

Church History: “The Reformation” 1500 – 1900

(Part 9)

The Rise of Modern Missions

“The Reformation itself was a great missionary effort, the mission field being Central and Western Europe, areas which, although not heathen, were grossly ignorant of the gospel of the grace of God. Not until medieval darkness had been dispelled could the true light shine out to other parts of the world.

“Linked with the growth of Puritanism in the 17th Century was the conviction that the Father in heaven had given the whole world to his Son as his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. ‘The Pilgrim Fathers were the first Puritan missionaries’ writes one historian of Christian missions. It is certainly true to say that the voyagers in the Mayflower were not only seeking freedom of worship but were ambitious to reach their Indian neighbors with the gospel.

“Towards the end of the 18th Century there was a stirring of missionary interest among Baptist ministers in Northamptonshire, England. Their interest was, in part, caused by a book written by Jonathan Edwards of Northampton, New England. The outcome was that twelve of these ministers founded the Particular (Calvinistic) Baptist (Missionary) Society. . . **William Carey**, one of their number, had already published a small pamphlet urging Christians to use all the means at their disposal in missionary effort.

“It was **Carey** who became the first of the new Society’s missionaries. His motto was, ‘Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God’, which is precisely what he himself practiced. He arrived in Calcutta, India, in 1793 and died in India in 1834, having been there without a break for the whole of that period. His chief co-workers were John Marshman and William Ward. They were unable to live in Calcutta because of opposition to missionary work by the British East India Company, and had to settle at Serampore, 14 miles inland, under Danish protection. Here they showed immense industry both in the work of translating the Scriptures into various Indian languages, and in preaching. There was much to discourage but nothing could diminish their zeal. Carey’s own particular flair was for languages. Before leaving England for India he had acquired a tolerable good knowledge of Latin, Hebrew and Greek - a remarkable achievement for a cobbler! In India he succeeded in circulating about 200,000 Bibles, or portions of the Bible, in about forty languages or dialects, besides many tracts and Christian books. . . His knowledge of Eastern languages was truly remarkable.”

“Another English missionary who worked in India was **Henry Martyn**. After serving for a short time as a curate. . . he believed that God was calling him to gospel service in India, and he sailed there in 1806. Like Carey he was highly skilled in language work and much of his time was spent in

translating the Bible into Hindustani, and later into Persian. But his health was never good, and he died at the early age of 31.

“**Adoniram Judson**, a native of Massachusetts, was one of the most devoted of 19th Century missionaries from the American Churches. At the age of 24 he and his wife sailed for India with the support of the American Board of Missions (Congregational). During the voyage, however, they adopted Baptist views, were baptized on arrival at Calcutta, and thereby cut themselves off from American financial support until, at a later date, they were adopted by the American Baptist Missionary Union.

It is as a missionary to Burma that Judson is remembered. He mastered the Burmese language without undue difficulty, but six years passed before he baptized the first convert. From 1824-26 England was at war with Burma and Judson suffered almost incredible hardships. He was imprisoned under most degrading conditions and at times was bound with as many as five pairs of fetters. The records of his sufferings from fever, heat, hunger, and imprisonment have passed into missionary history. One might say that his physical survival was a miracle. He work finally met with success and he has become known as ‘the apostle of Burma’.

“Sketches from Church History” S.M. Houghton pp.202-205

David Livingstone (1813-1873) was a Scottish missionary, doctor and explorer who helped open the heart of Africa to missions. His travels covered one-third of the continent, from the Cape to near the Equator, and from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.

“Arriving in 1841, Livingstone served for ten years in the ordinary routine of missionary work. The mind and impulse of the explorer were in him, and he was always drawn on, in his own word, by the “smoke of a thousand villages” that had never seen a missionary. But Livingstone was at all times more than a traveler. His cause was the gospel. He wrote, “I place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ.”

“Church History” Bruce L Shelley p. 395

“The 19th Century saw also the beginning of efforts to reach out to the islands of the Pacific with the gospel. . . But the inhabitants of the Pacific Isles were noted for their cannibalism and this naturally occasioned intense horror in Christian minds. When **John Paton** of Scotland informed his Glasgow friends that he purposed to become a missionary in the New Hebrides, ‘one dear old Christian gentleman’, he say, ‘sought to deter me, his crowning argument being “The cannibals! You will be eaten by the cannibals!”’ The risks were indeed great. John Williams, one of the early pioneers in Polynesia, as the area was called, was clubbed to death by the natives. But John Paton’s life was preserved. His labors, described by his own pen, are of intense interest. After long, patient and dangerous toil he had the immense joy of seeing some whose hands had been stained by fearful sins brought to repentance and faith in Christ, so that they were able to sit with him at the Lord’s table. His joy was almost too great to be borne.

“The best known English missionary to China in the second half of the 19th Century was **Hudson Taylor**, a Yorkshireman who founded the China Inland Mission. Earlier missionaries had been substantially confined to China’s coastal lands, but Hudson Taylor wanted to reach the vast interior. He met with considerable success. But the mission did not escape the persecutor.”

“Sketches from Church History” S.M. Houghton pp.205-207

“His ship arrived in Shanghai, one of five “treaty ports” China had opened to foreigners following its first Opium War with England. Almost immediately Taylor made a radical decision (as least for Protestant missionaries of the day): he decided to dress in Chinese clothes and grow a pigtail (as Chinese men did). His fellow Protestants were either incredulous or critical. Within months of arriving, and the native language still a challenge, Taylor, along with Joseph Edkins, set off for the interior, setting sail down the Huangpu River distributing Chinese Bibles and tracts.

“Taylor became convinced that a special organization was needed to evangelize the interior of China. His new mission, which he called the China Inland Mission had a number of distinctive features, including this: its missionaries would have no guaranteed salaries nor could they appeal for funds; they would simply trust God to supply their needs; furthermore, its missionaries would adopt Chinese dress and then press the gospel into the China interior.

“Between his work ethic and his absolute trust in God (despite never soliciting funds, his CIM grew and prospered), he inspired thousands to forsake the comforts of the West to bring the Christian message to the vast and unknown interior of China. Though mission work in China was interrupted by the communist takeover in 1949, the CIM continues to this day under the name Overseas Missionary Fellowship (International).