

Global Missions

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[0 : 00] But let's open in prayer. Father in heaven, we know that you sent your son to not only preach the gospel to us, but! to accomplish the gospel among us, to suffer and rise and then to commission us as your ambassadors, your missionaries, your evangelists, your preachers, your teachers, your servants, your slaves.

And Lord, we pray that you would help us to learn more about your church through the ages and that you would help us to draw closer to you and you would help us to fulfill your great commission to preach the gospel to all nations.

And we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. We are in class four of our series on missions. And today we will be looking at the history of missions in the early and medieval church.

This is something that is often understudied and unknown by Christians today. It's also something that we don't have as much information about as we would like.

But the stuff we do have is fascinating, encouraging, interesting. So what I want to do is give a brief sort of stereotypical view of Christianity that you often hear in popular culture.

[1 : 19] Sometimes Christians among us have this view of the history of Christianity. And then we'll zoom in and give a more realistic view of the history of Christianity, the history of missions and how the gospel reached the nations.

So if we go back to, you know, 30 AD, we're in Jerusalem. And according to what you often hear, there's this Jesus guy.

And he's this kind of hippie, free love kind of guy. You're supposed to love everybody. That's what he taught. And it was neat. It was cool. But nothing really much happened until this guy came along, Constantine, the first Christian emperor, who you will often hear converted the Roman Empire to Christianity.

And that's why Christianity became a world religion. And that's why Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire. And that later on in the age of colonialism, when the European powers conquered the world, that's when Christianity became a global religion.

And so that this was all mediated through political military power. First, Constantine. Second, the European colonies. You can see how much of the world Europe conquered at certain points.

[2 : 40] The gray areas are the areas that were never actually colonized. But I'll point out, you know, Afghanistan, Japan, South Korea. These were places that, if you include the U.S., were conquered by the U.S. at various points.

So much of the world was indeed conquered by European powers or of powers of European descent. However, I'm here to tell you this is not how the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire and throughout the nations.

The actual spread was very different, was fascinating. Of course, Jesus wasn't that stereotypical person that we see. He was, in addition to being a profound teacher, he was an amazing healer. But above all, the Son of God who died for our sins. And the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire not due to political power, but the opposite. Due to faithful Christians who laid their lives down for Jesus again and again and again and again.

And if we look at a map around 200 A.D. So we've got the Parthian Empire in the east. We've got some minor empires or kingdoms, really, between them.

[4 : 00] And these borders are porous. You know, they go back and forth. And we've got the huge, huge Roman Empire, the most powerful empire the world had ever seen. This is about 170 years after Jesus.

And this is well before Constantine, the first Christian emperor, comes to the scene. He comes to the scene more than 100 years later. And if we look at the spread of Christianity, it's extraordinary.

It's already in the west, in France. It's in North Africa. It's in Greece. It's in Turkey. It's in Egypt. It's in, of course, Palestine. But it's also in southern Egypt, in Nubia and in Ethiopia and east of the Roman Empire, in Syriac-speaking lands in modern-day Iraq.

But even further east in what we would call Iran today and even in India and perhaps even farther east. What I'd like to do today is just highlight some fascinating points in these moments of the spread of Christianity.

So look at how did the gospel get to all of these places? We don't know the answer to many of these locations. We just know, well, they did. They were there. We don't know who.

[5 : 18] We don't know how. But we know the gospel went there for various reasons. But there are some things we do know. And I want to give you some highlights today. So today we'll be looking at little mountain peaks in history of how the gospel went to region A or region B.

And we'll find out that the map we're looking at is not big enough. We have to go further east to get a better, fuller situation of the gospel amongst the nations.

So where should we start? I thought we could start in a very far-flung territory from our perspective. So my little laser pointer, I had to switch at the last moment.

So bear with me here. We're going to go right over here in northeast Africa to Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a beautiful, beautiful place.

Way high up on plateaus, very mountainous. And here's a map of Ethiopia in the south here. You can see it. It's quite some distance away.

[6 : 21] Just so you can get a sense of the geographic distance from, let's say, northern Egypt, Cairo, all the way down to Ethiopia. Here's a map of the eastern U.S.

And if we put Cairo right over New Haven, if you drive all the way down to the tip of Florida to Miami, you're still not in the equivalent of Ethiopia. Ethiopia. And remember that it's a lot harder to get there back then than it was today if you were going by car.

Ethiopia was a very advanced, very powerful civilization. These were the kinds of things they were building in the early 300s, these huge obelisks. You have to have 79 feet tall, 160 tons.

You have to have quite an advanced civilization and a wealthy one. Most of these have fallen down these days. How did Christianity come to Ethiopia? I want to qualify what I mean by how Christianity came, because, of course, we have the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in the Book of Acts, who presumably brought the gospel back to Ethiopia.

So there are probably many individual Christians. There were probably churches. In fact, we know there were churches before the 300s in Ethiopia.

[7 : 35] But we do know one really amazing story about the gospel in Ethiopia. And it has to do with two little boys who were Greeks, who were Christians, who were on a boat with their uncle or cousin.

And they're sailing through the Gulf of Aden up to the Red Sea. And the Ethiopians capture the boat. They slaughter everyone on board except the two boys, whom they sell off to slavery.

And the two boys spoke Greek. Greek was the prestige language of that part of the world. So it was the language everybody wanted to learn. And at some point, these boys, one whose name was Frumentius, they are sold into slavery into the court of the king of Ethiopia.

And they are appointed to be tutors of the prince. Because presumably, we don't know why, but presumably it's because they spoke Greek fluently. And the idea was that they would speak Greek to the prince of Ethiopia.

So he would be raised knowing this prestige language and be able to communicate and everything. And Frumentius shared the gospel with the prince.

[8 : 51] And he believed, as the story goes. And one day, he became the king of Ethiopia. And it's an amazing story. It reminds one of, you know, Joseph, story of Joseph being sold into slavery and then rising up through.

It reminds one of the story of Daniel, who sold into slavery and then rises up to the ranks.

Frumentius, sold into slavery, his family killed, and then rises up to the ranks.

Yes. Frumentius ends up being appointed. He travels back to Egypt. He's appointed bishop and returns back to Ethiopia. It's a fascinating story. There's a problem with it, though.

If we go and look for evidence of this prince, his name was Izana, who became a Christian. We have some inscriptions that he left behind.

And here's a translation of one inscription. Izana, king of the Aksumites. Aksum was the capital of Ethiopia. And, you know, you read this, and he's just bragging about killing people, basically. [9 : 55] He doesn't really seem like a Christian. And then we have some coins of him. This is him. There he is. And the problem with this is this.

This is a lunar crescent. It is the symbol of Sin, the moon god. It's pagan symbolism. Kind of weird if you're a Christian to have pagan symbolism on your coins.

And then we've got this beautiful, beautiful inscription here. It's called the Izana stone. It's trilingual or at least bilingual. And this is interesting. You maybe detect a shift here.

He says, By the might of the Lord of heaven, who holds power over all beings. Izana. So it's Izana. Izana. But it's, if you keep reading, it's monotheistic.

He says, May the might of the Lord of heaven, who has made me king, who reigns for all eternity, invincible. Cause that no enemy can resist me. So it's this. It's interesting. It doesn't seem pagan.

[10 : 55] It doesn't seem exactly Christian either. It seems like this middle monotheistic ground here. Hmm. Well, we have more coins of Izana.

These are the ones I showed you before. Here's other ones. Now, do you see a difference? There's a cross right where the lunar crescent used to be.

Hmm. Maybe this guy did become a Christian. These are known as the Christian coins of Izana. Fortunately, we have other inscriptions of Izana.

He was one of the most powerful kings Ethiopia ever had. And this one is amazing. The translation of it goes like this. In the faith of God and the power of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who saved for me the kingdom by the faith of his son, Jesus Christ, who has helped me and will always help me.

I, Izana, king of the Aksumites. And he goes on and he gets very personal. He says, Clearly, Izana was a Christian.

[12 : 16] And what I want to highlight is not just that Izana became a Christian. It's how he became a Christian. He became a Christian because of a slave who preached the gospel to him.

Fruventius. Who shared the gospel with him. That's why he became a Christian. We will see this theme come up again as we look at other places where the gospel reached.

Here's just some Ethiopian manuscripts. Ethiopia, the church, was very famous for the manuscripts that they designed. This is John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in one of their manuscripts.

Here's their oldest manuscript. Very beautiful. Probably the oldest illuminated manuscript in the world. Remember that map I showed you of the European colonies? What's interesting about Ethiopia is it's one of the few places that was never colonized.

And yet it's one of the oldest Christian locations in the entire world. It's 4th century, so 300s.

[13 : 27] There's debate whether he was like 350 or like 310. I think maybe 310, 320, but it's not entirely clear.

Let's keep moving around. So we've been down here in Ethiopia. Let's go up here on the outskirts of the Roman Empire. This is the Roman Empire at its greatest extent. It often, the borders ended around here.

So up around here in what today is Bulgaria, western Ukraine, Romania. This, back then in the 300s again, this is where the Goths were powerful.

The Goths were sort of a semi-nomadic barbarian people in Europe, and they were all over the place. There were the eastern Goths and the western Goths. And they were viewed as barbarians, uneducated, illiterate.

And there was a gentleman named Vulfila. And he was, his family was captured by the Goths and enslaved.

[14 : 29] And he grew up, he appears to have been a brilliant, brilliant person. He knew Latin, he knew Greek. He also learned the Gothic language.

And he returned to the Roman Empire at one point and felt called to go back to preach the gospel to the Goths, which he did very successfully.

He translated the Bible into the Gothic language. And here is the most ancient Gothic manuscript we have. It's called the Silver Bible. And this is not, that was not written out by the hand of Vulfila, but it's a transcription a century or two later of his translation of the gospels into the Gothic language.

We don't know a lot more details about what exactly happened other than Vulfila was a captive slave who returned to his captors to preach the gospel and to translate the Bible.

But do you see that again? That we have another, another slave story of someone preaching the gospel to their captors with Vulfila. That's not the last time we'll hear of this.

[15:49] If we go to the northwestern regions of our map here, so way up in the British Isles, which I know to us as Americans, this can seem like the closest part of Europe.

Remember back then, this was like the far reaches, the ends of the earth. One of the things I like doing as a historian is reading about people groups that I'm either descended from or that, you know, my wife is British and reading what the ancients thought of these people.

And they're horrible. They're eating one another and they're killing each other and sacrificing each other. And they're doing all these terrible things. And now, you know, the British, the stereotype is they were, you know, the pinnacle of human civilization, but not back then.

And here's just some fascinating Christian ruins. This is the Isle of Lindisfarne on Easter morning. You can see some ancient ruins.

There's an ancient manuscript of Lindisfarne Gospels, often said to be one of the most beautiful manuscripts ever made. This was made at Lindisfarne. This is the Dunfaladay Stone way up in Scotland.

[16:53] And I know you can't really see it. So here's a drawing of it, but you can see a cross right in the center on one side of the stone. It's a Christian inscription.

Nobody really knows what it means. It's by the Pictish people in Scotland. And this just illustrates how far Christianity had spread in the British Isles.

And including Ireland, this is St. Patrick's Cathedral. And this is, according to tradition, the site where St. Patrick baptized many of the local inhabitants in the 400s, in the 5th century.

And this is a well-stone cover that seems to have been for St. Patrick's well, seems to have been very ancient. Well, how did the gospel come to Ireland?

Some people will say, well, wasn't it St. Patrick? But when you know what St. Patrick, he's not a legendary figure. He's real. He was real. We have some of his writings. And it turns out that he was captured by the Irish and enslaved as a kid.

[17:59] And then, after escaping, returned to preach the gospel to them. Ivor? He's actually from where I'm from. Oh, yeah? Yeah. Awesome.

Birmingham. Birmingham. Awesome. Awesome. Wow.

Yeah. It's beautiful. Well, folks, here we have, again, the gospel being spread by slaves.

Often slaves who had chose to return and preach to their former captors after either being released or having the chance to be released.

It's a beautiful, beautiful thing. One more story I want to share with you before I transition. And this is up in the caucuses here in Georgia.

[18:56] Georgia is, if you know Richard, he's a linguist, a grad student here. He studies the Georgian language. It's a language isolated. It's a unique language. It doesn't really have nearby relations.

It's a very difficult language, extremely difficult, notoriously difficult language to learn. And these are mountainous people. They live tucked away in here. Well, around the same time, in the 300s, the gospel came to Georgia.

And the story of how that happened was, yet again, a captive, a slave, this woman who was impoverished, who was a devoted Christian.

And the inhabitants of the native peoples were kind of puzzled by her because of her fasting and her prayers. And they didn't understand her. And one day, a local woman's child fell ill.

And she was so desperate for healing and was asking people, just going around asking, does anyone know how to, some medicine maybe that could be given to my child?

[20:00] And the slave woman, whose name was Nino, said, well, I can't heal your child, but Jesus can. And prayed, and the child was healed.

And this rumor, this report, spread throughout the kingdom. And the queen, the queen heard this, and she was suffering, we don't know what it was, but some terrible bodily illness.

So she went to the slave woman and asked for healing. And slave woman prayed for her, and she was healed. So she went to the king and said, hey, look, like, we got to do something for this lady here.

And the king says, well, let's give her a bunch of gold and stuff. And the queen said, but she's not going to want that. She wants us to follow Jesus.

And the king said, I'm not going to do that. And later, shortly after this, he was out hunting and was caught in a terrible storm by himself, separated from his men, feared for his life, and remembered the God of the slave woman and prayed to this God, and instantly the clouds parted, and he went home a Christian.

[21 : 09] And the Bible was translated into Georgian soon after that. An amazing story. Again, though, we have a slave preaching the gospel to her captors to remarkable, remarkable effect.

If we look at the New Testament and we read the epistles, you'll see that Paul opens his letter to the Philippians by saying, Paul, a slave of Christ.

And James says the same thing. James, a slave. Peter says the same thing. A slave of Christ. Jude says the same thing. A slave of Christ.

And Paul, in that famous hymn in Philippians, says, Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, the form literally of a slave. Being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[22 : 21] Friends, we see this same mind in the early church, in the early missionaries, in those who preached the gospel so successfully at the far reaches of the earth, in Ethiopia and in Ireland and in Georgia and amongst the Goths.

These were the hardest to reach places. Some of these folks were stereotyped as being terrible. You don't want to go to those people. They're going to kill you. And yet these people went, and they went as slaves of Christ.

We also see some other points in this story is the importance of loving your enemies. It would have been very easy for many of the folks we've heard about to become embittered by being enslaved, by being captured, by being deported, by being exiled.

But they weren't. They still loved their enemies. Another item we see is the emphasis on the translation of the scriptures.

We see this especially with Volthila. He himself translating the Bible into Gothic. We'll see this again later on in a few moments.

[23 : 42] But we also see that very quickly, after many of these places believed, the Gospels and the New Testament and the Bible was translated.

So the Georgians, the Bible was translated into Georgian very soon after this into Ethiopic as well. There was a translation done very, very shortly afterwards. We don't know who did the Ethiopic translation.

We think we know the name of this guy, Mashtots, Mesrat Mashtots. But he also did the translation into Armenian. A brilliant, brilliant linguist, according to tradition anyway.

Friends, there's still a whole lot of the world left, though. And I want to highlight down here in Nubia. We've kind of, the Gospel was in Egypt at a very, very early point, which we don't have time to dwell on today, but went down to Ethiopia.

That's because it was actually easier to get to Ethiopia than it was to get to Nubia. Because you could just sail to Ethiopia and get in that way. It was harder to get into inner Nubia.

[24 : 45] You had to go down the Nile and you reach these cataracts, these waterfalls. Very treacherous that you have to get out and get your ship out of the water and haul it up. And very treacherous.

A perfect pinch point to be ambushed by the neighboring tribes. But Nubia was a very advanced civilization. These are some Nubian warriors from 2000 B.C. in an Egyptian tomb.

Here's another Nubian prince giving tribute to Tutankhamen in 1300 B.C. They say that Sudan, which is where ancient Nubia was, modern day Sudan, has more pyramids than Egypt.

They were big builders. Taharqa was the most powerful emperor that ever reigned in Nubia. He actually conquered Egypt at one point. He was based way down in here.

This is Taharqa's column. You can see, look how the people there, look how huge this is. This is what Taharqa built. Very advanced civilization. A Christian civilization, too.

[25 : 46] This is Corinthians and Hebrews in Nubian. We don't know who translated it. We don't know how the gospel came to Nubia. We just know that it did.

And here are, here's a map of various Nubian kingdoms. Nubia is so huge. It's hard to appreciate how large this area is. You look at a map of Africa and you think, oh, that's like the equivalent of like Pennsylvania.

And you realize, no, that's like half the U.S. And there were three Nubian kingdoms. This is in Pharos, a wall painting in a cathedral in Pharos in northern Nubia.

Here's another one. You can see the Nubian priest right there in this. I've shown you this already, but you can just see how huge this territory is we're talking about, which is, you know, it's kind of this area right here.

If we focus in on a place called Soba, which I have two maps here. So we're talking about Sudan here, ancient Nubia. Soba is right around here, south of Khartoum.

[26 : 50] There are some remains. There was also an ancient kingdom called the Kingdom of Alwa. And this was a very large kingdom.

And it went straight into Central Africa, the very edges of Central Africa. And we have a traveler's report around 1200 A.D. where the guy is sailing down here.

And he's just talking about all these churches he sees everywhere. And what's amazing about this is that this kingdom was sort of the last kingdom before you get into Central Africa.

And we don't know what the gospel was doing down in here. Now, the thing is, is we don't know about anything that was happening down here. There's no writings.

There's no historical material remains, really. We don't know. What we do know is that there was right on the borders a Christian kingdom for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years.

[27 : 54] And I can bet you that some of them did bring the gospel down into Central Africa. I was talking with Kalou. Kalou and Gigi are from this area.

They're from right around here. And he was telling me that actually the language that he speaks is spoken, is a very similar related language, is spoken by a people way down south.

And usually that happens because of migration. And so the idea is at some point these folks did go far south. Hopefully they brought the gospel with them.

We don't know. These are mysteries that we will find out one day, I'm sure. There's some other Christian locations. There's some Christian pottery found way out over here in Ein Pharah. Here you can see it, a fish with a cross on it.

Anyway, these are huge countries. This is just transposing some of these countries, Egypt and Sudan and Ethiopia. You can see how large these countries are. They're very large.

[29 : 00] All right. I want us, though, to move further east in Asia to hear about the gospel in that part of the world. And we're going to start here, sort of the outpost to Asia, Edessa, ancient Edessa.

This was on the outskirts of the Roman Empire. The people of this city, the city state, spoke Syriac, which was a language very closely related to Aramaic that Jesus spoke.

Think sort of Spanish and Portuguese, very similar. And we have a writer from 200 A.D. He's our first Syriac writer, writing from Edessa, named Bardazin.

And he's got this little sort of argument. Everybody in his culture believed in fate, that your actions were guided by the stars controlling what you're doing and stuff. So he wrote a, he was a Christian theologian, and he wrote a document against this idea.

And in this, he lists all of the wicked practices of the nations and how Christians don't follow these practices. And he says this, For behold, we all, wherever we may be, are called Christians, after the one named the Messiah.

[30 : 12] And upon one day, the first day of the week, we gather together, and on the appointed days we abstain from food. And our brothers who live in Gaul do not marry men. And those who live in Parthia do not marry two women.

And in Judea, they are not circumcised. Our sisters among the Geli and the Kushanians do not have intercourse with foreigners. They're not sleeping around. They who live in Persia do not marry their daughters. And he goes on like this.

Now, I'm pointing this out because of the locations he mentions Christians. In these locations, Gaul, Parthia, amongst the Geli, wherever they are, the Kushanians. You maybe never heard of these people before.

And if we zoom out, we see that Bardazin is writing here in Edessa, and he's talking about these people. And what is interesting is what this means is that, ooh, there are Christians over here.

He's telling us in 200 AD there's Christians in Parthia and Media and amongst the Geli people and amongst the historic heart of Persia. This is historic Persia as opposed to what would become the Persian Empire in a few decades after Bardazim.

[31 : 16] But we don't see all the people he's mentioned. One other group he talked about were the people from Gaul, way up in France.

But he also mentions these folks, the Kushanians, way out here in Afghanistan. And actually their capital was ancient, the ancient city of Balkh.

This was visited by Alexander the Great, you know, hundreds and hundreds of years before. This is Balkh today or 20 years ago, actually. It's in ruins now. And this is the Kushan Empire at the time, centered here and stretching into what is today China and India and Pakistan.

And Bardazim says there were Christians there. We don't know how they got there. We don't know what they were doing. We don't know how many. But he says they were there. Fascinating.

By 200 AD, we do know a little bit more about, the spread of Christianity in the Persian Empire.

[32 : 24] The Persian Empire, mighty, mighty empire, often more powerful than the Roman Empire. And you see how large it is. It stretches all the way into what is today Pakistan on the edges of China.

And these borders are going back and forth throughout the decades and the centuries. Up into Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, but all the way west into what is today Turkey and Saudi Arabia and places like that.

In fact, it would often even come all the way down the Arabian Peninsula. Well, I want to share one story about the spread of Christianity. And this was during the reign of the Emperor Shapur I.

Here's a monumental statue of him, 240 to 270 AD. Here's another picture of him accepting the surrender of a defeated king.

And scholars suggest that this king is the Emperor of Rome, Valerian, whom Shapur defeated in battle.

[33 : 24] And captured Shapur. And the story goes, would use Shapur as a footrest. So this is how powerful the Persian Empire was.

They would defeat the Romans. And Shapur was the most powerful man in the world. And he goes in, mows down the Romans in the Eastern Empire, captures thousands of people and deports them back into Persia.

And there's an account of this deportation. It's a chronicle written in Syriac. And it says this, Those of the fathers, our ancient ancestors, who had been exiled by the accursed Valerian.

Valerian, remember, he's the Roman Emperor. He was a pagan. He's persecuting Christians.

Shapur comes and defeats Valerian, makes him his footstool. Well, what ends up happening is Shapur goes to the Roman territory and he takes with him prisoners.

That he later settled in Iraq, in Susa, in Persia, and the cities that his father had built. He settled prisoners and he gave them land to cultivate, to populate, and houses to live in.

[34 : 29] Christians, too, became more numerous in Persia. And they built monasteries and churches. So, it looks like amongst these huge prison population that Shapur captured, there were many Christians.

Who are now being settled all over the Persian Empire. And the chronicle says Christians spread throughout the entire country and became very numerous in the East.

For example, at Yaran Shar, the Archdiocese of Persia, two churches were built. One was the Roman Church that had Syriac and Greek in there. God was merciful to the Romans, that is, the Roman Christians, by mitigating the distress of exile and servitude in that their situation improved.

They prospered in Persia and their situation became better than in their own country. This is because, at the time, Rome was persecuting Christians. And it turns out, Persia wasn't.

And so, Christians spread throughout Persia during this time. It was like God just scattered them throughout, where they just founded churches and preached the gospel.

[35 : 37] It's really remarkable. Not everything would continue to go well in Persia, though. If we zoom in, there's this fabulous inscription here. This is the country of Iran. It's right here.

It's called Naqsh-e-Rajab. It's a monumental inscription. And this guy right here. This is Cartier, the archpriest, the high priest of Zoroastrianism.

He's sometimes called the Arch Magus. And he left this inscription right here. He's pointing at it.

And if you zoom in, you can see some of the squiggles of the writing.

And if you translate it, what he does here, among many other things, is brags about persecuting Christians. And this is around the year 270.

So, about 50 years after Shapur. Things continue to get worse. The successor, Shapur II, not the first one, the second one, he comes to power in the 300s.

[36 : 37] He reigns for 70 years. Really long time. He was crowned in his mother's womb when his father died. And he started a massive persecution that could rightly be called like a genocide of Christians.

And he killed untold thousands. There's a report that says the number of dead was passed finding out. And we have lists of the priests who were killed in this manuscript from 411.

Very, very ancient manuscript. I've held this in my hands in the British Library. It's from 411. One Christian writer, we have his writings. His name is Afrahat.

He has a beautiful prayer about this persecution. And his prayer is, Lord, just leave a remnant of us. Please just leave a remnant. And God answered his prayers.

There's a later account about this persecution where this magus, Zoroastrian priest, is complaining about Christianity.

[37 : 44] And this is from a Christian historian, Elijah Vartipat. And what he describes the Christians doing during this persecution in Persia is so beautiful.

He says this. In the days of Shapur, king of kings, when that doctrine of yours, Christianity, began to increase and spread and fill the whole of Persia and even reach the east beyond, those who were the teachers of our religion, Zoroastrianism, enjoined the king to prevent the religion of Magiism, that's Zoroastrianism, from being completely exterminated from the land.

So he gave a strict order that Christianity should be silenced and brought to a halt. Yet the more he wished to restrain and prevent them, the more they increased and expanded, reaching even the land of the Krushans and to the south spreading as far as India.

They were so fearless and audacious in Persia that in every city of the land, they built churches which surpassed in splendor the royal palace. And although the king lay forcible hand on them, arresting and torturing many of them, slaughtering even more and becoming embittered and soured, yet he was unable to diminish their number.

Furthermore, although he locked and sealed the doors of the churches throughout the whole land of Persia, they made every house a church and they practiced the religion everywhere. Each one considered himself a shrine and they reckoned bodily temples superior to material ones.

[39 : 09] The swords of the executioners were blunted, but their necks were not wearied. Oh, wow. That was how they kept the precious treasure of the gospel, by laying their lives down and persevering.

And actually, after Shapur II died in 379, after a terrible 70-year reign, a new emperor came to the throne who realized that persecuted Christians wasn't working.

They just kept spreading. So he stopped the persecution. Now, there were other periods of persecution. It didn't just get, you know, better all of a sudden. In fact, the Christians in Persia never had a Christian emperor like the Romans ended up having at some point in their history.

An interesting thing about the Persian church was their evangelistic zeal. They wanted to spread the gospel.

There's a famous poet from the Persian church named Narsai. He's writing around the year 500. He wrote many poems, wrote many hymns. And just like us, when we write hymns, sometimes we will take on in our hymnography, like the voice of God, where God will be speaking in the hymn, or Jesus will be speaking in the hymn.

[40 : 27] He did the same thing. So he takes up the voice of Jesus, and he says this, Your task is this, to complete the mystery of the preaching. And you shall be my witnesses of the new way, which I open in my person.

You I send as messengers to the four quarters of the earth, to convert the Gentiles to kinship with the house of Abraham. By you is the light. I will banish the darkness of error.

By your flames I will enlighten the blind world. Go forth, give freely the freedom of life to immortality. See that evangelistic zeal that they had to spread the gospel, and that they were willing to lay their lives down for it.

So, one story I want to highlight is one of the greatest leaders of this Persian church was a gentleman named Mar-Aba the Great. He was in charge for 12 years of the Church of the East,

from 540 to 552.

And his story is instructive. He was born as Oroastrian. The story of how he converted to Christianity was one day he was trying to cross the Tigris River.

[41 : 39] Massive river. So, you need a ferry. You've got to wait for the ferry. And he gets on the ferry, and he sees a Christian on the ferry. And he tells the guy, get off. I'm not going to be on the ferry with someone like you. Makes the guy get off.

The ferry starts crossing. A storm comes up. The ferry has to return. So, now they're awkwardly sitting next to each other. Then, the storm passes. He gets on the ferry again. Doesn't let the Christian get on.

Starts crossing. A storm comes up again. So, he's got to go back. Then he's sitting there. And so, the third time, he's going, and he's getting really upset. He's starting to wonder if this has something to do with his treatment of the Christian.

Third time, he lets the Christian come on. Starts talking to the Christian, and the Christian forgives him. And Marabba is so amazed by this, that by the time they reach the other shore, he's become a Christian, too.

And he went on to be a mighty leader in the Persian church. He journeyed to Jerusalem, to Egypt, to Greece, to Constantinople. He toured many of the dioceses of Persia.

[42 : 43] Remember how huge Persia is. He accepted the Council of Chalcedon from a couple hundred years earlier. And one day, the Christians are doing such a great job of evangelizing.

And the Zoroastrian high priests are getting really upset about how many Zoroastrians are becoming Christian. So, they appeal to the emperor, the king of kings, the Shah and Shah.

And they're like, you've got to arrest this guy. In fact, it's against the law to convert from Zoroastrianism to Christianity, which he did. And then he's doing it to other people. He deserves to die.

So, he's arrested. He's brought before the emperor. The emperor, you know, not quite as zealous for Zoroastrianism as the high priest Sars. And he kind of likes Marabba. So, he tries to strike a deal.

And he says, okay, Marabba, I'm going to save your life. You just got to stop preaching the gospel. You can do whatever you want. You can be a Christian. Just stop preaching the gospel.

[43 : 44] And Marabba said this, I am a Christian. And I preach my own faith. And I want every man to join it. But I want every man to join it of his own free will and not of compulsion.

I use force on no man. So, he says, no. I'm not going to agree to that. And the king's upset. Throws him in prison.

Eventually, Marabba gets out. Isn't actually executed for that. But this illustrates, just again, that diligent perseverance for the gospel.

The patience under persecution that Marabba exhibited and that was exhibited by so many other Christians in Persia. Well, how far eastward did the Church of the East extend?

We have some idea. They had a church council in 424 where they took attendance. And we know where some of the representatives came from. They came from places like Turkmenistan.

[44 : 42] And Afghanistan and Pakistan and Sijistan. This is right where Neroz is from. And from Herat, Afghanistan. And in fact, they had many councils and people came from these places for hundreds of years.

But did they go further east? Oh, this is a bronze cross of Herat from 750 A.D. It's one of the very few Christian artifacts that remains from Afghanistan.

How far eastward did the Church of the East go? Well, we've got a couple ways to figure this out. One is with a story of the Hephthalites.

These are a nomadic people from Kazakhstan. And they were sweeping down and conquering people and pillaging and everything. And how did that happen?

Hmm. We have lost the PowerPoint. There we go. And there's a beautiful story of after the Hephthalites had conquered of Persian missionaries translating the Bible into their language.

[45 : 50] They had to create a whole alphabet, translate the Bible into their language, and working with another Armenian missionary. So you have kind of a cross-cultural missionary team. You have Syriac folks and Armenian folks ministering to these people.

Here's an example of a Christian artifact from Kazakhstan, one of the very few that we have.

Well, how far eastward did the Church of the East go? Well, we know that they made it to India. We have artifacts, bronze plates, inscriptions that remain in India.

Here's one of them, the Kilon copper plates written in various languages. We have crosses in India as well, Christian crosses. This one may be one of the oldest.

It's hard to date. Some people say 340 A.D., but we don't really know. It could very easily be 8th century. Here's another one from Taksila up in the north, a Christian cross up from around there in what is today Pakistan.

[46 : 54] We also have a story of the gospel going to India, and that involves the apostle Thomas. Way back in apostolic times, the tradition from the 2nd century goes that Thomas was sent by Jesus to go to India.

He didn't want to go, and Jesus, now this is according to legend, Jesus appears in a market and sells Thomas into slavery to get him to go to India.

And he talks to the slave trader, and he says, I want to sell that guy over there to you, and he sells him. And then the guy wants to make sure Thomas is actually a slave and not just Jesus isn't just pulling a prank.

And so he goes up to Thomas, and he points at Jesus across the market. He says, is that your master? And Thomas says, yes. And then he grabs him and sells him into slavery, not knowing that, you know, like sensei master kind of thing, your teacher.

Anyway, so the story goes, Thomas goes, there's a lot I could say about this. He preaches to a king, Indian king, Gundafaris, and is very successful, ends up dying as a martyr.

[48 : 06] And the problem with this story is there's a lot of hilarious, funny things about it, which seems like maybe are made up. And then Gundafaris never existed as a king.

There's another big problem with the story. However, when the British were in India, they started finding these coins. And what do you know? It's the coins of King Gundafaris right here.

And when you date these coins through other inscriptions, the king dates to right around 55 AD. So right when Thomas would have been there.

Gundafaris was part of the Indo-Parthian kingdom up in northwestern India. So maybe he did. I think he did go to India. This collection of his stories is part of a collection of like the Acts of Paul, Acts of Peter, Acts of Thomas, Acts of John.

And the one thing we know about these is that they placed Peter in Rome where he dies. They placed Paul in Rome where he dies. They placed John in Ephesus. And we know from church history, those apostles did actually go to those places.

[49 : 13] So the fact that Thomas is placed in India is a pretty good indication he did actually go. Thomas ended up dying, according to tradition, down here. So and most of the ancient Christians were down here and in Sri Lanka.

In fact, when Marco Polo went to China, he sailed back and stopped at the tomb of the Apostle Thomas right here. So I think Thomas did go to India. These pictures were taken by Timothy Hines. Some of you might remember him. His wife is from India. And this is the rock where Thomas was, according to tradition, martyred in southern India. So last story before we'll end.

The gospel in China. There's much to say. I'll have to rush here and skip over a lot. But there is a monument in Xi'an, China, 10 foot tall, maybe nine feet, covered in Chinese inscriptions.

It was found in the 1600s. It dates to the year 785, I think. There it is today. If you go to Xi'an, China, you can see it. It's beautiful.

[50 : 21] Here's a rubbing of it. You can see how exquisite the inscriptions are. However, this is a Chinese Christian monument set up in 785 AD telling the story of how Christianity came to China.

There's also some different writings, Syriac writing, because it was the Persian Christians who made it there. Here are the names of the Persian Christians who helped set up this monument.

Their names are written in Syriac and in Chinese characters. The story this monument tells is extraordinary. It says in 635 AD, a monk named Alapen from Persia came to China.

And we don't know how, but somehow he was able to meet with the emperor, who was like godlike. How this would happen, we don't know.

In fact, many scholars believe that the monument is exaggerated, that this could have actually happened. Alapen, I'm sure he probably came to China, but he didn't like sit with the emperor.

[51 : 29] But we know that he did because the Chinese are very good record keepers and they kept records of imperial decrees. And there's an imperial decree from the very emperor named on

the monument that mentions Alapen meeting with the emperor.

So we know it happened. And the emperor tells Alapen in this decree that you have permission to preach the gospel throughout the empire. And the monument goes on to say they also translated the scriptures.

And it's fascinating. We do have some Chinese Christian remains. This is a silk portrait. You can see a cross right here. It's very hard to make out, but it is there.

Trust me. And if you see a line drawing of it on the left, this is one of the few Christian artifacts that remain. Well, the monument goes on and it says that Alapen prospered for some time.

And that by the time the next emperor came along, so Alapen arrives in 635, the next emperor is from 650 to 683. And so great had Alapen become that the emperor conferred to him the honor of the office of the great patron and spiritual lord of the empire.

[52 : 52] Ooh, that's a big deal. And it says the monument calls Christianity Jingjiao, the law, the luminous religion. And it says the law of the luminous religion spread to the ten provinces.

So these are the ten provinces of the Tang dynasty. And it says that there were churches and monasteries in all of them in the 600s, the 700s. Here's another Christian monument from 815 A.D. You can see in a rubbing the crosses that are on there. If you chart out known Christian locations between 635 and 1000 A.D., we see that they're kind of all over the place, even in Tibet.

I think perhaps one of the most remarkable pieces of information, though, is that if you read these names that are inscribed on the side of the monument that we saw earlier, that are in Syriac and then in Chinese, there's one name that says that the person in China, the missionary who's working there, his native hometown, and his native hometown was Balkh, Afghanistan.

In other words, Afghanistan was a sending church. That Balkh is the same place where Bardai's in 200 A.D. said, oh, yeah, there's Christians there in 200 A.D.

[54 : 17] And then in 835, we get an inscription here that says, oh, yeah, there's Christians there. They sent a guy here to start this fabulous mission in China.

Friends, how beautiful is this? So, quickly going, the Mongols roll into power.

They conquer pretty much everything. And we've got all sorts of stories like Marco Polo going from Europe in the 1200s all the way to China. If you read Marco Polo's journey, what's interesting is he just keeps running into Christians where he's going.

And if you chart Christianity in China from 1200 to 1350, these are all places of known where Christians were known to have been in China in the 1200s and the 1300s.

Amazing, amazing, amazing, amazing, amazing, amazing. So, here's some Christian artifacts from China. This is my favorite one. Tombstone. We have a reverse Marco Polo.

[55 : 21] Rabban Barsama was a native Christian in Beijing who went all the way to France and back and kept a journal.

And when he came back, his friend, his companion, became head of the Church of the East. So, let's pause here. What I want to highlight here is, number one, the gospel did go to the nations before the rise of European colonialism.

Well before the gospel was all over Africa and Asia. Secondly, how Christians did this was by becoming slaves of Christ, laying their lives down, loving their enemies, and diligently translating the Bible.

We saw this with Volfila. We saw this with Alapen immediately trying to translate the scriptures into Chinese. We see it in Ethiopia with Fermentius. We see it in Georgia with Nino.

The scriptures being translated so that the people can hear the word of God in their own language. These places were enormously successful, enormously successful missions, but they came at great cost.

[56 : 36] A lot of people died doing this. It was risky, but it was worth it. They were serving an eternal kingdom. Friends, we only have about two minutes before our service begins.

I'd love to talk with you more about it. I left so much stuff out, but talk to me after the service if you're interested. But let me close in prayer. Father in heaven, we thank you for the brothers and sisters who have gone before us, preparing the ground, sowing seeds, digging up stumps, persevering in hardship, in trials, loving their enemies, forgiving their enemies.

Help us to do the same. Help us to have that same spirit. Lord, that we may love our enemies, that we might forgive those who have done us wrong, that we might persevere under servitude and injustice, that we would not grow embittered, but would rejoice, Lord, at the lot that you have given

to us to give you glory.

Lord, we pray for the nations now that your gospel would go to them. We pray for people, our brothers and sisters today, who are doing this right now, who are in places where they are persecuted, oppressed, where they're in need.

Lord, give them strength. And we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.