

News Story Summary

Christianity is spreading in Nepal. In 1951, Nepal's census showed no Christians in the country. Ten years later, it showed just 458. However, forty years later, the number had risen to 102,000 and by 2011, it had risen to 375,000. What's more, according to a report by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, Nepalese Christian leaders believe that this last figure underestimates the number of Christian by a factor of six: instead of 375,000 Christians there are closer to 2.3 million.

If the 2.3 million is correct, nearly 10 percent of the population is Christian as opposed to the government's claimed 1.5 percent. Nepal is officially a secular country. Its interim constitution states that "no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another and shall not take actions or behave in a way that would create disturbance in another's religion."

The constitution effectively outlaws evangelism, yet Nepalese are converting to Christianity in large numbers. Part of the reason is Christians have stepped into areas of need that neither the government nor the Hindu majority can or will serve. As is the case in India, many of the converts to Christianity come from the lower castes. Even though discrimination on the basis of caste is illegal, centuries of custom and practice continue to be a barrier. What makes a difference in the lives of these people is followers of Jesus whose faith not only rejects the idea of caste but also insists on ministering to the "least of these".

(For more on this story, enter the phrase "Christianity, Religious Tensions on Rise in Nepal" in your search engine.)

Focus Attention

As the group arrives, ask: *What would cause Christianity to grow in an area that outlaws evangelism?* After most have arrived, share the news story about the spread of Christianity in Nepal, encouraging the group to listen carefully for why it is on the rise. Explain that today's Scripture passage also deals with government opposition to the spread of Christianity, but how God makes a way for its extraordinary, explosive growth.

Challenge

Point out that Acts 11 describes the offering believers collected for famine relief in Judea (see Acts 11:27-30). Emphasize that Herod's persecution of the church followed the church's response to people's physical needs. Refer back to the news story and note that in Nepal, government opposition to Christianity has arisen after Christians met the needs of lower-caste members of society. Challenge the group to be sensitive to opportunities to minister to people's needs in the community. Opposition may result, but so will the spread of the gospel.