

The three sent ones travel to the new area and live with families that help them learn the language. They work hard to earn their living. They do the things that they learned from the stories about the apostles. The people trust them, because they work hard and reflect Jesus in their lives. Helper sends back a report to his congregation. “Many people are receiving Christ. We baptized a good number today. Their customs are very different but God blesses our work when we respect their culture and customs.”

The report brings joy and great encouragement to the congregations that sent Helper and Rachel. The Spirit of God works through them to reproduce many new congregations where there were none, just as He did with Mr. Wise when he began training Learner to be a leader of God’s people.

Practical Work

- Find out which groups of people in the world still lack healthy congregations and arrange for your congregation to pray for these people regularly.
- Ask God to show the congregation whom He has given the spiritual gift for working with people of other cultures.
- Make plans to support missionaries with prayer and giving.
- Train your missionaries to imitate the incarnation of Christ when they enter another culture, by learning it like little children, and identifying with the people. If possible, let them practice this first with people of another culture who live nearby.
- Train them to accept the customs of other cultures that do not deny the Lordship of Christ.
- Train your missionaries to plant healthy congregations and prepare the leaders.
- Set apart these people as missionaries as the Antioch church set apart Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1-3, to repeat the cycle of church reproduction over again.

Ministry 14

Send Missionaries

Mr. Wise visits Learner again, after several months. Learner tells Mr. Wise, “You have taught us how to teach! I thank you! You showed how to listen before we start teaching, in order to teach what the new congregations really need. You showed us how to use stories, so our apprentices remember God’s truth and pass it on to others. You showed us how to ask questions about what you taught, to help us think it through and apply it to our congregations.”

“I only taught you the way that Jesus did.”

Mr. Wise and Learner visit his brother Helper, and find Mr. Foolish at his house. He tells Mr. Wise, “Learner has treated me badly so now I attend Helper’s congregation.”

Mr. Wise tells them, “I am moving to a part of the country where there are no churches, to begin the Lord’s work there. I am going to form a task group, and came to ask you, Helper, to join me. You have started a congregation with people from another culture and raised up leaders in it. God has given you the gift and the desire to start congregations. You are a ‘sent one.’ That is what the word ‘apostle’ means. We will learn a new language and a new culture.”



“You can not take Helper!” Mr. Foolish protests, “He has responsibilities here, and much work to do! Besides, the congregation is too poor to support him as a missionary. After we are more firmly established as a church we can think about sending missionaries. We have enough pagans here to worry about.”

Learner disagrees. “This is a great opportunity for Helper to take the gospel to people who have never heard it. God promised Abraham that through his descendents all nations would be blessed. This promise comes true in Jesus Christ, the descendant of Abraham. Jesus said in Matthew 24:10 that the end of the world and His final coming will happen after the gospel is preached to

every nation. He did not mean political nations, but ethnic groups—people of the same culture.”

“Yes!” Mr. Wise concurs. “Jesus said in Acts 1:8 that we are to be His witnesses in places both near and far, in our own and other cultures. His last command to us in Matthew 28:18-20, is to make disciples of all the nations of the world. God blesses the congregations that obey His commands. He loves all the people of the world and wants them to know Him through Jesus Christ, His Son. Let me tell you about Jonah, the Reluctant Missionary, who at first thought like Mr. Foolish about reaching other cultures.”

God Will Save People from All Nations of the World

Exercise

Find in the book of **Jonah**:

- What did the Israelite prophet do when God gave him a message for an enemy city?
- How did God make His will prevail, even when the missionary refused to go where he was sent?
- In what way does this story show God's love for even the most sinful nations of the world?



- This vision helped Peter to deal with another culture. How did God want Peter to treat the visitors?
- What does Peter's vision and actions tell us about accepting people with different traditions?

“I see,” Helper says. “We give the same freedom to people of other cultures that the apostle Paul gave them on his missionary journeys. We will not require them to learn our language or follow our customs or use our style of music. We will teach them to turn to God who forgives and accepts them as they are. He will give them the gift of the Holy Spirit just as He gave us when we turned to Him. The Holy Spirit will guide them into all truth. He will convict them of sin. He will show them what customs are helpful and what customs deny the Lordship of Christ.”

“We will send you and Rachel,” Learner tells Helper. “We will lay hands on you and send you with our blessing. We will pray for you faithfully during worship and in our small groups. We will help support you with gifts of love and visit you if we can. You will be God's ambassadors to those people, and we will be your partners in God's work. Please send reports to us often so that we can rejoice in everything the Lord does and pray for help when there are problems. Although the new congregations you start may not look like this congregation in external things, we will all be one body in Christ. He unites us, not by language, culture or traditions, but by His Holy Spirit within us.”



All the new congregations of the area meet in secret one night in a secluded place out of sight of the authorities. They pray and lay hands on Helper and Rachel, to commission them to go with Mr. Wise and make disciples of Christ in a distant land.

- How did God show that all people can be saved without leaving their culture?
- Even though they were not under the law, what were the Gentile Christians to do to avoid offending their believing Jewish brothers who still followed the Old Testament law?
- How did the council encourage the believers?
Mr. Foolish walks away. He never again attends any of the congregations.

Mr. Wise continues to instruct Helper and Rachel concerning missionary work. "The book of Acts records three missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. When his own people, the Jews, rejected Paul's message about Christ, he went to the Gentiles who receive it. Some Jewish believers said that the Gentiles should follow all the Jewish traditions to be saved. Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply with that. They said that God does not require us to follow any laws or traditions to be saved. God saves us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ just as we are. We do not have to change our culture."

Sara says, "Mr. Wise, we will gladly respect other cultures where we serve as missionaries."

"I knew you would. The apostle Peter reminded the Council in Jerusalem of his visit to Cornelius and his people. They were Gentiles, but when they turned to God, He gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit. That proved to the apostles that God had accepted them as they were, without having to adopt Jewish customs. Peter and his Jewish helpers rejoiced and baptized them that same day. The Council decided not to impose the law of Moses of the Old Testament on the Gentiles. Instead, they asked the Gentiles to avoid offending their Jewish neighbors. All the believers were encouraged, because this kept Christ's church united. It was united, not because everyone followed the same traditions, but because they were all saved by faith in Christ and could freely follow different traditions. Do you remember Peter's Vision?"

Exercise

Find in **Acts chapter 10:**

- How many times did God tell Peter to rise, kill and eat animals that were forbidden by his culture?

"This is dangerous talk!" Mr. Foolish cries, as he listens to Mr. Wise, Learner and Helper, in Helper's house. "We do not need to go to distant lands to find people who need to repent from their sins!"

Mr. Wise continues to explain, "Jonah refused to preach to an enemy nation. He took a ship in the opposite direction. God sent a storm and then a fish to bring him back. Jonah learned the hard way that he must do God's will. God cared about the bad people of Nineveh just as He cares about all the people of the world. When they repented, God forgave them just as He forgives all who repent and turn to Him. God gives us love for people even when they are different from us. He sends us to take them the good news and blesses us when we go willingly. If we do not go as He commands, He will reach those people in another way, but we will not receive this special blessing."

Mr. Wise says to Helper's wife Rachel, "God has given you both the spiritual gift of being able to love and communicate with people of other cultures. Please go with me. Helper, you are poor, and I do not expect your congregation, which is also poor, to pay you a salary. It should help some, as should the other congregations that God has raised up in this area. My plan is for you and me to go and work as agents for a business that has offered us employment there. We will earn our living just as the apostle Paul did in Acts 18. Paul's friends, Priscilla and Aquila, gave him employment making tents. We have Christian friends who are like Priscilla and Aquila. They will provide employment for us where we start congregations."

How to Take the Good News to People of Another Culture

Rachel says, "I do not know how to work with people of a very different culture."

Mr. Wise explains, "We do it in the same way God that came into our culture. Think of Jesus' incarnation. God sent Jesus as a missionary to tell us the good news. He did not come as a king even though He deserved the worship of everyone. He left His glorious place in heaven and came as a helpless baby. He learned the Jewish culture as a young boy. When He taught, people listened, not because He was powerful or famous. They listened because they knew that His words came from God. Those that did not like what He said killed Him. Because of His love for us, He endured all these things. He could not have saved us any other way."

"But how do they do that?" Mr. Foolish asks. "They cannot become children again and grow up in a new culture!"

"Mr. Wise responds, "We cannot become children but we can enter the other culture in a childlike way. We humble ourselves as Jesus did, and learn the language and culture from the people. We let them teach us. We build trust and loving relationships, like Ruth did, when she moved into another culture, that of Israel. She bonded with the Israelites because she loved them, starting with her mother-in-law Naomi.

Helper adds, "When we know the people well, we will know how to relate the good news in words that they understand. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 that for the Jews he became like a Jew, and for the other nations he became like them. He became like others as much as possible, to win them to Christ. I think it will be fun!"

Mr. Wise says, "I brought a study for you. It lists how missionaries can imitate the incarnation of Christ like Paul did:

1. Go live among people; live as they live, except for the sin.
2. Get a helper, to help you learn the language.
3. Choose a few sentences in their language to learn each day.
4. Go walking and practice these sentences with fifty people that you can find that day.
5. When you know their language well enough, begin telling Bible stories about God and His Son, Jesus.
6. Focus on the receptive people and leave the resistant ones for another time.
7. Speak to the heads of households. This makes it easier for entire families to come to Christ."

Mr. Wise continues to explain to Helper and Rachel, "When people from another culture come to Christ, we must be careful to teach them the commands of Christ and the apostles and not our own traditions. Let them develop their own traditions as they grow. If we introduce anything besides the Bible to them, we will confuse them. They will follow our traditions instead of Christ. Most traditions are good, but when we take traditions from one culture to another, they almost always cause harm. We will simply tell them about Christ and baptize those who repent and ask God for forgiveness in the name of Jesus. Then we will gather them as a church body to worship God and serve Him in love."

"Let us start as soon as possible!" Helper says happily, "As soon as there is a group of baptized believers, we will teach them the basic elements of worship—praise, prayer, confession of sin and the Lord's Supper, the Word, giving and fellowship. I will teach them to sing praises with their own cultural musical style. We will help them to obey all the commands of Christ. We will give them the tools to study and apply the Scriptures, just as you did for us, Mr. Wise. Those that shepherd their own families we will appoint as elders for the new congregations."

Rachel agrees enthusiastically and Mr. Wise concludes, "When we train the new elders we will leave. We will continue to visit them occasionally to mentor their leaders, but we will not lead their congregations. God will raise up leaders among them quickly, as He did in Acts, and we will train them."

Missionaries Face New Customs

Mr. Foolish scoffs, "You cannot form churches until you have money to pay their pastors and build a chapel."

"We discussed this many times." Mr. Wise answers. "When money is lacking, we do not let that stop the Lord's work. We keep meeting in homes. There must be over a million tiny but healthy house churches in the world today, like the one that met in the home of Philemon. Paul greeted them in Philemon 2.

"You cannot form new churches so fast!" Mr. Foolish continues to argue. Those people are very different from us. They would introduce their strange customs into the new churches, just like all those outsiders down the river. They sing music in a different way that hurts my ears and eat foods that I would not touch. They do not use our ceremonies and celebrations. People of other cultures must learn all of our customs before they can be Christians!"

Mr. Wise sighs sadly, "I am very sorry that you do not understand God's grace, Mr. Foolish. We do not worship a list of rituals and traditions. We worship Christ and serve Him in love as He commanded. Let us review the story again of The First Church Council."

Exercise

Find in Acts **chapter 15**:

- What did some Jewish believers teach that denied God's grace in the Antioch culture?
- What does God require us to do to be saved?