



**Ron & Cheryl Myers** **GOD'S WORD FOR ISAN NEWSLETTER** **May, 2017**

**Eternity In Their Hearts**

"He hath made every thing beautiful in His time:  
also he hath set [eternity] in their heart..."

By Ron Myers

Greetings Again In Jesus' Name,

I realize this is a little longer than the one-page newsletter I usually write to you. However, it is very informative and I believe will enhance your understanding concerning barriers that cross-cultural missionaries face when attempting to reach people groups with absolutely zero knowledge of God, the Gospel message, and the Name above all names, the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may recognize the title of our May newsletter, *Eternity In Their Hearts*. It is taken from Ecclesiastes 3:11 in the Old Testament. Secondly, *Eternity In Their Hearts* is the title of a groundbreaking missiology-related book by missionary-author Don Richardson, also author of *Peace Child*. Reflecting on the verse in Ecclesiastes, Don describes how his research shows that heathen cultures around the world contain "redemptive analogies" interwoven into their cultural beliefs and folklore, which seems so coincidental that they appear to have been placed there by the Creator Himself. With that in focus, according to the book's foreword, "Has the God who prepared the Gospel for all peoples, also prepared all peoples for the Gospel?"

What are *redemptive analogies*? I call them uncut gems of truth, buried within heathen cultures and belief systems. They are keys that help open the closed hearts and minds of the unreached—unearthed through the missionary's studying the language and culture, and personal interaction with the people. Like diamonds in the rough, when analyzed and considered in the light of the Gospel, they can be used as stepping stones to gain the interest of the people who believe them. It's as if God has placed these within the worldviews of unreached peoples. Like shadows of biblical truths, however vague, they have remained buried, waiting to be unearthed and used when presenting the Glad Tidings of Salvation through Christ. Please understand that redemptive analogies are *not* the Gospel, but are analogous talking points... including the love of creation, which in turn point to the Creator and the Gospel.

Don Richardson discovered a unique tribal concept known as *Peace Child*, a key redemptive analogy within the cultural worldview of the cannibalistic and headhunting stone-age Sawi people of Irian Jaya (*Western New Guinea*). These unreceptive people initially applauded the treacherous betrayal of Judas as heroic, and the compassion of Christ as weakness. However, when comparing the Peace Child to Christ, closed tribal hearts and minds were opened to understand and accept the Gospel.

What is a *worldview*? Basically, a worldview is a comprehensive system of beliefs or perspectives that provides explanations of things both seen and unseen in the universe and the world around, along with all aspects of life and the supernatural. These include auspicious occasions (*births, coming of age, marriages, deaths and the hereafter*) as well as explanations of incidents that occur and how to deal with them, all within the confines of that particular culture. Every culture and every person within that culture shares a particular worldview, specific to that people group; be it a small tribe or ethnic group, up to and including whole nations or groups of nations. Worldviews are belief systems held by societies that are passed down from generation to generation. Our parents taught us our Judeo-Christian worldview, following our forbearers before them after the Gospel replaced their heathenism.

What is meant by *heathen cultures*? The word *heathen* or *pagan* is synonymous with the biblical term "Gentile," which encompasses every people group apart from God's chosen people, i.e., Israel or the Jewish race. Abraham was the progenitor of the Jewish race, through his descendant lines of Isaac and Jacob, who was the father of the twelve Jewish Tribes—Jesus the Messiah being born through the lineage of the tribe of Judah. These are those of whom God's holy laws and precepts were given, and expected to follow, to worship and serve God alone, and no other. Therefore, heathen cultures are all those based on concepts outside of the Judeo-Christian cultural realm. That is, those with no knowledge of the Creator God, who worship and practice anything and everything but God-given standards for belief and aspects of living, defined in the Word of God.

These three definitions—heathen cultures, pagan worldviews, and redemptive analogies found therein—set the stage for effective cross-cultural communication when seeking to reach people groups without any knowledge of God or familiarity with a Judeo-Christian worldview. Furthermore, meaningful communication is one of the most important things any serious-minded missionary can attain to, starting with hands-on mastery of the language and culture of the target people group. Redemptive analogies, contained within these cultures and worldviews, are invaluable tools when seeking to win unreached peoples that do not share a Judeo-Christian worldview, including any knowledge of the one true God. We can discover and draw from these hidden gems and utilize them as bridges to present the Gospel. This is especially necessary among unreached people groups where the biblical Gospel message has never yet been preached or heard.

We see a good example of this starting in Acts 17:18. Here, Paul demonstrates this aforementioned cross-cultural strategy with an audience that had no Judeo-Christian exposure or biblical knowledge whatsoever. Paul had been invited to speak to these elite and highly educated, but deeply pagan *Epicurean* and *Stoic* philosophers in the High Court atop the Areopagus (Mars Hill) in Athens, Greece, who were intrigued at his strange new message. Paul's spirit was vexed at the sight of all their heathen idol shrines, but he then spots one shrine dedicated "to the unknown god." Seizing upon the opportunity, he announced that he wanted to declare to them about this one whom they did not know, but sought to worship.

In using this *redemptive analogy* from within their own worldview, Paul started by telling them; <sup>a)</sup> this unknown God is Creator of heaven and earth *who gives life to all things*; and <sup>b)</sup> is not: an idol made by men's hands, dwelling in a manmade shrine, and worshipped on manmade terms. Paul then breaches the subject of sin and judgement, and finishes by identifying the Righteous Judge (*Jesus Christ*) as having been raised from the dead. Note that some mocked, but others wanted to hear more. Paul's *shrine to the unknown god* approach proved successful in that it got their attention. Now, what if Paul, without any foundational groundwork whatsoever, had begun by saying: "My dear philosophers, God loves you and Jesus died for your sins," what do you suppose their response might have been? Some well-meaning uninitiated folks might believe these had just heard the Gospel and should understand. I, for one, don't think so, because their own cultural worldview was far removed from Judeo-Christian origins.

Note also that using this approach is mostly unnecessary when attempting to reach people familiar with a Judeo-Christian exposure; however, that familiarity is getting slimmer as our formerly Christian-oriented Western society declines into a more godless state.

**Redemptive analogies I discovered while working among the Isan villagers of Northeast Thailand.** These are people who have zero Judeo-Christian understanding. Nor do they believe in a Creator God; only a localized Eastern or Buddhist philosophy and comprehension of life.

✓ The first example is one that I have no idea as to how it got there. I had been invited to attend a Buddhist temple fair in a neighboring village, celebrating a Buddhist holiday, one of the many annual temple fairs. In among all the tables and displays was a large white sheet hanging on a makeshift frame. On that sheet was a roughly-drawn colored image of a tree, a discretely-naked man and woman, a snake, and a piece of red-colored fruit. It was obvious to me that it depicted Adam and Eve, the Serpent, the forbidden fruit and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In asking around during a later followup, no one could shed any light on the sheet, or the meaning depicted by the drawing. To this day I still have no clue as to who put it there. I learned later that, years earlier, Catholics had tried unsuccessfully to establish a beachhead in the general area, so I deduct that the colored visualization displayed at the Buddhist temple fair that evening must have been a left over oddity.

✓ Of more relevance, I later discovered that both the Isan people and their Laotian neighbors hold to the belief of an original or first father and mother. They are known as *Grandpa Sang-Kai-Sah* and *Grandma Sang-Kai-See*, which are simply names with no underlying meaning. (We know them as Adam and Eve.)

✓ While querying Uncle Gaew, my elderly village neighbor about old legends, he told me the story of an ancient world-wide flood where the only ones who survived rode out the waters on a floating island. Uncle Gaew said there was a huge fish called "Pla-Ti-Moke" that helped keep the island afloat. I don't know how it fit in, and surmise the story might have gotten crossed with that of Jonah.

✓ Another thing I learned is that there is a four-faceted lifecycle that they believe... Gert, Gae, Jep, Taai (Birth, Aging, Sickness, Death).

✓ Almost unbelievable, this next one was told to me by Uncle Gaew, my elderly neighbor... "*Wah-Yo, who has always been there, breathed out (blew) and the world was created out of nothing. He breathed out again and created our original father and mother, but they were on two mounds of earth, separated by water. Wah-Yo blew again and the separating water dried up, allowing them to come together as man and wife. In the future, when evil has become totally rampant, Wah-Yo will breathe out again, causing fire to destroy the world. Wah-Yo also has another name; 'Pra-Tham,'*" This means the Truth or Teaching (*Dharma*). Uncle Gaew said this is who the Lord Buddha was searching for in his quest for life's meaning.

Comparatively speaking, Wah-Yo would be synonymous with *Phra-Jow*, the Thai term for God. Referring to Phra-Jow (God) is becoming more accepted and an increasingly familiar term in Thai society, and not really thought of as being associated with *religion*. However, mentioning Jesus Christ immediately summons the thought of the "Foreigner's Religion" in the Thai mind, automatically evoking an aversive or defensive attitude. Whereas, I found that approaching the Thai through discussing nature (*which they all love*), and "Intelligent Design," and associating Christ in relation to Creation, seems to not draw the same defensive response.

✓ There is also a fascinating old document that was discovered among the archives in a Buddhist temple in the Northern city of Chiang Mai. It described another Buddha (*Enlightened One*) who will come in the future. Known as the *Merciful One*, He can be recognized by the wounds in his hands, feet, and side. This is so clearly speaking of Christ that the Buddhists blamed the Christian community for "planting" it there in their temple. No one knows for sure, but it has been copied and recopied, and spread throughout the Thai Christian community. Many have used it as an evangelism tool, including me. However, given their love for their state-ordained socio-religious society, centered around Buddhism, the response is not what one might hope for.

Note: As mentioned, I have tried using this approach and find that people are not very receptive. I also find that a *tit-for-tat* comparative religion approach does not work all that well; "*Buddha said this, but Jesus did that*" ... "*Jesus said this, but Buddha did that, etc.*" Besides that, the Thai feel it is very offensive to downgrade their beloved Buddhism. I do not use these religious-oriented analogies any more. When I began my ministry in Thailand, I met an elderly missionary who told me something that has never left me. He merely quoted; "*Jesus said, 'If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.'*" (John 12:32) Bottom line: Introducing Christ through friendly, informal exchanges using redemptive analogies is way more productive than "knocking" their religion.

Getting back to using redemptive analogies; some of the most productive times I've had were when I would enter a village, sit down and start conversing with older folks, often being invited up into their homes. There, I would bide my time, looking to God for the right opportunity. The neighbors would often saunter up and sit down, analyzing the "foreigner." After exclaiming about how good I was with their language, the questions began; Did I have a Thai wife? How many children did I have? Could they speak the language? Where was I from? Did we eat sticky rice? Hot chillis? What was the cost of airfare from the US, etc.? With a little practice it all came very naturally, and was great fun.

I distinctly recall one Phu-Thai ethnic village I had visited. I was studying the Phu-Thai language and could hold a basic conversation. I happened by the home of an elderly gentleman by the name of *Poh-Lang* ... don't recall the details, but as we began talking, I asked him if he knew about *Grandpa Sang-Kai-Sah* and *Grandma Sang-Kai-See*, to which he responded in the affirmative. I added that I had a father, and everyone I knew had a father, but I wonder who Grandpa Sang-Kai-Sah's father was—being the very first man (or Adam), according to their legends. Intrigued by my knowledge of their cultural stories, Poh-Lang smiled and said he didn't know. Continuing, I asked him about the four-faceted lifecycle *Birth, Aging, Sickness, and Death*. When did it begin? Was it before or after the first man? Or, was it always that way? Poh-Lang said he didn't know for sure, because he wasn't there. We both laughed. I then mentioned Wah-Yo, the creator according to their legends, associating Him with the first man ... also about Wah-Yo's other name, "Phra-Tham." I could tell that I had his undivided attention. I said that at that early time, there were no religions, and that people only worshipped the Creator. I spoke of the Garden that the Creator had made, giving our original parents free reign, along with the Warning, the spirit world, the Serpent (whom they call the Naga) who lied to Grandma Sang-Kai-See about the Creator's goodness, the Temptation, the Fall, Death, the Curse and Banishment from the Creator and the Garden. And finally, the Creator's Promise to send a Redeemer to fully restore their broken relationship with their Creator.

An hour had gone by, but it seemed like only minutes. As I turned my head, I saw that the whole area was filled with people, listening as I used these redemptive analogies, pointing to the Creator and the Promised Redeemer. Poh-Lang and I remained friends. Later, a man from a nearby village invited me to come explain these stories to them, which I did in his home, twice a week, traveling 100 kilos round trip on my Honda motorcycle. I was elated, yet sad, because circumstances beyond my control, including a drastic drop in financial support, forced us to return home the following week.

During my very last visit to that village, one of the men came up to me as I dismounted my bike. He exclaimed: "*Thank you so much for coming. I never knew.*" With teared eyes, he pointed to the newly planted rice paddies, "*See those rice plants? The Creator made those just for us, so we could have food to eat. Isn't He wonderful? And, see that water in the rice paddies? There are fish in there that the Creator made just for us, so we could have something to eat. Thank you for telling me. I never knew before.*" That was the last I ever saw of him. Years later, when I was finally able to return to Thailand, I went to look him up, and the group I had taught those last days before returning home. Many had passed during my absence, but not before hearing about the Creator and Promised Redeemer. The Creator's story is now written in a pocket-sized booklet, *Considering Creation*.

In closing, Cheryl and I want to extend our appreciation for your continued prayers and partnership on behalf of the unsaved millions in Thailand.

By God's Grace and For His Glory,

  
Ron & Cheryl Myers  
God's Word for Isan – IsanBible.org

The second surgery on my left shoulder was two weeks ago. At that time, I underwent the repair and reattachment of my left shoulder's rotator cuff ligaments. My sports medicine shoulder-specialist, Dr. Jonathan Myer, said it was worse than he had originally thought. Pray for my complete healing. I return for a second post-op checkup in two weeks, and am scheduled for physical therapy a week in mid-June. I hope to return to Thailand when released by my surgeon, likely sometime in late August. Political conditions there are increasingly uncertain. Please pray for safety and a good trip.