

# GLOBAL



## *Bible Translators*

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### Preparing the Ground

by Steve Combs

**M**ost of the unreached people groups of the world can be found in the 1040 (ten forty) Window. The 1040 window is an imaginary box drawn from 10 degrees North to 40 degrees North Parallels from just west of Africa to east of Japan. If we extend this to 10 degrees South we include even more unreached peoples. Nearly all the peoples who live in this large area are Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Animist. It should be obvious that these people think very differently than Westerners. Their backgrounds and training are different. Their basic views of the world are radically different from those in the West. We must not think that we can present the gospel to them using the same methods as we use with an American. They are liable to think that Jesus is nothing more than a Western Guru. Many times, they need more explanation before they can understand the Gospel.

The Parable of the Sower (Mt. 4) illustrates this. In the parable some of the gospel seed fell on thorny ground, some on stony ground, and some on good ground. Only the seed that fell on good ground yielded fruit. The 1040 Window is full of hearts that are thorny or stony ground. Perhaps this is why the gospel has been so slow to catch on in the Far East. How, then, can we reach them? The answer is simple, but the process to implement the solution is not. The answer to reaching them is to turn their hearts into good ground. Any farmer knows that before you can grow a good crop you have to prepare the soil. You remove stones, bushes, and trees. You plow or till the land, and you fertilize. After this, as Paul said in 1 Cor. 3, we must sow. Even then, the word must be watered after being sowed. Therefore, in some circumstances there is a lot of work to do to lay a foundation for the gospel.

In Western Europe and the Americas, we have had centuries of preparation to understand the gospel. We have been taught that the Bible is God's word. We have an understanding of God as being a distinct person separate from the world and the universe, an individual as we are individuals. We are familiar with the concept of creation and of a Creator. In the 1040 Window Muslims have a similar concept of God, but many other peoples do not. As stated above, Buddhists have no concept of God at all. They especially have no concept of a Creator. Other religions see things in a variety of ways. There is a reason why the Bible starts out with "In the beginning God..." and not with "The generations of Jesus Christ..." A people must have a basic concept of the Creator God before they can understand who the Lord Jesus Christ is.

## Getting Their Attention

In Acts 17:16-34 Paul preached a sermon that many have considered a failure because he incorporated man's philosophy into his sermon. The gospel and the gospel alone is the power of God to salvation, they say. So, all we need do is simply preach the gospel. Paul violated that principal and failed.

I say that his sermon was a great success. After he left Athens, he went to Corinth. Years later, he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:26-32) that there would not be many mighty, noble, or wise men called. Paul was certainly preaching to that kind of group. They were Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. Paul had two goals in his sermon. First, he wanted to show them that God is not an idol and to reveal the true nature of God. His second goal was to preach Jesus and the resurrection. He accomplished his goals. His success is seen in that he won to Christ those few of the mighty and wise who were willing to be saved.

Paul started with the nature of God rather than the gospel. Why? It was because that was the key area of misunderstanding that kept them from embracing the gospel. As long as they believed that God is an idol, they could not understand Him well enough to trust His Son. He began his sermon with a reference to their "unknown God" and declared him to be the true God. In order to drive this point home to them he quoted one of their philosophers showing them that their own logic and philosophy agreed to the facts about God that Paul was preaching. By using their own culture he grabbed their attention and drove his point home. Not only did he have their attention, but he had related God to a concept they already understood. Paul understood their thinking. He met them where they were at that time in their understanding and led them to a greater knowledge of God. How else do you suppose he won so many of this hard group to Christ with his very first sermon?

The Lord Jesus did the very same thing. He grounded the teaching of His parables in frameworks that were culturally understood by His listeners: farmers, seed, tares, vineyards, husbandmen, rulers, day workers, etc . Those with hard hearts may have missed the spiritual lessons, but they understood the examples and Jesus gained their attention by using familiar examples from their culture.

When we preach to a hard culture, we must understand that culture if we are to get their attention and communicate effectively. This is especially true among Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and animists. You must learn where they have blind spots that keep them from an understanding of the gospel. It may be that that will be the best place to begin.