

HISTORY OF BAPTIST MISSIONS

The history of Baptist missions is illustrious. But there are too many good names to make this presentation just dates and biographies. For example, over 20,000 persons have been appointed career missionary by the Southern Baptist Convention alone since its start in 1845. I will tell you about a few of them along with talking about some of the trends in missions work, some of the conflicts, some of the ways in which doctrine and world politics have affected spread of the Gospel by missionaries.

"At times we would wish to view our history from rose-tinted spectacles, seeing only those things that are in agreement with our own ideas!" said Karen E. Smith, a British Baptist professor of church history. "Yet," said she, "every family history will have tales of sorrow and joy, courage and fortitude, and shame and remorse."

The story of Christian missions is one of regrets as well as glory. One regret is the dry period of about thirteen centuries after the rapid spread of the faith in the first centuries after Jesus's death – the time of Apostles Peter and Paul and following. There were occasional exceptions like St. Patrick of Ireland.

Four hundred years ago, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys and other brave dissenters against state-sponsored religion behaved like the church planters of Southern Baptists who gathered like-minded immigrants from the depressed agrarian South to the industrial north – Kentucky to Detroit, for instance – and formed congregations. According to historian Bill Leonard, the mission of Baptists in the 1600's seems to have been to call people to faith, and to encourage them to see Baptist views as the most biblical way of understanding Christian life and practice. They founded churches, urged sinners to experience God's grace in Jesus Christ, fed the hungry, clothed the naked and celebrated

worship. That understanding also made them 'missionaries' for religious freedom. The first Baptists were convinced that all Christians were missionaries, sent out to speak and live the words and deeds of Christian ministry around the world, that all baptized believers were to live as witnesses to the faith and compassion of Christ, Leonard wrote.

Keep in mind the time line: Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, Europeans were colonizers in both hemispheres and often sent priests along with soldiers and explorers – Spain and Portugal to Mid- and South America; the Dutch to East Indies; the British to Asia. In 1609, Smyth and Helwys were declaring religious freedom in Holland then England. The Mayflower brought Puritans to Plymouth in 1620, to keep the time in perspective.

The forced conversions by conquerors do not count as missions from the Baptist viewpoint although the term was used. Baptists of that day were powerless dissenters without means or temperament to pursue outreach beyond their neighborhoods. The most basic doctrines of soul competency and priesthood of the believer seemed counter to vigorous evangelism.

In 1612, Thomas Helwys wrote in the copy of his book on separation of church and state which he sent to King James (of the KJV of the Bible in 1611): "The King is a mortal, and not God, therefore he hath no power over the mortal soul of his subjects to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual lords over them." His comments about freedom to believe or not to believe were anti-missionary in a way.

About 1611, my ancestor, John Price, son of an Anglican rector, came to Jamestown, a purely commercial venture. Until the American Revolution the official church in Virginia

was Church of England. By 1800 the Pricers who came to Kentucky were Baptists. The fight for civil freedom seemed ready-made for Baptists some of whom advised writers of our constitution and by-laws. The first Baptist church in the South dates to 1690 following the move to South Carolina from New England. Shubal Stearns and his sister, Martha Shearns Marshall, and Daniel Marshall, her husband, brought their families to North Carolina in 1755, bringing the revival movement of First Great Awakening. They preached the gospel to all who would listen. By the Revolution in 1776 there were 35000 Baptists in America. After 1790 and the revival movement there were counted over 67000.

More time lines: Harrodsburg dates to 1775. Kentucky became a state in 1792.

William Carey, father of modern missions, was born in England in 1761. He became a Baptist in 1783. Carey was influenced by reading a pamphlet by Andrew Fuller, "The Gospel Worthy of Acceptance"; reports of John Wesley in America; preacher Jonathan Edwards's biography of David Brainerd, an Anglican who traveled extensively among American Indians; and the journals of James Cook, British explorer of the Pacific islands.

At a ministerial meeting in 1786, Carey raised the question of the duty of all Christians to spread the Gospel throughout the world. In 1792, he published his manifesto, "An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathen." He argued that the Great Commission ("Go ye therefore into all the world and preach, teach, baptize, disciple", Matthew 28:19-20) was binding still. He answered the objections of language barrier and personal danger. He called for the formation of Baptist Missionary Society. Carey is often quoted: "Expect great things for God; attempt great things for God." The Baptist

Missionary Society sent Carey from England to India with a medical missionary doctor.

Trade and private business have both used missionaries and interfered with them. British East India Company objected to William Carey's going to India, claiming their trade monopoly. So Carey and family worked for an indigo factory while learning Bengali then translating the New Testament. He wrote grammars of both Bengali and Sanskrit languages. His first convert was in 1800.

Translation is a vital part of Christian missions, particularly from the Baptist viewpoint of soul competency, and publications ministry has been connected with modern missions from very early days. Roger Williams learned language of Native Americans. David Brainerd did not so Brainerd's observations of Indians lacked heart and did not bring the Gospel to the tribes. Judson's Burmese language work is still the standard there.

Adoniram Judson, born in 1788 in Massachusetts USA, learned of Carey's work. With several other mission-minded students at Andover he "lit the fire that led to the first organized missionary society in the US by Congregationalists who formed the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810."

(Time reminder: Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky in 1809. My Baptist pioneer ancestor, Revolutionary War veteran, Leonard Page, came to Kentucky in 1811.)

Judson was appointed for India by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions –ABC FM – in 1812 with his wife, Ann Hasseltine. On the long sea voyage, Judson studied the Bible to build his argument against William Carey's Baptist stand on believer's baptism. Judson's study convinced Judson to change and ask for baptism in India by an associate of William Carey.

The local authorities and the British traders expelled the Judsons (for the business objections Carey faced, as well as the British- US hostility in War of 1812.) So they moved to Burma in 1813. Without the support of the Congregationalist ABCFM, the Judsons offered themselves for support of Baptists.

In 1814, the first national American Baptist denomination was formed to support the Judsons. The common name for the group was the Triennial Convention started in Philadelphia when thirty-three delegates from eleven states gathered. Baptist individuals and churches thus cooperating were called Triennial Convention Baptists. Baptists as a cohesive denomination then began because of missions.

Judson was a linguist. His preaching was a combination of conviction of the truth with firm belief in the Bible, and his determination to make Christianity relevant to the Burmese mind. He had slow success with the Buddhist majority, and first convert was seven years later.

The Karens of Burma, a primitive non- Buddhist hill tribe, were strangely prepared for Christian preaching. They had an oral tradition reminiscent of the Old Testament: a belief in unchangeable, eternal, all-powerful God, creator of heaven and earth, of man, the temptation of Satan and the Fall, and that someday a messiah would come to the rescue of humanity. Burma (now called Myanmar) has the third largest number of Baptists in the world, behind US and India.

Judson's name is connected in mission history to Luther Rice who campaigned for mission support to the Triennial Convention and to churches. On horseback he visited several towns in Kentucky. Minutes of Kings Baptist Church, Mt. Washington, record a visit from Luther Rice. The first Protestant missionary to go out from Canada was a

Baptist, Richard Burpe of New Brunswick, a contemporary of Judson in India and Burma. He went out under the Triennial Convention in 1845.

Some local associations of Baptist churches were formed before the Triennial Convention for the purpose of fellowship only. Because of the autonomy of local congregations and reaction to church hierarchy, some Baptists did not and do not participate in associations or boards to send missionaries. American Baptist Churches of USA have a separate missionary society directly descended from the Triennial Convention. Canadian Baptists of several associations send missionaries through Canadian Baptist Ministries.

Southern Baptist Convention was formed in 1845 because the old Triennial Convention (the Northern Baptists) would not appoint a slave owner as a missionary to native Americans. The resulting Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) became the most missionary of all Baptist groups in the US if dollars spent and numbers sent are criteria.

Lott Carey was a member of First Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, then a freed slave who was the second African American sent to West Africa as a missionary. He helped found the country of Liberia in the years shortly after our Civil War. He preached and started a school. Today a missionary society named for him "helps churches extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth" with ministries in health, education and evangelism.

Domestic missions or Home Missions grew right along with overseas missions because native Americans and the untamed frontier were both seen as a foreign field. The Second Great Awakening of the early 1800's made Christians in the Eastern US more aware of the needs of the frontier.

The Baptist gospel, the organization of local

autonomous churches, and emphasis on life-changing experience appealed to the frontier spirit. My ancestor, Leonard Page, planted at least twenty Baptist churches in the Red River area of South Central Kentucky which experienced a long revival period during the Great Awakening.

John Mason Peck and his wife left Connecticut in 1817 for St. Louis, a wagon journey of 125 days. He started a school there. In 1852, Harvard University honored him with a doctorate for his mission work – the same university that had expelled a President in 1652 for being a Baptist!

Peck's school was one of many started by missionaries around the world. The Baptist doctrine of soul competency fed this movement for education, publication and translation so seekers could hear and read God's word for themselves.

Missiologists of that day said Baptist doctrine of soul competency and equality before God demanded the heathen everywhere have same privilege of knowing Jesus Christ as did Americans and Europeans.

The SBC had a Foreign Mission Board and a Home Mission Board from the first. They took over the support of a worker in China in 1846, making that country its first foreign field. The second was Nigeria, West Africa.

Charlotte Diggs Moon "Lottie Moon" was not the first Southern Baptist in China but one of the best known because of her diligence in correspondence and reporting to the constituency that sent her. She was appointed to China from 1873- 1912, literally starving, suffering with her people during a famine. Lottie Moon lived with and as her people. She didn't take a furlough the first fourteen years she served alone. Some of her correspondence was pleas for more volunteers as well as funding. The largest mission offering in all Baptist life, not just SBC, is named for Lottie Moon.

In the latter half of the 19th Century and since there has been debate about the clash of cultures in foreign missions. (Think of the popularity of the writings of Pearl Buck, herself a former Presbyterian missionary in China, and "Poisonwood Bible" written by Kentuckian Barbara Kingsolver, daughter of a doctor who spent time in East Africa.) To what extent should the converts to Christianity imitate Western ways? One theorist said, "While it is true that Christianity civilizes, never does civilization Christianize!" There was also criticism of missionaries behaving as Ugly Americans, and of entanglements with commercial and political forces in the sending countries. Conservatives leaned toward evangelism only while the social, medical and education work of liberals could be accused of cultural meddling. Nevertheless, Baptist work at home and abroad was rather holistic.

What else was happening in mid-19th Century? With commerce and improved transportation and some communication, missionaries were being sent to all continents. Muslim countries were bypassed for the most part except those Middle Eastern sites controlled by the British. Mission boards thought the yield of gospel planting to Muslims was poor in proportion to its cost. Many missionaries were dispatched to nations with large Roman Catholic work since evangelical and Baptist doctrines of personal conversion and believers baptism left cultural Catholics out of the Kingdom. Large groups served in Brazil, one of SBC earliest missions in South America. Canadian Baptists had the only Baptist work in Bolivia.

After the Civil War, immigration brought alien groups to the US. Post war poverty and recession made social work an important part of home missions even for conservative groups that were against the Social Gospel's claim to save the world by changing environment.

In 1888, Annie Armstrong of Baltimore led a movement of women in the South to pray, give and learn of missions, the movement that became Woman's Missionary Union – WMU. She was an astute activist, knowledgeable of organization and business and held her own with male leadership in the SBC. Partly because of her wisdom as well as anxiety of the male leadership about women's place, WMU was called auxiliary to the SBC, never a Board in denominational organization, and therefore never dictated to. She wrote and traveled extensively in support of missions. The offering for domestic missions of SBC (North American Mission Board now) is named for Annie Armstrong.

In the 20th Century, two notable movements affected missions. Baptists in America divided further over doctrine. Some groups left Northern Baptist Convention in the twenties and thirties over perceived liberalism. Groups left SBC over Cooperative Program and other tendencies to centralize. Some of those who left Northern and Southern Conventions sent missionaries from individual churches or limited groups.

Asenath Brewster worked with the poor in Louisville before leading the small denomination called General Baptists, headquartered in Oakland, Indiana, to do missions. Free Will Baptists were somewhat organized.

Cooperative Program of SBC is a plan which receives money from churches and divides it among various boards and ministries, instead of the former system of each church sorting out the needs. Objecting churches feared their donations would help a ministry contrary to standards of their local church. Because of the cooperative plans such as Cooperative Program of SBC, started in 1925, local churches participated in more different sites than they could alone. Before the Cooperative Program, even until World War II, the mission boards carried heavy debt. Cooperative giving plans and their publicity along with visits of more different

missionaries to local churches changed the world view of more Baptists.

So did World War II. Because of travel, radio, GIs marrying overseas, international business, international politics, Americans were more aware of the rest of the world. Before such globalization, members of small local churches had no knowledge of other cultures except for the narrow picture they had from occasional visiting missionaries.

Baker James Cauthen went to China as a missionary from SBC in 1939. War with Japan shortened his stay. He became executive secretary of SBC Foreign Mission Board in 1954 and served for 25 years during the period of greatest missions growth. He introduced programs using short-term volunteers, as the Journeyman idea in 1965. Cauthen was generally respected as a Christian statesman according to his obituary in the New York Times. In 1955, SBC had 1000 missionaries. By 1980, there were 3000 career missionaries in 94 countries. Now there are Southern Baptist representatives in more than 125 countries.

American Baptists (the Northern Baptists of old) have missionaries in 75 countries. Canadian Baptists have about 150 missionaries in Asia, Africa and South America.

One of the most revered Baptist missionaries after World War II was Dr. Bill Wallace of Knoxville Tennessee who went to China. He died in Wuchow China during the Communist Revolution. A hospital in Wuchow is named for him, and another in Pusan Korea. His biography, the story of his bravery and martyrdom inspired many a young Baptist. After Baptist work was closed by the war in China, in the 1950's, work expanded in other Asia sites, particularly Indonesia. Dr. Jim Young started a hospital, the only Christian institution in Yemen for many years, in Jibla North Yemen. Dr. Martha

Myers was killed there by a Muslim extremist in 2002.

R. Keith Parks was a missionary in Indonesia before he became the president of Foreign Mission Board SBC (now called International Mission Board, IMB.) He championed an approach to pioneer fields that revolutionized the success rate for penetrating ethnic homelands. Research located unreached people groups. Strategy shifted to education and community development with gospel preaching in less open ways. Business and cultural platforms allowed workers to get visas to restricted areas of North Africa and Asia. The goal was that no ethnic group in the world be absolutely beyond potential reach of the gospel.

The conflict in mission theory escalated between direct evangelism, counting new converts baptized and new congregations started in more and more restricted locations versus maintenance of educational, medical and social institutions which disciple and train. Premillennialist conservatives believed the Second Coming of Jesus would be hastened by making the gospel available everywhere. Institutions were either closed, sold to other entities or turned over to local Baptist associations in host nations.

There has been a trend backward, if you will, from cooperative missions toward individual churches or local groups using their missions funds to send their own members on mission much as Highland has done this year with two projects in Morocco, and designating funds to a particular missionary as we have done for workers in Morocco. Larger churches can take the role of an agency.

Shortly after Dr. Keith Parks's forced resignation from IMB-SBC during the so-called conservative resurgence, he became Global Missions Coordinator for the new Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He led mission outreach there for several years with the theme, "Doing Missions in a World Without

Borders," which means assignments of workers were to ethnically related peoples rather than geographic divisions.

Home Missions, "domestic missions", has focused on fitting the method to the people also – hence, military and industrial chaplaincy, disaster relief, micro-business support in high poverty regions, cowboy churches, resort ministries, and interdenominational efforts such as Habitat for Humanity. Baptists, at least individual Baptists, and some churches are more willing to work with other believers instead of fearing dilution of the gospel by cooperation. Highland Baptist Church was one of the founding congregations of Highlands Community Ministries. About twenty such community ministries across Louisville are cooperative efforts of Catholic and Protestant Christians. A few conservative Baptist churches have not joined because of differences that have nothing to do with poverty.

CBF partners with free-standing agencies and seminaries without owning them. An example is World Vision. Kentucky Baptist Fellowship works with several organizations and non-KBF churches on the annual Extreme Build.

This hurried overview of more than four hundred years of Baptist Missions has seen an attitude shift from paternal to fraternal to advisory/consultative/collegial. We now find previous receiving countries sending to former senders like US and Britain.

Several members of Highland are former or retired career missionaries: The Janes, the Parks, the D'Amicos, the Teels, Barbara Spaulding, the Zoellers, Gloria Bogert. Dozens of our members have been short-term volunteers, serving from two weeks to two years all over the US and the rest of the world. We honor you.

Someone has commented that a church that does not share its Good News is little more than a club for like-minded persons. Our church gives more than 13% of monies coming in to ministries outside our building. Our missional viewpoint has strengthened the church. We provide an atmosphere for children, youth and adults to hear God's call to take the Gospel to every nation.

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