



Acts 16

1

Acts 17

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在多變的世界裡的宣教

Mission in a changing world

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



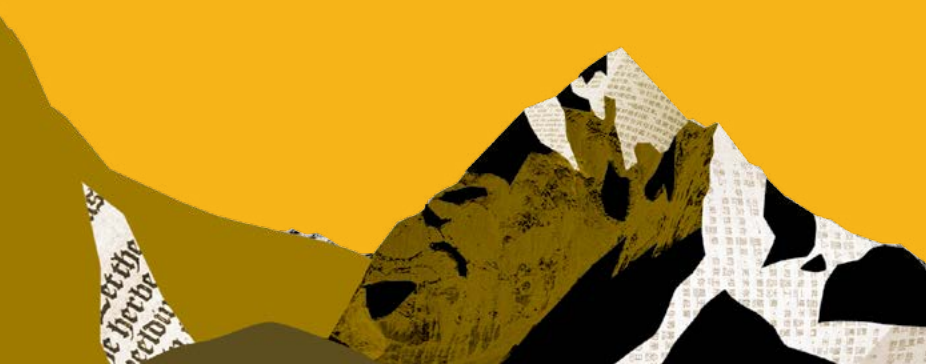


PARTICIPATE

前言

Introduction

In this anniversary year we want to take the opportunity to encourage Christians to think about mission in a fresh way. Mission has been changing, and many are questioning the role of mission agencies, some feel that the age of cross-cultural mission from the UK to other countries has passed. We recognise this changing situation, but see the huge need for the Church to engage with cross-cultural mission locally, as well as maintaining our vision for sharing the good news about Jesus Christ to the peoples of East Asia. We believe that God's mission is unchanged.



Why a Mission in a Changing World Bible study?

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

With this conviction we offer a series of six Bible studies in this year’s anniversary Billions, each looking at mission in the Bible, and seeking to apply principles both to the local and the global context. I want to encourage each of our Billions readers to pray about making use of these studies; introduce them to your church Bible study group, or invite a group of friends to form a new group, and spend six sessions this year studying mission together.

This issue sees the first two studies, written by Rose and Dick Dowsett, looking at Acts 16 and 17. The next two issues of Billions will each offer two more studies.

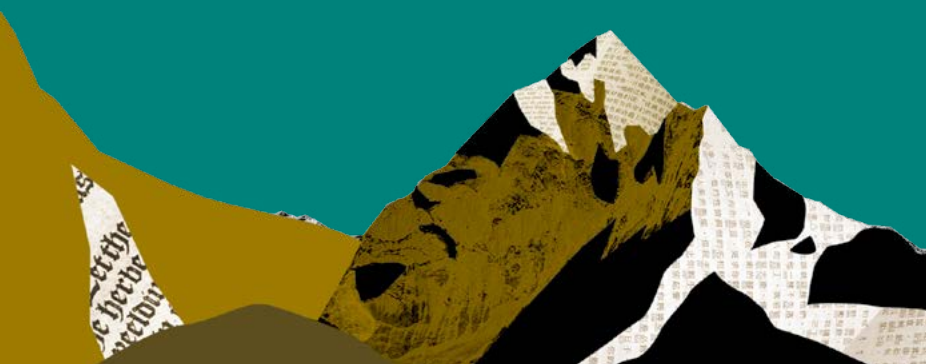
I trust the Lord blesses your time in his Word.



意想不到的帶領

Guidance and the unexpected

The Apostle Paul was not the only early Christian who took the gospel to new places, but the Holy Spirit has ensured that his story is recorded for us in The Acts of the Apostles. OMF International – formerly the China Inland Mission – is also only one among many communities spreading the gospel today; its story echoes some of those in Acts, and so it should!





1. Read Acts 16:6–10.

Paul's cross-cultural mission began with conviction by the Holy Spirit, confirmed by the church in Antioch (see Acts 13:1–4). After a 'home assignment' (see Acts 14:26–28), he revisits the believing groups established on his first journey, but longs to reach out further.

- i. Given that God wants all people to hear the gospel, what is surprising about verses 6 & 7? What might we learn from this about our outreach? What can we learn about where OMF should 'place' members?
- ii. verses 9–10: What is a vision? What role can dreams play in guidance? How do we know if a dream comes from the Holy Spirit? Hudson Taylor's compelling vision was of 'countless Chinese heading for a Christless eternity' because they had not heard the gospel. What is your compelling vision, and where does it come from?



2. Read Acts 16:11–15.

- i. Why do you think Paul and his companions headed for Philippi? Why are cities so strategic for mission in Asia today?
- ii. Why did Paul, Luke and friends go to the Jewish place of prayer? Are there similar places for other faiths in Asia? What are the equivalent places in UK today?
- iii. What can we learn from the story of Lydia about how divine and human responsibility come together in mission? What happens if we stress only one or the other? How should that shape our engagement in mission in Asia today?

3. Read Acts 16:16–21.

- i. Paul's Jewish background taught him to pray, 'I thank you, Lord, that I was not born a woman, a slave or a Gentile.' In Philippi, God builds the fledgling church on a woman, a slave girl and a Roman jailer – and Paul rejoices! What inherited prejudices and assumptions, even religious ones, might God require us to relinquish today?
- ii. The slave girl appears to have the right message about Paul and his friends. Why then does Paul react the way he does? What can we learn about the spirit world, both here and in Asia, from this?
- iii. What vested interests oppose the gospel in the UK and Asia? What should we do in response?



4. Read Acts 16:22–40.

- i. What do we learn about opposition to the gospel? Can you think of examples where God has used suffering for blessing and human evil for divine good? How does this affect the way we pray for God's people in Asia facing opposition?
- ii. How do we know when it's time to move on? Leaving China in 1950–51 was traumatic for the CIM, but God brought blessing, both in China and also in the unexpected 'rebirth' of the Fellowship in many other countries. How can we discern the Spirit's guidance today about when to move on and where to start afresh?



不同的文化，同樣的福音

Same Gospel different Culture

Evangelising Athenian intellectuals was very different from preaching in a synagogue. Paul had to adjust to a culture very different from his own. When Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission, he also had to adapt to a new culture. He insisted that everyone recruited should learn to speak Chinese and understand the culture. True disciple-making demands such commitment.

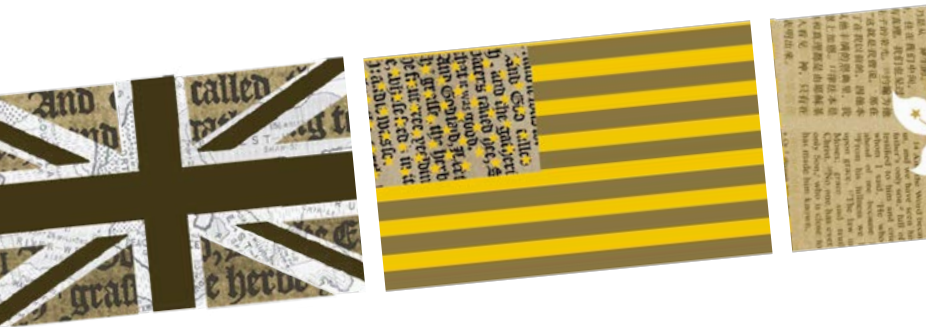


1. Read Acts 17:16–21.

When Paul entered Athens he began to look for opportunities to witness. The response was very different from that of the Jewish community in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2–4). In early CIM days responses to Christianity varied, some Chinese cartoons ridiculed it as the religion of the pig Jesus! (The words ‘pig’ and ‘Lord’ are very similar; some missionaries may have said one instead of the other.) People raised in Asia today have a different mindset to our overseas workers. Many will listen to the story of Jesus, but find it alien and confusing.

- **‘That is just what we believe’**
– a Thai Buddhist after a gospel presentation.
 - **‘You are wasting your time. We Japanese do not want to become Christians.’**
– student in a Sapporo coffee shop.
 - **‘I put an offering to Jesus on the god shelf.’**
– a Singaporean from a traditional religious background.
- i. What did Paul learn about Athenian beliefs from their responses to the gospel? Within your culture, what can you learn about peoples beliefs based on their responses to the gospel? Some of his discoveries were quite traumatic (Acts 17:16), and today many new workers also experience painful culture shock. Paul handled his distress in a godly way, not losing his gospel priorities. Pray that those sent will do the same.
 - ii. Paul explained the good news in three different locations. Places of religious practices, commercial areas and intellectual forums are all places OMF workers may find opportunities to share the gospel. In your life, what places provide you with the best opportunity to share the good news?





2. Read Acts 17:22–23.

In the market place, Paul preached about Jesus and the resurrection. After hearing responses he decided to start further back, and find a point that made sense to his listeners. Jesus often began with everyday matters: water supply, commerce, farming and fishing. We need to study our culture to find ways in for the gospel.

- i. Paul found a starting point for witness when he saw the altar dedicated ‘to an unknown god’. The Athenians believed there was a god that they did not know; Paul said that this was the real God, known through Jesus. What unique starting points to witness are there among people in Britain? Have you found any significant new starting points for sharing the gospel with those you know?
- ii. What do you think were the risks and advantages of using this creative approach? Some missionaries use a Western gospel package, and fail to engage with the unique culture they are approaching. Pray for missionaries attempting to communicate the gospel in a way relevant to specific cultures.



3. Read Acts 17:24–31.

As Paul preached the gospel, he engaged with local beliefs that may have caused the Athenians to stumble. He challenged Epicurean and Stoic philosophy, and built on the sentiments of Athenian poets. Cultures are a complex blend of the providence of God and the perversion of the devil. A truncated gospel (like a basic Western ABC of salvation) often leads to a syncretistic response: the mixing of incompatible cultural and Christian practices. It is difficult for OMF workers to learn Asian languages well enough to read culture-moulding Asian books and interact with ideas that might hinder discipleship. Churches in Britain face similar problems; we don't always understand how non-Christians think and even confuse Christian practices with cultural ones.

- i. What wrong responses to the gospel does Paul anticipate and seek to prevent?
- ii. What common ground did Paul have with the Athenians?
- iii. What are the essential elements of the gospel in Paul's message? How can we learn to speak with contextual relevance without losing gospel essentials?
 - 'Jesus will rescue you from the endless cycle of reincarnation.'
 - 'Jesus bore our shame on the cross, so that we can find harmony with the God who made us'
 - 'When you go to the mosque, you can pray to Jesus, son of Mary, the Messiah.'

Do you think these attempts to contextualise the gospel for East Asians are good, too risky, or in need of modification?

