

## Article of the Month – March 2013

### Missiological Observations in the NT (15) – 1 Peter

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When we compare the geographical areas in which the recipients of Peter's letters lived with those mentioned in Acts we see an overlap.<sup>1</sup> Some older people in the congregations that Peter addresses may have heard him preach in Jerusalem 30 years earlier. These churches were well established but apparently had a second generation problem that Peter seeks to address;<sup>2</sup> hence the discipleship-approach in his teaching.

In his first verse Peter addresses the *nations*, speaking about the 'grace that has come to you',<sup>3</sup> as prophesied throughout the Old Testament. Peter does not talk to his fellow Jews in Jerusalem here, but preaches cross-culturally: no Judaist garment is used to wrap the Gospel.

When Peter tells us to 'live as strangers and aliens in the world'<sup>4</sup> we may also feel encouraged to live as missionaries among a people group in the world that is not ours. We *live*, but do not *belong* there. Missions has two sides, *one* is adaptation, contextualization and incarnation with the purpose to remove all perceived foreignness from the Gospel message among our target-group. The *other* is what Peter addresses here: as citizens of heaven we are to maintain purity and holy living in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation.<sup>5</sup> In missionary terms: not being contaminated by idolatrous cultural practices that dominate our target-peoples; enculturation<sup>6</sup> is a step too far.

Peter speaks about a people that once was not a people.<sup>7</sup> There is a parallel with Old Testament Israel, concerning the 'chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation belonging to God' which stems from God's original plan for Israel when it had just left Egypt.<sup>8</sup> The implication is: where Israel failed through sin and conformity to the idolatrous surrounding nations, the worldwide people of God are to succeed through holiness.<sup>9</sup> Should it disregard holiness, it will be exiled into the spiritual Babylon, the false church that will turn anti-Christian in the Last Days.<sup>10</sup> God will not show more tolerance towards a sinning church today than He did towards the sins of Israel 2,600 years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare 1 Pet. 1:1 with Acts 2:8-11

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. 2:2

<sup>3</sup> 1:10-12 (italics mine)

<sup>4</sup> 1:1,17; 2:11

<sup>5</sup> Philip. 2:15

<sup>6</sup> Enculturation can be defined as 'immersing oneself into a culture without critical evaluation thereof' (my definition)

<sup>7</sup> 1 Pet. 2:10. Before Israel was a people, it was a clan of a father (Jacob) and his twelve sons. Before the Church was a people, it was a clan of one Man (Jesus Christ) and His twelve disciples

<sup>8</sup> Compare 2:5,9 with Ex. 19:5,6

<sup>9</sup> 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 2:11,12

<sup>10</sup> Rev. 17 & 18

From Peter's way of encouraging the wives of unbelievers<sup>11</sup> we learn missionary lessons on how to stand as Christians in a pagan society.<sup>12</sup> The common denominator between these passages is that actions speak louder than words. A display of Godly character speaks clearly, even before a local language has been mastered.

Godly character revealed in a missionary is of much greater value than presence of external assets, such as wealth, reputation, prestige or appearance.<sup>13</sup> Such externals should rather not be brought into play at all.

Again paraphrasing, we could say: 'Missionaries, be considerate as you live among your target-people and treat them with respect as the spiritually weaker partner in the Gospel enterprise, so that nothing will jeopardize your testimony'.<sup>14</sup>

When Peter says 'Always be prepared'<sup>15</sup> he points to an ambassador-attitude that is not a *missionary* privilege – it should be common among *all* God's children – but it does lie at the heart of missionary ministry. The witnessing tone ought to be gently respectful – the opposite of the haughty attitude that places 'me, the Christian' over and against 'you, the sinner'.

God waited patiently in Noah's days.<sup>16</sup> Christ compared the Last Days with those of Noah,<sup>17</sup> and again God waits patiently: He wants none to perish.<sup>18</sup> In Noah's time only few were saved – there was but one preacher. How many missionaries will we send to the unreached hundreds of millions who have never heard the Gospel once?<sup>19</sup>

The Good News for adherents of Tribal Religions who live in fear of evil spirits is that all angels, authorities and powers are submitted to Christ.<sup>20</sup> He loved them enough to give His life for them.<sup>21</sup> He is the highest Authority and to Him has been given all power in heaven and on earth.<sup>22</sup> Whoever believes in Him has nothing to fear.

The pagans have to account to Him Who comes to judge. Therefore we have to keep warning them.<sup>23</sup> It is our mission, whether we are missionaries or not.

Offering hospitality is not only a specific duty of missionaries with regard to their travelling colleagues but also a great privilege for normal church members.<sup>24</sup> Missionaries travel a lot and often spend too much of their funds on food and accommodation that could have been provided freely by local church members.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Pet. 3:1,2

<sup>12</sup> Compare with 2:12,15 & 3:16

<sup>13</sup> Paraphrasing 3:3,4

<sup>14</sup> 3:7

<sup>15</sup> 3:15

<sup>16</sup> 3:20

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 24:37-39

<sup>18</sup> 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4

<sup>19</sup> Rom. 10:13-15

<sup>20</sup> 1 Pet. 3:22

<sup>21</sup> John 3:16

<sup>22</sup> Matt. 28:18

<sup>23</sup> 1 Pet. 4:3-5,18

<sup>24</sup> 4:9

