Expect Great Things, Attempt Great Things:  
The Life and Ministry of William Carey

It has been well-noted by a historian that “The history of Christian missions is the story of God employing individual believers to spread the Gospel message around the world.” Such is the historical legacy of William Carey. His story is not his story as much as it is His story — the work of God in using redeemed men to redeem unredeemed men for the glory of God. So, just who was this man used by God, and what might believers today learn of God from his life?

A brief overview of Carey’s life

William Carey was born on August 17, 1761 in the tiny village of Paulerspury in England.

He died, at the age of 72, on June 9, 1834 in Serampore, India — just over 170 years ago.

He was born into a humble and poor family. His father was a schoolteacher, though he himself would receive only the equivalent of an elementary school education. And yet God used this man of humble means, background, education and status, to revolutionize world missions and to make an impact on the world that is still being felt.

One great irony of Carey’s life is that almost no original biblical or theological works of his remain in existence (apart from his many translations). There are no manuscripts of any of his sermons. He left no theological writings, except his Enquiry, which he wrote as a 30-year-old, prior to leaving England. In contrast, the collected writings (primarily sermons) of C. H. Spurgeon filled 63 volumes and totaled between 20 and 25 million words — the equivalent of the entire 27-volume collection of the Encyclopedia Britannica, 9th edition. Consequently, most of what is known about Carey’s theology is gleaned from his journal, which he kept during his first two years in India (1793-1795) and through his many letters. In large part, his personal writing reveals that which motivated his ministry and that which sustained him when discouragement set in, and ultimately, how God prospered him in his ministry.

Several life events are particularly helpful in understanding the man of God that Carey was.

When Carey was a mere 11 years of age, he went to work as an apprentice for a shoemaker named Clarke Nichols. Nichols had another apprentice by the name of John Warr, who became a Christian and then began to influence Carey with the gospel. Carey’s first response was resistance, but then over time, Carey too, became overwhelmed with a sense of his sin, and trusted Christ for forgiveness. In 1779 Carey and Warr, still working for Nichols, were graciously allowed to introduce the dying man to the Savior, Jesus Christ. “His death-chamber was changed into a soul’s birthplace.”
Subsequent to Nichols’ death, Carey was sent to work for another cobbler (who was a relative of Nichols) and thereby was introduced to other believers in the neighboring town of Olney. Through these influences, Carey came to be baptized by pastor John Ryland Jr. on October 5, 1783. At the time, the significance of Carey’s profession of faith was lost on the participants. Ryland himself wrote of that event some 30 years later,

5 October, 1783, I baptised in the Nene, just beyond Doddridge’s meeting-house, a poor journeyman-shoe-maker, little thinking that before nine years elapsed he would prove the first instrument of forming a society for sending missionaries from England to the heathen world, and much less that later he would become professor of languages in an Oriental college, and the translator of the Scriptures into eleven different tongues. [This would later total about 41.]

During this same time, Carey met and married Dorothy Plackett on June 10, 1781. She was five years older than him and illiterate (she signed their marriage license with an “X”). Yet she came from a puritan home and the first years of their marriage were happy. Carey would later baptize Dorothy, as he would also baptize his other two wives, Charlotte and Grace.

Two other significant events took place in those years. The first was the publication of the adventures of Captain Cook in the South Seas. Those writings captured Carey’s attention on two fronts: they appealed to his sense of adventure and they ignited within him a passion to be a missionary. Yet he himself was skeptical about the prospects of mission work in any area of the world.

It is very unlikely that any measure of this kind should ever be seriously thought of, as it can neither serve the purpose of public ambition nor private avarice; and, without such inducements, I may pronounce that it will never be undertaken.

The roots of his own later trouble with the British East India Trading Company and the government of Great Britain are revealed in that statement. The dominant interest in going to new lands was founded on financial purposes, and missionary endeavors were seen as a hindrance to the financial development of those new areas. In addition to this resistance was the reluctance of churches to engage in evangelism.

The second significant event of those years was Carey’s movement into the pastorate. While he began preaching soon after his baptism, his ordination was a difficult one. The church at Olney initially rejected him in 1785. It was another year before that congregation ordained him with “unanimous satisfaction.” Through that ordination, he was named pastor of a church in the town of Moulton. In many ways, those too were difficult years: the initial rejection of his ordination was compounded by the death of his daughter Ann in the third year of his marriage. And Carey and his wife were so very poor that it took three jobs for Carey to support his family: pastor, cobbler, and village teacher.

Yet these also were highly formative years spiritually, and the seeds of his passion for mission work grew strong. In his cobbler’s workshop, Carey made a large homemade map of the world and began collecting data on the world’s population. This later was incorporated into his 87-page book, An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of
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. This "little piece," as Carey called it, would become the manifesto of the modern missionary movement. 16 His passion for the salvation of the lost is seen throughout the document, but perhaps most boldly in his statement, "I question whether all are justified in staying here, while so many are perishing without means of grace in other lands." 17

This work was finally published in early 1792. Later that year, on May 31, 1792, Carey was asked to speak to a group of pastors from an association of 24 churches. He chose as his text Isaiah 54:2-3. His chosen text follows that of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. In this chapter, the prophet details the saving work of that suffering servant — a work that will expand the influence and descendants of Israel, God’s chosen nation. 18 It may be that Carey was encouraged to pick this text by lines written by William Cowper,

\[
\text{Behold at Thy commanding word,}
\]
\[
\text{We stretch the curtain and the cord. 19}
\]

Regardless of his inspiration, there is no doubting the clarion call of Carey that day. 20 It was offered in few, passionate, poignant words: “Expect great things; attempt great things.” While no copy of that sermon remains, those words have been repeated often in the context of missions and the spiritual life. The meaning is abundantly clear — God is the provider of all and many great things, and on the basis of those truths, the believer is to attempt similarly great things that will bring honor and glory to the name of God.

The next day, the association was about to dismiss, yet without having done anything in response to Carey’s petition for evangelism and missions. The man who was gripped by the heartache of unregenerate men going to hell rose and asked one more passionate question: “Is there nothing again going to be done, sir?” 21 Unable to avoid Carey’s voice any longer, the pastors agreed to form a plan “against the next minister’s meeting at Kettering, for forming a Baptist Society for propagating the gospel among the heathen.” 22

This formation of that society would in a short time offer a significant influence on the world.

In November of that same year (1792), this society received a letter from John Thomas, who had already served eight years as a doctor and missionary in India and was looking for someone to return to India with him to continue together in ministry. Carey was the obvious choice of the society, and in June of 1793, he left England with his wife and children, her sister, and John Thomas and his family. None of them would ever see England again. All died in India, Carey after almost 41 years of labor there.

What was the result of Carey’s ministry in India? He either translated or directly oversaw and edited 41 partial or complete translations of the Bible. 23 He was instrumental in the planting of Lall Bazar Chapel in Calcutta in 1809 — a church that continues in ministry to this day, now under the name Carey Baptist Church. During his ministry they oversaw the opening of over 100 schools for the Biblical education of Indians. The man who had an elementary education was given a doctorate in linguistics and served as a Department Chairman of the Fort William
College in Calcutta for 30 years (from 1801 until 1830). He also was instrumental in the abolition of infanticide, abortion, slavery and sati in India. And by the time of his death in 1834, there were 50 missionaries serving in 18 mission stations in India.

Carey was a simple, common man who was used by God for remarkable purposes. His life was marked by the simple statement made in his 31st year: “expect great things; attempt great things.”

**Biblical principles that guided Carey’s life**

To gain encouragement and wisdom from the life of this man, the question “What were the truths that sustained Carey in pursuing a new course of ministry?” must be asked. A review of his journals, letters, and some of the more than 50 biographies that have been written about him reveal a number of Biblical principles that provided his passion and stability.

Carey’s journals and letters are permeated with trust in the working of God in his life. Whether that difficulty brings “ease” or “difficulty,” Carey regularly saw both as the gracious workings of God and thus saw both as God’s blessing in his life.

It is seen in one of his earliest writings, a journal entry on the day of his departure from England to India on June 13, 1793: “After being prevented from going on the ‘Oxford’ (by reason of the abominable East India Monopoly) we embarked by divine providence in the Cron Princess Marie, a Danish ship.” Providence it was indeed, as they were attempting to enter India without the permission of the British government, making them “illegal aliens.” But traveling on a Danish ship allowed them to enter India without harassment from the East India Trading Company.

His letters and journal regularly sound notes similar to that of May 1, 1794. Written at a time when he was not yet settled in a permanent spot in India, John Thomas had proved unfaithful with their finances leaving Carey and his family living in virtual poverty while Thomas had 8-12 servants. Yet Carey wrote, “I find that support in God which I can find no where else, and perhaps these trials are designed to put me upon trusting in and seeking Happiness from the Lord alone.”

So, when Carey was sent by the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Heathen (hereafter referred to simply as “the Society”) to India instead of to Tahiti as had been his original dream (having been influenced by the writings of Captain Cook), Carey was wholly content (and holy content). And when it was that three of his children died (Ann and Lucy both at two years of age in England and Peter at five years of age in India), Carey could still be content with God’s sovereign working. When the death of Peter put his wife Dorothy “over the edge” emotionally — into an “insanity” from which she would never recover, still Carey was at peace with God’s work. On the death of his beloved second wife, Charlotte, he honored the name of God. When nearly 20 years of work were destroyed in one night by a fire at their printing presses, Carey did not despair as one who had no hope.
Even believers in Christ may become overly distraught over having to endure something “bad” and miss something “good.” Carey rightly observed in a letter to his sisters that neither he nor we are good judges of “good” and “bad:”

Be assured that I have borne a share of all your trials and afflictions, and have blessed the Lord for supporting you so graciously. I have no doubt but the present dispensations of Divine Providence are those which are the most united to your good of all others, had it not been so you would not have been exercised with them; for no good thing will be withheld from them who walk uprightly. We are the worst possible judges of what things are really good things, for we generally suppose ease, prosperity, friends, and external enjoyments health and plenty to be good things, whereas they may be either good or evil according to circumstances.

God’s judgement of what things are good, therefore, frequently differs from ours, for he often bestows those external, apparently good things on his Enemies, and visits his saints with poverty, disappointment, afflictions, contempt, and many other things supposed by us to be evil. He, however, well knows these external evils to be necessary to the substantial good of his servants, and were not this the case they would not be exercised under them; for be doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the Children of Men. I rejoice that you have both been enabled to commit your ways to the Lord; persevere in that cause and all will be well. The joy of the Lord will be your strength.33

Over and over, Carey gives evidence to the truth of God: “Why should the nations say, ‘Where, now, is their God?’ But our God is in the heavens; He does as He pleases” (Ps. 115:2-3). And there is contentment that results from one who sees God is graciously over every event and action of life: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

A second Biblical principle that shaped Carey’s life was his love for and dependence on Scripture. This sentiment was well-expressed in a letter to Jabez, who had departed the mission at Serampore to engage in translation work elsewhere: “The success of your labours does not depend upon outward ceremony nor does your right to preach the Gospel or administer the ordinances of the Gospel depend on any such thing but only on the divine call expressed in the word of God.”34

His commitment to the Scriptures was revealed not only in the astounding number of translations that he himself did or oversaw, but also as early as his Enquiry. The entire second article of this document is comprised of a brief exposition of the book of Acts: why should believers go to the “heathen” with the truth of the gospel? Because this is the Biblical command and pattern of Scripture itself. “Why was Carey so committed to a Bible-centered approach to missions? Because he knew that the Word of God was full of living power. Time and again he witnessed the transforming effect of the simple reading of the Scriptures on the people of India, steeped as they were in the fables and false theologies of their culture.”35 His ministry was ordered around the prayer of Jesus, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17).

It was this commitment to the Scriptures that led to Carey’s consuming passion to see those who were dead in their sin to come to know Christ as Savior and redeemer. The translations were the tool; the goal was conversions.36 His journal and letters reverberate with deep heartache over those who were dying without the knowledge of Christ.
…if there is anything engages my heart in prayer to God it is that the Heathen may be converted…\textsuperscript{37}

O may my Heart be prepared for our Work — and the Kingdom of Christ set up among the poor Hindus.\textsuperscript{38}

I wish that we might see some good fruit of our Labours — and doubt not but we shall soon have some reason to rejoice in the Salvation of God.\textsuperscript{39}

…in the Evening had a long conversation with two or three Hindus about the things of God. I first shewed them a translation of the ten Commandments, with which they were much delighted: I tried then to make them understand how contrary the second Commandment was to their practice — and as I could try to tell them of the sinful, helpless state of man — and the willingness of God to save — but my imperfect knowledge of the Language makes me liable to mistake their meaning when they speak — and to be misunderstood by them.\textsuperscript{40}

…the uncivilized state of the heathen, instead of affording an objection against preaching the gospel to them, ought to furnish an argument for it.\textsuperscript{41}

His heart was consumed with Christ’s great commission.\textsuperscript{42} So deeply did he believe in this responsibility being for today that he said that if the command was only for the apostles, then so too was the promise of Christ’s “divine presence in this world…limited” to the apostles.\textsuperscript{43}

A fourth guiding Biblical principle in his life was his trust in the practice of prayer. This is seen again in \textit{An Enquiry}.

The most glorious works of grace that have ever taken place have been in answer to prayer… If an holy solicitude had prevailed in all the assemblies of Christians on behalf of their Redeemer’s kingdom, we might probably have seen before now not only an “open door” (2 Cor. 2:12) for the gospel, but “many running to and fro, and knowledge increased” (Dan. 12:4); or a diligent use of those means which Providence has put in our power accompanied with a greater than ordinary blessing from heaven.

Many can do nothing but pray, and prayer is perhaps the only thing in which Christians of all denominations can cordially and unreservedly unite…\textsuperscript{44}

Yet by this he did not mean to pray and not work (which would be akin to the theology of John Ryland, Sr.). He explicitly notes: “We must not be contented however with praying without exerting ourselves in the use of means for the obtaining of those things we pray for.”\textsuperscript{45} His trust was in the God who answered prayer, but that was balanced by an understanding that God works through those who trust in Him.

His life of prayer afforded Carey sweet fellowship with the Savior.\textsuperscript{46} Yet he also yearned for fellowship with believers. This yearning propelled him to regularly articulate another Biblical foundation of his life — the necessity of fellowship and unity among believers.

Carey’s journal, documenting his first two years in India, particularly laments his loneliness. It is not until his next to last entry, 23 months after he began his chronicle, that he writes, “Blessed by God have at last received Letters and other Articles from our Friends in England. I rejoice to hear of the Welfare of Zion…”\textsuperscript{47}
This led him to pursue godly fellowship in two arenas, the first being fellowship with other believers. When Joshua Marshman and William Ward and their families came to live with Carey and his family at Serampore (they became affectionately known as the “Serampore Trio”), he devised a covenant that was instituted for the protection of their unity. As part of that agreement, every Saturday evening all the members of the “brotherhood” in Serampore would gather for an opportunity to air any differences that had arisen in the previous week. If the offense was not voiced during that time, there would be little comfort or help for the person who brought it up at a later time.48 The intent was for sin to be addressed quickly, and with true offers of confession and forgiveness. “Honesty, Intimacy, Equality were the watchwords for the community.”49 Help and fellowship were long in coming to Carey in India, and he did all he could to preserve their unity and fellowship.50 His quest for unity reflects the tenor of the New Testament’s emphasis on the “one another.”51

Yet fellowship, especially in the early years in India was not always possible. So he sought fellowship in another arena — the arena of the written word. He became dependent on the writings of others, standing on the shoulders of other spiritual giants to encourage his own heart. Carey, who became such a rich encouragement for others to pursue missions and ministry, fed himself at the trough of David Brainerd’s Diary, the life and ministry of John Eliot, the sermons and writings of Jonathan Edwards, and numerous others, including: John Newton, William Cowper, John Bunyan, John Flavel and Martin Luther. Like those who followed the Apostle Paul, he followed the lives of men who followed Christ.52

A sixth guiding principle for the life of William Carey was his practice of personal humility. In fact, this may have been the great key to his success.

Over and over his journals particularly are filled with honest self-examination and critique of his heart:

Still I mourn my Barrenness, and the foolish wanderings of my mind, surely I shall never be of any use among the Heathen. I feel so very little of godliness in my own Soul: It seems as if all the sweetness that I have formerly felt was gone, neither am I distressed, but a guilty calm is spread over my soul, and I seem to spend all my time and make no progress towards the desired port either in a publick or private way.53

Began the Day with uncomfortable expectations, and heart breaking views of Wretchedness, Pride, and unmortified Affections within, and Confusing appearance without…54

I feel too much sameness to be spiritual…no heart for private duties…55

My soul is prone to barrenness, and I have every day reason to mourn over the dreadful stupidity of my nature and the wickedness of my Heart, so that I need daily Cultivation from the hand of God, and from all the means of Grace.56

Were these laments and observations of his own heart accurate, or merely some form of self-pity? These comments flowed from a man who wrestled honestly with the new nature that Christ provided, yet with the flesh is that not yet “completely dead.” His journal is a reflection of Romans 7:14-25. And these sentiments and evaluations also flowed from his lifelong desire to exalt the glory of God and not the glory of William Carey.57
One account from the end of his life illustrates this central passion in his life:

On one of the last occasions on which Duff saw him — if not the very last — he spent some time talking, chiefly about Carey’s missionary life, till at length the dying man whispered ‘Pray.’ Duff knelt and prayed and said goodbye. As he passed from the room, he thought he heard a feeble voice pronouncing his name, and, turning, he found himself recalled. He stepped back accordingly, and this is what he heard, spoken with a gracious solemnity: ‘Mr Duff, you have been speaking about Dr Carey, Dr Carey; when I am gone, say nothing about Dr Carey — speak about Dr Carey’s Saviour.’

He loved his Savior and yearned for nothing of himself to detract from that. So it was that he specified in his will that his gravestone should bear only his dates and a simple pair of lines from a favorite hymn of Isaac Watts:

\[\text{A wretched, poor, and helpless worm,} \\
\text{On thy kind arms I fall.}\]

Great things come from God. Great things are attempted for God, but the greatness is always in God and not in the one who serves Him. This is an enduring lesson from William Carey’s life.

**Lessons to be learned from Carey’s life**

Two final lessons from Carey’s life may be particularly appropriate for the contemporary American church. The first is this: God uses “small people” from “small places” to accomplish His sovereign purposes

Carey was the epitome (at least from external observation) of the “ordinary man” used for extraordinary purposes by God. George says it well:

Here is his resume: education, minimal; degrees, none; savings, depleted; political influence, nil; references, a band of country preachers half a world away. What are his resources? A weapon: love; a desire: to bring the light of God into the darkness; a strategy: to proclaim by life, lips, and letters the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Cowper of Olney had said it: “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.”

What God accomplishes in the life of a man is not primarily dependent upon that man, but upon God. It is His purpose, His will, His plan, and His strength. He is not dependent upon the status, position, wealth, abilities or accomplishments of men to fulfill His eternal plan. What is necessary for those who will serve Him is to have a heart wholly yielded to God, submissive to whatever God will deign to do that life — whether “great” or “small.”

“What is there in all this world worth living for,” Carey asked, “but the presence and service of God? I feel a burning desire that all the world may know this God and serve Him.”

The second and final lesson is somewhat more painful: shepherd your family. When Carey left for India, his wife was not on board with him — either literally or spiritually. He felt the
compelling call of God to go to India, with or without his wife. As she was pregnant at the time and furthermore felt uneasy about leaving her homeland, she resisted leaving. Carey left with their son Felix and John Thomas and his family anyway, writing to his father, “I have many sacrifices to make, I must part with a beloved family and a number of most affectionate friends….But I have set my hand to the plough.”

Through the gracious and providential hand of God, the departure of Carey and Thomas was delayed until after the birth of the Carey’s child, and Thomas was finally able to persuade Dorothy to travel with them (Carey had planned on returning for her a year later, after he was settled in India). Yet Dorothy’s reluctance never abated. And the sad end of her life was that after making absurd accusations against her husband and attempting to kill him on several occasions, she was declared “insane” and was forcibly confined to her home. Again, his journal and letters reveal the sorrow that this became to him.

And in later years we see the influence of these events on his perspective on missionary families. Perhaps the pain of his own relationship with Dorothy influenced the words he wrote to his son Jabez, as Jabez left to expand their ministry elsewhere:

You are now a married man. Be not satisfied with conducting yourself towards your wife with propriety. Let love to her be the spring of your conduct towards her. Esteem her highly and so act that she may be induced thereby to esteem you highly. The first impressions of love arising from form or beauty will soon wear off but the esteem arising from excellency of disposition and substance of character will endure and increase. Her honour is not yours and she cannot be insulted without you being degraded.

Not only is his life at the Serampore mission an example to follow in pursuing unity in the body of Christ, but so also is his life with Dorothy an exhortation to pursue unity in the marriage relationship. It is a fundamental priority of the husband and father to care for those under his care in his home.

How then do we respond when standing in the shadow of a spiritual giant? Where do we go from here? What do we do now? How do we evaluate and respond to the life of a man who expected great things and also attempted great things?

One may be tempted to despair inadequacy when standing in the shadow of such a man. Do not. As a young missionary from Scotland, John Leechman, wrote back to England after witnessing Carey’s burial,

And now what shall we do? God has taken up our Elijah to heaven. He has taken our master from our head today. But we must not be discouraged. The God of missions lives for ever. His cause must go on. The gates of death, the removal of the most eminent, will not impede its progress, nor prevent its success. Come: we have something else to do than mourn and be dispirited. With our departed leader all is well. He has finished his course gloriously. But the work now descends on us. Oh, for a double portion of the divine Spirit!

To honor the legacy of Carey most, honor his Savior most. His Savior, our Savior, will be honored when we expect great things from His hand, and attempt great things for His glory.
Bibliography


Written by a Baptist pastor and great-grandson of William Carey, this has long been considered the definitive work on Carey. It is well written, and quotes liberally from his letters and journals, offering a helpful and compelling portrait of William Carey.


This work contains the complete journal of William Carey, written during the first two years of his ministry in India (1793-1795). It also contains many of his letters written to family members and his friends and supporters in England during the whole of his ministry. The letters are arranged topically, which is very helpful. This book is best read in conjunction with one of the biographies.


This entire magazine is devoted to the theme “William Carey & the Great Missions Century.” It is a good summary and overview of Carey’s life. Articles cover the topics of Carey’s perseverance, his difficult family life and his first wife’s emotional problems, the secular pressures Carey faced in India, and why the 1800s were a time of explosive movements in missions. Copies may still be purchased for $5 plus postage at http://store.yahoo.com/cti/chhiis2650.html.


George is the Dean of Beeson Divinity School, and a highly respected Baptist historian. This book is most helpful for its theological perspective of Carey’s life and the inclusion of Carey’s work “An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians.”

George, Timothy. “The Life of William Carey.” This audio is available at http://resources.christianity.com/chbchenryforum/talkInfo.jhtml?id=46583&JServSessionIdroot=4cujk515x1

This is an audio file of a message given at the Henry Forum lectures at Capitol Hill Baptist Church.


This is a simply written, short (203 pp.) book that would be a good place for a young reader to begin being acquainted with Carey. This book is part of Barbour’s “Heroes of the Faith” paperback series. The books are readily available and inexpensive.
Websites:


This site offers current demographic data about the country of India.

http://www.grace.org.uk/mission/enquiry0.html

This site offers the text (without any of his charts documenting the population and religious status of the nations of the world at that time) of Carey’s document, “An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens,” commonly known as “An Enquiry.”


This paper was written for the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Carey’s “Deathless Sermon” (Is. 54:2-3), which launched the Society for Propagating the Gospel, which led to Carey’s departure a few months later to India. This paper is helpful in that it identifies a number of lessons from Carey’s life, which are indispensable even today in ministry and missions.

http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/biorpcarey.html

This site offers links to a number of other sites and sources on Carey, including the entire manuscript of the biography, *Life of William Carey: Shoemaker & Missionary*, written by George Smith in 1909 (http://www.biblebelievers.com/carey/index.html). For a time, this was considered the best biography on Carey.

http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/

This website contains an extensive listing of sources and resources on William Carey; it is an extension of the ministry of William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Their goal is to archive as much material as possible about Carey and to sponsor research about Carey. This site includes a number of books and manuscripts about Carey in .jpg files.

---

2 Despite his lack of formal education, Carey loved languages and learning; he taught himself Latin at the age of 12, simply by studying an old textbook. He also taught himself Greek by studying a borrowed Greek grammar and lexicon, and Hebrew with the help of a friend. He also taught himself to read Dutch and French. “It is known,” he said, “to require no extraordinary talents to learn, in the space of a year, or two at the most, the language of any people upon the earth, so much of it, at least, as to be able to convey any sentiments we wish to their understandings.” See Timothy George, *Faithful Witness*, Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1991, pp. 23-24.
4 See below for a more detailed discussion of this work. A .pdf version of this document is available online at a variety of places, including http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey.
6 Carey never was able to definitively document the date and time of his conversion, though he did recall that on Sunday, Feb. 10, 1779, he became a “Nonconformist,” a group of dissenters that crossed denominational lines and who were generally considered Calvinistic in their theology. This theological tradition introduced him to the writings and influence of people like John Newton, William Cowper, William Wilberforce, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, and David Brainerd — men whose writings and theology influenced him all his life. Additionally, his own work stimulated a host of other missionaries and theologians, including men like Charles Simeon and Henry Martyn. See S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey*, London: The Wakeman Trust, 1993, p. 27 and George, pp. 135-136.
The resistance to Carey’s encouragement to the church to engage in evangelizing the lost was profound. After proposing to a group of ministers that they discuss the topic “the duty of Christians to attempt the spread of the gospel among heathen nations,” John Ryland Sr., the father of the man who baptized him, is said to have responded, “Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine!” He apparently was also called a “miserable enthusiast” by another pastor for making his suggestion. See George, p. 53.

The same fever that took the life of his daughter left him prematurely bald at the age of 22. He often wore a wig to cover the baldness, but on the trip to India threw his wig overboard, and never wore one again.

At his pastorate in Leicester, they were sustained better financially, yet his schedule was no easier. In a letter to his father on Nov. 12, 1790, he wrote, “On Monday I confine myself to the study of the learned languages, and oblige myself to translate something. On Tuesday, to the study of science, history, composition, etc. On Wednesday I preach a lecture, and have been for more than twelve months on the book of Revelation. On Thursday I visit my friends. Friday and Saturday are spent in preparing for the Lord’s day; and the Lord’s day, in preaching the word of God. Once a fortnight I preach three times at home; and once a fortnight I go to a neighbouring village in the evening. Once a month I go to another village on the Tuesday evening. My school begins at nine o’clock in the morning and continues till four o’clock in winter, and five in summer. I have acted for this twelve month as secretary to the committee of dissentors and am now to be regularly appointed to that office, with a salary. Add to this, occasional journeys, ministers, meetings, etc.; and you will rather wonder that I have any time, than that I have so little.”

A sample of one of the many charts from that work is illustrated below (reproduced from George, p. E-30):

![Chart of Asia](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Length (Miles)</th>
<th>Breadth (Miles)</th>
<th>Number of Inhabitants</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isle of Ximo</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
<td>Pagans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Xicoco</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>1,800,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Tsussima</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Iki</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Kubitessima</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Matounsa</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Fastistia</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Firando</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Amaunga</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Awasi</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India, beyond the Ganges</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>50,000,000</td>
<td>Mahometans and Pagans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indostan</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>110,000,000</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>10,000,000</td>
<td>Pagans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An Enquiry, p. 73.

That influence and expansion is seen in the language “enlarge the place of your tent…stretch out the curtains…lengthen your cords…strengthen your pegs.” All these speak to a tent that must be made larger (because there are more inhabitants within it).

Carey, p. 75.

William Carey’s nephew, Eustice Carey, offered this recollection of that sermon: “After observing, by way of
introduction, that the church was here compared to a poor desolate widow, who lived alone in a small tent; that she who had thus lived in a manner childless, was told to expect an increase in her family, such as would require a much larger dwelling; and this because her Maker was her husband, whose name was not only the Lord of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel, but the God of the whole earth; he proceeded to take up the spirit of the passage in two exhortations, which he addressed to his brethren: 1. Expect great things from God; 2. Attempt great things for God. The discourse was very animated and impressive.” Eustace Carey, Memoir of William Carey, D.D.: Late Missionary to Bengal; Professor of Oriental Languages in the College of Fort William, Calcutta, Boston: Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, 1836. Accessed on http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/careymemoir/eustace.htm, June 24, 2004.

23 George, p. 33.
24 Ibid.
25 A complete listing of these translations can be found at: http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/bibles/translation.htm. See also, Carey, pp. 393-4, who says that Carey made 35 partial or complete translations. George suggest a number of approximately 40 (Faithful Witness, p. 173) or 41 (“The Life of William Carey,” audio message).
26 This is commonly known as “widow burning,” when a man’s widow would be burned alive with her husband’s remains.
27 George, xviii.
28 Carter, p. 3.
29 This is Carey’s punctuation. His journal and letters are filled with spelling, punctuation and capitalization irregularities.
30 Carter, p. 28.
31 Writing to his son Jabez about the sudden death of his son Felix (and Jabez’ brother) at the age of 37, Carey noted, “Thus, mysterious, afflicting and yet merciful are the dealings of God. It is our part to be dumb with silence because the Lord has done it.” [In a letter dated November 12, 1822 in Carter, p. 290.]
32 In a letter to his sisters, October 5, 1795 (not quite two years after having arrived in India), Carey wrote: “I told you before I believe of the Afflictions of my Wife, and Felix, and the Death of Peter - the two first are through mercy recovered; and Mrs. Carey is near having another little one, but I have greater Afflictions than any of these in my Family; known to my Friends here, but I have never mentioned it to any one in England before – – in my poor Wife — who is looked upon as insane to a great Degree by both Natives and Europeans. I believe there may be something of that, and perhaps much; but I have been for some time past in some Danger of losing my Life. — jealousy is the great Evil that Haunts her mind — tho blessed be God. I never was so far from temptation to any evil of that kind in my Life.– – But her misery, and Rage is extreme. Europeans have repeatedly talked to her, but in vain, and what may be the end of all God alone knows. Bless God all the dirt which she throws is such as cannot stick, but it is the Ruin of my Children to hear such continual accusations.” [Carter, p. 281; my emphasis.]
33 As difficult as his marriage to Dorothy was, his 13-year marriage to Charlotte was great sweetness and delight to him. Yet on her death, he wrote to his friend John Ryland, “My loss is irreparable but still I dare not but perfectly acquiesce in the divine will. So many merciful circumstances attend this very heavy affliction as still yield me support beyond anything I ever felt in other trials.” [Letter dated, June 14, 1821 in Carter, p. 289.]
34 Immediately after the fire, Carey commented to a friend, “How unsearchable are the divine ways! I had lately brought some things to the utmost perfection that I could, and contemplated the Mission with, perhaps, too much self-congratulation. The Lord has laid me low, that I may look more simply to Him.” So the following Sunday, the appropriate text was obvious to Carey: “Be still, and know that I am God.” His outline? Very simple: “1. God’s right to dispose of us as He pleases. 2. Man’s duty to acquiesce to His will.” So he could also write home, “Much ground must be laboured over again, and I have suffered most. But we are not discouraged. We are chastened and not killed; cast down, but not destroyed; perplexed, but not in despair.” [Carey, pp. 286-7.]
35 Letter, October, 1818 in Carter, p. 270.
36 Letter dated January 24, 1814 in Carter, p. 132; my emphasis.
37 George, pp. 173-4.
38 Joshua Marshman, the partner of Carey in Serampore called the first 2,000 copies of the Bengali New Testament “2,000 missionaries.” [George, p. 139.]
40 Journal, November 9, 1793 in Carter, p. 7. This was written shortly before they left the ship and entered India.
42 May 5, 1794 in Carter, p. 29.
43 Enquiry, p. 69.
44 Matt. 28:18-20 — “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven.
and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.””
43 Enquiry, p. 9.
44 Enquiry, pp. 78, 80.
45 Enquiry, p. 81.
46 His journal has numerous entries like “A Day of Sacred Pleasure; the Conversion of the Heathen & the setting up of Christ’s Kingdom has been a pleasant theme of Contemplation” [March 13, 1794; Carter, p. 18.] and “Yet I will glory in the God, I will rejoice in the God of my Salvation” [March 25-28, 1794; Carter, p. 21] and “Still a time of Enjoyment of God; I feel that it is good to commit my Soul, my Body, and my all into the Hands of God, Then the World appears little, the Promises great; and God an allsufficient Portion.” [April 14, 1794; Carter, p. 25.]
47 May 9, 1795 in Carter, p. 59.
48 George, p. 122.
49 George, p. 123.
50 In his ministry, Carey also endured several serious instances of broken fellowship: with the Society in England after the death of his strong supporter and friend, Andrew Fuller (the Society accused them of misuse of funds, when Carey and the others were self-supporting, taking no regular funds from the Society after August of 1794 — a mere 9 months after his arrival in England); the temporary departure of the first Indian convert, Krishna Pal; with a group from Serampore who departed to form their own mission agency in Calcutta. Of this group, he wrote to John Ryland, Jr. on October 4, 1818, “…I do not recollect any thing in my whole life which has given me so much distress as this Schism in the Mission has done. Many sleepless nights have I spent examining what we had done to give occasion for it; but can discover nothing on which I can fix; The Mission is, however, rent in twain, and exhibits the scandalous appearance of a body, half of which is divided against the other half, and doing everything possible to wound their feelings. We could easily vindicate ourselves, but that vindication would be our and their disgrace. We have, therefore, resolved to say nothing for ourselves, but leave the matter in the Hand of God. I hope my penning out these my distresses into the bosom of an old, and much beloved Friend, will not be accounted a deviation from this resolution. The division of the Mission, distressing as it is, is a much smaller evil than that crippling every effort to spread the Gospel which results from it.” [Carter, p. 123; my emphasis.]
51 Fifty-eight times in the Epistles the words “one another” or “each other” are used with a variety of imperatives such as: minister to,… serve…, accept…, build up…, encourage… These words emphasize the truth that we in the body of Christ need each other and were made by God for each other.
52 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1.
53 March 1, 1794 in Carter, p. 17.
54 April 20, 1794 in Carter, p. 27.
56 February 1, 1795 in Carter, p. 51.
57 He lived the contrast of Romans 3:23-24 — “All have sinned…being justified as a gift by His grace.” His sin condemned him, yet in acknowledging the sin, he received the gracious redemption found in Christ alone.
58 Carey, p. 374.
60 George, p. 93.
61 George, p. 162.
62 George, p. 74.
63 Two examples suffice: in a letter to his friend Andrew Fuller, on November 16, 1796 (just three years after arriving in India), he wrote: “Poor Mrs. Carey cannot I think be a greater burden than she is. She has even attempted my Life. Mr. [Thomas] has been a too unhappy witness of this conduct…” [Carter, p. 281.] And following her death, Carey wrote Fuller on January 14, 1808, saying, “On the 8th of December past, it pleased God to remove my wife by death. She, poor woman, had been in a state of most distressing derangement of mind for this last twelve years; indeed [terms] of her mind was such, as prevented her from feeling even those ideal pleasures which sometimes attend maniacal persons.” [Carter, p. 287.]
64 Letter dated January 24, 1814 in Carter, p. 130.
65 Ephesians 5:26, 28; Colossians 3:19; 4:21; 1 Timothy 5:8.
66 Carey, p. 383.