

Thomas goes East

India and Iraq

Foundation

After His death and resurrection Jesus told His disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations”. The Bible shows us how this work began but concentrates on the spread of the gospel in the Roman Empire, of which Judea was just a small part. Though we see the early believers being persecuted the existence of the Empire, transport, security, stability and shared languages greatly aided the spread of the gospel. But other early sources and archaeological evidence also tell us about how the gospel was spread by the apostles and others beyond the Empire. We can't be sure of all that is said in those early accounts but much of it has a solid foundation in facts.

Thomas (called Didymus, The Twin, according to John 11.16) is often known as Doubting Thomas. Despite his initial doubts (see John 20.24-29) Thomas travelled extensively east of Judea sharing the message about Christ in Assyria (modern Iraq), Parthia (modern Iran) and India. Early tradition says that Thomas was a carpenter and builder before he started following Jesus.

One story says that the 12 Apostles decided that they should all go to different places and drew lots to decide where each should. But Thomas was not impressed with the idea of going East to India. It would be a long and dangerous journey, he would somehow have to support himself on the way, and how was he supposed to tell people about Jesus if he didn't know their language and they didn't know his?

Thomas therefore refused to go. But then a man turned up at his house looking for carpenter



Evangelistic work of the apostles according to various traditions.

and builder. His name was Abbanes but he had been sent by King Gundaphorus in North West India (modern day Pakistan). Thomas saw it as God's intervention and off he went.

The King wanted him to build a great palace but Thomas used the money mostly to care for the poor. This landed Thomas in prison, but also led to the King coming to faith. Whether or not the story is true there have been Christians in that area ever since.

Thomas is said to have then travelled back to Judea through Assyria where he continued to evangelise. He later went to Parthia and finally to Kerala in south west India and to Mylapor on the east coast of India. In each place people came to faith not simply because of his message, but how he lived. There is a tradition that he was martyred at Mylapor.

We don't know how true some of the early traditions about Thomas are but still today there are Thomas Christian churches in south India who date their founding to the evangelistic work of the Apostle.



After first refusing to go, Thomas travelled great distances to tell people about Jesus and many came to faith.