



Tertullian

# A Light in the World

## - Study 2

The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD shifted the centre of the Christian mission to its second home of Antioch in Syria from where Paul set sail on his missionary journeys. By the end of the 4th century the population of Antioch was around 500,000, half of whom may well have been Christians.

There was a common language of trade in the Roman Empire, which was Greek, and this was the language that enabled the gospel to spread so quickly across linguistic barriers.

Paul's missions extended the boundaries of the faith to Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) which proved a promising mission field. The Church in Rome grew mainly through the influx of Christians from other parts of the Empire. By 251 AD under Bishop Cornelius there were around 30,000 Christians in Rome, with 46 elders, 7 deacons and other workers.

There were a few hiccups in the triumph of Christianity over Paganism within the Roman Empire, but from the late 4th century the highest authority in the empire would be Christian!

There was already a large Jewish population in Egypt, and the gospel message reached them in the early years, being translated from Greek to

Coptic in the 3rd century. The monastic movement seems to have its origins in Egypt and soon attracted a man called Anthony around AD305 who seems to have followed Jesus' command to "sell all you have and give it to the poor, and come, follow me!"

West of Egypt, the gospel spread to Cyrene (Libya), Tunisia and Algeria where the first Latin speaking churches developed, each with their own Bishop. The first church documents in Latin were written by Tertullian (c. AD 155-222).

Mission success in Spain and Gaul was slower, and by the time of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (c. 130-200 AD) the Church was only just establishing itself in the southern regions.

The earliest support for the idea that Christianity arrived in Britain early is from Tertullian who wrote in "Adversus Judaeos" that Britain had already received and accepted the Gospel in his lifetime. Three Bishops represented Britain at the Council of Arles in 314 AD.

In these early centuries there was also missionary activity in the countries we know as Syria, Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia, Armenia, Germany, Austria, France, Ireland and possibly even India.

## Mission Focus - Wycliffe Bible Translators



Although Scriptures are available in around 2700 languages, there are 2000 language groups who have none.

Closing this gap is the mission of c7000 affiliated staff of the Wycliffe Global Alliance.

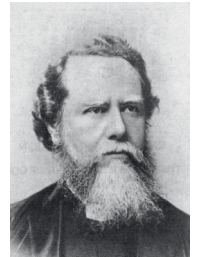
The organisation began after Cameron Townsend tried to sell Spanish Bibles in Guatemala. He found most people he met did not understand Spanish, so learned their language and translated the New Testament for them.

Townsend and L.L. Legters started a "Camp Wycliffe" to train linguists and translators to serve under established missionary societies, but were encouraged to start a separate Bible translation society.

In 1942 Wycliffe Bible Translators Inc. was created.

At the core of its mission statement is the belief that Bible translation is an essential component of the Church's responsibility as they participate in God's mission to redeem and restore His creation.

At seventeen James Hudson Taylor professed his faith in Christ and committed himself to mission work in China. The next few years were spent studying languages, theology and the rudiments of medicine. Sponsored by the Chinese Evangelization Society he arrived, aged 21 at Shanghai in 1854.



To overcome local resistance Taylor decided he would wear Chinese clothes and grow a pigtail. He travelled around the area, distributing Chinese tracts and Scriptures, and was married to fellow missionary worker Maria Dyer in 1858.

Returning to the UK shortly afterwards because of ill health Taylor toured extensively promoting his work, and completed a medical degree. In 1865 he devoted his time to translation and founding a new society, the China Inland Mission. He returned with a new team of fifteen to Shanghai. When other missionaries sought to preserve their British ways, Taylor was convinced that the Gospel would only take root in Chinese soil if missionaries were willing to affirm the culture of the people they were seeking to reach.

It was a gruelling life, with hardship, illness, injury, personal loss and sadness, but Taylor was sure of his vocation. Numbers of missionaries increased dramatically to over 300 by 1888. The Boxer rebellion disrupted missionary work in 1900, and CIM lost 58 missionaries and 21 children.

Taylor died unexpectedly at his base in China in 1905 after 51 years of service, leaving 205 mission stations with over 800 missionaries, and 125,000 Chinese Christians. Though mission work in China was interrupted by the communist takeover in 1949, the CIM work continues to this day under the name Overseas Missionary Fellowship.

# Mission in the New Testament

In the Old Testament it was through the nation of Israel that God made his ways and purposes known to the world,

*“Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:4-6)*

It was the priest’s role to be the mediator between God and humankind.

In the New Testament we find the Church chosen to be God’s witnesses to the world.

There is a wonderful parallel in 1 Peter 2 where he is addressing the Gentile Church,

*“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:5*

There is no real contradiction, as in the Old and the New it is the people of God who are central to a call to be the means through which knowledge of God would reach all nations.

From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry we get a feel for mission,

*“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Luke 19:10*

Jesus’ repeated call to potential disciples was a simple one of “Follow me!” which has within it the implication that they will participate in the work of mission.

This is emphasised in Matthew 28:18-20 with the Great Commission to go out into the world and make disciples of all nations, with the promise that those who obey the call would not walk alone.

*“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

It is at Pentecost that we traditionally think of the Church coming of age, as the disciples received the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus,

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8*

The Church’ mission began in a packed Jerusalem full of visitors, who would return home and tell others what they had seen and heard. God’s perfect timing!

The pattern of mission was based upon the foundation of regular prayer and worship, the study of the Scriptures and a shared vision and lifestyle. (Acts 2:42)

*“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47)*

It took some time for the early Jewish believers to lay aside their prejudices about Gentiles. However in Acts we read of persecution forcing the believers to scatter throughout Judea and Samaria, and with them went their faith in Jesus.

A major breakthrough was Philip’s work among the Samaritans - despised by mainstream Jews - with follow-up undertaken by Peter and John. (see Acts 8)

Acts tells us how the gospel spread, and the parts played by Paul and the other Apostles in mission and Church growth.

**“People who don’t believe in missions have not read the New Testament. Right from the beginning Jesus said the field is the world. The early church took Him at His word and went East, West, North and South.” (J. Howard Edington)**

## Do it! Nurturing New Believers

One definition of nurture is “Care for and encourage the growth or development of” and that’s probably as close as we’re going to get in understanding what the responsibility of a Church is when faced with new converts, or even those whose faith is weak or wavering.

This definition also indicates that it is both an ongoing and a long-term commitment, in the same way that we might nurture our own children.

Churches which have mission at their heart should also have in place the means by which growth and development can take place.

Nurture is not just about teaching, it is about making people feel part of the family of God!

So what do new believers, and indeed all believers need to know to help them grow to maturity?

1) They need assurance that they

have been forgiven and accepted by God. This is the beginning of a new relationship. They need to begin to understand how important God’s Word is to the life of the Church. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

They also need to communicate with God through prayer. (Philippians 4:6,7)

2) New believers need fellowship with mature Christians. They need role models, and people to whom they can turn in times of need.

3) They also need the pre-existing relationships that they enjoyed before committing their lives to Christ. What greater testimony is there than someone noticing the change in another person’s life?

But this needs training, the development of a testimony that is both true and relevant, and the confidence to share this with current friends and colleagues.

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## Discussion

- 1) Read Acts 8:1-3, and relate this to stories in the media concerning persecution of Christians in some countries. Discuss how the Christians who were refugees in Judea and Samaria reacted to their predicament (v. 4-8)
- 2) Is Acts 2:42-47 a real challenge to the modern Church? Discuss how this might be tackled in your local area.
- 3) What resources has your church in place to welcome, nurture and develop into maturity new Christians who might come through the doors?
- 4) A Christian testimony is the story of a journey. It can be a paragraph or a novel. Write a short account of a part or, if you wish, the whole of your journey that you are happy to share with others.