

Households in Focus

The Oikos and the Wineskins

by David Anthony

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Like beautiful tapestries being woven by God, movements of the gospel are making their presence known throughout our modern world. Each year, we have the privilege of traveling back to the country where we lived and labored for fifteen years. We visit, encourage, and mentor national men and women who are our dear friends and spiritual children. We have known some of them for over thirty years. These national workers are boldly presenting Christ to high-identity Muslim people (HIMP) and consistently reporting how the kingdom of God is spreading rapidly within their regions. Within these movements are many thousands of Muslim followers of Jesus (MFJ). They have committed their lives to Christ by becoming his disciples. They are the warp and the woof of his magnificently expanding kingdom tapestry.

The kingdom's DNA for movements of the gospel is naturally inherent in the *oikos* of families, household, clans, and communities. “. . . and by you shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:2).

The national workers mentioned above have stepped away from using a traditional Christian approach when sharing the good news. They are applying a kingdom paradigm to their message and are seeing real changes taking place. This kingdom paradigm allows the *oikos* to become the source from which flow natural, powerful, and spontaneous movements of the gospel. In this article, we will look at Jesus' ministry, and the writings of Paul and James, to understand the biblical foundation for how movements start in and through *oikos*. Biblical examples of *oikos* movements will also be examined, and four modern case studies will be presented. These case studies portray movements of the gospel among high-identity Muslims which are flowing from family to family, village to village, and city to city. The *oikos* is proving to be an essential kingdom key to release the gospel rapidly into high-identity Muslim people groups.

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Where there is such progress, and such promise, there is also a problem. Historically, high-identity Muslim people groups have been impregnable to a Western-influenced impartation of the message of Jesus. Centuries of traditional outreach within these communities have seldom resulted in movements of the gospel. As Roland Muller states,

During the history of missions, the church has done well among some cultures, and has related poorly to others. In Muslim cultures, which are primarily shame-based, the church has struggled to communicate the gospel in an effective manner.¹

Because of this history, it is vital to understand the importance of the oikos and the impact of ethno-religious identity in relation to movements of the gospel among HIMP.

High-identity Muslim people are communities of families who for centuries have esteemed their Islamic heritage. Some HIMP embrace a lifestyle of strict dedication to Islam's religious forms, customs, and traditions. Other HIMP are much less devoted in the actual practice of Islamic rituals, but highly value their Muslim heritage. These communities range from high identity and practice to those who are high in identity but medium-to-low in practice. Both groups, those who are faithful adherents of Islamic rituals and traditions and those who have a much more relaxed commitment, hold their love for Islam in common. Regardless of their commitment levels, HIMP can be defined as those who are content, and even proud, to be Muslims. To this group of Muslims, Islamic heritage is a treasure.

Another aspect of HIMP is their strong conviction that Islam is vastly superior to Christianity. Joshua Massey says that HIMP love their Islam and believe with all their heart that Islam is the only true path to God. When they look at Christianity, they see: the highest divorce rate in the world, where

selfish ambition and materialism are at their zenith, where sexual immorality and homosexuality are accepted, and whose economic appetites have led to the colonization and exploitation of their Muslim people and national resources. They are often repulsed by "Christian culture." They are impressed by the person of Jesus and totally unimpressed by Christianity.²

The ethos within HIMP is collective; it encompasses a group mentality, whereas the Western concept of individuality is foreign, even incomprehensible. Collective societies can be defined as those

in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive



in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.³

This "family spirit" in the HIMP community is one of the most basic elements shaping their worldview. It

lies at the very heart of culture, touching, interacting with, and strongly influencing every aspect of their culture.⁴

Kingdom movements of the gospel among high-identity Muslim people can be very practically defined. They are simply the truth of the gospel flowing freely and powerfully through relational networks where Muslims, who have come into a life-changing relationship with Jesus, are now sharing

him in life-to-life and family-to-family situations. A biblical kingdom movement of this type is viral in nature, spreading naturally through the initial family network and crossing over into interconnected families. When it is fueled by prayer and the witness of passionate Muslim followers of Jesus, the movement will spread even farther, crossing over into other villages, towns and cities. The gospel, which is "the power of God for salvation," then impacts countless individuals and families, villages and communities. Husbands, who are experiencing Jesus, are becoming faithful to their wives, marriages are being restored, and children are being disciplined. Men and women are growing in new biblical principles and slowly moving out of poverty. Villages and communities that once lived in fear of death, demons, curses, and black magic are being delivered from ancient traditions of darkness and are now living in joy, hope, and peace. All of this transformation is a direct reflection of the dramatic changes in the lives of those who have encountered Jesus. After spending time in the Gospels and Acts, one should not be surprised to see that these movements to Christ are accompanied by supernatural visions, dreams, and miracles. Through Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is invading their earthly reality. He is making all things new!

Jesus Ignites Kingdom Movements through the Oikos

The Lampstand Imperative

Those who are truly experiencing Christ will reflect his character. Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). He also announced that those who follow him are the light, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). This light, which transforms lives, is best communicated in the context of natural life relationships. Those who are submitted to him as Lord embody his light and are to partner with Jesus to be "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Jesus explains

this idea in his “lampstand” command by saying, “Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to the entire household. Let your light so shine” (Matt. 5:15–16).

The word “household” in Greek is *oikos*. *Oikos* simply means the natural relationships in the new follower’s life. This could be, for example, his immediate family, extended family, friends, business associates, and anyone with whom they come into contact as they live life.⁵ This is where, if at all possible, the new follower of Jesus, the light, is to remain. With Jesus, this principle is not a suggestion, for he states it in the imperative, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). New believers, who are lit by the Spirit, are to follow the command and example of Jesus and remain as light in their *oikos*.

When HIMP convert and declare themselves Christian, they often cannot fulfill the lampstand command because their conversion frequently tears apart family relationships. The family explodes with anger and the new convert is cast out of their *oikos*. The opportunity for new believers to be light is then extinguished.

Jesus does explain that when people make him Lord of their lives, a choice between him and their *oikos* may occur. He warned, “Do you think that I have come to bring peace on the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother” (Matt. 10:34). There are times when remaining as light will cause division and rejection from the believer’s *oikos*; this is a possible kingdom reality. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* expresses this same idea, saying:

Jesus said He had come at this time not . . . to bring peace to the earth . . . but a sword which divides and severs. As a result of His visit to earth, some

Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to the entire household. (Matt. 5:15)

children would be set against parents and a man’s enemies might be those within his own household. This is because some who follow Christ are hated by their family members. This may be part of the cost of discipleship, for love of family should not be greater than love for the Lord.⁶

While this is a reality, the problem is that Jesus’ statement concerning the possibility of separation is consciously or unconsciously mistaken by many workers among HIMP as a natural result of the Great Commission. Rejection from one’s *oikos* may be a result of striving to fulfill the Great Commission, but it is not the objective. The objective is to “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19–20). Jesus demonstrated intentionally living out his life within his own *oikos* and commanded his followers to endeavor to do the same, to remain as “light to the entire household” (Matt. 5:15–16).

Looking into Jesus’ parables shows both the importance and the reality of remaining in one’s *oikos*. In the parable of the wineskins Jesus states, “No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins” (Luke 5:33–38).

Mohammed Beni, a Muslim follower of Jesus, spoke of this parable in application to his own people:

Brothers, we in this meeting, who are Muslims [followers of Jesus], must understand that we are the new wine and if we are to reach our people we must create new wineskins. The old wineskins of Christianity have never held the gospel for my people. Our own families and our own villages are the new wineskins. We who are the new wine must place ourselves in these new wineskins.⁷

Ralph F. Wilson summarizes the parable of the wine and the wineskins:

Jesus insists the gospel of the Kingdom must not be hindered by man-made rules . . . It must be free to work its power unfettered. The new wine may not be as smooth to the tongue and fine as old wine. It may be a bit sharp and unrefined, but it is alive. You can’t contain it in the old structures. You must find new wineskins for it or none at all.⁸

Many Christians will not be comfortable with Jesus movements of the gospel inside Islamic contexts. These movements may seem unrefined and “hard to swallow” like new wine, but they are alive and unfettered. In these new wineskins, the Father is being glorified and is kingdom is advancing.

The second parable of Jesus that shines more light onto this difficult idea of remaining in one’s ethno-religious identity and culture is the parable of the wheat and the tares.

He presented to them, saying, “The kingdom of God may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?”

And he said to them, “An enemy has done this!”

And the slaves said to him, “Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?”

But he said, “No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather up the

tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.” (Matt. 13:24–30)

This parable shows the reality of the perfect kingdom in the midst of imperfection while on earth. In every culture and every place where the kingdom dwells on earth, there are both true followers and there are those who are imposters. From this parable, it can be understood that the enemy and those who are not believers are right in the middle of the kingdom’s growth. Yet Jesus says, “Allow both to grow together” (Matt. 13:30).

The New Bible Commentary states,

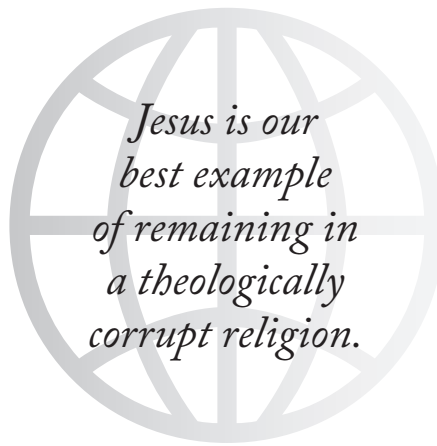
There is bound to be a mixed community, caused by the actions of the Son of man sowing good seed and the devil sowing weeds, but in the end the truth will be revealed and they will be divided into two classes, the evildoers and the righteous.⁹

Jesus interprets this parable by explaining that the field is the world. The children of the kingdom are Christ’s followers who remain in the midst of the people who belong to the kingdom of darkness. These tares are also regarded as being in the midst of God’s kingdom on earth, while yet not being a part of it. This parable expressing Jesus’ desire for his disciples to remain in their world is reiterated later in his prayer to his Father when he said, “I do not pray that thou should take them out of the world, but that thou should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15–16). Jesus does not call his followers to leave their environment but to remain in it.

The question is often asked, “How can a Muslim follower of Jesus remain in the theologically corrupted religion of Islam?” Jesus is our best example of remaining in a religion that not only had distorted theology, but was also fraught with evil. Jesus said of the religious leaders, “So for the sake of your traditions you have made void the Word of God” (Matt. 15:6). The truth of the scriptures had been totally blurred by the time

Jesus entered the realm of Judaism. He taught in their synagogues even though he later called them “synagogues of Satan” (Rev. 3:9). The satanic activity in Judaism was evident by the number of Jewish people Jesus freed from demons. While Jesus was in Peter’s house “they brought many to him who were possessed with demons and he cast out the spirits with a word” (Matt. 8:16). In Mark 1:21–26, the demonic activity was clearly seen even in religious settings when Jesus cast out an evil spirit while he was teaching in the synagogue.

There is much controversy concerning high-identity Muslim people who have become Muslim followers of Jesus and yet remain in their Muslim culture. This is understandable since



Muslim culture contains occult practices, corruption, and a distorted theology. Jesus expressed that there was much that had become fundamentally evil in the Jewish system as well. Yet Jesus remained as light, and he commanded his followers to do the same. Nathan Roberts is a long-term veteran worker who pioneered a growing Jesus movement among a people who were high-identity Muslims. He stated:

Every culture has been corrupted, including the Jewish culture and even our Christian culture. Jesus and many others didn’t seem to think the Jewish customs were a great thing. In fact much of the New Testament brings out the uselessness of Judaism without Christ. Jewish believers would have

constantly sat under legalistic teaching in the synagogues that slapped the gospel in the face, carrying out endless religious customs that were empty in themselves without Christ.¹⁰

Many of the people of the movement Roberts helped to spark have stayed within Muslim mosques or are Muslim seminary leaders who remain faithful to their mosque activities. The key for these HIMP is consistent discipleship in the areas of character, ministry, and depth in biblical understanding. As Milton Coke, another pioneer in the field of igniting movements among HIMP, stated, “Any movement that is not deep in the Bible will be in the ditch shortly.”¹¹

Among modern Christians, Jews for Jesus or Messianic Jews are accepted by evangelicals as credible Jesus followers. These modern-day Jews do not identify themselves as Christians and most of them still participate in Jewish cultural and religious activities. They remain in the Jewish system as a light to their lost people. Yet for Muslims who follow Jesus to remain in their culture is often viewed by the Western church as impossible because Islam is perceived as intrinsically evil. As Jeff Burns stated,

Any system that does not have the presence of the Holy Spirit will be essentially evil. Even systems that do have the Holy Spirit will have the presence of the evil one.¹²

This insight reflects the truth of the parable of the wheat and the tares.

In the Islamic system, there is a deep respect for Jesus and he is incorporated into their religious beliefs. In the Qur’an, he is called God’s Word who is held in honor, and he is called Messiah,

Christ Jesus the son of Mary was a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which he bestowed on Mary. (An-Nissa 4:171). Behold! The angel said: “Oh Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him, his name will be Christ [Messiah] Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter.” (Al Imran 3:55)¹³

By contrast in Judaism, Jesus is ignored and disregarded and dishonored. He does not play an active role in their religion. Although the historical figure of Jesus was known to be Jewish, he is not incorporated into the Jewish religious worldview.

T. B. Pranaitis explains from the Talmud the Jewish position concerning Jesus:

The Talmud teaches that Jesus Christ was illegitimate and was conceived during menstruation; that he had the soul of Esau; that he was a fool, a conjurer, a seducer; that he was crucified, buried in hell and set up as an idol ever since by his followers.¹⁴

Theologically, concerning Jesus, the Islamic system is much more Jesus-friendly than the Jewish system.

The Jewish system and the Islamic system are both theologically flawed. Both cultures have demonic activity and the influence of evil is rampant. In both systems, the wheat and the tares are represented. Yet, the example lived out by Jesus was to remain in his ethno-religious identity within its corrupted system, and he asked his followers to do the same.

Jesus' Kingdom Approach among the Gentiles

Jesus spent most of his time among the Jews. All the men he chose as his apostles were Jewish, yet he also sparked movements of the gospel among the Gentiles. Jesus ministered to the centurion in Capernaum (Matt. 8), the Canaanite woman (Mark 7), the demoniac of Gerasene (Mark 5), and returned again to this area where he healed many Gentiles (Mark 7:31–37). Jesus also ministered to a Roman centurion (Matt. 8, Luke 7). He fed 4000 Gentiles (Mark 8:1–4 and Matt. 15:32–39). It is important to note that in all these instances, Jesus never spoke of religion. Jesus acknowledged that “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22), but he did not entice those who believed in him from

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the Samaritans or the Gentiles to leave their ethno-religious identities and follow Judaism. He focused on himself as the gospel and the entrance into the kingdom of God.

The demoniac was an example of Jesus' desire to keep the new believer in his birth-environment. The demoniac was from the area of Gerasenes, a region which was noted for numerous pagan practices. After the demoniac was healed, he “begged him [Jesus] that he might be with him” (Mark 5:18). Had Jesus desired, this would have been a time to establish in the scriptures a biblical example of extraction. Rather, Jesus commands the demoniac to, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19). Jesus tells the man to go home to his people and be light to them. He demonstrates, in this pagan environment, his lampstand method. What Jesus asked his disciples to do, in their Jewish oikos, he told the demoniac to do among his Gentile oikos.

The fruit of commissioning this new believer is seen later when Jesus returned to the Decapolis region, the home area of the demoniac, and healed a deaf man. The very same Gentile people who had begged Jesus to “depart from their neighborhood” (Mark 5:17), had heard and seen firsthand the testimony of the demonic. Now they responded in a manner totally opposite to their previous encounter with Jesus. They concluded, “He has done all things well” (Mark 7:37). The foundational man for this movement was the demoniac whom Jesus sent back to live among his people.

Jesus' Kingdom Approach among the Samaritans

The lampstand pattern is seen again when Jesus ministered to the

Samaritan woman. The Samaritan religion was a mongrel religion. They were

a half-caste people who owed their origin to the mingling of the remnant left behind when Samaria fell in 722 BC. Their worship in consequence became contaminated by idolatry.¹⁵

The name “Samaritan” became a curse word to identify a despised people as well as to discredit and dishonor them. This was expressed by the Jewish leaders when they called Jesus a Samaritan who had a demon (John 8:48).

The Samaritan people cast off most of the Jewish scriptures and intertwined their bastard beliefs with pagan rituals.

In the New Testament, this name (Samaritan) is the appellation of a race of people who sprung originally from an intermixture of the ten tribes with Gentile nations. Most of them were half converted from their native hedonism. Moreover, they rejected all the sacred books of the Jews except the Pentateuch.¹⁶

The Samaritans were idolatrous, hedonistic, and after having thrown aside a majority of the Jewish scriptures, they created their own distorted theology.

Jesus applied his lampstand principle in this depraved culture by sending the Samaritan woman back to her people where she invited them to come and meet the Messiah. The result was, “Many of the Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony” (John 4:39). The short time Jesus spent with the Samaritans prepared them for the coming of Philip years later when multitudes believed. This is explained in Acts 8 when Philip “went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said” (Acts 8:5–6). This movement started at the well with the Samaritan woman and Jesus. Jesus'

strategy for this expansion of the gospel was for the Samaritan woman to remain in her environment though it was deeply pagan and theologically flawed.

Henry H. Halley implies that Jesus' lampstand methodology was the reason for the gospel movement among the Samaritans in Acts 8. Halley states, "This visit of Jesus laid the groundwork for the hearty reception of the gospel by the Samaritans a few years later" (Acts 8:4-8).¹⁷

Jesus applied the lampstand principle in his own corrupted Jewish environment. He also sparked movements of the gospel among the demoniac's and the Samaritan woman's people. All of these were fallen cultures where demonic activity was pervasive. Jesus remained in his Jewish culture, the demoniac remained in his, and the Samaritan woman in hers. This strategy of Jesus launched three movements of the gospel.

These examples have application for high-identity Muslim peoples. In all three cases, it was Jesus' desire for the light of the gospel to be available and to shine into the respective oikos. The cultures of these people who identify so strongly with Islam, are like every culture, imperfect and fallen. Yet if movements of the gospel are to be established among these honor-driven people, the example of Jesus must be followed. To remove or extract high-identity Muslims from their people is to rupture the wineskins of the oikos, preventing them from embracing the gospel. When this happens, the new follower's oikos is not given a chance to taste the reality of Jesus. In fact, they will always view the new wine as poison, for one of their own drank it and is now dead to them!

Jesus Demonstrates Using, Modifying or Discarding

Jesus remained in his fallen corrupted environment for the sake of his people. He exemplified the lampstand pattern by leaving the demoniac and the Samaritan woman in their oikos. But how should the people with the light live in

their oikos? How can the new believer navigate through all the corruption, pagan practices, and beliefs of the fallen environment? What activities, if any, should the new follower of Jesus continue in? What should he discard?

Jesus demonstrates the biblical model for navigating the pitfalls present in fallen environments. He remained in his Jewish environment, emptied himself, and became a bond-servant (Phil. 2:4-8). As a slave, Jesus *used* some of the Jewish activities, traditional practices, and ideologies; he *modified* and expanded some ideologies into new meanings; and at other times he totally *discarded* some of them. Jesus' principles of using, changing, or throwing away have insightful applications



for HIMP who determine to remain among their people.

Jesus Demonstrates Using

Although Jesus often harshly criticized the synagogues, he also used them and participated in some of their activities. Jesus told some of the synagogue leaders that their "father was the devil" (John 8:44), that they were "sons of hell" (Matt. 23:15), and that they were "serpents" and a fellowship of "vipers" (Matt. 23:33). He also said that the Jewish places of worship were synagogues of Satan (Rev. 2:9, 3:9). In another example, Jesus called the main temple synagogue "a den of robbers" (Luke 19:46). With the prevalent demonic influence and corruption in

the synagogue, it would seem that Jesus would have avoided any contact or participation in it. Yet he stated, "I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple; I have said nothing secretly" (John 18:20). All places of worship whether Christian or Jewish are, to varying degrees, imperfect in kingdom theology since those who participate therein "have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

Jesus was not afraid of the fallen demonic environment in the synagogues. Other verses also show his consistent use of the synagogue, "And he went on from there and entered their synagogue" (Matt. 12:9). "On another Sabbath, when he entered the synagogue and taught..." (Luke 6:6). "Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath" (Luke 13:10-12). "This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum" (John 6:59). In spite of the faulty theology taught by those who "made void the Word of God" (Mark 7:13), Jesus used the synagogue as an important platform for reaching his people.

Many of the Jewish followers of Jesus (JFJ) also used the synagogue as part of their daily routines, among them Peter, John, Paul and James. "Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer, at the ninth hour... And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 3:1, 5:2). These Jews who followed Jesus continued to worship in the synagogue as had their Messiah. Concerning worship in any given place, Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "But the hour is coming; and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). Jesus must have deemed it possible to worship the Father in spirit and truth in the theologically-polluted synagogues. In fact, it was one of the bridges he used to bring truth to his people. He also must have deemed it acceptable to worship using the Jewish

methods of prayer, because in Matthew 26:39, Jesus is viewed using this form. His followers continued daily in these forms as is told in the Book of Acts, chapters 2 and 5.

Jesus Demonstrates Modifying

Jesus changed or transformed some of the applications of the Jewish laws. In Numbers 5:1-5, it is commanded that a person with leprosy is considered unclean and should be placed outside the main living area of the Israelites. The rabbis took this command to the extreme by teaching that the source of disease was the person's own sin. They even specified exact distances one must stand away from the leper.

Rabbinism loved to trace disease to moral causes... Eleven sins were mentioned which brought leprosy... No less than six feet must be kept from a leper; or if a wind came from that direction, a hundred feet were scarcely sufficient... (and) even his entrance defiled a habitation."¹⁸

Jesus changed the Pharisees' tradition and not only drew near to a leper, but even touched him, "And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will [heal you]; be clean'" (Luke 5:13).

Immediately after Jesus rejected and transformed some of the restrictions for lepers, he then used and affirmed others. Leviticus 13:49-50 explained that in any case of leprosy the person must be examined by a priest. After Jesus healed the leper, he sent him to the priest saying, "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded for proof to the people" (Luke 5:14). Jesus, using the Jewish law, asked him to keep this Mosaic ritual. The Lord did not wish to have the law broken. Rather, Jesus used this law to help the leper. For by presenting himself to the priest as healed, he would fulfill the law and be welcomed back into society. This example portrays how Jesus used the leprosy laws. It also shows that he was willing to change laws that kept people as outsiders, but used them

Jesus modified the Pharisees' rabbinical tradition and not only drew near to a leper, but even touched him.

when it meant the restoration of a person to their community and back into their oikos.

Another example of modifying and changing a Jewish practice is found in John 8:1-11. In Deuteronomy 22:22, it says that any person caught in adultery must be put to death. The Jewish leaders brought to Jesus a woman who had committed this sin and said, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do you say about her?" (John 8:1-11). Jesus changed the application of the law and released her with a warning, "Go, and do not sin again" (John 8:11).

One Sabbath Jesus' disciples picked grain, rubbed it in their hands and then ate it. According to the traditions, this was labor and was forbidden. But Jesus defended his disciples in front of the Pharisees using David's example, that there are times when it is acceptable to change what is unlawful by tradition (Luke 6:1-4).

Jesus Demonstrates Rejecting

The Jewish leaders' hypocrisy had become codified into customs and traditions. As an example, the temple in Jerusalem had a divinely-given place for Gentiles to come and seek God. Yet, it had become an established custom every Monday to fill the Gentiles' area with market booths to sell cattle, sheep, and many different products. "The enormous profits from the market booths inside the temple area went to enrich the family of the high priests."¹⁹ By turning over the tables, Jesus boldly and violently throws out this tradition, which had become a hindrance to the kingdom.

Jewish hypocrisy can also be seen through the custom of fasting and worshipping in public in order to be

seen as holy. Jesus rejects this and says, "And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by man" (Matt. 6:16-18).

The Pharisees would not be seen with those they deemed sinners. "The very term 'Pharisee' or 'separate one' implied the exclusion of sinners."²⁰ Pharisees considered tax collectors prime examples of sinners, but Jesus rejected this idea by choosing a tax collector as one of his twelve key men (Matt. 9:9, 10:3). Levi-Matthew was not only a tax collector, but he was considered the worst kind, a customs official, who extracted taxes from ships. Matthew certainly would have been known by the fishermen and the ship owners like Peter, Andrew, James and John. Yet Jesus compelled the ship tax collector to be with him, rather than repelling him like the Pharisees.²¹

Another example of Jesus rejecting an established Jewish tradition is found in Luke 11:37-39. Here the Pharisees are washing their hands according to the customary ceremony before eating. They taught that if this were not done, then everything that was eaten afterward would be unclean. "Indeed a rabbi who had held this command in contempt was actually buried in excommunication."²² Jesus speaks harshly against this tradition, "Woe to you Pharisees, you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness, you fools!" (Luke 11:39-40). As Edersheim states, "Jesus is dealing a blow to traditionalism, it was to be rejected as incompatible with the Word of God."²³ Jesus lived as light among his people and he masterfully chose

what should be used for the sake of the kingdom, what might be changed or transformed, and what must be rejected and discarded.

There was much tension as Jesus remained among his people. However, his examples reveal biblical applications for high-identity Muslim peoples who are determined to remain among their own people as a light.

Paul Declares How Kingdom Movements Should Be Actualized through the Oikos

“Let them remain.” 1 Corinthians 7:17–24

To remain in one’s God-given environment is Paul’s “rule in all the churches” (1 Cor. 7:17). This rule encourages the new followers of Christ to stay in their culture and maintain their natural network of relationships.

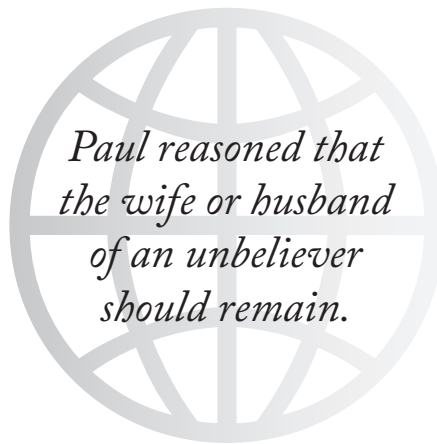
The first example Paul uses in this segment is the marriage environment. He states that if at all possible the husband or wife of an unbeliever should remain with his or her spouse, for “the wife should not leave her husband” (1 Cor. 7:10). The believing husband should also remain with his wife and the husband should not send his wife away (1 Cor. 7:12). Paul reasoned that, in remaining, the wife may bring her husband into the kingdom. “For how do you know, oh wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, oh husband, whether you will save your wife?” (1 Cor. 7:16). Clearly, the objective of remaining in the marriage is, if possible, to lead one’s unbelieving spouse to Christ.

New belief in Christ does not necessitate ripping apart the new followers’ natural network of relationships, for one does not know whether the new believer will save some by remaining. Paul’s rule of remaining in one’s environment sets the stage for its application in a much broader sense. *The Interpreters Bible* agrees with a broader application,

Having established that conversion to Christ does not involve the rupture of

the marriage relationship, Paul now extends it to other aspects of life. The Christian [new believer] is to take his stand and make his witness just where he is.²⁴

Paul’s rule, for the sake of sustaining relationships, also includes remaining in one’s religious identity. “Was any man at the time of his calling already circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised” (1 Cor. 7:18). The new Jewish follower of Jesus (the circumcised) is to remain in his Jewish identity “at the time of his calling.” When was he called? He was called when he believed in Christ and entered into the kingdom. Paul states clearly that the new believer is to continue to remain in his religious identity (in this case as a Jew). Likewise, Gentiles should not seek to become Jews. “Has anyone been called



in uncircumcision? Let him not become circumcised” (1 Cor. 7:18). The Gentile was also to follow Paul’s rule and remain in his uncircumcised identity.

Whether the new believer is Jewish or from a Gentile religion, obedience to God in one’s natural surroundings is what matters. To remain in one’s ethno-religious identity was essential for the flow of the gospel, but the specific religious title was not considered important to Paul. He said, “Circumcision [being of the Jewish religion] is nothing, and uncircumcision [being of a Gentile religion] is nothing. What matters is the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). In Galatians Paul says, “For in Christ

Jesus neither circumcision [being a Jew] nor uncircumcision [non-Jewish religions] means anything, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). Later Paul reiterates, “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). What is important is living out one’s faith in love and obedience to God. What matters is the new creation living as light among his people. High-identity Muslim people remaining in their God-given religious identity allows this to happen.

This principle—that new believers should remain, if possible, in their environment (including in their religious identity)—is crucial for winning their oikos. In 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, Paul exhorts the new creation to remain in the environment in which he was called. Paul states, “Only let everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches” (1 Cor. 7:17). Again repeated in verse 20, “Every one of you should remain in the state in which he was called” (1 Cor. 7:20). Once again Paul makes his plea, “So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God” (1 Cor. 7:24).

By staying in their natural context, new believers function as ambassadors for Christ. This is why Paul speaks of the new believer as God’s ambassador. God is using their situation to make his appeal through them in order that those around them can “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). R. Deal also speaks to this,

The new believer’s appearance does not change but his heart does, which will change his aura not his skin. He will become a light among his *oikos*.²⁵

In other words, the new followers of Christ become new creations in their old environment.

This raises an important question. If Paul set a rule that the new followers of Jesus should strive to remain, why

did he command them to “come out from among them and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17)? Paul defines his meaning in 1 Corinthians 5:9–11,

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with any immoral people; I did not mean the immoral people of this world, or with covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person or covetous or an idolater... not even to eat with such a one.

Paul had no aspirations to take new believers away from their lost friends. Instead he desired that they would be protected from the contaminating influence of those who called themselves Christ followers, but who lived in disobedience. Certainly, Paul knew Jesus’ prayer for his disciples, “I do not ask Thee [God] to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world” (John 17:15–16). Both Paul and Jesus desired that Christ followers would be in the world, but not of it.

The Corinthian culture and religion was fraught with idolatry and potential pitfalls for the new-believer, yet Paul desired the believers to remain as engaged as possible for the purpose of a positive witness. However, Paul places some very strong restrictions on their behavior, so that in the midst of being light, their faith would not be tainted. Paul makes absolute statements against idolatry in any form (1 Cor. 10:14). He also makes it clear that engaging in temple prostitution was not acceptable (1 Cor. 6:15–17). He does affirm some degree of freedom is possible in “eating meat sacrificed to idols” with some significant cautions concerning the weaker brother (1 Cor. 8:9). Paul seems to make a nearly absolute statement about not joining unbelievers in the temple feast, because it probably included the use of temple prostitutes (1 Cor. 8:10, 11). In Paul’s mind, the risks

In striving to stay engaged without compromise, each situation must be evaluated and each person held accountable by his kingdom community.

of attending such an activity would outweigh any possible benefits.

Regardless of time or culture, those followers of Jesus who remain among their lost family and friends will always face tensions in relation to how they should live. The Corinthian environment was different from the Jewish one, and modern-day Islamic environments has their own respective differences. In striving to stay engaged in one’s culture without compromising one’s faith, each situation must be evaluated and each person held accountable by his kingdom community. This community consists of the people of God who are under the authority of the Word of God and are led by the Spirit of God.

James Demonstrates Kingdom Movements Activated through the Oikos

When he returned from his mission among the Gentiles, Paul related to James and the other Jewish followers of Jesus, “one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry” (Acts 21:18). James and some of the other Jewish believers rejoiced with Paul adding, “You see brother [Paul], how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed; and they are zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20). What does it mean that these Jewish followers of Jesus were zealous for the Law? *The New Testament Explanatory and Practical* implies that being zealous for the Law meant James’ movement still observed the Law of Moses which included circumcision, sacrifices, distinctions of meats, days and festivals. The commentary goes on to explain that James and his followers had been trained since youth to observe these rituals, which had been given by God. After

their faith in Christ, they continued to fervently follow the Law of Moses and their Jewish traditions.²⁶ This may seem unnecessary and even contrary to New Testament theology. Certainly, James comprehended the ramifications of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus had appeared to James personally after he rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:7). Jesus had also taught James and the other disciples during the forty days before his ascension (Acts 1:3–4). William Barclay states that James, “was a rigorous observer of the law” and “the Pillar and crown of orthodoxy.”²⁷ According to Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington, James was indeed the biological brother of Jesus and “was a towering figure in the early church.”²⁸ It is said that even the famous historian Josephus believed “after Jesus himself, James was the most important person associated with the Jesus movement.”²⁹

James’ credibility was prominent because he was the younger brother of Jesus the Messiah. When Jesus preached in Nazareth, the local people were trying to figure out what Jesus was all about. “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not these his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?” (Matt. 13:55–56). The *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states that the James spoken of in these verses is indeed the biological brother of Jesus.³⁰ James grew up watching his older brother Jesus live out the fact that he came “not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it” (Matt. 5:17). From this vantage point, James gained a firsthand empirical understanding of remaining in one’s birth culture and identity. This intimate contact with the risen Messiah was more than enough for James to grasp that all people of all times had now been released from the law.

However, following the example of Jesus, James remained in his cultural and ethno-religious identity. Because of the life lessons he learned while observing Jesus, James was able to be the example to thousands of Jews who had embraced Christ. These thousands followed James' example and remained ardently obedient to the Law of Moses. Like Jesus, they fulfilled the law in the truest sense. Ben Witherington wrote,

James and his disciples did not see themselves as Christians. They saw themselves as Jews who followed Jesus the Messiah. It needs to be kept squarely in view that these people did not view themselves as founding a new religion.³¹

Like Jesus, James was not promoting a new religion. Instead, James remained as a light among his people, and for the sake of the harvest continued to be steadfastly zealous for the Law. James personally applied Jesus' teaching, "Men do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but place it on a lampstand in order to give light to all the household" (Matt. 5:14). For the sake of his people, James stayed like his people. He chose to keep himself and his followers under the law in order to become a lampstand that gave light to the nation of Israel.

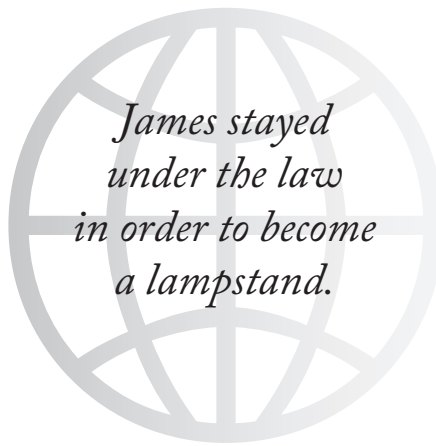
In his book *Church without Walls, Moving beyond Traditional Boundaries*, Jim Peterson calls James "the ultimate free man." Peterson reflects on the Jewish followers of Jesus in Acts 21,

Even at that juncture, the Jewish believers remained adamant about the importance of the Mosaic Law. They were people who, because of their deeply ingrained religious and cultural traditions, could never get beyond the idea that circumcision and the Mosaic Law were essential for godliness. James chose to exercise his freedom by serving a people who were extremely limited in their own freedom, for the sake of the great harvest their fellow Jews represented.³²

Jesus remained James' perfect example. For while Jesus was totally free in the image of God, he emptied himself and

took on the image of a slave and became like those he was called to reach (Phil. 2:6-8). James, along with Paul, followed Jesus' example as they became slaves and emptied themselves. They did this in culturally appropriate, contextual, and varied ways. The lives of these men and their extremely different approaches among two dissimilar cultures, allowed the beauty, creativity, and freedom of Jesus movements to be seen as they began to appear among the Jews and the Gentiles.

Some have assumed that James' movement faded quickly after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Even if this were true, then the case study of James and this kingdom movement would still have great validity for



HIMP, since thousands of Jews came to Christ over a number of decades and continued spreading the gospel.

Yet Rodney Stark, professor of comparative religions at the University of Washington, discusses in his book *The Rise of Christianity*, that he strongly disagrees with the notion of a sudden disappearance of Jewish believers. He states,

But it is generally assumed that this pattern (Jewish believers in Christ) ended abruptly in the wake of the revolt of 66-74, although some writers will accept a substantial role for the Jewish conversion into the second century.³³

Stark's own opinion is contrary to traditional history, in that he believes that Jewish Christianity played a

central role until much later in the rise of Christianity. Not only was it the Jews in the diaspora who provided the initial basis for church growth during the first and second centuries, but the Jews continued as a significant source of Christian converts until at least the fourth century. Jewish Christianity was still significant into the fifth century.³⁴ Stark's statement shows the longevity of James' ministry and its impact on the early Christian movement. How James laid sustainable foundations among a high-identity, law-based culture has left significant kingdom principles for movements among high-identity Muslim peoples.

Case Studies of Ethno-religious Identity and Oikos

The Village Movement

During our first year on the field, I began to study the Gospels four or five times a week with Ismail. He, his family, and his village were staunchly Muslim. Through those Bible studies and some miracles from Jesus, Ismail began to discover the living Christ. Ismail often came to our home which was about fifteen miles from his village. He came not only to study, but to spend time with my family and me. Early one morning he came to our home and shared about one of his encounters with Christ. Ismail described,

I have come to love Jesus the Messiah; he has given me many miracles. Last week I was very sick. I think it was typhoid. The pain was terrible and usually it takes at least two weeks to be cured. I prayed, like we had read, in Jesus' name to be healed. Instantly I fell into a deep sleep and this morning I was totally fine.

In the process of experiencing the presence of Jesus, Ismail began to be burdened for his family.

I have been very concerned about my family, how can I tell them about Jesus? How can they also experience the miracles of Jesus? If I change my religious name to Christian, my family

will not allow me to visit them again. Even if they allow me to come to visit, they will forbid me to speak of Christianity. I know of a few Muslims from my tribe who changed their names from a Muslim name to a Christian name and have declared themselves as Christians. I tell you the truth, David; they are like a fruit seed placed on top of a big rock. They cannot do what Jesus tells us to do, to go and help others believe, because they cannot grow roots into their own culture. What do you think? Can I have Jesus and stay a Muslim?

Ismail was not asking a theological question. Through miracles, Ismail had encountered Christ, and after many hours of studying the Gospels, he had come to believe that Jesus was his Lord and Messiah who had died on the cross for his wrong doings. He also had come to view the Bible as incorrupt, inspired of God, and having authority over his life. However, Ismail was asking a cultural question. To change one's religious identity would be viewed as a rejection of his family, culture, and country. Ismail's perplexing question led to many hours searching the scriptures. As Ismail studied, he found the very words of Jesus answered his question. "Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bowl, but they put it on a lampstand in order that it may give light to the whole household" (Matt. 5:15). Jesus clearly states that the new believer is to remain as light for his family and not to flee. Jesus also said, "In this way let your light so shine" (Matt. 5:15). The "Jesus way" was to remain in one's family as a witness on display for all to observe. After studying many verses and chapters from the Bible, Ismail felt God led him to remain in his ethno-religious identity as a Muslim. He began to share his faith with his family, not as a convert to Christianity, but as a Muslim who now followed Jesus the Messiah. He shared first with his mother and grandmother the good news of Jesus. Both asked one question, "Have you become a Christian?"

Those who changed their Muslim name to a Christian name are like a fruit seed placed on top of a big rock.

He answered that he had not changed his religion, but now saw Jesus as his Master and Messiah. Then he began to share some of the miracles Jesus had done for him. That day, both his mother and grandmother professed faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That night as Ismail's mother prepared to go to bed, a man "shining so brightly" appeared in the doorway and she realized it was Jesus! The mother talked to everyone about the shining man that had appeared. As the news spread through the family and the village, anger and suspicion grew. Had these three become apostate? Had they become Christians?

While visiting my house, Ismail shared his joy that his mother and grandmother had begun to follow Jesus the Messiah, but he also spoke of the increasing suspicion from his family and village. Then he explained that the night before, the Messiah had appeared to him in a very clear and vivid dream. In the dream, many Muslims in a vast field were bowing down to Jesus. Jesus was like a giant and very strong and he only looked down at him. Ismail said that when he looked up into the face of the Messiah he saw love in his eyes and then he felt a great peace. Jesus just said to him, "Don't worry, don't worry." Two days later a letter came from his four brothers in his village summoning him to return for a discussion. The dream had confirmed to Ismail that he should indeed return to his village and face his brothers. He was strengthened with the comforting words of Jesus, "Don't worry."

As he entered the village, his brothers and the other leaders stood at the front door of his father's house with their arms crossed, looking very angry. They took Ismail in, sat him down, locked the door, and surrounded him.

They started their questioning with, "Have you become a Christian?"

Ismail asked for a Qur'an and read from 5:111 which explains that the followers of Jesus are Muslim (submitted to God). He explained that he was now a Muslim who followed Jesus and that this verse allowed him to do this. They began to question him as to whom he thought Jesus was. Again from the Qur'an, Ismail explained that Jesus is God's Word. Jesus is sinless, born of a virgin, and he is the most exalted in this world and the world to come. They asked why he was reading the Bible. Ismail read the Qur'an 4:136, which proclaims those who did not believe the previous books (the Bible, both Old and New Testament) are not true believers and in fact have gone far astray from God. Over the three hour interrogation, Ismail defended his new belief in Jesus. His brothers and the other men released him; some of them confused but convinced that Ismail was still a Muslim, albeit a strange one. The youngest brother, Asgar, was still suspicious. When Ismail would return to the village twice a month to do Bible study with his mother and grandmother, Asgar would sit outside the window and secretly spy on them. During this time, two more of Ismail's family members began to follow Christ. They also began to have answers to prayer and see miracles. During his times of "spying," Asgar heard over and over the stories of Jesus. He saw that Ismail and his small group of followers of Jesus had changed. They were so joyful, they no longer had a fear of demons, and they kept talking about answers to prayer. Finally, after many times of sitting outside the window, Asgar knocked on the door and asked if he could also join the group. Within a few weeks, the "spy" had become a follower of Jesus.

In this first ministry, the village movement, the new Muslim followers of Jesus had begun to understand the importance of remaining in one's cultural and ethno-religious identity. This allowed space and freedom for small groups of people to gather and study the Bible and begin to believe. The faith of these new believers, transformed by their encounters with Jesus, was contagious and many of their wives began to follow Jesus.

As one wife stated,

My husband was always dating. This is because our men can have extra wives. But when he started to follow Jesus the Messiah, he changed. One time he came to me and said that he read in the Bible that "the two shall become one," not the three or four shall become one. My husband is a very different man since he became a follower of Jesus. He likes me more and he pays more attention to our children and he is not dating anymore. This is why I also follow Jesus and so do my children. My parents want to believe also.

Another wife shared that her husband was always gambling and losing his wages, so there was never enough food for the family. But after he joined the Bible study group and believed in Jesus as Messiah, he stopped gambling and drinking, and now "there is so much more peace in our home and more food!"

The persons who have experienced Christ are attractive to the lost, for as Paul states, "We are a fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved" (2 Cor. 2:15). This fragrance is the love, joy, peace, and power that a true kingdom individual displays in his life. Abu Ahmed, one of the first believers in the Village Movement, was a well-known witch doctor before becoming a follower of Jesus. He explained his first encounter with a transformed life:

I had never met a Muslim like this man. He was full of peace and he had no fear of death or of evil spirits.

My whole village feared death, hell, curses, ghosts and spirits. This man [Humza] even prayed for my son who was not eating or drinking and was very sick. I was sure he was going to die and all my magic wasn't helping. Humza prayed for my little son in the name of the one in the Qur'an who is called the great healer, Isa [Jesus]. By the next morning my son was healed and healthy again. Humza began to teach me about Jesus from a wonderful book [New Testament] I had never seen before. Now I have found peace and have no fear of death. Many of my family and friends now have found this same peace.³⁵

Transformed people are contagious and are the foundational building blocks for movements of the gospel.



The supernatural love and joy expressed in the new believer becomes irresistible to those in their family and their natural networks. The new Muslim followers of Jesus continued to study Jesus, his ministry, and his teaching of the kingdom, seeking to understand how he planted the seeds of movement into the nations. The biblical truth became clear, simple, and visible in these first villages. As more and more of the Muslim followers of Jesus (MFJ) experienced the living Christ, their faith became more and more contagious, spreading to other families. With Jesus living in them and transforming them, they began to see many of their families, cousins, friends

and others drawn to the Messiah and the movement began!

Because of families coming to Christ, areas of other villages began to believe in Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Meetings between village leaders began to consistently happen, studying the Bible, praying and experiencing the miracles and healings of Jesus. A network of MFJ leaders emerged along with a solidifying of their new identity. I attended one of these two-day meetings along with about eighty national followers of Jesus. The time consisted of in-depth Bible study, researching the kingdom and identity and its application to the many high-identity Muslim people who were coming to Christ in that area. One of the sections of scripture researched was the parable of the wine skins. During one of the sharing times, Mohamed Beni, a Muslim follower of Christ, a respected leader and teacher, stood up and explained how the parable of the wineskins was important for gospel movements among his people. As is the custom in Islam, Mohamed Beni opened with, "Assalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh" (may the peace of God be upon all of you). He then continued:

Respected brothers, as you know I am from a very devout Muslim area and when I first believed in Christ I did not understand this idea of remaining in my family as light and salt. I was told by my Christian friends I must confess I had become a Christian to my family for if I did not, I was denying Christ. When I boldly announced I had converted to Christianity, I had to flee for my life. My relationship with my family was destroyed.

Then I heard about groups of Muslims who had remained in their Islamic identity and I went to find them. After a few weeks of studying the Bible with these followers of Jesus, I returned to my village. There I announced that I had made a mistake, that I was not a Christian, but had become a Muslim who was more devoted and surrendered to God. They were so delighted

and accepted me back immediately. That very day I shared my new faith in Jesus, his death on the cross, and his resurrection first using the Qur'an. They all listened intently and are now very open to a new perspective about the Messiah.

This parable of the wineskins is about my life. I am the new wine who tried to place myself into the old wineskins. The old wineskins are Christianity. When I did this I tore my family apart and like this parable, my opportunity to tell my family and village about Jesus was spilled out and lost, I thought, forever.

Brothers, we in this meeting, who are Muslims, must understand that we are the new wine and if we are to reach our people we must create new wineskins. The old wineskins of Christianity have never held the gospel for my people. Our own families and our own villages are the new wineskins. We who are the new wine must place ourselves in these new wineskins.³⁶

The Village Movement grew in numbers and boldness and many of them met nightly to study the Bible. In one of these studies, a group of the leaders and I had just finished the Book of Matthew and were discussing Matthew 28:19–20. One of the Muslim followers of Jesus explained that this verse implored them to go into other areas besides their own and make disciples. The group began discussing enthusiastically about some of them moving to the Mountain people. Others in the group talked of the slums of the inner city in another district. Still others talked about the vast numbers of peoples from the plains who had never experienced Jesus the Messiah. In the next few years, selected nationals were mentored, trained in spiritual and ministry formation, and sent to these three new areas.

Inner City

The first national team was birthed from the Village ministry and sent to the people living in the inner city slums. This people group was

At first it was just a small crack, and at year thirteen the dam broke. Talking to the Slum people about Jesus is now easy.

considered staunchly Muslim and solidly opposed to the Bible and Christian evangelism. In a report from the national team leader who had been sent by the Village Movement:

The first ten years were excruciatingly difficult. We shared the gospel hundreds of times. We developed educational programs and a fish farm and other social development programs. Our platform to be among the inner city slum people was credible, but only a few began to believe in Jesus the Messiah. Our goal was to talk to everyone we could about Jesus and to pray for the sick in Jesus' name. These people were always angry and suspicious, even though we explained we were not trying to get them to change religions. We often told them we only wanted them to understand the life benefits of experiencing Jesus the Messiah and the importance of the Bible to help them move out of poverty. Around year eleven, there seemed to be a shift in the spiritual atmosphere. We do not know exactly what was happening, but the iron wall of the Slum people began to crack and they began to listen to our stories of Jesus. Part of this dramatic change in the spiritual atmosphere came from some amazing healings that they had seen done in the name of Jesus. At that time, through our network of national workers, we were hearing of many hundreds of Muslims in other difficult people groups in our country coming to Jesus. Miracles, visions, and dreams were also happening in those other areas. The Holy Spirit was moving, not just among the Slum people, but across the country in other areas that in the past had seemed impossible. We just don't know what happened, but something cracked. At first it was just a small crack, then a larger one. At about year thirteen, the dam broke and, I can only say, talking to the Slum people about Jesus is now easy. Yes, in the last seven to eight years, thousands

have confessed faith in Jesus, over 1200 have been baptized, and many are in Bible study two and three times a week. We now have sixty-eight key leaders who each oversee their own ministries. Much of our work seems done as these sixty-eight men have taken ownership of this movement.

When asked if any of the thousands had changed their religious identity to a Christian identity, the national leader reported:

We always give them freedom to choose their own identity. However, we study the Bible to help them see that they can remain culturally and in name a Muslim. Then we always ask this question, "If you change your identity to Christian, can you reach your family?" The answer is almost always, no. But about 10% have decided to take on the identity of the name Christian. About half of these people who changed religions have been thrown out of their families. The other half have been allowed to stay in their families, but honestly they are not effective in bringing others in their villages to Jesus.

The Mountain People

A few years later, the Village ministry sent their next team to the Mountain people. The Mountain people were also staunchly Islamic, higher in their practice of Islamic rituals and much more educated than the Slum people. Building on the foundations and lessons of the Village and Slum people movements, the long trek to movement found momentum a bit faster, but the journey was still arduous and filled with persecution. As one of the early national pioneers of the Mountain movement shared,

Since I became a Muslim who follows Jesus the Savior, many of my friends have come to follow him also. In fact, thirteen other Muslim mosque leaders

have decided to follow Jesus and to believe the Bible and many of their religion students have believed. But there have been many problems and insults since I began to tell others about Jesus. When I first started, someone put poison in my coffee. I almost died, but Allah spared me. Also I have been thrown in prison many times.³⁷

Over a period of two years, the Mountain people movement became prolific in their multiplication. The last six to eight years have been especially fruitful. In the coming year, this group will be sending eight new teams of Muslim followers of Jesus into eight new areas in their country from their own people. Each team is made up of four to seven people. Here again, in the Mountain movement, the oikos is respected as essential. One national leader said,

Oikos is the heart of all our new movements. If the oikos is weak, movements are slow to happen. This is why we focus on discipleship, Bible study, prayer and scripture memory. Each new leader in our movement must memorize at least 200 verses from the Bible. Also, some of us are each memorizing a book from the New Testament.

The Mountain movement has now grown to many thousands of adult Muslim followers of Jesus. Most of these are active in discipleship groups two to three times a week. Last year alone, in this ministry there were over 2400 confessions of faith, well over 1000 baptisms, and 214 new discipleship groups were formed.

When I asked the leaders about identity, it was clear that very few of the new followers of Jesus changed their religious identity. Sheik Om stated,

There is a natural tendency in our movement to remain who God made us. We were born Muslims. And now we are born again Muslims who follow and obey Jesus as the Word of God. God did not make a mistake, but privileged us to be born into this culture and religion to bring the Messiah to our people.

The gospel has been carried by these Muslim followers of Jesus to the Mountain people. Therefore, it is natural for the new believers to follow the example of those who first told them about the Messiah and to remain in their ethno-religious identity.

The Plains People Movement

Once again from the first Village people ministry, about two years after the team was sent to the Mountain people, a new national team was sent to the Plains people. This team consisted of over twenty-five nationals. They broke off into five groups and moved into five different Plains towns. They moved in as small business owners who hired local Muslims as employees. Each of the five



teams also developed a social program to serve their new community. They established these programs in partnership with the local Muslim leaders who researched a major need of each respective area. In two areas, where the government educational programs were very poor, the towns' people said they needed after-school programs to help tutor their children. They had dreams of seeing their children graduating from high school and even going on to college. These things had never happened in these two villages. After-school reading, writing, and math programs were developed. Each team member took turns leading these programs with other town leaders. Two other teams, again in partnership with the local leaders, decided the most

important project would be helping young mothers raise healthy babies and children. The mortality rate for newborn children up to two years old was very high. Wellness baby workshops were developed to train mothers in nutrition, basic health, hygiene, and teeth care. A milk and vitamin distribution center was also founded. Another team decided along with the Muslim town leaders that the community's need was for a library and for tutoring in literacy.

Each team, as they prepared to move into their new area, presented themselves as followers of Jesus who came to bless their new community through the kingdom principles of the Messiah. Each team explained they would not Christianize, but desired to bless their new community by applying the principles of the Messiah found in the New Testament. These five teams decided to not speak of Jesus until trust was gained and until the leaders of the towns asked them about Jesus. The teams lived like Jesus among their respective Muslim areas. Trust was solidly established as they served unconditionally and these five teams became beloved members of their communities. After a few years, some of the leading Muslim leaders began to ask questions about their faith.

As one of the team members recounted:

We began where they were. We used their own book, the Qur'an, as a bridge to the Bible and Jesus. We shared from Surah 4:136, "Unless you study all the holy books you have gone far astray...."

They themselves asked if they could study the Bible with us, so we began in the New Testament reading in Matthew. We would study almost every day in the evening and more joined us, so we had to break up into a number of different study groups. Slowly many men and women began to believe in Jesus and their children began to believe also. After about another five or six years of this, there were over 150 of these studies going in the Bible. News

of our new faith must have spread to the capital city, because one day some Muslim leaders from that city came to us and commanded us to leave. They said we were pagans to study any book but the Qur'an. And they commanded all the many hundreds of followers of Jesus who had been baptized to stop studying the Bible. There was a large, heated meeting in the mosque for hours between the outside Muslim leaders and the Muslim leaders who follow Jesus. Finally, it was amazing as our dear Muslim friends defended us. They told the outsiders that we had taught them Jesus principles that had changed all of their lives. Their children were much better educated, some had graduated from high school and a few had gone on to college. Their babies were staying alive and growing healthy. Their marriages were so much better and financially they were doing much better. They stated to the angry outsiders, "Jesus has made us new, and we are what the New Testament calls 'new creations.'" Then they told the leaders to get out of their towns and never come back!

Twenty years ago, it was unheard of for a Muslim to call Jesus his Lord and Messiah and to study the Bible. As one Plains MFJ stated,

It used to be said, why would any Muslim follow Jesus? Anyone who would do this is a pagan. Now we say why would anyone not follow Jesus? Those Muslims who do not follow Jesus are pagan.

The Plains People movement started twenty years ago. As with the Mountain and Inner City movements, there are now many thousands involved, and every year God is adding to their numbers those who believe. Last year alone, this movement saw over 680 confessions of faith in Jesus, 350 baptisms, and 140 new discipleship groups birthed.

When asked about religious identity, one of the main leaders told me that identity is simply not a question anymore:

All of the people coming to Christ in our movement are being led to Jesus through their parents, family, and

The men and women who came twenty years ago told us they would not Christianize us. They promised.

friends who are Muslim. The men and women who first came to us over twenty years ago told us they would not Christianize us. They promised. We finally believed them and now we are Muslims who love and obey Jesus. Indeed, they never Christianized us but they did 'Christ-ize' us.

From these case studies, it is clear that the high-identity Muslim peoples in these movements are naturally inclined to keep their ethno-religious identity as Muslims. They live among their people as new creations in their old environment. They are salt and light in their families and communities. By remaining in their God-given surroundings, they are bringing their oikos into transformative encounters with the living Word of God, Jesus. Many years of traditional methods of outreach among these very same case study groups had not produced natural movements of the gospel. As stated by Harley Talman:

But what happens to Muslims after they come to faith in Christ? Muslims who embrace the gospel are encouraged, even compelled, to "become like" the national Christians in their community or foreign missionaries. They become "converts" not only in matters of Christian faith but also in culture, lifestyle, religious identity, and practice. Their becoming "Christians" and joining the Christian community has resulted in persecution and expulsion from their Muslim community—not necessarily for following Christ, but for bringing shame upon their family, rejecting their culture, and betraying their community.³⁸

The four case studies of the Village, Mountain, Slum and Plains people demonstrate that becoming a follower of Jesus does not need to result in being rejected by one's family or rupturing the oikos. This results in the spilling of the new wine. Rather, the new wine is finding new wine skins

in their own families, communities, towns, and country. They have become new creations in the old environment and new wine in new skins.

Conclusion

Kingdom movements of the gospel among high-identity Muslim peoples were the overarching theme of this article. One major barrier to this endeavor is the traditional approach of extracting new Muslim believers from their birth environment. Within traditional missions, the message has often been one that compels the Muslim to convert to Christianity. This has meant taking on a Christian identity and rejecting one's ethno-religious identity. Charles Kraft speaks to this problem saying,

The mistake of trying to convert people to our form of Christianity has, for many, radically changed the message of Christ into what is primarily a cultural, rather than a spiritual message. What they heard is that He, not simply we, requires conversion from their cultural religion to our cultural religion (called Christianity, whether or not it is biblical).³⁹

The traditional message of changing one's allegiance to Christianity from Islam is asking the Muslim to lose his or her birth identity and birthright. For high-identity Muslim people, becoming a Christian most often results in being rejected by the entire extended family, thus extinguishing their influence as a light to their people.

This is a matter of enormous consequence, for the high-identity person to alter his or her ethno-religious identity and to "become a Christian" is to commit high treason. One becomes a traitor and often an outcast. Therefore, this article through biblical case studies and modern day case studies, has offered an alternative approach.

The biblical case study of Jesus demonstrates remaining in one's oikos, even though that oikos is deeply influenced by the kingdom of darkness. Paul's admission about the corruption of his own Jewish culture is evidence of this. Paul confessed, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Rom. 2:24). Jesus did not come to bring a new religion into the world; he came to bring himself into the world. Jesus did not speak of Christianity, but he often spoke of the kingdom. He did not invite anyone into Christianity or to follow Christianity, he invited them into the kingdom to follow him. Jesus himself was not a Christian. He was a Jew. He was born a Jew, lived as a Jew, and he died a Jew.

Jesus demonstrated the importance of remaining in one's own oikos when he healed the demoniac who begged Jesus to go with him. Jesus did not invite the demoniac into a different religion. Rather, he sent him back to his own people, which resulted in a movement of the gospel. The Samaritan woman's religion was fraught with animism and distorted theology and her life was far from exemplary. Yet Jesus did not invite her into his own Jewish religion. He left her in her oikos and a Samaritan movement began.

Paul, in I Corinthians 7, states his "Rule in all the Churches" which clearly explains that if possible, the new believer is to remain in the birth environment wherein he began to follow Christ. Paul reiterates this in Galatians 6:15, "For neither circumcision [being a Jew] counts for anything, nor uncircumcision [being a non-Jew] but a new creation." Paul's rule was for the new believer to strive to live as a new creation in the old environment. In the next verse, Paul implies the life benefits to follow this "rule." "Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule..." (Gal. 6:16).

James the brother of Jesus, grew up watching the Word incarnate live as

light to his own oikos. Jesus lived and fulfilled the law: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). James followed the example of his big brother. He led his Jewish people to remain "zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20). In the decades to come, this allowed many thousands to believe and has left valuable principles for high-identity Muslim peoples.

The four modern movement case studies presented in this chapter among peoples, all of whom were high-identity Muslims, reveal that many thousands of Muslims have determined, for the sake of the gospel, to remain in their imperfect Islamic context "to give



light to their whole household" (Matt. 5:17). In their new passionate love for Christ, they have resolved to continue to live within their culture and within their religious identity. Following the examples of Jesus and James, they are remaining in their environment and kingdom movements are being birthed among HIMP.

Past traditional efforts among Muslims who were high-identity have seldom resulted in movements of the gospel. However, the four case studies presented show that many thousands of HIMP are living life immersed in their birth oikos. These new creations, in their old environment, are personally encountering the living Christ,

their lives are contagious and many are being drawn to the light of Christ.

Ralph Winter, in his article "New Wine in Old Wine Skins," states,

If properly pursued, there could be 100 million Muslims who are followers of Christ in the next 10 years. If not properly pursued, that is absolutely a pipe dream at the rate we are going. If we insist upon all Greeks becoming Jews, or all Muslims becoming "Christians" we are simply smoking a pipe filled with marijuana. The fact of the matter is that Evangelicals are no more likely to convert millions of Roman Catholics or Orthodox or Muslims or Hindus or anybody else if we insist on them adopting the Evangelical Western "Christian" cultural tradition with all of its different strengths and appalling weaknesses...⁴⁰

"Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule..." **IJFM**

Endnotes

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