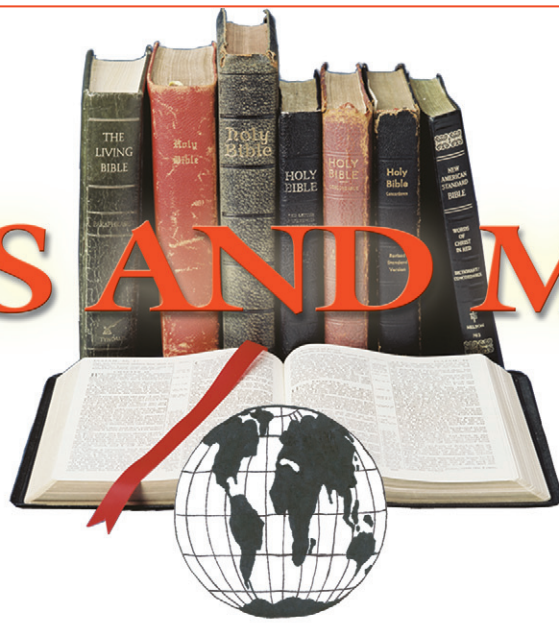


BAPTISTS AND MISSIONS



Baptists throughout the world are committed to missions and evangelism. The two terms are interrelated but distinct. Evangelism involves sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with people in word and deed. While it is true that every Christian is “on mission,” missions involves **sending** people to share the gospel with people with whom they normally would have no contact. **Being sent by Jesus on mission is part of what it means to follow him (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. A leader in this change was **William Carey**, a bivocational pastor in England. Carey was a brilliant student of both the Bible and the languages and cultures of the world. His study of the Bible led him to believe God wanted people everywhere to hear the gospel. Other Baptists joined together to establish the Baptist Missionary Society in the fall of 1792. The society commissioned Carey to India as a missionary.

The spirit of missions spread to America. Ann Hasseltine Judson and her husband, **Adoniram**, along with **Luther Rice** were appointed as Congregational missionaries to India in 1812. On the sea voyage to India and shortly afterward, a careful study of the Bible led them to become Baptists. Rice returned to the United States to solicit support from Baptists for the Judsons. Largely as a result of his efforts, Baptists formed their first national organization; it was devoted to missions.

Baptists continued their efforts in local and home missions but also began to be 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 on a worldwide scale.

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 us 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 its beginning in Genesis (12:1-3) to its conclusion in Revelation (5:9; 7:9) the Bible sets forth God’s desire that all the people of the world know him and his salvation. Sharing this good

“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

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 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 ff). 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 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, geography no longer is considered the only organizing principle. **Wherever people without the gospel are located, there is a site 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 now 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. Today, churches continue to do these things, but many also are **directly involved in missions activities.** They regularly send groups to conduct various kinds of mission service. Denominational organizations are available to assist in coordinating these efforts.

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

Baptists around the world increasingly are involved in missions. Once many areas were only on

“The rankest heresy of which a church can be guilty is to ignore or repudiate its missionary obligation.”

H. E. Dana, *A Manual of Ecclesiology*, p.233

the receiving end of missions, but today they also are vitally involved in sending missionaries.

Support for Missions

Baptists support missions in various ways. **Churches** send a portion of tithes and offerings 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 organizations are effective in missionary education, prayer, fund raising and mission action. 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, and share their sons and daughters to carry out missions.

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

Challenges to Missions

Challenges exist for missions today as in the past. **Some of the challenges come from within the Baptist family.** Extreme views on predestination and on local-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. Conflict within the denomination threatens to divert attention from missions and to undermine support for missions.

On the other hand, a bewildering complex of trends creates serious external challenges. Rising nationalism combined with a resurgence of world religions obstructs missions endeavors in many places. Various worldviews that hinder evangelism, such as materialism, relativism and universalism, also affect missions. Doing missions in outdated ways reduces effectiveness.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is to garner adequate funds and personnel to meet the huge mission need in the world. Jesus said, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.” That still is true today. So let us pray, as Jesus instructed, that the Lord of the harvest “will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38).

Conclusion

Baptists have written and are writing a huge chapter in the story of missions. However, much yet needs to be done. As Baptists work in, give to and pray for the mission fields of the world, God can use them to make a huge difference in the lives of millions.

For further information on Baptists and missions, see www.baptistdistinctives.org.