

6. Crossing the Language Barrier in Evangelism

In our last three topics, we have talked about crossing the barrier of our own fear, crossing the barrier of making contacts and crossing the barrier of another culture, religion or ethnic group. Today, we would like to focus on crossing the barrier of language. In order to take the Gospel to every creature, it will of necessity mean learning to cross the barrier of language by at least some Christians.

Paul and the team with him faced the barrier of language a number of times in their ministry. In Acts 14:11, we read, “Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” This language barrier caused the Lycaonians to make certain assumptions. They thought:

- Paul and Barnabas were gods
- Paul was the god, Mercury and Barnabas was the god, Jupiter
- They should offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas

Paul immediately focused on several things:

- ◆ We are men of like passions with you
- ◆ We are here to help you turn from these vanities
- ◆ We are here to introduce to you the living God
- ◆ We want to tell you that the living God is the Creator of heaven, the earth, the sea and everything in them
- ◆ The living God allowed people to walk in their own ways in the past
- ◆ The living God left Himself the witness of doing good, giving rain, giving fruitful seasons and filling our hearts with food and gladness

Paul gives us three key principles for crossing the language barrier:

1. Use the common trade language - In crossing the language barrier, Paul was using the common trade language, Greek. In most cultures today, at least some of the people are familiar with the common trade language (major language of an area - English in U.S., Spanish in Mexico) and can translate to those of other languages.

2. Build a team that is multilingual - As you list the names of people who traveled with Paul at various times you will find that there were at least 39 people from 16 Roman provinces who would have spoken at least 13 different languages who traveled with Paul at various times. A verse that illustrates this principle is Acts 20:4 where we read, “And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.” This verse shows us that a key principle for crossing the language barrier is to build a team that is multicultural and multilingual. The team in this verse was composed of men from the Roman province of Macedonia, the province of Asia, the province of Galatia as well as Paul from the province of Cilicia.

3. Make initial contacts in the places where you can find people who can help you cross the language barrier. Paul usually began in the synagogue which enabled him to find Jews who knew

the language of the area. Acts 13:5, 14-15; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 16-17; 18:4, 19; 19:8

Additional ways to cross the language barrier:

4. In cities like L.A. where the school district must use over one hundred languages to communicate with the parents, the children are learning English and can translate to the parents.

5. Bibles or books of the Bible are available in many languages - use those Bibles to have people teach you how to quote verses in their language (if they see that you are making an effort to learn something in their language, it will build a bridge and prepare the way for evangelism).

6. Most important of all, depend on the Holy Spirit to help you communicate the Gospel across language barriers (since God created the language barriers as described in Genesis 11:7-9, He can also show us how to cross them). May the Lord richly bless you as you seek to cross language barriers to share the Gospel.