

Eternity in Their Hearts Study Guide

Eternity in Their Hearts by Don Richardson

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Plot Summary

Don Richardson is a Christian missionary and scholar. He examines what he has learned about primitive groups of people, and compares it with what he reads in the Bible, and concludes that God has prepared these groups of people to receive the message of Jesus Christ. He sees this as the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. Richardson says that God has generally revealed himself in the hearts of all people, but specially revealed himself to only a few.

Richardson tells the stories of many groups from around the world, examining their religious practices and beliefs, trying to find some common thread with Christianity. He talks of Epimenides, an ancient prophet from Crete who builds an altar in Athens to an unknown god. Many years later, the apostle Paul uses this as a jumping-off point to explain the message of Jesus. In the 1800s, various groups in Asia believe in one God who has created everything, and they wait for a messenger to bring them the holy book they have lost, so they can be reconciled to God. These people are overjoyed to receive the message of Christianity, although it is quite foreign to their cultures.

Other ethnic groups have a variety of religious practices which a missionary can use to preach the gospel, if only they are willing to study the culture enough to find the key. Some groups have places of refuge, where violence is absolutely forbidden, reflecting the cities of refuge in the Bible. Some groups cast their sins onto an animal or object, calling to mind the ceremonial scapegoat used by the Israelites to take away sins. Some peoples practice a symbolic second birth, where a chief and his wife pretend to give birth to a child of an enemy, as a symbol of peace, and this could be compared to the Christian idea of being born again. Many Native American tribes highly regard the number four, as does ancient Jewish numerology, and Campus Crusade for Christ's Four Spiritual Laws. The Chinese writing system has so many interesting symbols within ideographs, that many of them can be used to illustrate Christian principles. Richardson states that this is because God has prepared these people to receive his message.

Richardson examines the words and actions of Jesus himself, concluding that Jesus very much wants his followers to spread his message all over the world. Richardson thinks that the message is initially given to the Jews, then transferred to Jesus's Twelve Apostles, then given to Paul, and finally broadcast to all Christians who are willing to obey God's command. Richardson encourages Christians to follow the example of missionaries throughout history, believing that all people need and want to hear Jesus's message of redemption and love.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 1: Peoples of the Vague God, pp. 9-23

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 1: Peoples of the Vague God, pp. 9-23 Summary

Several hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ, a plague is destroying the city-state of Athens. A town elder summons Epimenides, who builds altars to an unknown god, stopping the plague. This unknown god may be Jesus Christ.

All over Athens, people are dying from the plague, and begging their gods for help, but nothing seems to be working. Nicias, one of the town elders, announces that the Pythian oracle says that they need to send for Epimenides, from Crete. Epimenides comes to Athens and is amazed how many idols he sees there; he thinks that perhaps the city has too many gods. He tells the people to bring stones, mortar, and a flock of hungry black and white sheep to a certain place in the morning. Epimenides offers up a prayer to an unknown god, any god that might be listening, and tells the people to let loose the flock of sheep to graze. Any sheep that lie down instead of grazing have been claimed by the unknown god, and should be sacrificed there. A number of sheep lie down in the grass, and they build an altar where each sheep lies. The very next day, the plague begins to dissipate.

Many years later, two men are walking by the spot, and see that the altars have fallen into neglect. Remembering the power of the unknown god, they decide that they should clean up one altar, and have a special ceremony so that people can hold on to the power of that god. After hundreds of years pass, the apostle Paul finds himself in Athens, the city of philosophers. Paul has recently had a vision in which Jesus Christ called him to spread the news of Jesus's resurrection to all the world. Knowing how logical the Athenians are, Paul knows that they will listen to him, as long as he speaks logically. Paul sees the altar built by Epimenides, and he uses that as the focus of his speech. He tells the Athenians that he sees that they are a very religious people, since there are so many gods and shrines in the city. He says that he is there to reveal who the unknown god is. Paul tells the people that Jesus Christ is the unknown god in flesh form, but when he announces that Jesus has risen from the dead, his argument is dismissed as completely irrational. A few of them become Paul's followers, however. Those who walk away lose the opportunity of a lifetime by harping on a technicality, because they do not understand why it would be necessary for Jesus to die and rise from the dead, so it sounds like nonsense to them.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 1: Peoples of the Vague God, pp. 9-23 Analysis

Paul puts off many of the Athenians in his argument by announcing the resurrection of Jesus, without explaining who Jesus was or what led up to the resurrection. The apostle John, when writing the Gospel of John, finds a way to show God's relationship with Jesus by using Greek terms. John uses the Greek term Logos, which can mean Word, or Reason That Ties Everything Together, as a metaphor for Jesus. He uses the Greek word Theos, which can mean Almighty God, or can generically refer to any type of deity. John says that the Logos was Theos, indicating that Jesus is the name that can be given to the idea of the unknown god.

It is important that the story of Epimenides takes place five or six hundred years before the arrival of Jesus, because it emphasizes a long-term plan on the part of God. This suggests that for a long time, God had been planting the seed in the hearts of the Athenians, so that they would be receptive to the gospel of Jesus when Paul arrived.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 1: Peoples of the Vague God, pp. 23-37

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 1: Peoples of the Vague God, pp. 23-37 Summary

Richardson surmises that the Athenians were not the only group of people prepared to be receptive to the idea of one God. He tells the Bible story of Abraham and Melchizedek as an example of this. Melchizedek is the king of the ancient Canaanite city of Salem. Abraham is the first person to be called by Yahweh or Jehovah, the God of Judaism and Christianity. When Abraham is traveling through Canaan, Melchizedek comes out of Salem and greets Abraham with food and drink. Since Melchizedek is also a priest of El Elyon, or God Most High, Abraham offers a tenth of his income at Melchizedek's altar, and Melchizedek blesses Abraham. Since Abraham accepts the blessing of El Elyon, this indicates that El Elyon is the same entity as Yahweh, implying that Melchizedek has been worshiping Yahweh in Canaan. This suggests that Yahweh speaks generally to people around the world, but speaks more specifically through his covenant with Abraham.

Another example of people outside of the influence of Christianity being receptive to monotheism can be found in the Incan empire in the 1400s A.D. For most of history, the Incans worshiped Inti, the sun god. Pachacuti is a very wise, powerful king in the 1400s, who builds many impressive structures, including the fortress of Machu Picchu in Peru. Although Pachacuti builds temples to Inti when he is younger, as he ages he is filled with doubts about Inti's god status. He wonders why an all-powerful god can be dimmed by a cloud, and why the sun has to stay within its regular paths. Pachacuti remembers that his people have an ancient god named Viracocha, who is considered to be the creator of everything. Pachacuti revives worship of Viracocha, although only among the upper caste, because he considers it to be too profound for the common people. However, since he does not spread worship of Viracocha to most of his subjects, it quickly dies out among the Incans after Pachacuti's death.

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 1: Peoples of the Vague God, pp. 23-37 Analysis

Richardson is operating on the assumption that the reader agrees with him that Yahweh is the one true God, and that Jesus Christ is the son of God. Further, he assumes that



God intends for all peoples to receive the message of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, this lends conviction to Richardson's beliefs, because he has clearly done so much research, and is completely sure of his ideas. He cites sources not just from the Bible, but from many international historians and scholars, showing that he has examined the belief systems of many different cultures. However, the strength of his convictions also lends a strong bias to his arguments, so that he seems to be focusing only on evidence that supports his points. If there is historical or literary evidence that seems to go counter to his beliefs, Richardson seems to work hard to show why those examples actually support him. Some of his arguments are confusing and complex enough that they work against him. Richardson sometimes seems to be making fun of the religious beliefs of ancient peoples, but his only justification seems to be that they believe differently than he, an evangelical Christian, does.

In order to really understand the meaning of the Biblical character of Melchizedek, the reader needs to have an extensive background in the Christian and Jewish scriptures, and even among Christians, there is little agreement as to the meaning of the Melchizedek story. Melchizedek is treated as being in a superior position to Abraham, the founder of Judaism, yet Melchizedek is not a Jew, and is rarely referred to within Christianity. In fact, many Christians have never heard of him at all. Some people treat Melchizedek as a priest of Yahweh, while others imply that he is an angel, or Jesus, or Yahweh himself.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 1: Peoples of the Vague God, pp. 37-63

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 1: Peoples of the Vague God, pp. 37-63 Summary

Richardson continues to give examples from around the world of how different groups of people already had a belief structure with important aspects in common with Christianity. He says that these examples show that God works in the hearts of all peoples, preparing them to hear the message of Jesus Christ. Some of the cultures already have a concept of a single creator god, and others are already waiting for a son of a god to come to them. These people easily accept a message which seems to be totally foreign in origin, because it seems to answer some of the questions set up by their own religious background.

The Santal are a group of people living near Calcutta in India. In 1867, a Norwegian missionary named Lars Skrefsrud first meets the Santal, and is delighted to hear that they have an ancient concept known as Thakur Jiu, which literally translates to Genuine God. Not only that, but the Santal have been looking for a way to get back to worshipping Thakur Jiu, which they left behind many years ago, after making a covenant with some mountain gods. Skrefsrud recognizes that Thakur Jiu seems to be the same as Yahweh, so he preaches to the Santal that Jesus Christ has reconciled them to Thakur Jiu. The Santal are so receptive to his message that 15,000 people convert to Christianity!

In Ethiopia, there is a group of people called the Gedeo. They believe in an omnipotent (all-powerful) creator god named Magano, but they also feel bound to sacrifice to lesser gods, for fear of punishment. A man named Warrasa Wange has a dream in which two white visitors come and show him the way to be reconciled with Magano. In 1948, two European missionaries are allowed only into Dilla, a town at the edge of the Gedeo lands. Wange happens to live in Dilla, and he goes to meet the missionaries, and asks them why they have not come to him sooner with this knowledge. Christianity spreads all over the Gedeo region.

In the Central African Republic is a group called the Mbaka people. The Mbaka believe in Koro, the creator. Not only that, but an ancient Mbaka legend says that Koro has already sent his son into the world, but men have forgotten the wonderful message carried by the son of Koro. The Mbaka wait for someone to come and tell them what has been forgotten. In the 1950s, a missionary named Eugene Rosenau comes to them, and they eagerly ask him what his message is. Christianity easily takes off among the Mbaka, because it answers the questions they have already been asking.



In China, there is belief in Shang Ti, the Lord of Heaven, but soon, worship of Shang Ti is limited to the emperor, because it is considered too great for the common people. Soon, Shang Ti is all but forgotten. In Korea, there is a similar deity idea named Hananim, or the Great One. When the first Christian missionaries come to Korea, they try to use the Chinese name Shang Ti to describe the one God, but the Koreans reject this as foreign, and implying that they are inferior to the Chinese. When missionaries realize that Koreans already believe in one God named Hananim, Christianity becomes very popular in Korea.

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 1: Peoples of the Vague God, pp. 37-63 Analysis

In addition to talking about aspects that different world religions have in common with Christianity, Richardson also mentions several beliefs that seem to be similar, but are different in ways fundamental to Christian beliefs. For example, in India, many people are waiting for the tenth incarnation of the god Vishnu, while others wait for the fifth manifestation of the Buddha. It seems logical to preach to these people that Jesus Christ is the god-made-flesh that they are waiting for, but Richardson thinks that these manifestations are not unique enough to be compared to that of Jesus. Richardson also discusses the word origins of Deus, Theos, and Zeus, three designations for gods that have the same root. In Richardson's opinion, Deus and Theos are still used to refer to one creator God, while Zeus can no longer be applied to anyone beyond a very specific Greek deity. Richardson's explanation is that Zeus is said to be the son of Chronos and Rhea, while a God who creates everything could not have parents.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 2: Peoples of the Lost Book, pp. 65-76

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 2: Peoples of the Lost Book, pp. 65-76 Summary

In 1795, the British Empire is trying to take over the country of Burma (now called Myanmar), and the Burmese leaders are doing what they can to resist. A British officer, with a Burmese guide, encounters a village of people who claim to be not Burmese but Karen. The Karen eagerly ask the British officer if he is the white foreigner that they have been waiting for, who will bring them a sacred book from God, and set them free. The officer reports this story back to his superior officer, Michael Symes, who includes the episode in a book he writes about Burma.

Over the next hundred years, several foreigners visit the Karen. In 1816, a Muslim man meets them, and when they ask about the book, he gives them a copy of his holy book, although they can not read it. However, they revere the book, and appoint a priest as Keeper of the Book. A man named Alonzo Bunker lives with the Karen for thirty years, and writes down many of their religious beliefs, and their hymns. Although Burma is a mostly Buddhist nation, the Karen hold on to their own religion for many years.

Bunker is surprised at the many similarities between the Karen religion, and Judaism or Christianity. The creation myth is especially similar. It features a lovely garden, created by Y'wa, or the Supreme God, who creates everything. In the garden, Y'wa puts a man and a woman, surrounded by seven fruit trees. Y'wa warns the people not to eat the fruit of the seventh tree, which leads to sickness and death. Mu-kaw-lee, the king of the demons, comes to the man and suggests that he should eat the forbidden fruit so that he will be like Y'wa. When the man resists, the demon tempts the woman, who eats the fruit, and the man follows suit. When Y'wa returns to the garden, he knows that they have eaten the fruit, and tells them that they will now be bound to death. The people have to offer sacrifices to the demons, so that the demons will not make them sick.

Ever since, the Karen have been waiting for a white foreigner to come to them and bring them the book with the words of Y'wa, so that they can be reconciled to him. Richardson points out that this is a situation that missionaries dream about, since the Karen people seem so eager to receive a Bible and become Christians.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 2: Peoples of the Lost Book, pp. 65-76 Analysis

Many of the aspects of the creation myth of the Karen are strikingly similar to the Jewish and Christian story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, found in the book of Genesis in the Bible. Calling these stories myths does not necessarily imply that they are false, as some would assume. A myth can refer to a lie which is commonly believed, but it can have a different meaning in the context of studying people's beliefs around the world. In a religious context, a myth is any story which illustrates an important idea from that religion. Whether or not people believe that the story literally happened or not, they can still study the story and learn from it, and these stories can be a guiding principle in their lives. In this case, the idea illustrated by either creation myth is that the Creator intends good things for the first humans, but humans have been separated from God by giving in to temptation.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 2: Peoples of the Lost Book, pp. 76-96

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 2: Peoples of the Lost Book, pp. 76-96 Summary

The Karen are not the only group of people in the Burma/India/China area who are waiting for God's book to come back to them. In the 1800s, there are many groups who hold out, not converting to Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, or Confucianism. These groups, which include the Kachin, the Lahu, the Wa, the Shan, the Palaung, the Kui, the Lisu, the Naga, and the Mizo, have some belief in one God who is over everything else, and most of them are waiting for the return of the book from God, which has been lost.

In 1817, an American Baptist missionary named Adoniram Judson comes to Burma, and tries to convert their mostly Buddhist population to Christianity. He has so little success that he spends most of his time translating the Bible into Burmese. When a Karen man hears his message, the man excitedly accepts Christianity, and insists that the message be carried to the other Karen. Other missionaries also arrive in the area, and whenever the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached to any of the people waiting for the lost book, the missionaries can not believe the extent of their success. All of these groups eagerly listen to the message that they have waited so long for, and many of them also become missionaries, so that now Christianity is the norm for such groups of people.

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 2: Peoples of the Lost Book, pp. 76-96 Analysis

Some critics think that the fast conversion of the peoples of the lost book is only superficial, and that it occurs because the people do not understand the message, or because they just want to please the missionaries. Some are also dismayed at the way they think that European influence has destroyed the religions of these tribes.

Richardson points out that many tribesmen resist or even kill Christian missionaries, and he asserts that primitive people are perfectly capable of understanding ideas of love and redemption. He says that Christianity has not destroyed the religion of the converts, but rather fulfilled it. He believes that the reason that these groups resisted other, more established religions, such as Hinduism, is because they were waiting for Christianity.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 3: Peoples with Strange Customs, pp. 97-116

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 3: Peoples with Strange Customs, pp. 97-116 Summary

In addition to the way that many groups of people have waited for a sacred book, all over the world there are examples of people practicing customs that are easy to use as illustrations of the message of Jesus Christ. Richardson speaks of his own experience with the Sawi people of New Guinea, a fearsome group of headhunters and cannibals. Richardson observes a peace ceremony in which children from enemy tribes are symbolically born to the leaders of one another's tribes. The adopted children represent a desire for peace, and Richardson compares this to the Christian idea of being born again. This is also very similar to the traditions of another group in New Guinea, the Asmat.

Richardson describes the ancient Jewish tradition of the scapegoat, in which the sins of all of the people of Israel are symbolically placed onto a goat, which is then driven into the wilderness, taking the sins with it. This is similar to the custom of the Dyaks in Borneo, who place their sins onto a chicken tied to a small boat, and then send the boat down the river.

Another New Guinea group, the Yali, build places of refuge in their villages, and anyone who makes it to the place of refuge is safe from outside violence, and must not shed blood while they are inside. This is similar to cities of refuge scattered throughout Hawaii, which contain food, water and shelter to support inhabitants for years. Richardson compares these to the Jewish cities of refuge in the Bible.

The Chinese writing system is complex, with thousands of ideographs made up of combinations of symbols. By studying the metaphorical meaning of these symbols, missionaries to China have been able to illustrate many Christian ideas to the Chinese.

Most Indian tribes living in North America consider the number four to be sacred, and they tend to use lessons that have four parts. When missionaries mention the Christian idea of the four spiritual laws, the Indians listen because the number four makes sense to them.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor; Chapter 3: Peoples with Strange Customs, pp. 97-116 Analysis

Richardson shows that even groups of people who seem to be completely different from one another can still learn to communicate, and not just on a superficial level. He also points out that this requires hard work, and a willingness to appreciate the culture of others. Richardson attributes similar customs around the world to the hand of God, preparing these people to receive the message of Jesus Christ. Although the powerful metaphors seem to make persuasion easy, the hard work is studying the alien culture until one can find the relevant metaphors, which both point to Christianity, and which resound in the hearts of those who hear the message.



Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel; Chapter 4: Scholars With Strange Theories, pp. 117-133

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel; Chapter 4: Scholars With Strange Theories, pp. 117-133 Summary

In the 1800s, there is a prominent scholar named Edward Tylor, whose work is very influential in Europe. Tylor is excited to hear Charles Darwin's theories about evolution of species, and tries to apply some of these ideas to anthropology. Tylor wants to discover the ancient, evolutionary origins of religion, and he imagines that primitive humans came up with the idea of a soul to explain some of the aspects of consciousness that are confusing, like death, dreaming, and shadows and reflections. In Tylor's theory, primitive men then attributed spirits to all living things and objects, including big things like weather and the sky. As monarchy emerged as a social order, this was reflected in their spiritual beliefs, creating a belief in a King God over all the other gods and spirits, eventually evolving into monotheism. Tylor claims that this is why all primitive societies are polytheistic, until they are influenced by monotheistic missionaries.

Tylor's main pupil, Andrew Lang, does a lot of research on the same subject, but he finds example after example of primitive groups who believe in one Sky-God, or in one great God who reigns over all the lesser spirits. Eventually, after Tylor's death, Lang publishes studies showing that Tylor's theory is false. However, by this point, Tylor's theories are well enough known that many groups of scholars continue to build other theories upon Tylor's ideas, not realizing that they have been disproven. One result of this confusion is that many Communists have used the teaching of Tylor's theories as a basis to annihilate religion altogether in Communist countries. This has led to much religious persecution, and resistance to Communist regimes in some countries. Nazi scholars have also studied evolutionary explanations of the origins of religion, and used such explanations as a justification for stratified racism, with the German people being the most evolutionarily advanced. These ideas also draw upon Nietzsche's idea of the Superman, a theoretical human who is perfectly evolved.

Part I: A World Prepared for the Gospel; Chapter 4: Scholars With Strange Theories, pp. 117-133 Analysis

Edward Tylor is not the only scholar to try to apply Darwin's theories to areas where they just do not work. Many people, when learning about the theory of evolution, attribute a lot of ideas to Darwin that he never postulated, and many people have a tendency to credit Darwin with any humanist or genetic idea that has any connection



with his theories. For instance, many teachers, religious or atheistic, teach students that Darwin claimed that the universe was created by the Big Bang, and all living things originated from one original cell, and that humans are the descendants of monkeys. Just as Darwin did not back up these theories, he also did not suggest that his ideas about genetic change should be applied to social groups within humanity, or used as a justification for brutality and murder. Here Richardson is making the point that it is important to actually focus on real research and evidence, rather than merely seeking out evidence that supports one's own pet theories.



Part II: The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor; Chapter 5: The 4,000-Year Connection, pp. 137-148

Part II: The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor; Chapter 5: The 4,000-Year Connection, pp. 137-148 Summary

Richardson refers to a sermon by a missionary pastor named Ralph Winter. Winter claims that the main story of the Bible actually starts in the twelfth chapter of Genesis, the first book in the Bible, and that the first eleven chapters are just the introduction. Winter's justification of his statement is that the main plot of the Bible is the progress of God's covenant with Abraham, and that everything that happens in the Bible has to do with the results of that covenant. This covenant begins in Genesis Chapter 12, when God tests Abraham by demanding that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac. At the last minute, God stops Abraham from killing Isaac, satisfied that Abraham is truly his servant. God promises to bless Abraham and make his offspring as numerous as the stars. God also promises to bless Abraham and to bless all groups of people on earth, through Abraham's offspring.

Richardson says that, although the Old Testament (the part of the Bible describing Jewish history before the birth of Jesus Christ) focuses mainly on Abraham's descendants, and their relationship with God, there are many prominent stories in which Israelites bless people from other nations. He claims that the New Testament (the part of the Bible that focuses on the life and message of Jesus Christ) continues this theme, because Jesus is a descendant of Abraham. Although the earliest Christians regard Christianity to be a sect of Judaism, the Apostle Paul believes that God wants him to share the message of Jesus with people all over the world. In this way, Richardson thinks that Jesus, Abraham's descendant, blesses all peoples of the earth, fulfilling God's covenant with Abraham. Not only that, but Richardson thinks that anyone who truly believes the message of Jesus becomes the spiritual descendant of Abraham, whether or not they are genetically related.

Part II: The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor; Chapter 5: The 4,000-Year Connection, pp. 137-148 Analysis

Richardson talks about two different kinds of divine revelation, or ways that God could speak to a person in their life. The first kind is general revelation, which could be compared to the way almost everyone has a conscience, and most people can agree on



some basic moral principles, such as not murdering children. Richardson believes that these widespread morals have been planted by God in people's hearts, so that they will understand how to live a good life. The second kind of revelation is special revelation, which is a more literal vision or conversation with God. In Richardson's opinion, Jesus's message is a special revelation, explaining to everyone just what they need to do to gain redemption and eternal life. The reason that some groups of people so quickly convert to Christianity is because the special revelation of Christianity answers the questions set up by the general revelation in these people's hearts, making them long to be reconciled to God.



Part II: The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor; Chapter 6: A Messiah for All Peoples, pp. 149-174

Part II: The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor; Chapter 6: A Messiah for All Peoples, pp. 149-174 Summary

Richardson acknowledges that, in his statement that the message of Jesus Christ is intended for all groups of people, it is important to ascertain whether or not Jesus himself tries to reach foreigners, in the Biblical accounts of his life. Analyzing various stories in which Jesus interacts with Gentiles (non-Jews), Richardson concludes that Jesus subtly sows the seeds of multi-culturalism in much of his ministry. This is significant, because one of the main themes of the Old Testament is that the Jews are a people set apart for God, and that they are not to mix with the other groups of people around them. As an example of the importance that the people of Israel place on racial purity and isolation, Richardson points out the extremely negative attitude that the Jews in the Bible have toward the Samaritans, who live very close by. The Samaritans are the descendants of Jews and Gentiles, and so they are considered (by Jews) to be even worse than Gentiles, because they are living evidence of racial mixing by the Jews. Although Jesus' apostles try to shun the Samaritans, Jesus seeks them out for contact, showing that he wants to reach out even to people who are despised by his own people.

Richardson implies that most of the Twelve Apostles want to focus only on the part of Abraham's covenant that promises to bless the Jews, but that Jesus slyly surprises them over and over by favoring Gentiles in his teachings. Often, when Jesus encounters a Gentile who wants his help, he surprises the Jews around him by commending the faith of the Gentile, and promising that they will be blessed because of their faith. There are also several times when he talks about how self-righteous some of the Jewish groups are, and says that they are more wicked than Gentile cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah. When Jesus has risen from the dead, he tells his apostles to preach his message to the ends of the earth, and this seems like a very abrupt thing to say, since he ascends into Heaven immediately after saying this. However, Richardson contends that it is not nearly as abrupt as it seems, and that Jesus has slowly been training his apostles so that they can handle a cross-cultural experience.



Part II: The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor; Chapter 6: A Messiah for All Peoples, pp. 149-174 Analysis

In earlier chapters, Richardson criticizes certain scholars for seeking out only evidence that supports their own theories, and defaming any evidence that threatens their own theories. He also talks about how important it is, when studying ancient things like primitive anthropology, or Bible history, to focus on the real meaning of a piece of cultural lore, thinking about its origins, and considering the original source of information or literature. Unfortunately, Richardson does not apply these academic standards to his own study of the Bible. He points out similarities and connections between various biblical characters and places, as though these are of phenomenal significance, but fails to mention the countless other examples available in the Bible, which go against his theories. For instance, he suggests that Jesus Christ was crucified in exactly the same location that Abraham tried to sacrifice his son Isaac, which was the beginning of the Abrahamic covenant. Although the two events likely happened in the same vicinity, they are next to the city of Jerusalem, which is the backdrop for the main stories for thousands of years, for several major religions. There are countless "significant" events that basically took place on the same spot, which is part of the reason that the area has such a turbulent history.

Richardson also compromises his academic standards in his somewhat entertaining, lyrical telling of Bible stories, which are often subtly changed to suggest that Richardson has a special insight into the inner motivations of the characters. Although many scholars try to interpret ancient documents in a way that is meaningful and tangible, Richardson does not make it obvious, as he logically dissects his points, that he is broadly embellishing the stories that he considers to be divinely inspired Scripture.



Part II: The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor; Chapter 7: The Hidden Message of Acts, pp. 175-189

Part II: The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor; Chapter 7: The Hidden Message of Acts, pp. 175-189 Summary

Richardson contends that, after Jesus ascends into Heaven, his apostles avoid obeying his last command to preach the message to all peoples. Instead, they stay in Jerusalem, only reaching out to other Jews. When Pentecost comes, and the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles, they spontaneously start speaking in foreign languages, and preaching the good news to the many foreigners assembled in the city. This is the beginning of the spread of the gospel.

Soon, a Jew named Saul of Tarsus has a vision in which Jesus calls him to preach to the Gentiles. Saul begins going by the name Paul, and he spreads the message throughout Asia Minor. He also convinces many of the early Christians that it is all right to reach out to Gentiles, and that the Gentiles do not need to be circumcised, or converted to Judaism in order to follow Jesus. This is important, because it establishes that now the message is what is important, and not the ceremonial actions of the religion. As a result of Paul's leadership, many early Christians travel across much of the known world with their message.

In Richardson's opinion, the Jews did not fulfilled their duty to spread the message of God's blessing, so it was given to the apostles. When many of them failed to do so, it was given to Saul. Richardson thinks that the command still stands today, calling Christians to spread their message everywhere, but he thinks that the vast majority of Christians have not obeyed. However, he feels that those who have obeyed have accomplished amazing things, through the hand of God, and he calls his readers to complete God's work.

Part II: The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor; Chapter 7: The Hidden Message of Acts, pp. 175-189 Analysis

Richardson indicates that the early apostles are afraid of the possible consequences of their radical new religious/ political alignment, and thus they hold back, not wanting to



call undue attention to themselves. He says that in fact, it takes extreme persecution of the early Christians to spread Christianity outside of Jerusalem, but this ends up scattering the message far and wide. He does not mention that the apostles have every reason to be nervous, having just seen their own leader lynched for his message. In fact, many of the early Christians are executed, beaten, imprisoned, or exiled, and Richardson knows from personal experience that the command to spread the message still involves huge sacrifices.



Characters

Abraham

Abraham is an ancient man living in the region of Canaan. Abraham is originally named Abram, but God changes his name to Abraham. Abraham has a son named Ishmael with his maidservant Hagar, but since Ishmael is illegitimate, he does not inherit the blessings of the firstborn son. Abraham has his second son, Isaac, with his wife Sarah when she is very old, so Isaac is considered to be a gift from God, and receives the blessing. Abraham is a righteous man, so God chooses him and tells him to sacrifice his son Isaac, to prove his loyalty. Abraham is filled with sorrow, but he binds Isaac to an altar and gets ready to kill him. At the last second, God stops Abraham, providing a ram to sacrifice. God then makes his covenant with Abraham, promising to bless him and make his descendants as numerous as the stars. God also promises that all peoples of the world will be blessed through Abraham's offspring. Abraham is the ancestor of both Judaism and Christianity, through his son Isaac, and also the father of Islam through his son Ishmael. In the land of Canaan, Abraham meets the King of Salem, Melchizedek. Abraham bows down and pays a tenth of his earnings to Melchizedek, and Melchizedek blesses him. This indicates that Melchizedek is Abraham's superior.

The Apostle Paul

Saul of Tarsus is a man who is a Jew and a Roman citizen. He zealously persecutes the early Christians, until one day he has a vision in which Jesus Christ appears to him, and calls him as an apostle to preach the message of the forgiveness of sins to the Gentiles. Saul is temporarily blinded, and when he regains his sight, he becomes a Christian. He starts going by his Roman name, Paul, and preaching the message of Jesus to everyone, even Gentiles. At first, the other Christians are suspicious, since at the time, Christianity is just a sect of Judaism, and also because they have heard of Saul for his persecutions. Soon they embrace Paul, acknowledging him as one of the apostles, and he convinces them that Jesus's message is meant for all people, not just the Jews. He also decides that there is no need for Gentile Christians to convert to Judaism. Much of the New Testament is made up of Paul's letters to different churches. Paul endures all kinds of terrible misfortunes as a result of his mission, from shipwrecks, to public flogging, to imprisonment, to stoning. Richardson considers Paul to be one of the best examples for a Christian missionary, and thinks that Paul obeys God's call when the other apostles are too afraid to do so.

Melchizedek

Melchizedek is the King of the Canaanite city of Salem, and a priest of God. He blesses Abraham, and Abraham gives him a tenth of what he has earned. This indicates that Melchizedek is righteous, even though he is outside of God's covenant with Abraham.



Epimenides

Epimenides is a prophet from Crete. He is summoned to Athens to find out how to end a plague, and he erects altars to an unknown god, indicating that this deity could be any god other than the specific ones already represented in the temples and idols.

Pachacuti

Pachacuti was a great king of the Incas, who built the great fortress of Machu Picchu. He believed in one God over all creation, replacing Inti, the sun god.

Lars Skrefsrud

Lars Skrefsrud was a Norwegian missionary to India in the 1800s. He reached a large number of people in the Santal group.

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is believed by Christians to be the Son of God in human form. He was a Jew who was crucified by the Roman Empire, and his followers say he rose from the dead.

Adoniram Judson

Adoniram Judson was an American Baptist missionary in Burma in the early 1800s. Although he found it hard to convert Buddhists to Christianity, he translated the Bible into Burmese, allowing the gospel to reach many other groups within the area, who became Christians.

Edward B. Tylor

Edward Tylor was a scholar who tried to apply the ideals of Darwin's natural selection to anthropology, and the origin of religion. Tylor claimed that all primitive peoples believe in polytheism before they develop monotheism.

Andrew Lang

Andrew Lang was the student of Edward Taylor, and found proof that Taylor was wrong about the origins of monotheism. Lang found, and published, many examples of monotheism preceding polytheism.



Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche came up with the idea of a Superman, who would be the pinnacle of human evolution.



Objects/Places

Salem

Salem was the ancient Canaanite city where Melchizedek was king. The name means Peace, and it may have been on the same site as Jerusalem.

Golgotha

Golgotha, also called the Place of the Skull, is the hill outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified.

Burma

Although most Burmese are Buddhists, there are many smaller ethnic groups living there who quickly converted to Christianity after encountering missionaries.

The Abrahamic Covenant

When God first made his covenant with Abraham, he promised to bless him and make his descendants as numerous as the sand on the shore. He also promised to set Abraham's descendants apart, and bless them, and bless all peoples through them.

The Lost Book

There are many groups of people in the area of Burma, China, and India who believe that long ago, God revealed himself to them in a sacred book. Somehow, they have lost this book, and are waiting for someone to bring it to them again.

Sky-God

Throughout the world, there are many different names for deities, and anthropologists use the generic term Sky-God to refer to an overarching God who has created everything. Sometimes Sky-God is the only God worshiped by the people, and sometimes Sky-God rules over many minor gods.

The Sodom Factor

Richardson describes the human tendency to vainly worship idols instead of God as the Sodom Factor, and he credits this factor with separating humanity from God. It is named after the doomed biblical city of Sodom, which was destroyed by God.



The Abraham Factor

Richardson refers to any special revelation from God as the Abraham Factor. This includes any divine visions, dreams, or divinely inspired writings.

The Melchizedek Factor

Since King Melchizedek appeared to be a righteous man without being exposed to Abraham and his covenant with God, it can be assumed that some people are naturally tuned in to God. Richardson calls this the Melchizedek Factor.

Korea

When early Christian missionaries used a Chinese name for God, the Koreans rejected their message, thinking that it elevated the Chinese above Koreans. When the missionaries used a Korean name for the supreme God, many Koreans became Christians.

The Great Commission

After Jesus' resurrection, he ascended into Heaven. Just before disappearing, Jesus told his disciples to spread his message all over the world, and this command is called the Great Commission.



Themes

God Has Prepared All Peoples for the Gospel

Richardson talks a lot about the relationship between what he calls general revelation, and special revelation. He believes that God has revealed himself to members of all groups of people. This general revelation could be compared to a common idea of right and wrong, but Richardson refers more specifically to actual examples of surprising similarities of certain primitive cultures to Christianity. This leads Richardson to conclude that, "In other words, has the God who prepared that gospel for all peoples also prepared all peoples for the gospel?" (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 1, Peoples of the Vague God, Section 2, p. 30). This preparation of their hearts is what he means when he talks about general revelation.

Special revelation refers to an actual vision, dream, or other face-to-face encounter with God. For example, when Moses encounters the burning bush in the Bible, and receives the Ten Commandments, these are examples of special revelation. Although special revelation imparts an important message from God, general revelation prepares the way, so that people will be able to accept the message. Not everyone responds this way, for Richardson believes that God only promised to generally reveal himself to at least one of each ethnic group. Still, the receptiveness caused beforehand by general revelation makes it possible for many people to understand and receive God's message. When Christian missionaries first encounter the Karen people, it is easy to explain concepts from the Bible to them, because "The Karen story of man's falling away from God contains stunning parallels to Genesis chapter 1. . ." (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 2, Peoples of the Lost Book, Section 1, p. 69). Richardson believes that God intends to make the gospel accessible to all kinds of people.

Abraham's Covenant

According to the Bible, 4,000 years ago, there was a righteous man named Abram. God saw how good Abram was, and decided to make a covenant with Abram. He changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means Father of Many, and tested Abraham's obedience by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac. When Abraham came very close to doing just that, God stopped him, and made a covenant with him. God promised to make Abraham's offspring as numerous as the stars and to bless them, and he also promised that all nations would be blessed through Abraham's descendants. In return, Abraham must serve only Yahweh (the Hebrew name for the one God), and not worship other gods. Abraham's offspring are the Hebrews (Jews), and also the Muslims, although in this book, Richardson focuses on the covenant as fulfilled through Isaac, the father of the Hebrews.



Richardson says, "So-called higher critics have snidely suggested that the Abrahamic Covenant was really just another example of a petty tribal god whetting the selfishness of an exclusive little clique of followers with promises of exclusive blessing," (Part 2, The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor, Chapter 5, The 4,000-Year Connection, p. 138). Richardson makes this distinction in order to make it clear that he does not agree, for he thinks that the Abrahamic Covenant is unique and sacred, and still alive today. Richardson gives a long list of examples of ways in which Jews in the Bible are a blessing to the peoples around them. He points out that since Jesus Christ was a Jew, Christians could be considered the spiritual descendants of Abraham, indicating that God can continue his covenant by blessing people today through their interactions with Christians of all nationalities. Richardson sees Abraham's covenant as having passed from Abraham, to the Jewish people, to Jesus, to his apostles, to Saint Paul, and finally to all who hear and repeat the message of Christianity. Although Richardson gives plenty of examples to back up his statement that Abraham's covenant is still working today through Christians, there are plenty of Jews who would disagree with him, saying that Abraham's covenant has nothing to do with Gentiles (non-Jews) who do not convert to Judaism.

Evangelism

Since Richardson is a missionary, it is no surprise that he is passionate about evangelism. Evangelism literally means to tell the good news, and that is how evangelical Christians see their mission. Christians want to share their message, because they consider the message of love and forgiveness to be so wonderful that they want to share it with everyone. However, there is also a part in the Bible called the Great Commission, in which Jesus commands his followers to take his message to the ends of the earth. Christians like Richardson feel that this command still applies today, to any followers of Jesus, and that is why Richardson puts himself and his family into dangerous situations, living among cannibals and headhunters, all in the hope of sharing the love of Jesus with them.

Richardson talks about how frightening the prospect of missions seems to many Christians. He tells of how most of the early Christians stayed in Jerusalem with their fellow Jews, until driven out of the city by persecution. He also mentions the fear many modern Christians feel, not just at the danger and foreign environment, but from fear of failure at converting people to Christianity. He addresses this latter fear, saying, "Actually, missionary work has produced results so far beyond the expectations of even missionaries themselves that it boggles the mind to try to grasp its accomplishments in full perspective!" (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 2, Peoples of the Lost Book, Section 2, p. 88). In Richardson's opinion, the problem is not a lack of potential converts, but a lack of enough people to reach such huge crowds. In the chapter about the peoples of the lost book, Richardson lists many ethnic groups with striking similarities to Christianity, and indicates that these groups wish that missionaries had come to them hundreds of years before.

Style

Point of View

"Eternity in Their Hearts" is written from an evangelical Christian point of view. It is narrated by Don Richardson, the author, and sometimes he tells his own life stories from a first-person point of view, such as describing going to live among headhunters with his family. Richardson tells various stories from around the world and throughout history, some of which are historical accounts, while others are from scripture or folk tales, or even from his own imagination. He tells them from the point of view of a third-person narrator, who is not omniscient. However, he adds color and vivacity to the characters by surmising what their thoughts and motivations might be, and although he is drawing upon sources, he adds his own details to make it more interesting and coherent. To some extent, this serves to improve the storytelling, especially with stories that have been told over and over, or where few details are available. Nonetheless, this undermines Richardson's message, because he is usually citing the stories as evidence of his own theories, and he robs them of their objectivity by inferring his own interpretation into them.

One example of the way that Richardson forces his very specific point of view into a Bible story is his description of how the early Christians reacted to the news that their message was being preached to the Gentiles. Richardson says, "One can almost detect a note of mild sarcasm in the sentence that follows: 'News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem'" (Part 2, The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor, Chapter 7, The Hidden Message of Acts, p. 181). Richardson very much wants to win his readers over to the idea that God wants Christianity to reach Gentiles, to the point where he attributes sarcasm to the Bible characters. He has no reason to assume that the comment is meant to be sarcastic. Considering that he considers the Bible to be the inspired word of God, it does not make sense to just choose certain statements and decide that they mean the opposite of what they say. This is especially awkward when coupled with Richardson's insistent examination of other scholars, claiming that they do not have strict enough academic standards in their research.

Setting

The settings of the book range all over the world, because the main message of "Eternity in Their Hearts" is that God speaks to people all over, not just to Christians, or just to people in the Bible. The first part takes place in the city-state of ancient Athens, which has been said to have a thousand gods. Even though Athens has many gods, and many priests to make offerings to those gods, there is a terrible plague on the city. When they summon Epimenides from the nearby island of Crete, he has them construct a number of altars in a field. After many years, the altars have gotten so old that only one is restored, and this altar shows up in the biblical story of the apostle Paul.



Another prominent setting of the book is Burma, which is now called Myanmar. Although many of the inhabitants of the region are Buddhist, there are many groups who are not, and they do not convert to the Buddhism practiced throughout Burma. Burma is a hot, hilly place, with lots of jungles. The book also visits several other hot, primitive areas, which are peopled with fierce headhunters and cannibals who have never heard the message of Christianity. Richardson talks about the Inca empire, and how a monotheistic emperor named Pachacuti builds the huge mountain fortress of Machu Picchu.

Although the book focuses a lot on taking the gospel message all over the world, it also spends significant time examining the roots of Christianity and Judaism, telling stories that take place in ancient Canaan and Palestine. This is an area with mild weather and a lot of desert, as well as fertile farmland and land for grazing sheep.

Language and Meaning

The name for God in various languages makes a big difference in the success or failure of various missions in the book. Richardson describes how Theos, Deus, and Zeus all come from the same root, but he says that Zeus has changed enough in meaning that it can no longer refer to the one God, generically called Sky-God by anthropologists. Richardson accepts the idea that one God can have many names in many languages, and he thinks that it is good for missionaries to use whatever name the native population already attributes in their language to the supreme Creator. However, Richardson cautions that it is important to make sure that the name really refers to a God over all others, and not to some minor deity.

Richardson makes the general assumption that his reader is an evangelical Christian, and thus he uses a lot of terminology that might be unfamiliar to non-Christians. Other than that, however, the entire book is written in a very easy-to-read, rather conversational style, and Richardson lends life and details to the characters in the stories he tells, often by embellishing his stories with mention of the setting, the physical appearance of the characters, the inner thoughts of the characters, and the way in which they say certain things. This is because the meaning of the stories is more important to Richardson than just the few details provided by the historical record. He sets about the task of storytelling as a challenge to make old, familiar stories more interesting and engaging to the reader, and to make strange, exotic peoples seem normal in spite of their strange appearance, beliefs, and customs. However, he criticizes this tendency in other scholars, for instance saying that a rival anthropologist ". . . scornfully suggests through his use of quotation marks that thatched buildings on piles cannot truly be considered churches" (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 2, Peoples of the Lost Book, Section 2, p. 89). While Richardson is correct to condemn the loaded wording of his rival, he himself often refers to non-Christian religious groups as cults of folk religionists who trick gullible people into idolatry. He himself uses language to imply that any non-Christian belief system is false and evil, forced upon helpless people by deceptive, greedy priests.



Structure

"Eternity in Their Hearts" is divided into two parts. Part 1 is A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor. This part focuses on the evidence found in cultures around the world, that God wants all peoples to hear his message of salvation. It is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1, Peoples of the Vague God, talks about cultures who worship an unknown God, and claims that the unknown God is the God of the Bible and Christianity. Chapter 2, Peoples of the Lost Book, describes many cultures, mostly in Asia, who believe that God has revealed himself to them in a sacred book. Unfortunately, they have lost this book, so they wait eagerly for someone to bring them this book. In Chapter 3, Peoples with Strange Customs, Richardson describes interesting rituals practiced by various primitive cultures, and compares these rituals with Judeo-Christian practices. He tells how missionaries have used these similarities to win people over to their message. In Chapter 4, Scholars with Strange Theories, Richardson talks about European scholars who have tried to apply principles of the theory of evolution of the species to anthropology, specifically studying the possible origin of religion. Richardson also mentions the effect some of these theories have had on Communism worldwide.

The second part is The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor. This part focuses on the idea that God initially intended his covenant with Abraham to bless people all over the world, not just Jews. There are three chapters in this part. Chapter 5, The 4,000-Year Connection, examines the actual meaning of God's covenant, inferring that from the very beginning, it says that the world will be blessed through his offspring. However, Richardson claims that most Jews like to ignore this part of the covenant. In Chapter 6, A Messiah for All Peoples, Richardson examines whether Jesus Christ himself aimed his ministry primarily at Jews, or also at Gentiles (non-Jews). He gives many examples in which Jesus commends or interacts with Gentiles, suggesting that Jesus wanted his disciples to get used to sharing with Gentiles. Chapter 7, The Hidden Message of Acts, describes the progress of the early Christian church, and Richardson contends that the early Christians did not want to obey Jesus's command to spread his gospel to the ends of the earth. However, Richardson himself obeys it, and he closes by urging Christians who read this book to go out and share the good news.



Quotes

"Several hundred!" Epimenides exclaimed. "Gods must be easier to find here than men!" (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 1, Peoples of the Vague God, Section 1, p. 11)

"Any god great enough and good enough to do something about the plague is probably also great enough and good enough to smile upon us in our ignorance—if we ACKNOWLEDGE our ignorance and call upon him!" (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 1, Peoples of the Vague God, Section 1, p. 12)

The thesis of this book is that Melchizedek stood in the Valley of Shaveh as a figurehead, or type, of God's GENERAL revelation to mankind, and that Abraham correspondingly represented God's covenant-based, canon-recorded SPECIAL revelation to mankind. (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 1, Peoples of the Vague God, Section 2, p. 28)

From now on it would be the moral content of the law and not the ceremonial framework that mattered! (Part 2, The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor, Chapter 7, The Hidden Message of Acts, p. 184)

The lesson of Jesus' worldwide cross-cultural imperative was so hard for even His own handpicked apostles to learn! It still is for us today. (Part 2, The Gospel Prepared for the World, The Abraham Factor, Chapter 7, The Hidden Message of Acts, p. 180)

One must study the purpose behind any given custom before drawing conclusions about its potential relation to biblical concepts. (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 3, Peoples with Strange Customs, p. 102)

In other words evolutionists erased distinctions between "true" and "false" religion as scientifically meaningless. (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 4, Scholars with Strange Theories, p. 118)

Prophets of God among the Karen also emphasized man's duty to love God and one's neighbor . . . (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 2, Peoples of the Lost Book, Section 1, p. 73)

The Karen nation was thus poised like an 800,000-member welcoming party, ready for the first unsuspecting missionary who approached them with a Bible and a message of deliverance from God. (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 2, Peoples of the Lost Book, Section 1, p. 76)

The mere fact that the originators of a theory may later abandon it does not guarantee that leaders in other fields will automatically abandon it also! (Part I, A World Prepared



for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 4, Scholars with Strange Theories, p. 127)

The removal of sin requires not only the death but also the living presence of something pure! (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 3, Peoples with Strange Customs, p. 101)

"In other words, has the God who prepared that gospel for all peoples also prepared all peoples for the gospel?" (Part I, A World Prepared for the Gospel, The Melchizedek Factor, Chapter 1, Peoples of the Vague God, Section 2, p. 30)



Topics for Discussion

What lessons can you learn from this book about doing research? What are the most reliable sources of insight? What are some challenges in doing research?

Why do missionaries go into dangerous and unpleasant situations? Do you think it is worth it to them?

How does the message of Jesus Christ seem to be written on the hearts of some people who have never heard of him? Give some examples.

Do you agree with Richardson's ideas? Why or why not?

Richardson discusses the relationships between various racial groups, including Jews, Gentiles, Caucasians, and Asians. Does he seem racist to you? Does he seem anti-Semitic? Explain.

What are some of the different ideas presented in the book about the origin of religions?

Consider a fictional population, perhaps from popular culture, such as those in *Twilight*, the Klingons, or even the characters of *Peter Pan*. Assume that they have never heard of Christianity, or you can pick another religion. If you wanted to share the message with them, like the missionaries in the book, what illustrations could you take from their culture so that they would understand? (This is a creative exercise, and is not meant to imply that the Christian story of Jesus is a fairy tale or a cartoon).

If God has revealed himself worldwide through general revelation, why is special revelation necessary? What does Richardson think? Do you agree?