

**The History of Modern Missions**  
**Week 6**  
**Slightly edited from CHBC's Core Seminar**

**Main idea:** The gospel advances through the faith-filled afflictions of missionaries who treasure Christ above all else.

**Class goals:**

- Define the dominant paradigm in missions leading up to the 20th century to give context for recent shifts.
- Share stories that encourage and inspire faithful missionary *go-ers* and *send-ers*.

**Introduction**

Last week we saw how gospel-advance around the world is often accompanied by suffering. We saw how all suffering is under God's sovereign hand, for our good, such that as Christians we can always respond in trust and hope through the gospel.

Today we turn to missionary history as part of our transition from the theological foundations of missions to the practical section of this class. And what we find is that the kind of suffering we learned about last week has often marked the lives of faithful missionaries.

Now, I should say up front that we're not looking at *all* of missionary history. We're looking specifically at what historians call the "Modern Missions Movement," roughly dated from 1792 to 1911. This "long-eighteenth century" marked one of the greatest periods of missionary expansion in church history.

And as we study two figures from this period, I want you to pay attention to three characteristics of nineteenth-century missions. First, it was word-focused. These missionaries believed Romans 10:9, that the gospel *must* be preached verbally, and therefore gave themselves to language acquisition, translation, and preaching.

Second, their missionary model was church-centric. For them, establishing autonomous healthy local churches was the *end* and *means* of missions. This often

meant staying in one place for a sufficiently long period of time to train leaders or travel itinerantly.

Third, they were faithfulness-oriented. They did not expect results overnight. They were willing to spend their whole life devoted to the Master's cause.

Word-focused, church-centric, faithfulness-oriented. Pay attention to those three themes as we go along.

The modern day missions movement really starts with a shoemaker named William Carey.

### **I. William Carey (1761-1834): Recovering the Imperative Force of the Great Commission<sup>1</sup>**

Often called the “father of the modern missions movement,”<sup>2</sup> Carey was born in England in 1761. With only a grammar school education, Carey worked as a cobbler (making and mending shoes), while pastoring a Baptist church in Northamptonshire, and teaching at a school. He always kept a book next to him on his workbench while working, teaching himself Dutch, French, Latin, and several Indo-European languages.

*Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen (1792)*  
As a young man, Carey recounts being fascinated by a biography of the explorer James Cook published in 1788 and inspired by reading Jonathan Edwards’ *Account of the Life of the Late Rev. David Brainerd*, detailing Brainerd’s missionary efforts to reach Native Americans in the New England colonies. Through the study of Scripture, Carey became convinced that Matthew 28:18-20, known as the Great Commission, was binding on churches and Christians today, and remained unfulfilled as long as there were people groups around the world that had never heard the gospel.

In 1792 he published these thoughts on missions along with a plan to reach the nations in his book *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen (1792)*. Those two words are key: *obligation* and *means*. This book, divided into five parts, includes theological arguments for missionary activities, arguing as the title suggests that Christians have an obligation to use the means given to them by God to seek the conversion of the “heathen.” In the Introduction, Carey asks whether Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 28:18-20 remains as an obligation on Christians after the apostles.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Carey’s life and ministry, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Missionary Fellowship of William Carey* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *Ten Who Changed the World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2012), 1.

<sup>3</sup> William Carey, *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens: In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, Are Considered ...* (Ann Ireland, 1792), 6.

Section I responds to several objections against missionary efforts, including the idea that the need at home is too great to warrant efforts elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> To this, Carey responds,

“Our own countrymen have the means of grace, and may attend on the word preached if they choose it. They have the means of knowing the truth, and faithful ministers are placed in almost every part of the land, whose spheres of action might be much extended if their congregations were but more hearty and active in the cause: but with them the case is widely different, who have no Bible, no written language, (which many of them have not) no ministers, no good civil government, nor any of those advantages which we have. Pity therefore, humanity, and much more Christianity, call loudly for every possible exertion to introduce the gospel amongst them.”<sup>5</sup>

In Section II, entitled, “a Short Review of former Undertakings for the Conversion of the Heathen,” Carey expounds past missionary efforts of the church, including Paul’s missionary journeys.<sup>6</sup>

Section III contains “a Survey of the present State of the World” in regard to the missionary task. It is a product of painstaking effort, including twenty-three tables of the world’s countries, their land size, populations, and religious beliefs.<sup>7</sup> (Kind of like what Patrick Johnstone has done in *Operation World*). “All these things,” Carey writes, “are loud calls to Christians, and especially to ministers, to exert themselves to the utmost in their several spheres of action, and to try to enlarge them as much as possible.”<sup>8</sup>

Section IV offers a plan for sending Christian missionaries, including practical and logistical necessities such as language acquisition, financial support, and the moral character of missionaries.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Carey, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Carey, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Carey, 14-37.

<sup>7</sup> Carey, 38-66

<sup>8</sup> Carey, 66.

<sup>9</sup> Carey, 67-76.

Lastly, in Section V, Carey examines the means that ought to be employed in missions, including, first and foremost, fervent united prayer.<sup>10</sup> He writes, “The most glorious works of grace that have ever taken place, have been in answer to prayer.”<sup>11</sup> Carey warns not to look at prayer as a small or insignificant part of world missions:

“Many can do nothing but pray, and prayer is perhaps the only thing in which Christians of all denominations can cordially, and unreservedly unite; but in this we may all be one, and in this the strictest unanimity ought to prevail.”<sup>12</sup>

Second, Carey encourages the organization of a society for the purpose of sending and supporting missionaries.<sup>13</sup> “I would therefore propose that such a society and committee should be formed amongst the particular baptist denomination.”<sup>14</sup>

Carey’s book landed like a bombshell. It’s safe to say that it changed the trajectory of Baptist history, and even of world history. Later that year, on October 2, 1792, a group of fourteen Baptist ministers, including William Carey, John Ryland, Andrew Fuller, William Staughton, formed the “Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen” (later renamed the Baptist Missionary Society).

### *Carey’s Missionary Efforts*

A year later, in 1793, Carey left England for India. He would never return home again, dying in 1834 among the people he had given his life to reach with the gospel. In India, Carey preached, taught, and translated the Bible into Sanskrit. During his years in India, he translated the Bible into Bengali, Oriya, Marathi, Hindi, Assamese, and Sanskrit, as well as completing partial translations into 29 other languages and dialects.

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<sup>10</sup> “If a temple is raised for God in the heathen world, it will not be by might, nor by power, nor by the authority of the magistrate, or the eloquence of the orator; but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts” (77).

<sup>11</sup> Carey, 78-79.

<sup>12</sup> Carey, 81.

<sup>13</sup> Carey, 82-83.

<sup>14</sup> Carey, 84.

### *Personal Suffering*

Carey faced periods of depression and loneliness. He suffered the loss of his wife Dorothy, and, when he remarried, his second wife died as well. He buried three children on the field, faced constant illness, and labored for seven years before seeing his first Indian convert baptized.<sup>15</sup>

Three years before his death, he wrote this letter to his son,

“I am this day seventy years old, a monument of Divine mercy and goodness, though on a review of my life I find much, very much, for which I ought to be humbled in the dust; my direct and positive sins are unnumerable, my negligence in the Lord’s work has been great, I have not promoted his cause, nor sought his glory and honor as I ought, notwithstanding all this, I am spared until now, and am still retained in his Work, and I trust I am received into the divine favor through him. I wish to be more entirely devoted to his service, more completely sanctified and more habitually exercising all the Christian graces and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness to the praise and honor of that savior who gave his life a sacrifice for sin.”<sup>16</sup>

When Carey died on June 9, 1834, these simply words were inscribed on his tombstone: “A wretched, poor, and helpless worm, on thy kind arms I fall.”<sup>17</sup>

His son Eustace recounted in his biography of his father, “He once said to me: ‘Eustace, if, after my removal, any one should think it worth his while to write my life, I will give you a criterion by which you may judge of its correctness. **If he give me credit for being a plodder he will describe me justly. Anything beyond that will be too much. I can plod. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything.**’”<sup>18</sup>

His strong Calvinist beliefs did not stop his missionary zeal. His life was spent for the sake of Christ and the gospel. And his life and writings inspired a generation of

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *Ten Who Changed the World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2012), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Eustace Carey, *Memoir of William Carey, D, D.: Late Missionary to Bengal, Professor of Oriental Languages in the College of Fort William, Calcutta* (Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, 1836), 566-567.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 573.

<sup>18</sup> Eustace Carey, *Memoir of William Carey, D, D.: Late Missionary to Bengal, Professor of Oriental Languages in the College of Fort William, Calcutta* (Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, 1836), 623.

missionaries, not only from England, but from the United States of America, which is where we turn next.

→ **Discussion prompt:** *Carey talked about being a plodder. What is the importance of perseverance in missions?*

## II. Adoniram Judson and the Rise of American Missions

If William Carey is the father of the modern missions movement, Adoniram Judson is the father of the American Baptist missionary movement.

*Adoniram Judson (1788 - 1850)*

Judson was born on August 9, 1788 in Malden, MA to Adoniram Judson, Sr., a Congregational minister.<sup>19</sup> Raised in a godly and pious home, Judson was a brilliant young man, entering Brown University at age seventeen. However, in college, he abandoned his godly roots and embraced skepticism and Deism under the influence of his close friend, Jacob Eames.<sup>20</sup> (Deists admitted the existence of God but denied his revelation in the Scriptures, and thereby ever cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith). Graduating as the valedictorian his class, Judson returned home to teach, all the while keeping his rejection of Christianity a secret from his parents. Eventually finding his father's preaching and their family religion oppressive to his skepticism, he resolved, on his twentieth birthday, to travel to New York City and take up a life on the stage, perhaps becoming a writer. Now, at that time, New York City was known as the pit of immorality. When he told his parents his plans, they were incredulous. As they pressed him on his calling, his devotion to the Lord, he suddenly exploded: denouncing his parents' faith as wishful thinking and foolish mysticism, quickly overpowering his father's best arguments, and smugly reducing him to sorrowful silence.<sup>21</sup>

Leaving behind his weeping mother and broken father, Judson quite literally demanded his inheritance in the form of a horse, and set out for New York City. There, however, all his hopes of worldly glory and sensuality came to nothing.

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<sup>19</sup> Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987), 33.

<sup>20</sup> Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987), 33.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, 38.

After months of trying to make his way, not altogether unlike the Prodigal Son, he resolved to return home.

On the way home from New York City, Judson entered an inn, only to learn that the only room available was next to the room of a dying man. The innkeeper warned him that it might make for an unpleasant night. “No,” said Judson, still committed to his philosophical stoicism, “A few sounds next door won’t deny me a night’s rest.”

But all night long, he tossed and turned, unable to sleep next to the low voices, footsteps coming and going, and cries and wails of the dying man.

Eventually falling asleep, he woke as if a new man, chuckling to himself at his weakness the night before. As he settled the bill, he was surprised to hear from the manager that the man next to him had died. “Dead?” Judson asked, “did you know him?”

“Oh yes,” the manager replied. “He was a young man from the college in Providence. Name was Eames, Jacob Eames.”<sup>22</sup>

Deeply shaken, Judson returned home, renounced his deism, and from that point onward, his whole life changed. He enrolled in Andover Theological Seminary, receiving a special dispensation to enter as an unbeliever, and during his first semester Judson was converted.<sup>23</sup>

In his second year of seminary, Judson became aware of the need for world missions. He read about William Carey who had brought the gospel to Serampore, India, and begun translating the Bible into Bengali.<sup>24</sup> As he studied geography and the nations of the East, Judson soon resolved to become a missionary to the kingdom of Burma: a completely unreached Buddhist country.

The next few years were busy for Judson: He graduated seminary, married a young woman named Ann (“Nancy”),<sup>25</sup> (**NOTE: read this footnote; it is powerful**) and

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<sup>22</sup> Anderson, 44.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, 50.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Before marrying Ann, Luther sent the now legendary letter to her father asking his permission:

I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure,



along with several other students, including Luther Rice, organized the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the first organization in the United States committed to sending missionaries around the world.<sup>26</sup>

On February 19, 1812, Judson set sail aboard the *Caravan* with his wife Ann Judson, Luther Rice, and Samuel and Harriett Newell. Their plan was to travel to Serempore, unite with William Carey, and go from there to establish a mission in Rangoon, Burma.

On the boat to India, however, Adoniram Judson began to wrestle with the issue of baptism. See, they were Congregationalists, and like Jonathan Edwards, they practiced infant baptism. But Judson knew he would be soon meeting William Carey, this legendary Baptist, famed for his knowledge of Scripture, and began to investigate Scripture with regard to the question of baptism. And do you know what happened? Judson became a Baptist! So did Luther Rice, who was on the same boat as Adoniram and Ann. The other missionaries were on a separate boat. So upon their arrival, some months later, there was the awkward realization that they could no longer work together.

The result was that Luther Rice was sent home, to raise funds for the Judson's mission, but this time from the *Baptist* churches, leading to the founding of the first national Baptist organization, the Triennial Convention in 1814.

### Ministry in Burma

Arriving in Burma on July 13, 1813, the Judsons spent the next ten years learning the language and sharing the gospel. During this time Judson began developing a

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and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?

Cited in Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987), 83.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 94

grammar and dictionary of the Burmese language and translating the New Testament. He shared the gospel widely and printed and distributed thousands of tracts.<sup>27</sup> He began to hold public discourses, following the style of the Burmese religious teachers—sitting on the ground in an open tent and inviting passersby to stop and converse. On June 27, 1819—six years into his ministry—he baptized his first convert. By 1822, he could count eighteen converts after 10 years.<sup>28</sup>

Everything changed in 1824 when a war broke out between Great Britain and Burma. Suspected of being a British spy by the Burmese government who could not distinguish between an American and a Brit, on June 8, 1824,<sup>29</sup> Judson was thrown into what was called a “death prison”: a hut with no ventilation where over fifty prisoners of both sexes were bound in fetters and kept in putrid conditions.<sup>30</sup> At night, their feet were tied to bamboo shafts and lifted off the ground so that only their shoulders remained on the ground, to prevent them from escaping. Fed only scraps of rice, amidst illness, beatings, and cruel treatment, Judson began to die.

Meanwhile, his dear wife Ann did her best to secure his release, trying every relationship, every friendship, even personally appealing to the Queen and King. But there was something else. Ann was pregnant. On January 26, 1825, Maria Elizabeth Butterworth Judson was born.<sup>31</sup> What would it have been like for Judson, in fetters, to see his wife approach the fenced in prison, carrying his baby girl in her arms?

As time wore on, the war worsened, the economic effects began to be felt by the Burmese. Food prices rose to exorbitant prices. One day she came to the prison with her baby, and told Adoniram that she had no food. Moreover, smallpox and various illnesses were going around, and, as Judson languished in prison, Ann began to succumb to illness. That is when Adoniram got news that Ann was dying. Taking pity on him, the prison warden allowed Judson to leave, still in shackles and under guard, to take his baby daughter Maria around the village, begging mothers to have compassion and nurse his little girl.

Driven nearly mad from suffering, Judson struggled to make sense of it all. His daughter was starving before his eyes; his wife was nearly dead; his translation was lost; and he seemed marked for death. But somehow, God sustained Judson’s faith.

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *Ten Who Changed the World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2012), 20-21.

<sup>28</sup> Akin, 20-21.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, 302.

<sup>30</sup> Anderson, 304.

<sup>31</sup> Anderson, 330.

And miraculously, baby Maria held on to life. And eventually, Ann too began to recover.<sup>32</sup> How much of what sustained the Judsons through those dark days, was due to the prayers of believers thousands of miles away, who although they would not have known the particulars, knew the Lord, and knew that He would answer their prayers. Finally, on December 31, 1825, Judson was released from prison. He had been in prison since June 1824—over a year and a half.<sup>33</sup>

For the next twenty-five years, Judson labored tirelessly in Burma. Tragically, while Ann survived his imprisonment, she soon succumbed to spinal meningitis and died less than a year after his release.<sup>34</sup> His daughter Maria followed her mother less than a year after.<sup>35</sup> She was two years and three months. Before her death, Ann had written a book entitled, *A Particular Relation of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire*, which was published in Washington D.C. in 1823, by a publishing company called Mission Press, started by Luther Rice for the sake of bringing attention to world missions.<sup>36</sup>

Shortly after her death, in 1829, James Knowles wrote the *Memoir of Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah*.<sup>37</sup> Together these two books went through hundreds of printings, and were best-sellers in America, inspiring thousands to give themselves to the missionary cause. I recently read a memoir of a Baptist pastor's wife, named Sally Merriam Waits, who recounted how it was reading about Ann Judson's faith and faithfulness, that proved a lifelong encouragement for her in her own discipleship of Christ and marriage to a pastor.<sup>38</sup> As fruitful as the Judson's work was abroad, Tribble speculates that "it could be argued that foreign missions had [an even] greater impact in saving souls in America," as "thousands of [men and] women read the stories about Ann Judson... vowing to follow in their footsteps."<sup>39</sup>

→ **Application:** Read missionary biographies. Like a chiropractic workout—that realigns the whole body on life, death, suffering and eternity.

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<sup>32</sup> Anderson, 351.

<sup>33</sup> Anderson, 352.

<sup>34</sup> Anderson, 369-370.

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, 380.

<sup>36</sup> Ann Hasseltine Judson, *A Particular Relation of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire: In a Series of Letters, Addressed to Joseph Butterworth* (J. S. Meehan, 1823).

<sup>37</sup> James Davis Knowles, *Memoir of Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah* (Lincoln & Edmands, 1829).

<sup>38</sup> Mary C. Tribble, *Pious Ambitions: Sally Merriam Wait's Mission South, 1813-1831*, First edition, America's Baptists (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2021), 8-9.

<sup>39</sup> Tribble, 9.

How has God used Christian biographies in general or missionary biographies in particular to challenge you and grow your faith?

Finally, one anecdote from Scottish missionary John G. Paton: when Paton announced his intention of bringing the gospel to the islands of New Hebrides, one older gentleman famously exclaimed, “The Cannibals! you will be eaten by Cannibals!”<sup>40</sup> But Paton replied,

“Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.”<sup>41</sup>

→ **Application question:** How do you see the three characteristics of historic evangelical missions—Word-focused, Church-centric, Faithfulness-oriented—portrayed in the lives of Carey, Judson, and Paton?

## Conclusion

As evangelicals following in the footsteps of William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and John Paton, and countless others. We understand that the responsibility of the Great Commission falls on us.

That means that all of us are called to support missions. (1) For some of us, that means giving, learning, and praying like Luther Rice did for Judson. (2) For others of us that means considering going.

In Philippians 2:17, Paul writes “Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.”

The fact is that all of us are pouring our lives out. Day by day, drip by drip.

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<sup>40</sup> John Paton, *John G. Paton: An Autobiography* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2009), 56.

<sup>41</sup> John Paton, *John G. Paton: An Autobiography* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2009), 56.

Carey, Judson, Paton—they poured their lives out for the gospel. What are you pouring your life out for?

Let's pray.