Must Jesus wait to return until all people groups are reached? Consider the following questions in connection with this magnificent scene in heaven as it relates to unreached peoples today: Since not all ethnic groups have been reached, does this mean Jesus can’t yet return? Does awaiting the evangelization of all the ethnicities in the world contradict a belief in the imminent return of Christ?

Both the Matthew and Luke Great Commission passages command the church to reach every ethnolinguistic group (*panta ta ethnē*). There will be representatives in heaven from each of them (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 15:3-4), and yet it’s

estimated that of 16,700 people groups in the world only 9,653 have been reached. Does this mean Jesus can't yet return? It does not, and here's why.

- *Efforts in the past.* We don't know for certain if a people group that's unreached today wasn't evangelized sometime in the past. A good example is Turkey. In past centuries, the church thrived in that country. Sadly, there are very few believers in that land today. Certainly, if Jesus were to return at this very hour, there would be many ethnics from Turkey in heaven—believers from Galatia, Colossae, and Ephesus—because the gospel was embraced by many of those residents in the distant past.
- *Efforts in the present.* With the migration of peoples across the globe today, we don't know if representatives from highly restricted countries containing unreached people groups have in fact been brought to Christ in the host country where they now reside. Neither do we know if there are those within unreached people blocks who, unknown to us, have been reached through media technology such as Christian radio broadcasts, television, or the Internet. We know for a fact that there are secret believers in highly restricted places like Saudi Arabia who have found Christ through these means.
- *Efforts in the future.* The end times must be considered. Those of differing eschatological opinions may take exception to my view, but here's a plausible explanation.

From Revelation 7, we know that after God has taken the church out of the world, he will preserve 144,000 witnesses from Israel. These witnesses, on earth during a time of great tribulation, will have the opportunity to proclaim the gospel around the globe. Theirs will be the task of “mopping up” the last remaining people groups still needing to be evangelized before the final end comes.

Therefore, it could well be that at this moment, if Jesus were to return to earth, there would be representatives from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation gathered before his throne to praise him and thank him for his provision

of salvation, though we don't know that for certain. It could be that a final ingathering will take place later by the witness of the 144,000, though we don't know that for certain either. Therefore, because of what we do know from Scripture, it's our responsibility to reach all peoples that are still unengaged and unreached. William Barclay said it nicely:

Here is the truth that heaven and earth and all that is within them is designed for the praise of Jesus Christ; and it is our privilege to lend our voices and our lives to this vast chorus of praise, for that chorus is necessarily incomplete so long as there is one voice missing from it.⁸

DOXOLOGICAL DIVERSITY'S ULTIMATE PURPOSE

What is the ultimate purpose of this doxological gathering in glory? The honor of God being recognized and praised through worship by diverse peoples.

The unadulterated fellowship of humanity with our God, which was lost in the Garden of Eden, is restored. In unity, harmony, and equality, humankind finally dwells peacefully together and corporately praises the Creator. Cultural divisiveness is swallowed up in doxological unity. Humankind's ultimate purpose for existing is achieved:

- The glory of God is honored.
- The holiness of God is revered.
- The greatness of God is admired.
- The power of God is praised.
- The truth of God is sought.
- The wisdom of God is esteemed.
- The beauty of God is treasured.
- The goodness of God is savored.
- The faithfulness of God is trusted.
- The commandments of God are obeyed.
- The justice of God is respected.
- The grace of God is cherished.
- The presence of God is prized.
- The person of God is loved.⁹

Representatives from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation will join the heavenly host in reverent praise:

Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving

and honor and power and might be to our God
forever and ever! Amen. (Rev 7:12)

Appendix A

Sermon Series Guide

Perhaps you're a pastor or an adult Bible study teacher who would like to present to your congregation a series on the biblical teaching of culture. But you find yourself overwhelmed by the volume of material covered in this book. It would be a daunting task to attempt to craft a series based on all of these many culturally related topics and passages. Thus the value of this guide.

The following is a suggested sermon/lesson series guide for presenting a theology of culture and crosscultural awareness over the span of a quarter. The most relevant cultural topics to a typical congregation can be covered using the following as core material.

Week	Chapter	Scripture	Topic
1	1 and 2: Intro to Culture Eden: Beginning of Human Culture	Genesis 1:26-27	Understanding the essence of culture and its origin
2	3: Tower of Babel: Beginning of Cultural Diversity	Genesis 11	The beginning of cultural diversity and appreciation of it
3	4: Abraham: Father of	Genesis 12:1-3	How the call of Abraham brings hope

	Blessing for All Cultures	and blessing to every culture found on earth
4	5: Sarah and Hagar: Honor and Shame Genesis 16 and 21	Understanding the dynamics of honor/shame vs. guilt/innocence
5	12: Ruth: A Book of Ruth Crosscultural Conversion	Importance of experiencing a "crosscultural conversion"
6	13: David and Uriah: The Interplay of Power-Distance 2 Samuel 11	The reality of power-distance and crosscultural abuse
7	14: Solomon and the Queen of Sheba: A Crosscultural Truth Seeker 1 Kings 10:1-13	Internationals living among us; The Crosscultural Seeker Cycle
8	16: Ethnocentrism to a Fault Jonah: Book of Jonah	How egocentrism, ethnocentrism, and punicentrism hinder crosscultural witness
9	22: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: Contrasting Worldviews John 4	Principles from Jesus on taking the gospel crossculturally
10	26: Acts 1:8: Crosscultural The Acts 1:8	Empowerment, strategic plan, and humanity's part in

Mission of the Church

taking the gospel across cultures

11	27: Jerusalem Church: Cross-cultural Conflict Management	The Acts 6:1-7	Dealing with crosscultural interpersonal conflict
12	30: Athens: Contextualizing the Message	Paul in Acts 17:16-34	Paul's example of contextualizing the gospel
13	36: Doxological Diversity	Eternity: Revelation 12	7:9-Representatives from every people group joyously worshiping before the throne of God in eternity

Appendix B

Crosscultural Encounters in the Book of Judges

The book of Judges covers a three-hundred-year period of judgment on Israel for their repeated apostasy. The book is full of gruesome accounts of armed conflict. Every crosscultural encounter in it relates to warfare against Israel’s neighbors who oppressed them. There are very few dialogues between the Jews and their oppressors. Israel was living far removed from the *barak* mission of blessing and benefit to the nations that God had given to them through Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). This was a low point in their special mission to the nations.

Reference	Who	What	Deliverer	Results
3:7-11	Mesopotamians	Oppressed Israel 8 years	Othniel	Land had rest 40 years
3:12-30	Moab	Oppressed Israel 18 years	Ehud	Land had rest 80 years
3:31	Philistines	Oppressed Israel	Shamgar	“He also saved Israel”
4:1–5:41	Canaanites	Oppressed Israel cruelly for 20 years	Deborah and Barak	Land had rest 40 years
6:1–8:35	Midianites	Oppressed Israel 7 years	Gideon	Land had rest 40 years
10:7–12:13	Philistines and Ammonites	Oppressed Israel for 18 years	Jephthah	Land had rest 31 years

13:1– 16:31	Philistines	Oppressed Israel 40 years	Samson	Period of intertribal conflicts
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Appendix C

Crosscultural Encounters in the Book of Acts

Although they started slowly, the apostles took seriously Jesus' command to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19) and to "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). Twenty-eight distinct crosscultural encounters are recorded in the book.

Reference	Who	What	Where	Results
Acts 2:1-46	"devout men from every nation under heaven" Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Cappadocia. Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Rome; Cretans, Arabians	Peter's sermon at Pentecost	Jerusalem	"About three thousand were added to the church"
9-10	Cornelius	Philip		

8:4-8	Samaritans	Philip proclaims Christ in Samaria	“the city of Samaria”	“much joy in that city”
8:14-25	Simon the magician, and others	Peter and John	“many villages of the Samaritans”	Simon asks forgiveness
8:26-40	Ethiopian eunuch	Philip	On the road between Jerusalem and Gaza	Eunuch believed and was baptized
10:1-48	Cornelius, a Roman centurion, along with relatives and close friends	Peter meets with them in Cornelius’ house	Caesarea	“The gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles”
11:19-27	Hellenists (Greek speaking non-Jews)	Lay believers of Cyprus and Cyrene, eventually Barnabas and Saul	Antioch	“A great number who believed turned to the Lord”
13:4-12	People on Cyprus and proconsul Sergius Paulus	Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark	Island of Cyprus	“The proconsul believed”
13:13-52	Residents of Antioch in Pisidia	Paul and Barnabas	Antioch in Pisidia	“And when the Gentiles heard this . . . as many

				as were appointed to eternal life believed.”
14:1-7	Residents of Iconium	Paul and Barnabas	City of Iconium	“The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles”
14:8-20	Residents of Lystra	Paul and Barnabas	City of Lystra	“They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead”
14:20-21	Residents of Derbe	Paul and Barnabas	City of Derbe	“Made many disciples”
15:40-41	Syria and Cilicia	Paul and Silas	Syria and Cilicia	“Strengthening the churches”
16:1-5	Derbe, Lystra, and Iconim	Paul added Timothy to his team	Central Galatia	“So the churches were strengthened”
16:11-40	Lydia, Philippian jailer, an attacking crowd	Paul, Silas, Timothy	Philippi	Lydia and jailer believed and were baptized
17:1-9	Residents of Thessalonica	Paul, Silas, Timothy	Thessalonica	Many believed, some of them leading women
17:10-15	Residents of Berea	Paul, Silas, and Timothy	Berea	“They received the word with all

				eagerness many believed”
17:16-34	Residents of Athens	Paul	Athens	“Some of the men joined him and believed”
18:1-16	Residents of Corinth	Paul, Silas, Timothy	Corinth	“Many believed and were baptized”
18:24-28	Residents of Ephesus	Apollos, Pricilla, and Aquila	Ephesus	“Greatly helped those who through grace believed”
19:1-41	Residents of Ephesus	Paul	Ephesus	“All the residents of Asia heard the word, both Jews and Greeks;” a riot ensued
20:1-6	Macedonia and Greece	Paul and his team	Macedonia and Greece	He gave much encouragement
20:7-12	Residents of Troas	Paul and his team	Troas	Eutychus raised from the dead
20:17-38	Elders of Ephesus church	Paul and his team	Miletus	Encouraged the elders
22:22– 23:22	Paul before the Roman tribune and Council	Paul	Jerusalem	Paul imprisoned
24:1-27	Paul before Felix the Roman	Paul	Caesarea	Paul imprisoned two more years

	governor			
25:1-12	Paul before Festus the Roman governor	Paul	Caesarea	Paul appeals to go to Caesar
28:1-10	Residents of Malta	Paul	Island of Malta	Paul healed many
28:17-30	Assorted Jews and Romans	Paul	Rome	“He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

Appendix D

Frequency of the Quadruplet Terms for Humankind in the Book of Revelation

John’s favorite way of expressing the universality and comprehensiveness of humankind in the book of Revelation is the frequent combining of four terms in a quadruplet arrangement. The mixing of the order of these terms, causing them to appear to be inconsistent, may indicate that taken together they intend to simply show the comprehensiveness of humanity. John records the words as quadruplets in six passages and varies only one term in the last reference.

Without getting into the nuances of meaning of the individual words, the following is the order of how they appear in the texts.

	Revelation 5:9	Revelation 7:9	Revelation 11:9	Revelation 13:7	Revelation 14:6	Revelation 17:15
1st	Tribe	Nation	Nation	Tribe	Nation	Peoples
2nd	Language	Tribe	Tribe	People	Tribe	Multitudes
3rd	People	People	Language	Language	Language	Nations
4th	Nation	Language	People	Nation	People	Language
Referring to:	ransomed people”	“great multitude” of redeemed	unbelievers in Tribulation period	unbelievers worshipping the Beast	angels proclaiming the gospel to these	unbelievers of these groups

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Notes

FOREWORD

1. See John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: Complete Text with Study Guide* (The Lausanne Movement, 2009), 43.

1 INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE

1. Paraphrased from David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, About Living a Compassionate Life* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009), 3-4.
2. These elements are a modification of the excellent definition and description from anthropologist and missiologist Paul Hiebert in his *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 30-34.
3. Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church: Helping Your Church Thrive in a Diverse Society* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 49-50.
4. Ebbie Gibbs quotes from Jaroslav Pelikan of Yale to help delineate between tradition and traditionalism: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, whereas traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” In Gibbs’s *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 163.
5. The seven woes that Jesus pronounced on the scribes and Pharisees were almost all a denouncement of their traditionalism.
6. J. Nelson Jennings, “Cultural Disorientation and Understanding the Missional God,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, July 2014, 2.

2 EDEN

1. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1942), 86.
2. By repeated use of “image” and “likeness of God,” the author of Genesis emphasized humankind’s distinction from the rest of the created beings. He reminds the reader of this creative act at the beginning of the first genealogy and mentions it again in a discourse on the sanctity of human life (Gen 5:1; 9:6).
3. By doing some calculations based on Adam’s age when Seth was born (130 years), it’s possible that Adam and Eve enjoyed up to one hundred years of sinless perfection.
4. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 1:64.

3 THE TOWER OF BABEL

1. E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), Kindle ed., loc. 717.
2. Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships of Effective Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 24.

4 ABRAHAM

1. In the midst of the years when God repeated his call to Abram, he changed his name to "Abraham." That is the name used for him throughout this chapter.
2. Joshua Project (http://joshuaproject.net/global_statistics) counts 16,765 people groups worldwide. IMB (<http://peoplegroups.org/>) counts the number of people groups at 11,502 as of January 2016.
3. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 171.
4. Ibid.
5. "Adamah," Hebrew Dictionary (Lexicon-Concordance), accessed January 30, 2016, <http://lexiconcordance.com/hebrew/0127.html>.
6. "Erets," Hebrew Dictionary (Lexicon-Concordance), accessed January 30, 2016, <http://lexiconcordance.com/hebrew/0776.html>.
7. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 117-18.
8. Werner Mischke, *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World* (Scottsdale, AZ: Mission One Resources, 2015), 255. For a fuller explanation on this topic, see 252-58.
9. Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation, *The Mission of God Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman, 2012), 12.

5 SARAH AND HAGAR

1. Werner Mischke, *The Global Gospel: Achieving Missional Impact in Our Multicultural World* (Scottsdale, AZ: Mission One Resources, 2015), 38.
2. Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 15.
3. Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham, 2012), 59.
4. QBible, "Genesis 16," verse 4, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://lexiconcordance.com/hebrew/0776.html>.
5. "Tsachaq," Hebrew Dictionary (Lexicon-Concordance), accessed January 30, 2016, <http://lexiconcordance.com/hebrew/6711.html>.

6. Mischke, *Global Gospel*, 62-63.
7. The test can be found at www.theculturetest.com.
8. Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame and Fear Cultures* (Timē Press: 2014), PDF ebook, 30-31.
9. Mischke, *Global Gospel*, 64.

6 ABRAHAM AND THE HITTITES

1. Merrill C. Tenney, gen. ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 166.
2. It's interesting that Sarah is the only woman in Scripture whose age at the time of death we are told.
3. In a state visit, President Johnson met with King Bhumibol Adulyadej on October 27-30, 1966.

7 THE MARRIAGE OF JACOB

1. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1942), 794.
2. The Hebrew *'asah* literally means "to do," but in the context is better translated "custom" by the NIV.
3. Adapted from Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 285.
4. For a good description of missionary kids, see chap. 3, "Missionary Kids, Citizens of the World," in Neal Pirolo, *Internationals Who Live Among Us: Doing World Missions at Home* (San Diego: Emmaus Road International, 2013).

8 JOSEPH

1. Michele Rickett, "Justice for Women in Border Towns, Brothel Communities and Conflict Zones," *Anthology 2:1* (April 2014): 46-50.
2. World Resources SIM Center, accessed on January 30, 2016, www.wrsc.org/attach_image/human-trafficking-pie-chart.
3. Rickett, "Justice for Women."
4. "Jim Elliot," Theopedia, accessed January 15, 2016, http://www.theopedia.com/Jim_Elliot.

9 MOSES

1. Neal Pirolo, *Internationals Who Live Among Us: Doing World Missions at Home* (San Diego: Emmaus Road International, 2013), 67.

2. Ibid., 46.
3. Ryan Shaw, *Spiritual Equipping for Mission: Thriving as God's Message Bearers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 34.

10 THE ISRAELITE COMMUNITY

1. The New International Version (NIV) is used in this chapter because the terms used for the groupings of the people in the passage are more clearly represented than in the English Standard Version.
2. This island has gone through several name changes over recent decades. It was originally known as Dutch New Guinea. The Indonesians changed it to West Irian in the mid-1960s and then to Irian Jaya in the early 1970s, before it was changed again to West Papua in the early 2000s.
3. Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 206.
4. Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 85.
5. Ibid., 91-93.

12 RUTH

1. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnation Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 113-22.
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5. Ibid.
6. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 33. Stott is of the opinion that the title “Acts of the Holy Spirit” overemphasizes the divine and overlooks the apostles as the chief characters through whom the Spirit worked. His suggestion of a better title was “The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by His Spirit through the Apostles.”
7. George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 214. Peters also added this important note: “Since the Christian life is charged with supernatural ideals and demands, it can only be lived in absolute reliance on the Holy Spirit. Unless the lessons are learned early, the Christian life becomes beset with frustrations and numbness; apathy sets in, or people become conditioned to an abnormal or subnormal Christian life. This is the tragedy of countless believers who do not even expect to live up to the biblical ideals” (213-14).
8. Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13-14. Sanneh adds, “As the ancient scribe foresaw, in the age of true religion God’s name would no longer be confined to one place but would be known and honored everywhere

among the Gentiles. The witness of believers that God was their only dwelling place has been validated.”

9. As the events in the book of Acts unfolded, Luke wrote of the springing up of regional centers of Christianity. Although Jerusalem held the distinction as the sole center of the church for twenty years, by the middle of the book, Antioch is mentioned as a strong center (by the AD 50s). Toward the end of the book, Ephesus is a growing center of influence (AD 60s), with the hint of Rome emerging on the scene as an upcoming center.
10. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, A Reader*, 4th ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 339-53.
11. *Ibid.*, 345.
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2. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 128.
3. Evelyn and Richard Hibbert, *Leading Multicultural Teams* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2014), 138.
4. Young Lee Hertig, “Cross-Cultural Mediation: From Exclusion to Inclusion,” in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context*, ed. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 64.
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3. The principle of discovering a sympathetic "person of peace" when entering a nonbelieving community has been advocated and explained by Jerry Trousdale in his *Miraculous Movements: How Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims Are Falling in Love with Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012). In essence "the person of peace" principle states we should share the gospel only where people are ready to receive, where God is already at work. An update on the disciple-making movement concept can be found in David and Paul Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making: Leading Others on a Journey of Discovery* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014).

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34 THE INCARNATIONAL MISSIONARY

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2. William Pringle Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar: Pioneer Missionary* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), 298.
3. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnation Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 113-22.
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Praise for *Crossing Cultures in Scripture*

“The Bible is filled with numerous crosscultural stories. Few people realize this. Taken together, these stories communicate the metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. I am so thankful Marv Newell has drawn attention to many of these stories and has led us to ask, what can we learn from them when it comes to crossing cultures today? While other disciplines are helpful with such kingdom labors, Marv challenges us to start with the best resource.”

J. D. Payne, pastor of church multiplication, The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, Alabama

“The Bible is rich in stories of cultures—the good, the bad and the ugly. In this book, Dr. Marvin Newell helps us look at the Scriptures from the lens of cross-cultural encounters. . . . This book helps us to both decode the Bible stories from the biblical cultures and encode the Bible stories for different cultures today so that God’s message always remains relevant and universal. All the stories point to one greater story—the story of Jesus Christ.”

From the foreword by **Patrick Fung**, general director, OMF International

“In this era of increasing globalization and multiculturalism, *Crossing Cultures in Scripture* provides a greatly needed biblical theology of culture. Newell weaves together biblical narratives and personal insights to present the Bible as a textbook for ministering and flourishing across cultures. The case studies of biblical figures who cross cultures address the main issues every missionary inevitably faces. If you are a Christian engaging the nations, this book is an ideal guide for you.”

Jayson Georges, missionary, author, founding editor, HonorShame.com

“This book is a wonderful gift to young adults who desire a biblical foundation for living faithfully and fruitfully in a culturally complex world. It also provides insights for congregants of all ages who want answers for addressing significant issues in the world that are based on Scripture rather than prevailing political ideologies. For these reasons I highly recommend it!”

Mary Lederleitner, author of *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*

“The clarity of the principles presented, the continuity regarding crosscultural mission from the Old through New Testaments, and the comprehensive nature of the book—taking you all the way from Eden to eternity—make this not only a compelling read but also a convicting call to God’s people everywhere to take up the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus to make disciples in every culture on planet Earth.”

Luis Bush, international facilitator, Transform World Connections

“Rather than examining the Bible through missiological lenses, Marv Newell rightly reverses the binoculars. Viewing crosscultural ministry through the lens of Scripture, Newell carefully examines a full spectrum of biblical texts to glean key principles. More than simply illustrative, *Crossing Cultures in Scripture* is instructional, providing additional rich insights from anthropology, missiology, and experiences both historical and personal. Salted with practical helps for understanding and praxis as well as suggested topical resources and chapter takeaways, this volume is a valued resource for preaching and teaching as well as training for effective gospel communication across cultural divides.”

Wes Taber, executive director, Life in Messiah International

“I love Marv’s purpose of bringing us back to the Bible to learn everything we can about crosscultural encounters. The Christian and mission world is in danger of minimizing Scripture in favor of trends, techniques, and strategies. The Bible is our greatest teacher, meant to inform and provide clarity and understanding in all spheres of life and ministry. Marv brings attention to the great extent (often

overlooked) of crosscultural emphasis throughout the biblical narrative and how we apply this emphasis toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission. I highly encourage the careful reading of this book by all who sincerely love Jesus and want to see his kingdom come in all the world.”

Ryan Shaw, international lead facilitator, SVM2

“Another book on culture and mission? Yes, but not *just* another. From the late nineteenth century onward, more and more ethnologists and anthropologists have been focusing on the relationship between human culture and Christian mission. However, far and away the primary emphasis has been on the contribution that studies of culture make to effective missionizing. Now, out of his intensive study of the Bible and extensive crosscultural experience, missiologist Marvin Newell has provided another perspective: the place of culture in biblical history and theology. Christian missionaries of course, but also all globally minded Christians, should read this book. It’s a breath of fresh air!”

David J. Hesselgrave, emeritus professor of mission, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“What I love about *Crossing Cultures in Scripture* is this: it magnifies the Word of God. Newell shows that the whole Bible is not just the foundation but also our most practical everyday guidebook for ministry in our multicultural world.”

Werner Mischke, author of *The Global Gospel*

“Marv Newell has given the global mission community the much-needed gift of a one-stop reference book of key crosscultural principles drawn from Genesis to Revelation. Because opportunities abound for crossing cultures abroad and at home, it is imperative that we know what the Bible says on how to think, behave, and live among people who are different from us. Newell has masterfully gleaned insights and provided us with practical guidelines in navigating a different culture. His honesty is refreshing and will serve both the

novice and the veteran well in crosscultural ministry. This book will definitely be in my top ten mission books!”

Lisa Espineli Chinn, ministry coach, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, crosscultural trainer, global mission consultant, author of *Crossing Cultures*

“Lifting up Scripture as our ultimate authority and teacher on culture, Newell offers insightful principles on missions practice as well as a multitude of practical takeaways for anyone crossing cultures. A must-read for anyone hoping to serve in crosscultural contexts!”

Tom Lin, president/CEO, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

“In *Crossing Cultures in Scripture*, Dr. Newell gives the church and its crosscultural workers a rich synthesis of biblical and crosscultural encounters and principles. These should guide both the crosscultural worker and churches in general as they engage other cultures with the gospel. While this book strongly instructs the Westerner in crosscultural work in non-Western cultures, it will serve non-Western crosscultural workers well. It will challenge them to better appreciate rich parallels between their own and other cultures in the light of biblical narratives. This book should be required reading for all crosscultural workers of all nationalities, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. It should also be required for pastoral students who, in the course of their work, will instruct such workers. I highly recommend it.”

Joshua Bogunjoko, international director, SIM

“Finally we have a thorough collection of biblical insights into the varied dynamics of cultural realities. It is instructional, richly illustrative, and infused with practical applications. This book profoundly equips anyone sojourning in another country and culture as well as those who interact with diaspora peoples in their communities.”

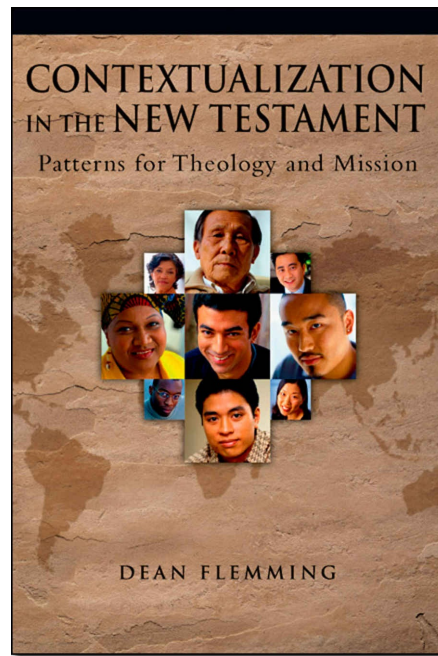
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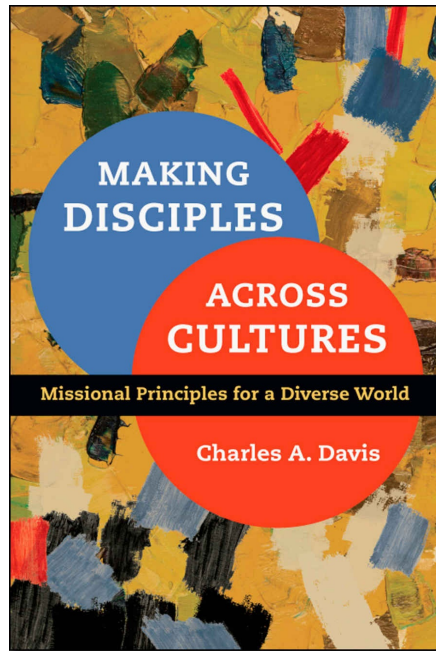
Marvin J. Newell (DMiss, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is senior vice president of Missio Nexus, a network of evangelical mission agencies, churches and training centers in North America. He served as a missionary in East and Southeast Asia for two decades and was professor and chair of the intercultural studies program at Moody Theological Seminary. His books include *Commissioned* and *A Martyr's Grace*.

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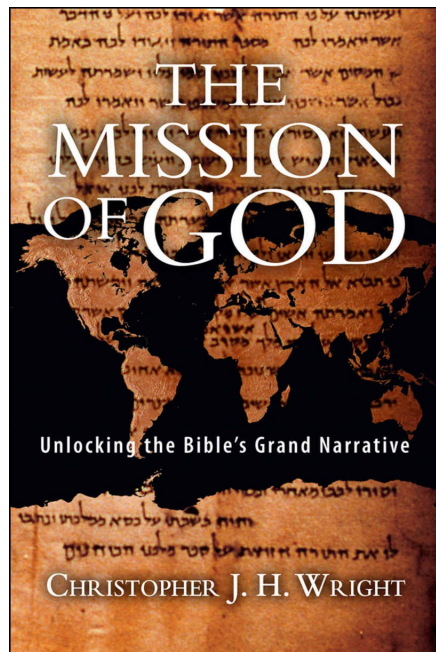
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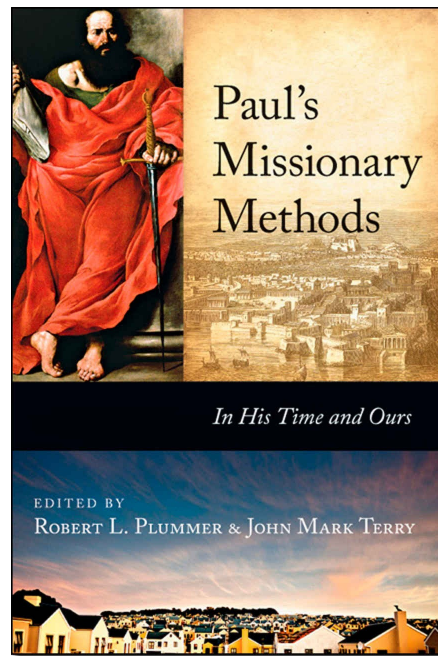
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