

Article of the Month – July 2008

From Jerusalem to the World

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When Jesus spoke in Acts 1:8 about His commission for the apostles to preach the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth, He meant not only those literal, geographical locations, but more than that. What else did He have in mind for us, His disciples of the 21st century?

In a *geographical* sense, 'Jerusalem' to us means our city or village, those *physical places* that we are most familiar with. In a *relational* sense 'Jerusalem' points to the *people* we are most familiar with, whether spouses, children, family, friends or colleagues that are not yet believers in Christ.

In a *geographical* sense, 'Judea' to us means our country or part of the country where the same language is spoken. Places that may not exactly be near – they may even be far away – but places where *relationally* we would not really be considered as strangers because we share the same culture, worldview and value-system.

The work of being witnesses for Christ in 'Jerusalem' or 'Judea' means *mono-cultural evangelism*: the Gospel can be shared with most people, without it being necessary for the evangelist to learn another language or culture.

In a *geographical* sense 'Samaria' for us means either another country or part of our own country, where a slightly different language is spoken and where people's religious views are also slightly different, e.g. belonging to a different form of the same major religion. *Relationally* speaking, the 'Samaritans' are the people we prefer to avoid because we dislike or despise them for whatever reason.

The 'uttermost parts of the earth', in a *geographical sense*, are parts of countries that are so hard to reach, that the Gospel has not yet been taken there. Reasons can be that there are no roads, rivers, or airports that make the area accessible. These uttermost parts can often only be reached by foot and are far away. These are areas where the languages as well as the cultures and religions differ very much from our own. *Relationally* speaking the people in the 'uttermost parts' are those we are least familiar with. They are total strangers to us in all respects. We may almost feel that they come from another planet!

The work of being witnesses of Christ in 'Samaria' and the 'uttermost parts of the earth' means *cross-cultural missions*: the Gospel can only be shared with people once the missionary has learned that people's language, culture and religion very well.

Outreach to Jerusalem & Judea

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Mono-cultural local Evangelism

Outreach to Samaria & the Ends of the Earth

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Cross-cultural foreign Missions

For *evangelism* in 'Jerusalem' and 'Judea' no more training is required than being a disciple of Christ, able to give one's testimony and tell the Gospel to an unbeliever in a way he or she can understand. Of course the words of such a witness need to be backed up by a Godly lifestyle. Practice and preaching must be consistent. 'Talking the talk' without 'walking the walk' will not work and bring discredit to the name of Christ and the church.

For *missions* in 'Samaria' and the 'uttermost parts of the earth' serious, hard training is needed, apart from the basic training anyone needs to minister in Jerusalem and Judea. Such missionaries need to be thoroughly trained in how to learn foreign languages, how to adapt to different cultures and how to get to know non-Christian religions so well that they can intelligently debate it with its spiritual leaders.

Although it may sound complicated, we need to understand that we are talking about *cultural, linguistic and religious barriers* even more than *geographical* barriers, although the latter do play a role in certain areas. For instance, when Christians live in a large city, it will be relatively easy for them to meet 'Samaritans' and people from the 'uttermost parts' just across the street where they live. With the migration from the rural areas to the cities, one can nowadays meet many more nationalities in one place than, say, fifty years ago. In a way therefore, the mission fields have come closer than they ever were, especially in the cities. This however should not make us blind for the fact that the remaining unreached people groups are unreached *for good reasons*, whether physical or relational. The 'easier' forms therefore, we call mono-cultural evangelism and the harder forms we call cross-cultural missions.

Finally we should understand that Jesus spoke about Jerusalem *and* Judea *and* Samaria *and* the uttermost parts of the earth. Every healthy church should occupy itself with all four areas simultaneously. Jesus never gave us the choice to minister *either* here, *or* there. The often heard argument that 'we don't have to engage in world missions, because the need is right here, at our doorstep', therefore is a fake and unbiblical excuse. Every Kingdom-focused church should do the one and not omit the other.

The Gospel has been preached in many places, but we should do well to keep Paul's ambition in mind, to preach the Gospel where it has not yet been preached before (Rom. 15:20). The everlasting discussion about how we define terms like 'unreached' and 'least-reached' will not help us, but the picture becomes clearer when we ask ourselves whether the Gospel is available in any given place or not. We need to concentrate on the latter and make sure that in those very places the Gospel will be presented to the local population in a relevant way, so that it addresses their felt needs.