

Containing a Short Review of Former Undertakings for the Conversion

by William Carey

The sermon describes the early church and the spread of Christianity through the apostles' preaching and missionary work.

Scripture: Acts 2:1, Acts 3:1, Acts 6:1, Acts 8:1, Acts 9:1, Acts 16:6, Acts 20:17, Acts 28:23

Topics: "Church Growth", "Missionary Work"

Description

William Carey preaches about the spread of Christianity from the early days of the apostles to the modern missionaries, highlighting the challenges faced, the miraculous conversions, and the relentless efforts to bring the gospel to all nations. The sermon covers the growth of the church from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, the persecution faced by the apostles, the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus, the dispersion of the church, and the missionary journeys of Paul and his companions.

Transcript

BEFORE the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ the whole world were either heathens, or Jews; and both, as to the body of them were enemies to the gospel. After the resurrection the disciples continued in Jerusalem til Pentecost. Being daily engaged in prayer and supplication, and having chosen Matthias, to supply the place of Judas in the apostolic office, on that solemn day, when they were all assembled together, a most remarkable effusion of the Holy Spirit took place, and a capacity of speaking in all foreign languages was bestowed upon them. This opportunity was embraced by Peter for preaching the gospel to a great congregation of jews and proselytes, who were from Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, the proconsular Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Lybia, Crete, Arabia, Rome &c and at the first effort God wrought so powerfully that three thousand were converted, who immediately after were baptized, and added to the church. Before this great addition they consisted of but about an hundred and twenty persons, but from that time they continually increased.

It was but a little after this that Peter and John, going up to the temple, healed the lame man; this miracle drew a great multitude together, and Peter took occasion while they stood wondering at the event, to preach Jesus Christ to them. The consequence was that five thousand more believed. This was not done without opposition; the priests and Sadducees tried all the methods they could invent to prevent them from preaching the gospel. The apostles, however, asserted their divine warrant, and as soon as they were set

at liberty addressed God, and prayed that a divine power might attend their labours, which petition was heard, and their future ministry was very successful. On account of their necessities who were engaged in this good work, those amongst them who had possessions, or goods, sold them, and devoted the money to pious uses. About this time a man and his wife out of great pretensions to piety, sold an estate, and brought part of the money to the apostles, pretending it to be the whole; for which dissimulation both he and his wife, were struck dead by the hand of God. This awful catastrophe however was the occasion of many more men and women being added to the church. The miracles wrought by the apostles, and the success attending their ministry, stirred up greater envy in the priests and Sadducees, who imprisoned them; from which confinement they were soon liberated by an angel; upon which they went immediately as they were commanded and preached in the temple; here they were seized, and brought before the council, where Gamaliel spake in their favour, and they were dismissed. After this they continued to prosecute their work, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ.

By this time the church at Jerusalem was so increased that the multiplicity of its temporal concerns was the occasion of some neglects, which produced a dissatisfaction. The apostles, therefore, recommended to the church to choose seven pious men, whose office it should be to attend upon its temporal affairs; that they might give themselves to prayer, and the ministry of the word. Seven were accordingly chosen, over whom the apostles prayed, and ordained them to the office of Deacons by imposition of hands: and these things being settled the church increased more and more. One of these Deacons, whose name was Stephen, being a person of eminent knowledge and holiness, wrought many miracles, and disputed with great evidence and energy for the truth of Christianity, which raised him up a number of opponents. These soon procured his death, and carried their resentment so far as to stir up such a persecution that the church, which till now had been confined to Jerusalem, was dispersed, and all the preachers except the apostles were driven thence, and went everywhere preaching the word.

A young man whose name was Saul, was very active in this persecution; he had been educated under Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin, was a person of promising genius, by profession a Pharisee, and much attached to the Jewish ceremonies. When Stephen was stoned he appeared much pleased with it, and had the custody of the clothes of his executioners; and from that time was fired with such a spirit of persecution himself, that he went about dragging some to prison, and compelling others to blaspheme the name of the Lord Jesus. Neither was he contented with exercising his rage at Jerusalem, but went to the chief priests and obtained testimonials of authority to carry on the same work at Damascus. But on his way, as he was almost ready to enter into the city, the Lord changed his heart in a very wonderful manner; so that instead of entering the town to persecute, he began to preach the gospel as soon as he was able. This presently brought upon him the same persecution which he had designed to exercise upon others, and even endangered his life, so that the brethren found it necessary to let him down the city wall in a basket by night, and so he escaped the hands of his enemies. From thence he went to Jerusalem where he preached the word, but being persecuted there, he went to Cesarea, and from thence to Tarsus. In the time of this trouble in the church, Philip went and preached at Samaria with great success, nay so great was the work that an impostor, who had deceived the people with legerdemain tricks for a long time was so amazed, and even convinced, as to profess himself a Christian, and was baptized; but was afterwards detected, and appeared to be an hypocrite. Besides him a great number believed in reality, and being baptised a church was formed there.

Soon after this the Lord commanded Philip to go the way which led from Jerusalem to Gaza, which he did, and there found an eunuch of great authority in the court of Ethiopia, to whom he preached Christ, who

believed, and was baptized; after which Philip preached at Ashdod, or Azotus. About the same time Peter went to Lydda, or Diospolis, and cured Eneas of a palsy, which was a mean of the conversion not only of the inhabitants of that town, but also of the neighbouring country, called Saron, the capital of which was Lasharon; and while he was there, a circumstance turned up which tended much to the spread of the truth. A woman of Joppa, a sea-port town in the neighbourhood, dying, they sent to Lydda for Peter, who went over, and when he had prayed she was raised to life again; which was an occasion of the conversion of many in that town. Peter continued there preaching for some time, and lodged at the house of a tanner.

Now another circumstance also tended to the further propagation of Christianity, for a Roman military officer who had some acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures, but was not circumcised, was one day engaged in prayer in his house at Cesarea, when an angel appeared to him, and bid him send for Peter from Joppa to preach in his house. Before this the work of God had been wholly confined to the Jews, and Jewish proselytes, and even the apostles appeared to have had very contracted ideas of the Christian dispensation; but now God by a vision discovered to Peter that Christianity was to be spread into all nations. He accordingly went and preached at the house of Cornelius, at Cesarea, when several were converted, and baptized, and the foundation of a church laid in that city. Some of the dispersed ministers having fled to Antioch in Syria, began to preach to the Greeks in that city about the same time, and had good success; upon which the apostles sent Paul and Barnabas, who instructed and strengthened them, and a church was formed in that city also, which in a little time sent out several eminent preachers.

In the Acts of the apostles we have an account of four of the principal journeys which Paul, and his companions undertook. The first, in which he was accompanied by Barnabas, is recorded in the 13th and 14th chapters, and was the first attack on the heathen world. It was a journey into the lesser Asia. In their way they passed over the island of Cyprus. No sooner had they entered on their undertaking, than they met with great difficulty; for Mark, whom they had taken as their minister, deserted them, and returned to Jerusalem, where, it seems, he thought he should enjoy the greatest quiet. Paul and Barnabas however went forward; in every city they preached the word of the Lord, entering into the Jewish synagogues and first preaching Christ to them, and then to the gentiles. They were heard with great candour and eagerness by some, and rejected by others with obstinacy and wrath, and cruel persecution. One while they had enough to do to restrain the people from worshipping them as gods, and soon after, Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. Having penetrated as far as Derbe, they thought proper to return by the way that they came, calling at every city where they had sown the good seed, and finding in most, if not all these places, some who had embraced the gospel, they exhorted and strengthened them in the faith, formed them into a church state, and ordained them elders, fasted and prayed with them; and so having commended them to the Lord on whom they had believed, returned to Antioch in Syria, from whence they first set out, and rehearsed to the church all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the gentiles.

About this time a dispute arising in the churches concerning circumcision, Paul and Barnabas were deputed to go up to Jerusalem, to consult the apostles and elders on the subject. This business being adjusted, they, accompanied with Judas and Silas, returned to Antioch with the general resolution, and continued there for a season, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord. Paul now proposed to Barnabas, his fellow-labourer, that they might visit their brethren in the places where they had been already, and see how they did. To this Barnabas readily acceded, but a difference arising between them about taking John Mark with them, who had deserted them before, these two eminent servants of God were parted asunder, and never appear to have travelled together any more. They continued however

each to serve in the cause of Christ, though they could not walk together. Barnabas took John and sailed to Cyprus, his native island, and Paul took Silas, and went through Syria and Cilicia, to Derbe and Lystra, cities where he and Barnabas had preached in their first excursion.

Here they found Timothy, a promising young man, whom they encouraged to engage in the ministry. Paul being now at Lystra, which was the boundary of his first excursion, and having visited the churches already planted, and delivered to them the decrees of the apostles and elders relating to circumcision, seems to have felt his heart enlarged, and assayed to carry on the glorious work of preaching the gospel to the heathen to a greater extent. With Silas and Timotheus he in his second journey [footnote: The account of this second journey into the heathen world begins at Acts 15:40 and ends chapter 18:22.] took a western direction, passing through Phrygia, and the region of Galatia. Having preached the word in these parts with considerable success, [footnote: See ch. 18:23 and Gal 1:2.] he and his companions wished to have gone into the proconsular Asia, and afterwards assayed to go into Bythinia; but being forbidden of the Holy Ghost, who seems to have had a special design of employing them elsewhere; passing by Mysia they came down to Troas on the sea-coast. Here a vision appeared to Paul, in which he was invited to go over to Macedonia. Obedient to the heavenly vision, and greatly encouraged by it, they with all speed crossed the Aegean sea, and passing through the island of Samothracia, landed at Neapolis, and went from thence to Philippi, the chief city of that part of Macedonia. It was here that Paul preached on a Sabbath day to a few women by a river side, and Lydia, a woman of Thyatira, was converted and baptized, and her household with her. It was here that a poor girl, who brought her employers considerable profit by foretelling future events, followed the apostles, had her spirit of divination ejected, on which account her masters were much irritated, and raised a tumult, the effect of which was, that Paul and Silas were imprisoned. But even this was over-ruled for the success of the gospel, in that the keeper of the prison, and all his house, were thereby brought to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and were baptized. From Philippi they passed thorough Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, (now Salonichi,) Berea, Athens, and Corinth, preaching the gospel wherever they went. From hence Paul took ship and sailed to Syria, only giving a short call at Ephesus, determining to be at Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover; and having saluted the church, he came to Cesarea, and from thence to Antioch.

Here ended Paul's second journey, which was very extensive, and took up some years of his time. He and his companions met with their difficulties in it, but had likewise their encouragements. They were persecuted at Philippi, as already noticed, and generally found the Jews to be their most inveterate enemies. These would raise tumults, inflame the minds of the gentiles against them, and follow them from place to place, doing them all the mischief in their power. This was the case especially at Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. But amidst all their persecutions God was with them, and strengthened them in various ways. At Berea they were candidly received, and their doctrine fairly tried by the Holy Scriptures; and therefore, it is said, many of them believed. At other places, though they affected to despise the apostle, yet some clave unto him. At Corinth opposition rose to great height; but the Lord appeared to his servant in a vision, saying, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace, for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city. And the promise was abundantly made good in the spirit discovered by Gallio, the proconsul, who turned a deaf ear to the accusations of the jews, and nobly declined interfering in matters beside his province. Upon the whole a number of churches were planted during this journey, which for ages after shone as lights in the world.

When Paul had visited Antioch, and spent some time there, he prepared for a third journey into heathen countries, the account of which begins Acts 18:23, and ends chap. 21:17. At his first setting out he went

over the whole country of Galatia and Phrygian order, strengthening all the disciples; and passing through the upper coasts came to Ephesus. There for the space of three months, he boldly preached in the Jewish synagogue, disputing, and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when the hardened jews had openly rejected the gospel, and spake evil of that way before the multitude, Paul openly separated the disciples from them, and assembled in the school of one Tyrannus. This, it is said, continued for the space of two years, so that all they who dwelt in the proconsular Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Certain magicians, about this time were exposed, and others converted, who burnt their books, and confessed their deeds. So mightily grew the word of the Lord, and prevailed. After this an uproar being raised by Demetrius, the silversmith, Paul went into Macedonia, visited the churches planted in his former journey, and from thence passed into Greece. Having preached up and down for three months, he thought of sailing from thence directly to Syria; but in order to avoid the jews, who laid wait for him near the sea coast, he took another course through Macedonia, and from thence to Troas, by the way of Philippi. There is no mention made in his former journey of his having preached at Troas; yet it seems he did, and a church was gathered, with whom the apostle at this time united in breaking of bread. It was here that he preached all night, and raised Eutychus, who being overcome with sleep, had fallen down, and was taken up dead. From hence they set sail for Syria, and in their way called at Miletus, where Paul sent for the elders of the church of Ephesus, and delivered that most solemn and affectionate farewell, recorded in the 20th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. From hence they sailed for Tyre, where they tarried seven days, and from thence proceeded to Jerusalem.

Paul's fourth and last journey (or rather voyage) was to Rome, where he went in the character of a prisoner. For being at Jerusalem he was quickly apprehended by the jews; but being rescued by Lysias, the chief captain, he was sent to Cesarea to take his trial. Here he made his defence before Felix and Drusilla, in such sort that the judge, instead of the prisoner, was made to tremble. Here also he made his defence before Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice, with such force of evidence that Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a Christian. But the malice of the jews being insatiable, and Paul finding himself in danger of being delivered into their hands, was constrained to appeal unto Caesar. This was the occasion of his being sent to Rome, where he arrived after a long and dangerous voyage, and being shipwrecked on the island of Melita, where he wrought miracles, and Publics, the governor, was converted. When he arrived at Rome he addressed his countrymen the jews, some of whom believed; but when others rejected the gospel, he turned from them to the gentiles, and for two whole years dwelt in his own hired house preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Thus far the history of the Acts of the Apostles informs us of the success of the word in the primitive times; and history informs us of its being preached about this time, in many other places. Peter speaks of a church at Babylon; Paul proposed a journey to Spain, and it is generally believed he went there, and likewise came to France and Britain. Andrew preached to the Scythians, north of the Black Sea. John is said to have preached in India, and we know that he was at the Isle of Patmos, in the Archipelago. Philip is reported to have preached in upper Asia, Scythia, and Phrygia; Bartholomew in India, on this side the Ganges, Phrygia, and Armenia; Matthew in Arabia, or Asiatic Ethiopia, and Parthia; Thomas in India, as far the coast of Coromandel, and some say in the island of Ceylon; Simon, the Canaanite, in Egypt, Cyrene, Mauritania, Lybia, and other parts of Africa, and from thence to have come to Britain; and Jude is said to have been principally engaged in the lesser Asia, and Greece. Their labours were evidently very extensive, and very successful; so that Pliny, the younger, who lived soon after the death of the apostles, in a letter to the emperor, Trajan, observed that Christianity had spread, not only through towns and cities,

but also through whole countries. Indeed before this, in the time of Nero, it was so prevalent that it was thought necessary to oppose it by an Imperial Edict, and accordingly the proconsuls, and other governors, were commissioned to destroy it.

Justin Martyr, who lived about the middle of the second century, in his dialogue with Trypho, observed that there was no part of mankind, whether Greeks or barbarians, or any others, by what name soever they were called, whether the Sarmatians, or the Nomades, who had no houses, or the Scenites of Arabia Petrea, who lived in tents among their cattle, where supplications and thanksgivings are not offered up to the Father, and maker of all things, through the name of Jesus Christ. Irenaeus, who lived about the year 170, speaks of churches that were founded in Germany, Spain, France, the eastern countries, Egypt, Lybia, and the middle of the world. Tertullian, who lived and wrote at Carthage in Africa, about twenty years afterwards, enumerating the countries where Christianity had penetrated, makes mention of the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Armenians, Phrygians, Cappadocians, the inhabitants of Pontus, Asia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the regions of Africa beyond Cyrene, the Romans, and Jews, formerly of Jerusalem, many of the Getuli, many borders of the Mauri, or Moors, in Mauritania; now Barbary, Morocco, &c. all the borders of Spain, many nations of the Gauls, and the places in Britain which were inaccessible to the Romans; the Dacians, Sarmatians, Germans, Scythians, and the inhabitants of many hidden nations and provinces, and of many islands unknown to him, and which he could not enumerate. The labours of the ministers of the gospel, in this early period, were so remarkably blessed of God, that the 1st-mentioned writer observed, in a letter to Scapula, that if he began a persecution the city of Carthage itself must be decimated thereby. Yea, and so abundant were they in the three first centuries, that ten years constant and almost universal persecution under Diocletian, could neither root out the Christians, nor prejudice their cause.

After this they had great encouragement under several emperors, particularly Constantine and Theodosius, and a very great work of God was carried on; but the ease and affluence which in these times attended the church, served to introduce a flood of corruption, which by degrees brought on the whole system of popery, by means of which all appeared to be lost again; and Satan set up his kingdom of darkness, deceit, and human authority over conscience, through all the Christian world.

In the time of Constantine, one Frumentius was sent to preach to the Indians, and met with great success. A young woman who was a Christian, being taken captive by the Iberians, or Georgians, near the Caspian Sea, informed them of the truths of Christianity, and was so much regarded that they sent to Constantine for ministers to come and preach the word to them. About the same time some barbarous nations having made eruptions into Thrace, carried away several Christians captive, who preached the gospel; by which means the inhabitants upon the Rhine, and the Danube, the Celtae, and some other parts of Gaul, were brought to embrace Christianity. About this time also James of Nisbia, went into Persia to strengthen the Christians, and preach to the heathens; and his success was so great that Adiabene was almost entirely Christian. About the year 372, one Moses, a Monk, went to preach to the Saracens, who then lived in Arabia, where he had great success; and at this time the Goths, and other northern nations, had the kingdom of Christ further extended amongst them, but which was very soon corrupted with Arianism. Soon after this the kingdom of Christ was further extended among the Scythian Nomades, beyond the Danube, and about the year 430, a people called the Burgundians, received the gospel. Four years after that Palladius was sent to preach in Scotland, and the next year Patrick was sent from Scotland to preach to the Irish, who before his time were totally uncivilized, and, some say, cannibals; he however, was useful, and laid the foundations of several churches in Ireland.

Presently after this, truth spread further among the Saracens, and in 522, Zathus, king of the Colchians encouraged it, and many of that nation were converted to Christianity. About this time also the work was extended in Ireland, by Finian, and in Scotland by Constantine and Columba; the latter of whom preached also to the Picts, and Brudaeus, their king, with several others, were converted. About 541, Adad, the king of Ethiopia, was converted by the preaching of Mansionarius; the Heruli beyond the Danube were now made obedient to the faith, and the Abafgi, near the Caucasian Mountains. But now popery, especially the compulsive part of it, was risen to such an height, that the usual method of propagating the gospel, or rather what was so called, was to conquer pagan nations by force of arms, and then oblige them to submit to Christianity, after which bishoprics were erected, and persons then sent to instruct the people. I shall just mention some of those who are said to have laboured thus.

In 596, Austin, the monk, Melitus, Justus, Paulinus, and Ruffinian, laboured in England, and in their way were very successful. Paulinus, who appears to have been one of the best of them, had great success in Northumberland; Birinnius preached to the West Saxons, and Felix to the East Angles. In 589, Amandus Gallus laboured in Ghent, Chelenus in Artois, and Gallus and Columbanus in Suabia. In 648, Egidius Gallus in Flanders, and the two Evaldi in Westphalia. In 684, Willifred, in the Isle of Wight. In 688, Chilianus, in upper Franconia. In 698, Boniface, or Winifred, among the Thuringians, near Erford, in Saxony, and Willibrood in West-Friesland. Charlemagne conquered Hungary in the year 800, and obliged the inhabitants to profess Christianity, when Modestus likewise preached to the Venedi, at the source of the Save and Drave. In 833, Ansgarius preached in Denmark, Gaudibert in Sweden, and about 861, Methodius and Cyril in Bohemia.

About the year 500, the Scythians over-run Bulgaria, and Christianity was extirpated; but about 870 they were re-converted. Poland began to be brought over about the same time, and afterwards, about 960 or 990, the work was further extended amongst the Poles and Prussians. The work was begun in Norway in 960, and in Muscovy in 989, the Swedes propagated Christianity in Finland, in 1168, Lithuania became Christian in 1386, and Samogitia in 1439. The Spaniards forced popery upon the inhabitants of South-America, and the Portuguese in Asia. The Jesuits were sent into China in 1552. Xavier, whom they call the apostle of the Indians, laboured in the East-Indies and Japan, from 1541 to 1552, and several missions of Capauchins were sent to Africa in the seventeenth century. But blind zeal, gross superstition, and infamous cruelties, so marked the appearances of religion all this time, that the professors of Christianity needed conversion, as much as the heathen world. A few pious people had fled from the general corruption, and lived obscurely in the valleys of Piedmont and Savoy, who were like the seed of the church. Some of them were now and then necessitated to travel into other parts, where they faithfully testified against the corruptions of the times.

About 1369 Wickliffe began to preach the faith in England, and his preaching and writings were the means of the conversion of great numbers, many of whom became excellent preachers; and a work was begun which afterwards spread in England, Hungary, Bohemia, Germany, Switzerland, and many other places. John Huss and Jerom of Prague, preached boldly and successfully in Bohemia, and the adjacent parts. In the following century Luther, Calvin, Melancton, Bucer, Martyr, and many others, stood up against all the rest of the world; they preached, and prayed, and wrote; and nations agreed one after another to cast off the yoke of popery, and to embrace the doctrine of the gospel.

In England, episcopal tyranny succeeded to popish cruelty, which, in the year 1620, obliged many pious people to leave their native land and settle in America; these were followed by others in 1629, who laid the foundations of several gospel churches, which have increased amazingly since that time, and the

Redeemer has fixed his throne in that country, where but a little time ago, Satan had universal dominion. In 1632, Mr. Elliot, of New-England, a very pious and zealous minister, began to preach to the Indians, among whom he had great success; several churches of Indians were planted, and some preachers and school-masters raised up amongst them; since which time others have laboured amongst them with some good encouragement.

About the 1743, Mr David Brainerd was sent a missionary to some more Indians, where he preached, and prayed, and after some time an extraordinary work of conversion was wrought, and wonderful success attended his ministry. And at this present time, Mr. Kirkland and Mr. Sergeant are employed in the same good work, and God has considerably blessed their labours.

In 1706, the king of Denmark sent a Mr. Ziegenbalg, and some others to Tranquebar, on the Coromandel coast in the East-Indies, who were useful to the natives, so that many of the heathens were turned to the Lord. The Dutch East-India Company likewise having extended their commerce, built the city of Batavia, and a church was opened there; and the Lord's Supper was administered for the first time, on the 3rd of January, 1621, by their minister James Hulzibos, from hence some ministers were sent to Amboyna, who were very successful. A seminary of learning was erected at Leyden, in which ministers and assistants were educated, under the renowned Walaeus, and some years a great number were sent to the East, at the Company's expense, so that in a little time many thousands at Formosa, Malabar, Ternate, Jaffanapatnam, in the town of Columba, at Amboyna, Java, Banda, Macassar, and Malabar, embraced the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The work has decayed in some places, but they now have churches in Ceylon, Sumatra, Java, Amboyna, and some other of the spice islands, and at the Cape of Good Hope, in Africa.

But none of the moderns have equalled the Moravian Brethren in this good work; they have sent missions to Greenland, Labrador, and several of the West-Indian islands, which have been blessed for good. They have likewise sent to Abyssinia, in Africa, but what success they have had I cannot tell. The late Mr. Wesley lately made an effort in the West-Indies, and some of their ministers are now labouring amongst the Caribs and Negroes, and I have seen pleasing accounts of their success.

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