

# The Issue of Scripture Availability and Use Within A “Ta Ethne” Ethnolinguistic People Group Focus

## A Hierarchy of Scriptural Availability and Use

**Introduction.** The Old and New Testament Scriptures for Christians compose the Word of God for Christians. Evangelism, discipleship, church planting, leader mentoring, and Christian and church life are based upon, thus guided by, God’s Word as found in the Christian Scriptures. Within a people group (“Ta Ethne”/Great Commission) focus, the first question is: “Does each people group have the Christian Scriptures--The Bible--in their heart language or dialect?”

**The Definition of A Hierarchy of Scripture.** A “hierarchy” is a “ladder” or “levels” or “phases” in a process. A “hierarchy” implies progression or regression in a process from a lower to a higher state, level or phase, or from a higher to a lower state, level or phase in a process. In this case a hierarchy of Scripture follows a hoped-for, a prayed-for, progression that moves from a lower, non-existence state or status of Scripture to a higher state where Scripture is possessed by a significant majority of the people in the ethne to the point that Scripture functions as authoritative, the driving force in their lives and their society. Given the awareness of the state, level or status of Scripture within the hierarchy among an ethne, engagers and evangelizers can quite easily understand their task in relation to Scripture provision and use.

**Primary Aims, Values and Uses of A Hierarchy of Scripture.** A Hierarchy of Scripture serves numerous utilitarian purposes. For ethnolinguistic people group engagers and evangelizers—ethnographers, translators, witnesses, disciplers, church planters, and leader mentors—four aims or uses will be cited at this point, with the realization that there are a number of other uses that remain unstated.

- A basic aim is to identify, define and place into perspective **the major rungs, levels, or phases in the process** of moving from the point of an ethne having no written language and no Scripture in either oral or written form through other phases or levels in the process to a desired state of Scripture functioning in lives, churches and society as the major authority and agent of influence and change
- A second aim is to so present the hierarchy with its various levels in the process so that Christian missiologists, researchers, linguists, ethnographers, translators, engagers and evangelizers **can determine with sufficient accuracy the current status** within the hierarchy process of a given ethne
- Another aim is to identify through monitoring and assessing the dynamics, both positive and negative, the status and details of progression through the various levels in the hierarchy among different ethne in various linguistic, historic and social settings.
- A fourth aim is that these assessments and the comparisons between them will provide linguistic, ethnographic and missiological strategists a clearer understanding of the nature of the task of engagers and evangelizers
  - These assessments will allow more accurate time calculations of the time and functions necessary to accomplish the entire process as well as the various phases or levels

- These assessments will allow the various participants in the process to share information with each other concerning the process of Scripture provision and use and to form partnerships that should assist the process more certain, efficient and economical in terms of the use of personnel, money and other resources
- Realization of these partnerships should lead to the progression of more individual ethnolinguistic groups from a state of no written language and no Scriptural availability to a position of a realized state of Scripture functioning as authoritative in the lives of Christians and churches

**Background for Use of this Hierarchy.** There are a number of Biblical, pedagogical, linguistic and ethnographic assumptions, or criteria, that serve as the foundation for the understanding, application and use of this Hierarchy of Scripture. (See the missiological assumptions document that was prepared by Dr. Jim Slack that is associated with this presentation.)

The most basic assumption of all for a Christian evangelizer is that the Bible, the Christian Scriptures, needs to be available in order for New Testament evangelization, especially conversions and church planting, to occur. So, the first question that an evangelizer of an unreached or unchurched “ta ethne” people group should ask is “What is the status of Scripture—the Bible—within this people group?” In a “ta ethne” (ethnolinguistic) people group focus, it is helpful, advantageous, if the evangelizer/s possess this information concerning the Scriptures on the unreached people group that will be engaged.

In an International Mission Board’s engagement theology, missiology and understanding, the engagement of a “ta ethne” (ethnolinguistic people group) is for the purpose of evangelization—establishing a presence among the “ethne”, developing relationships while praying for the opportunity for Gospel sharing (which includes Scripture provision and use), encouraging conversions to Christ among those who have heard the “shared Gospel”, gathering the converts into churches, personal discipleship of believers within the churches, and mentoring church leaders who can, along with the churches they lead, go on to evangelize their own “ethne” and other “ethnes” beyond their own. Therefore, during pre-appointment theological training and for sure during post-appointment orientation, this hierarchy is presented and discussed as foundational for effective engagement of an unreached people group.

This Hierarchy of Scripture spans the range of engagement and evangelization from initial engagement and **no Scripture availability** to the Christian Scripture being available in the heart language of the “ethne.” At this point the Scripture is accepted by a significant number of believers to the point where the Scripture is **functioning as authoritative** by those who are using it in the religious community, while at the same time serving as an influential force among lost people within the people group?

The following is the Hierarchy of Scripture with no explanation of each of the “rungs” in the hierarchy. Following the “rungs” only listing, each category, rung, or level in the hierarchy will be given again with a brief explanation following. Following these two is a marking or tabulation sheet designed for summarizing the status of Scripture within a particular “ethne.”

## A Hierarchy of The Christian Scriptures

Is this **Ethne's Language**, or Language and Dialects, **available** in only oral form, or is it available in oral and written form?

Is the **Christian Scripture available** in the ethne's heart language in oral or literate (written/print) format(s)?

Is the general population commonly **aware** that the Scripture is available?

Given that the Scripture is available and a significant number of individuals are aware that the Scripture is available; do individuals within the people group have **access** to the Christian Scripture should they as individuals desire and seek to personally possess it?

Is the Scriptures "**possessed**" (**owned**) by them and is it being made available in oral or literate form to others?

A Two-Phased Level Exists for Each of the Levels from this Point Forward in the Hierarchy

### **Phase 1: Literate "Reading with Understanding"**

If literacy is present within the ethne, can Christian literates, and especially those Christian literate possessors of the Scripture in written form in their heart language "read with understanding" the Scripture?

### **Phase 2: Oral "Hearing and Telling with Understanding"**

If the Scripture is possessed by orals in terms of a collection of "Oral Bible" stories in their memory in their heart language, can those orals recognize specific stories in their story set that speak to specific topics, and can they tell them and dialog with themselves or with hearers in ways that bring out the meaning of the story?

Is Scripture **reproducible** when needed, and being reproduced (orally or in printed published form) as needed, within the given society?

Is Scripture **presently in common use** among those who profess to be Christians within this particular people group?

Is the Christian Scripture accepted, in common use, **functioning as authoritative** and consistently producing Christian disciples among those in the religious community along with significantly influencing lost people in favor of belief in Christ?

## **A Hierarchy of The Christian Scriptures Explanations, Illustrations and Applications**

Is this Ethne's Language, or Language and Dialects, **available** in only oral form, or is it available in oral and written form?

- Available means that the heart language is for sure in an oral form that is understood by almost all of the people in the ethne
- Available as a question also asks if the language has been reduced to a written format with primers and readers available
- Available means that the language is in common use and is not an archaic language that is understood and used by fewer and fewer people

Is the Christian Scripture **available** in the ethne's heart language in oral or literate (written/print) format(s)?

(Is Christian Scripture **available** in oral or literate (print) format(s)?

(If the ethnolinguistic people group has no written alphabet, which means there is no written or printed Scripture in their heart language, have some Christians produced orally and memorized significant amounts of the Scripture in stories (narrative formats) such that the Scripture is **available** in this form within the heart language of their ethne?)

- Available means that the Scripture exists in the ethne's heart language, including dialects with minimal cognate ratios
- Available, in this setting, does not imply possession by anybody, only the presence of the Scriptures in a potentially possessed format or style
- Available means that the Scripture exists in the ethne's most common and preferred cultural form or style such as oral or literate such that the Scriptures could be, if possessed, understood, internalized, used and reproduced culturally by an overwhelming majority of the people group's common people
- Available implies that the Scripture is in a form compatible with a person's learning style such as oral or literate

Is the general population commonly **aware** that the Scripture is available?

- Aware means that a majority of at least the adult members of the ethne knows that the Bible, the Christian Scriptures, exists in their heart language in oral or written form or style
- Aware means at least a basic knowledge of the fact, perhaps understood and perhaps not understood, that the Bible is the Christian's Holy Book
- Aware means, in the case of a written Bible, that a significant number of people know that the Bible exists but does not presume that these same persons know geographically where copies are located and where one can get a copy
- Aware means, in the case of an oral Bible with no written Bible available in the heart language, that a significant number of people within the ethne know that there are those in their ethne who have a memorized number of Bible stories that they can tell orally in their heart language as they tell stories in their culture

Given that the Scripture is available and a significant number of individuals are aware that the Scripture is available; do individuals within the people group have **access** to the Christian Scripture should they as individuals desire and seek to personally possess it?

- Access means that individuals such as adults can, if they desire and seek to, get to the Scripture wherever it is and in whatever format it is, and acquire it
- Access means that the Scriptures exist in a format or style, oral or written, that a common person could acquire it from the “owners” of those Scriptures
- Access means that the cost of possession, however that is defined, and the act of possession is not beyond a common person’s means, skills and abilities
- Access means that “gatekeepers” as far as access and possession is concerned are minimal and can be overcome without much hindrance

Is the Scriptures **“possessed” (owned)** by them and is it being made available in oral or literate form to others?

- Possession means that typical common people, young and old, in representative parts of the ethne, do possess, do own, orally or in written form, have a copy or copies of the Scripture in their heart language
- Possession, on the initial side of the definition, means that the common people within the ethne have the option of owning, orally or in written form, the Scripture in their heart language.
- Possession means in the case of younger immediate family members, that their possession potential would be known and measured in terms of their family owning copies of the Scripture in oral or literate form.
- Possession means that persons within the ethne can freely take the Scriptures with them without serious pressures to “hide” the Scriptures which would make it less aware or assessable to others who ought to know and be able to possess the Scriptures
- Possession means that persons can, and that possessors of the Scriptures, often do recommend to others that they secure a copy for themselves
- As an illustration, possession of Scriptures in the USA has reached the level of being one of the most sold, purchased, owned, thus possessed, books in the USA. Possession is so common that most homes would have a whole Bible or a New Testament in their home

## **A Two-Phased Level Exists for This Level**

### **Phase 1: Literate “Reading with Understanding”**

If literacy is present within the ethne, can Christian literates, and especially those Christian literate possessors of the Scripture in written form in their heart language “read with understanding” the Scripture?

- “Reading with understanding” among literates normally begins to be true for individuals who have reached at least an eighth or ninth grade literacy level
- “Reading with understanding” is one of the characteristics of those who are “functionally literate.”
- “Reading with understanding” means they can personally read a Scriptural passage or text and understand its general meaning

- “Reading with understanding” usually means that a person with this functional literacy skill can accurately tell in common terms what an ordinary passage, or text, says
- “Reading with understanding” does not necessarily imply that individuals who can “read with understanding” can accurately and consistently go beyond telling what the Scripture says to the level of understanding the passage’s implications and how it applies to themselves or to others
- “Reading with understanding” means able to “see and say” what was read

## **Phase 2: Oral “Hearing and Telling with Understanding”**

If the Scripture is possessed by orals in terms of a collection of “Oral Bible” stories in their memory in their heart language, can those orals recognize specific stories in their story set that speak to specific topics, and can they tell them and dialog with themselves or with hearers in ways that bring out the meaning of the story?

- “Hearing and telling with understanding” means that Christian orals in the ethne who possess the Scripture in the form of a significant number of worldview and universal Bible truth story set, referred to by some as an “Oral Bible,” can consistently recognize a topic or an issue, and recall a specific story, or stories, in their story set that speaks to that specific topic or issue, and tell that story or stories, with accuracy, dialoging with the hearers in order to effectively and accurately bring out the meaning among them in their dialog
- “Hearing and telling with understanding” means the oral Christian can speak to topics or issues through remembering appropriate stories and telling them appropriately in bringing out Biblical meaning with understanding occurring among the hearers, oral or literate

## **Is Scripture reproducible when needed, and being reproduced (orally or in printed published form) as needed, within the given society?**

- “Reproducible” means that if literates exist in society, that as literates increase in number and as literates want to possess the Scripture, that local reproduction through printing, or that importation of sufficient numbers at affordable prices, is occurring at the level of need and demand
- “Reproducible” means that if orals exist in society, that as orals increase in number or as orals want or need to possess the Scriptures, that local reproduction—Christian storytellers with a significant set of Scriptural stories—can and are accurately and adequately giving the stories (reproducing them) orally to those who need and want them
- “Reproducible” means, from a negative perspective, that no restrictions or significant barriers exist concerning the reproduction—orally or in print—of the Scriptures
- “Reproducible” means that whole Bibles, New Testaments, and/or Scripture portions in printed, audio, video, storied, or other forms, are being reproduced and circulated among the people
- “Reproducible” also means that the Scripture when reproduced, is being reproduced in an understandable version—oral or literate--of the Scripture in the heart language of the common people

Is Scripture **presently in common use** among those who profess to be Christians within this particular people group?

- “In common use” means that Scripture—in oral or literate form—is in common use among Christians within the ethne
- “In common use” means that Scripture—in oral or literate form—is regularly being used by Christians as they witness, disciple, plant churches and train leaders within their ethne
- “In common use” means that Scripture—in oral or literate form—is regularly being used by a majority of the Christians in the ethne and in ministry through witnessing, discipling, planting churches and in training leaders

Is the Christian Scripture accepted, in common use, **functioning as authoritative** and consistently producing Christian disciples among those in the religious community along with significantly influencing lost people in favor of belief in Christ?

- “Functioning as authoritative” means that within most Christian believers and their gathered churches, the Scripture fulfills each of the previously mentioned hierarchy levels including this one
- “Functioning as authoritative” means that the Scripture is in common use and functioning as the sole authority for belief and practice among the believers and their churches
- “Functioning as authoritative” means that believers and their churches are using their understanding of Scripture as the foundational and ultimate appeal and authority in witnessing to the lost

Developed by: Dr. James B. Slack of IMB’s Global Research Department  
Field Strategy Services and Strategy Assessments Specialist  
C:\ScripturesInATaEthneFocus.doc  
April 10, 2005 Edition Revised in March of 2006

# A Hierarchy of Scripture Assessment Form

The Old and New Testament Scriptures for Christians--The Christian Bible--compose the word of God for Christians. Therefore, evangelism, discipleship (Christian nurture), church planting, leader mentoring, and Christian and church life are based upon, thus guided by God's word--the Scriptures. Within a people group (Ta Ethne/Great Commission) focus, the first question is "Does the people group have the Christian Scriptures--The Bible--in their heart language or dialect?"

People Group Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this **Ethne's Language**, or Language and Dialects, **available** in only oral form, or is it available in oral and written form? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Is the **Christian Scripture available** in the ethne's heart language in oral or literate (written/print) format(s)? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Is the general population commonly **aware** that the Scripture is available? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ % \_\_\_

Given that the Scripture is available and a significant number of individuals are aware that the Scripture is available; do individuals within the people group have **access** to the Christian Scripture should they as individuals desire and seek to personally possess it? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Is the Scriptures "**possessed**" (**owned**) by them and is it being made available in oral or literate form to others? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Percent (%) \_\_\_\_\_

## Phase 1: Literate "Reading with Understanding"

If literacy is present within the ethne, can Christian literates, and especially those Christian literate possessors of the Scripture in written form in their heart language "read with understanding" the Scripture? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ No Schooling % \_\_\_\_\_ 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Grade % \_\_\_\_\_ 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Equivalent % \_\_\_\_\_

## Phase 2: Oral "Hearing and Telling with Understanding"

If the Scripture is possessed by orals in terms of a collection of "Oral Bible" stories in their memory in their heart language, can those orals recognize specific stories in their story set that speak to specific topics, and can they tell them and dialog with themselves or with hearers in ways that bring out the meaning of the story? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Is Scripture **reproducible** when needed, and being reproduced (orally or in printed published form) as needed, within the given society? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Percent % \_\_\_\_\_

Is Scripture **presently in common use** among those who profess to be Christians within this particular people group? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Percent (%) among whom in common use \_\_\_\_\_

Is the Christian Scripture accepted, in common use, **functioning as authoritative** and consistently producing Christian disciples among those in the religious community along with significantly influencing lost people in favor of belief in Christ? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Percent (%) \_\_\_\_\_

Date Information Collected: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of this report: \_\_\_\_\_

C:\Scriptures\InATAEthneFocus.doc

August 22, 2005/March 2006 Revision

Developed by: Dr. James B. Slack of IMB, SBC Field Strategy Consultant & Assessments