

William Carey
The Father of Modern Missions



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The Foundations of William Carey

The Father of Modern Missions was fathered and mothered by Edmund and Elizabeth Carey on the 17th of August in 1761. His birthplace was the small village of Paulerspury in Northamptonshire. Carey's father was a weaver and William would become a shoemaker by trade. He first apprenticed with a shoemaker, along with another young man named John Warr. It was Warr that would be influential in William's conversion. But Carey was not just focused on making shoes, he was an avid learner and reader. Beginning at a young age William began reading books and studying foreign languages. By the age of 21 he had mastered Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Dutch, French and Italian.

William had grown up in church, the Bible was apart of his daily life and he was knowledgeable of it. He had a very good intellectual knowledge of the Scripture, which was displayed in many of his debates with John Warr, but he was lacking the spiritual, personal knowledge of Christ. John Warr invited William to a prayer meeting where Hebrews 13:13 was read. It spoke of us bearing Christ's reproach. William realized that he must bear Christ's reproach, He realized he was lacking this personal relationship. It was on this night that William committed his life to Christ.

Not only would William meet Christ at this Meeting House, but the father of his future wife was an elder. And in June of 1781 when William

was 20 he married Dorothy Placket. A few years after his marriage William began to meet with an association that included John Sutcliff, John Ryland, and Andrew Fuller. They met to pray for the revival of Churches and the spread of the gospel. These men and these meetings were no doubt influential in shaping the path of Carey's life. Carey soon began preaching, and it was his goal to "become an efficient and acceptable preacher of the gospel". William continued to sell shoes, but teaching, preaching, and proclaiming the gospel was his calling.

William accepted a schoolmaster position in Moulton where he also became the pastor of a small Baptist Church and was ordained here. It was in this place where his heart for the world was broken and his call to be a missionary was found. Part of his call was found in his classroom where he taught geography and formed maps of all the peoples known in the world. He would cry out to his pupils "These people are pagans! They have never heard the gospel of saving grace!"

It was during this time that Carey began to study and long to go to these people. He began reading the works of David Brainerd and John Eliot who worked with the Indians in North America and translated the gospel into their language. His study of the Scripture began to show him God's heart for the nations through the Old Testament and into the New. His geography maps for school became his prayer charts. He read some words of Andrew Fuller that soon became his call. "It is the duty of those

who are entrusted with the Gospel to endeavor to make it known among all nations.”

Carey’s Theological Impact

Carey took this vision for the world to a ministers meeting. He was completely rejected by his colleagues, but this did not stop Carey from pursuing the vision and calling he had received from the Lord. Carey’s friend John Ryland and his Father J.R. Ryland were at this meeting. J.R. Ryland is quoted as saying “Young man, sit down; when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine.” This hyper-calvinistic belief is one that was prevalent in the days Baptist churches. They took the beliefs and teachings of Calvinism to the extreme and rejected their command and privilege to share the gospel with the lost. But this did not hinder Carey’s vision from taking over his prayers, preaching, and conversation. He was determined for the Church to catch the vision. This is what led to Carey’s book entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (<http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf>. This book is free online). In this book on missions Carey answered arguments, surveyed the history of missions from apostolic times, surveyed the entire known world as to countries, size, population and religions, and dealt with the practical application of how to reach the world for Christ.

Carey's vision for the lost and passion to pursue his colleagues to join him in his endeavor his what his theology was all about. His view of Scripture and of God definitely was dominated by his vision for the lost. In Carey's *Enquiry* he addressed many of the arguments that were brought against his call to missions during his day in age. Carey states,

“There seems also to be an opinion existing in the minds of some, that because the apostles were extraordinary officers and have no proper successors, and because many things which were right for them to do would be utterly unwarrantable for us, therefore it may not be immediately binding on us to execute the commission though it was so upon them.”

This was the kind of opposition that Carey was up against in trying to persuade the people of his day to form a society that focused solely on taking the gospel to pagan nations. They also tried to argue that there was enough work to do at home with their own people to give time and resources to those in other countries.

Carey goes on to dismantle these arguments using the Scripture as his main backing. He shows that if we say that the spread of the gospel to all nations is only for the apostles then so is baptism as they are both commanded in the great commission. And almost all denominations practiced baptism. Carey was relentless in refusing to accept the men of his day's excuses not to make missions a priority in Church life. And Carey

did eventually succeed. The Baptist Missionary Society was formed under the perseverance of Carey. The men drew up a resolution that gives some insight to what their beliefs were about missions.

Humbly desirous of making an effort for the propagation of the Gospel amongst the heathen, according to the recommendations of Carey's "Enquiry", we unanimously resolve to act in society together for this purpose; and as in the divided state of Christendom each denomination, by exerting itself separately, seems likeliest to accomplish the great end, we name this: "The Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst the Heathen."

The society agreed to give a certain amount in order to pay a salary every year. And within a few weeks others and other churches were donating to the Society. Carey had succeeded in forming one of the first denominational organizations that's sole purpose was to evangelize the world. Soon many more of these organizations would follow.

Carey's theological impact is most definitely linked to his work in missions. He was the key player in forming the Baptist Missionary Society, which was a forerunner in the way missions is done today. The London Mission Society, International Mission Board, New Tribes Mission, World Vision, and many many others are all here because of the work and life of William Carey.

In Carey's *Enquiry* he also gave incredible statistics for the religions, populations, and the size of each of the countries. Carey spent the first part of his life trying to get his people to catch his vision of missions and then the latter part of his life on the mission field in India. Carey not only helped to get his people interested and engaged in foreign missions, He was a mobilizer, sender, and goer.

Carey went to India and accomplished some incredible things. In Carey's lifetime, the mission printed and distributed the Bible in whole or part in 44 languages and dialects. This was an incredible accomplishment, all of Carey's life works all focused on his hunger and passion to see the lost come to know Christ. He gave his life to translating, mobilizing, and going all for the aid of men who had yet to hear.

To sum up Carey's theology it can be done with one word. Missions. Carey had one sole calling for his life. To see the "heathen" come to saving knowledge in Christ, was this calling. He was single minded. And in accomplishing this calling he was very successful. He spent 40 years in India, but his accomplishments have lived on much longer than 40 years. His legacy still lives on today. His calling to see the lost come to know Christ was not just accomplished in his lifetime, but continues today partly due to his work and relentless determination to see that vision through in his life and the lives of his church and friends.

Carey's Importance Today

Does William Carey's life have any impact or importance on our lives today? I think the answer to this question most definitely must be yes!

"If anyone should think it worth his while to write my life, if he give me credit for being a plodder he will describe me justly. I can plod. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."

This is what Carey wanted those who write about him to say. He wanted to be a man who persevered. Possibly he wanted to be like Paul who said I fought the good fight. I stayed the course. Or perhaps James 1:2-4 was fresh on his mind.

"My brethren count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing."

Carey was definitely a man of perseverance. Carey faced many trials. Losing a child, losing a parent, losing a wife, opposition from his friends and colleagues to the vision the Lord had given him, the hardships of traveling to a foreign land and living there, and learning new languages and even writing an alphabet for them and translating the gospel into those languages.

If for nothing else Carey's life is of importance because the way he lived is an excellent example of how to fight for the passion the Lord has

put on our hearts. Whether it be the challenges of our day, abortion, heresy in the church, missions, etc. We must be like Carey and plod. We must persevere the challenges that face us. Many people of our age like to jump from thing to thing and forget to fight to the end. We must be like Carey and stick to what the Lord has put on our hearts until victory is found.

But William Carey left us with much more than just a life example. He left us with a model of denominational organizations coming together for the sake of spreading the gospel. They realized that financially it was unfeasible for just a single Church to send missionaries, but that if the common churches came together they could accomplish much more. This method is still used today.

Carey was also a leader in the translation of the gospel into other nations. He is often called the Wycliffe of the East. He realized that in order for people to really grasp the truth of the gospel they must first grasp the book in their own language in their own hands. He knew the Word was the power and that those he was trying to reach needed the Scripture in their native tongue.

Carey's most famous quote is "Expect Great Things From God, Attempt Great Things For God". In Carey's life he did just that. And the Lord blessed those attempts.

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