



BAPTISTS AND MISSIONS

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19-20

Baptists throughout the world are committed to missions.

The word “mission” means to be sent to carry out an assigned task. When used by Baptists it means to be sent by Jesus to carry out the assignment of sharing the gospel with all persons everywhere. It means to go beyond the familiar to the unfamiliar in order to share the Good News.

In a way, all Christians are “on mission,” that is sent by Jesus to tell others about him. But missions involves something more, such as going to persons who speak a different language, or have a different culture, or live in a different geography near or far, or are of a different race—and going for the specific purpose of sharing the gospel with them. **Being sent by Jesus on mission is part of what it means to follow him as Lord (John 20:21).**

The Background of Baptist Missions

Today, Baptists are a missionary people. This has not always been the case, especially regarding missions to people in distant places and different cultures. At one time, Baptists focused on evangelizing people nearby who were much like themselves in terms of language, culture, and geography.

In the late 1700s, however, worldwide missions began to be a vital part of Baptist life. In England a leader in this change was William Carey, a pastor-teacher-shoe cobbler. Carey was a student of both the Bible and of the cultures of the world. His study of the Bible led him to believe that God wanted people everywhere to hear the gospel.

A number of Baptists, convinced of Carey’s position, joined him in establishing the Baptist Missionary Society in the fall of 1792 in England. The following year Carey along with Dr. John Thomas, a surgeon, set sail for India as missionaries of the Society. With them were Carey’s wife Dorothy and their four children.

In America, Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann Hasseltine Judson, along with Luther Rice who was single, were originally appointed as Congregational missionaries but became Baptist missionaries. On their voyage to India in 1812 and after their arrival, they studied the New Testament and on the subject of baptism they came to question the Congregational practice of infant baptism. Baptists, who already had missionaries in India, practiced believer’s baptism by immersion. This careful study of the Bible led the Judsons and Rice to embrace the Baptist view, a sacrificial move in that it cost them the support of the Congregationalists.

Shortly after their baptism by immersion and becoming Baptists, the Judsons traveled to Burma (later called Myanmar) to share the gospel there. Luther Rice returned to the United States to solicit support from Baptists for missions.

Largely as a result of his efforts, **Baptists formed their first national organization in 1814; it was devoted to missions.**



Baptists continued their efforts in local and nationwide missions but they also became a worldwide missionary people. **Today, scores of Baptist missionary organizations in many countries send and support thousands of missionaries in all parts of the world.**

Bases for Missions

Most Baptists insist that the Bible's teachings make missions mandatory, not optional, and that voluntary cooperation by individuals and churches for missions is in accord with the practice of New Testament churches. They establish organizations to carry out missions both in their own country and on a worldwide scale in response to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

Belief in the Lordship of Christ is basic for Baptists. **Christ as Lord commanded that the gospel be taken to all people everywhere (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)**. Furthermore, Jesus set an example for missionary endeavor and bids his disciples to follow him (Matthew 4:19; 16:24; Luke 9:59; 1 Peter 2:21).

Baptists believe that the Bible is authoritative for doctrine and polity. **The Bible is a missionary book**, not just a book about missions. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible sets forth God's desire that all the people of the world know him and his salvation (Genesis 12:1-3; Revelation 5:9; 7:9). Sharing this good news requires that Christians be sent to spread the word of salvation (Romans 10:8-15). They go in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) with the knowledge that whosoever believes in Jesus can be saved (John 3:16; Romans 10:13).

"The rankest heresy can be guilty to its missionary"

H. E. Dana, *A Man*

The Bible records that **the early followers of Christ affirmed missions**. They declared that the gospel was for everyone, everywhere. They matched their words with deeds. The first churches sent out missionaries who surmounted barriers of geography, language, and culture in spreading the gospel (Acts 13:11–28:31). We are to follow their example.

Types of Missionary Activity

Mission activity includes personal witnessing and church starting as well as various forms of ministry such as medical, educational, and agricultural. All of these involve sharing the gospel.

Missions used to be thought of just in terms of specific locations, and missionaries were sent to work in local, associational, regional, national, and international locales. While this still often is the case for doing missions, geography no longer is considered the only organizing principle. **Wherever people without the gospel are located, there is a need for missions.**

At one time, Christians sent to do missions were expected to make mission service a lifetime career. **Career, full-time missionaries still are a vital part of missions**. However, many other individuals are involved in missions, such as short-term mission appointees and volunteers.

In the past, churches primarily were involved in missions by sending money for missions and urging Christians to serve as missionaries. Funds were provided directly

to missionaries or to missions organizations that commissioned and supported missionaries. Churches continue to do these things, but **many churches also conduct missions activities through the involvement of their members.** They regularly send groups to conduct various kinds of mission service both locally and in distant places. Every church ought to be a missionary church.

In addition to churches, **Baptist schools, childcare institutions, and medical centers** carry out mission service. Baptist organizations comprised of volunteers function effectively in missions.

Baptists around the world increasingly are involved in missions. Once many areas were only on the receiving end of missions, but they have become vitally involved in sending missionaries.

One aspect of this international missions involvement is the **partnering of Baptist entities** in one area with Baptist entities in another in order to expand missions efforts.. Churches, associations of churches, conventions, and other Baptist organizations are involved in various kinds of partnerships. Some of these are for limited periods of time while others are ongoing. Denominational organizations are available to assist in coordinating these efforts.

...of which a church ignore or repudiate its obligation."

Journal of Ecclesiology

Support for Missions

Baptists support missions in various ways.

Churches send a portion of tithes and offerings received from members to missionary organizations, finance their own missionary activities, and urge Christians to consider if

God is calling them to missionary service.

Various Baptist denominational entities help support missions.

Missionary boards and societies provide training and support for career missionaries as well as volunteers. Conventions and unions encourage financial and prayer support for missions. Women's and men's organizations are effective in missionary education, prayer, fund raising, evangelism, and ministry. Colleges, universities, and seminaries provide training for missionaries, sponsor missions conferences, and provide courses on missions.

Individual Baptists play a major role in missions support. They pray for and encourage missionaries, give to support missionaries and mission activity, engage personally in mission efforts, and share their sons and daughters to carry out missions.

The financial support for missions by Baptists always is voluntary. However, continual appeals are made for people to give sacrificially for mission support. The Baptist denomination has developed various ways to channel voluntary gifts for missions.

Challenges for Missions

Challenges continue to exist for missions as in the past. Some of the challenges come from within the Baptist family:

- Extreme views on predestination and on church autonomy diminish support for missions.

- Individuals and churches with an inward focus rather than a worldwide view can fail to carry out the Bible's missionary imperative.
- Conflicts within the denomination threaten to divert attention from missions and to undermine support for missions.
- Resistance to innovative ways of doing missions impedes effective missionary activities.
- Failure to provide adequate funds and personnel to meet the vast mission need in the world thwarts efforts to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

On the other hand, **a bewildering complex of trends creates serious external challenges:**

- Rising nationalism often combined with a resurgence of world religions obstructs mission endeavors in many places.
- Various worldviews that hinder evangelism, such as materialism, relativism, and universalism, also adversely affect missions.

Conclusion

Advancements in transportation and communication have opened up means of sharing the gospel that were not even dreamed of by early Baptists. The Internet and satellite telecommunication enable the gospel to be delivered to hitherto unreachable people groups in "all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Jet travel makes it possible for a multitude of persons to take evangelism and ministry to "the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8) on a scale never before achievable.

Baptists have written and are writing a huge chapter in the story of missions. However, **much yet needs to be done.** Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few." That still is true. So let us pray, as Jesus instructed, that the Lord of the harvest "will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

As never before Baptists need to work in, give to, and pray for the mission fields of the world in order for God to use them to make a difference in the lives of millions.

For further information, see www.baptistdistinctives.org

The basic material in this leaflet originally appeared in a series of articles in the *Baptist Standard* in 2005. Wanting to share information about Baptist distinctives, Noble Hurley, shortly before his death in 2004, established the Jane and Noble Hurley Baptist Identity Fund to provide for publishing the series. He asked William M. Pinson, Jr. and Doris A. Tinker to prepare the articles. The financial assistance of The Prichard Family Foundation and Vester T. Hughes, Jr. enabled this series of nineteen leaflets to be produced based on the articles. Skyler G. Tinker designed and formatted the leaflets for publication. Each leaflet is for both individual and group study.

The topics in this series: (1) Baptists: Who? Where? What? Why? (2) What Makes a Baptist a Baptist? (3) The Lordship of Christ; (4) The Bible as Authority for Faith and Practice; (5) Soul Competency; (6) Salvation Only by Grace Through Faith; (7) The Priesthood of All Believers; (8) Believer's Baptism; (9) A Regenerate Church Membership; (10) Congregational Church Governance; (11) Church Autonomy; (12) Baptist Church Life: Organization, Worship, Officers, Ordinances; (13) Voluntary Cooperation; (14) Evangelism; (15) Missions; (16) Ministry; (17) Christian Education; (18) The Application of the Gospel; (19) Religious Freedom.

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