

Why William Carey?

By Dr. Phil Stringer

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The William Carey Bible Society is devoted to promoting world evangelism by encouraging pure Received Text Bibles around the world.

It is a fair question to ask why an organization with such a purpose would be named after William Carey.

Carey was a shoemaker, Baptist pastor, missionary, Bible translator and educator.

Carey was born in 1761 and baptized in 1783. He went to India as a missionary in 1793. He served 41 years without a furlough. He died and was buried in India in 1834.

Carey studied at least one chapter of the Bible every day in each of six languages: English, Koine Greek, Latin, French, German and Italian.

He has been called the Bengali Luther, the Wycliffe of the East, the Tyndale of our Time, the Polyglot of India, and a Plodder for Christ. He is commonly known as the Father of Modern Missions. He has been called the greatest linguist who ever lived.

He served as a Professor of Oriental Languages at a secular University (Fort William College, which became Calcutta University). He started a Bible college, a medical hospital, a leper hospital, and a Christian liberal arts university, which accepted non-Christian students.

His mission teams translated the Bible into forty languages and dialects—seven complete Bibles and thirty-three New Testaments. They also produced eight grammars and three dictionaries. Carey produced four translations himself (Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit). He worked with other missionaries on translations and he supervised other translation efforts. In all of these efforts, the advice and aid of nationals was incorporated.

We live in a day of great confusion about the issues of Bible translation. William Carey serves as a great example of dedication, scholarship and clear thinking about Bible translation. He serves as a great example of accomplishment in the realm of Bible translations.

There are many who teach today that we must pick between world evangelism and the pure Word of God. They teach that any emphasis on accurate, faithful Bible translation will destroy the focus on soul winning. Yet, William

Carey was more successful in influencing soul winning than all of those leaders put together. He used faithful Bible translation as a means of world evangelism. He thought that true evangelism was based upon faithful translations.

William Carey did not teach that all Bible translations must be done from Greek and Hebrew as some do today. He did not teach that all translations must be done from the King James Bible as some teach today. Carey believed in using every tool available to get faithful translations in the hands of people as soon as possible. He did not participate in anything similar to the debates that are discouraging Bible translation today.

The Scriptures never tell us that translation must be done from the original languages. To teach that as a doctrine is to add to the Word of God. The Scriptures certainly do not teach that all translation must be done from English. To teach that as a doctrine is to add to the Word of God.

Faithful Bible translation has been done from Greek, Hebrew, English, German, Italian and Dutch at least. Some of the best and most effective translations have had multiple language source texts – the King James Bible for example.

Carey himself translated from Greek but also used the King James Bible especially in the Old Testament. Some of the translations associated with Carey were done from Greek and Hebrew and some from the King James Bible. Some were done from previously completed Indian translations. Carey believed in using whatever tools were available.

Carey did not believe that his translations were being inspired by God. None of his translations are in use today. He did not intend for them to be. He considered them all “starter translations” that needed to be improved upon. He wrote about gradual translation perfection. He encouraged those who followed him to continue the process of purification. William Carey was much more humble than many today who have much less record of accomplishment.

Carey’s younger associates revised all of his translations as he intended. Unfortunately, later revisions would be caught up in the campaign of the Bible Societies to replace Received Text translations with translations based upon the Critical Text. Translation work needs to be redone all over India and Pakistan.

Carey never belittled scholarship. Many of the loudest voices in the Bible translation debate today do not need to tell us that they are opposed to scholarship. It is obvious every time they speak.

Carey was able to function as a language scholar and be respected in both the secular and Hindu worlds. However, he never allowed scholarship to correct the Scriptures.

Carey did not have to engage in smear campaigns or file lawsuits to try to intimidate his critics. He promoted sound translations for the purpose of world

evangelism, answered his critics, dealt with issues and went forward. He accomplished more than all the loud voices today put together.

The cause of Christ needs a small army of “William Careys” today. Around the world, godly believers are starting to get this vision. The William Carey Bible Society exists to encourage this in every way possible.