

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

by

HAROLD R. COOK

MOODY PRESS CHICAGO

**CHAPTER TEN -
THE MISSIONARY CALL -
TESTIMONIES**

WE WISH WE KNEW about the missionary calls of all of our great missionaries. It would help us to see more clearly the many ways in which the Lord leads men into missionary work. But we don't. Only now and then do we get a clear picture of how the Lord dealt with one of them. Sometimes we have it in his own words. Sometimes we have to depend on the accuracy of his biographer.

In this chapter we are going to talk about seven great missionaries. They all lived in the past century, so their works have stood the test of time. Four of them were British and three were American. (The day had not yet come when American missionaries outnumbered all others.) They went to several fields in Africa and the Orient. And the information we have about their calls is fairly clear. We shall give their own words when we can.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

The very name Livingstone spells Africa. No missionary is better known today. Very few ever captured the imagination of their own day to such an extent.

Yet Livingstone did not at first intend to go to Africa. In fact, he didn't plan to be a missionary at all. Not that he was opposed to missions. He thought every Christian ought to be a soul-winner. It ought to be his chief desire and aim. But when it came to foreign missions, Livingstone's idea was that he would give money for it. He would give everything he earned above what he needed to live.

But that wasn't GOD's idea. One day Livingstone read an item that changed his whole purpose. Dr. Karl Gutzlaff, brilliant and devout missionary pioneer, had traveled up and down the coasts of East Asia all the way from Siam to Korea. Now he was pleading for missionaries for the great empire of China. And when Livingstone thought on those millions of Chinese without CHRIST, and on the lack of suitable workers to give them the Gospel, he decided to prepare and offer himself.

For China, did we say? Then how did he get to Africa? The Opium War did it. Livingstone prepared to be a medical missionary in China, and the London Missionary Society accepted him. But before he could sail, the war closed the door. Now what should he do? They suggested the West Indies. But he didn't think his medical training would be so useful there.

At this point Robert Moffat entered the picture. The great South Africa missionary was at home in Britain speaking about the work in that dark land.

"I had occasion to call for someone at Mrs. Sewell's, a boarding-house for young missionaries in Aldersgate street, where Livingstone lived. I observed soon that this young man was interested in my story, that he would sometimes come quietly and ask me a question or two, and that he was always desirous to know where I was to speak in public, and attended on these occasions.

By-and-by he asked me whether he would do for Africa. I said I believed he would, if he would not go to an old station, but would advance to unoccupied ground, specifying the vast plain to the north, where I had sometimes seen, in the morning sun, the smoke of a thousand villages, where no missionary had ever been.

At last Livingstone said, "What is the use of my waiting for the end of this abominable Opium War? I will go at once to Africa!" The Directors concurred, and Africa became his sphere."

JOHN G. PATON

When an author wants to write a thrilling missionary story for young people, he is very likely to turn to the life of John G. Paton. Not many can compare with it. Paton went to work among cannibals in the New Hebrides islands of the South Pacific. He lived a long life and an exciting one. And he found the time to tell about it.

Paton began as a city missionary in his native Scotland. He seemed to be doing well, but he says:

"Happy in my work as I felt, and successful by the blessing of GOD, yet I continually heard, and chiefly during my last years in the Divinity Hall, the wail of the perishing Heathen in the South Seas; and I saw that few were caring for them, while I well knew that many would be ready to take up my work in Calton and carry it forward perhaps with more efficiency than myself.

Without revealing the state of my mind to any person, this was the supreme subject of my daily meditation and prayer; and this also led me to enter upon those medical studies, in which I purposed taking the full course; but at the close of my third year, an incident occurred, which led me at once to offer myself for the Foreign Mission field.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, in which I had been brought up, had been advertising for another Missionary to join John Inglis in his grand work in the New Hebrides. Dr. Bates, the excellent convener of the Heathen Missions Committee, was deeply grieved, because for two years their appeal had failed."

He says further:

"At length, the Synod, after much prayer and consultation, felt the claims of the Heathen so urgently pressed upon them by the Lord's repeated calls, that they resolved to cast lots, to discover whether GOD would thus select any Minister to be relieved from his home-charge, and designated as a Missionary to the South Seas. Each member of the Synod, as I was informed, agreed to hand in, after solemn appeal to GOD, the names of the three best qualified in his esteem for such a work, and he who had the clear majority was to be loosed from his congregation, and to proceed to the Mission field - or the first and second highest, if two could be secured.

Hearing this debate, and feeling an intense interest in these most unusual proceedings, I remember yet the hushed solemnity of the prayer before the names were handed in. I remember the strained silence that held the Assembly while the scrutinizers retired to examine the papers; and I remember how tears blinded my eyes when they returned to announce that the result was so indecisive, that it was clear that the Lord had not in that way provided a missionary. The cause was once again solemnly laid before GOD in prayer, and a cloud of sadness appeared to fall over all the Synod.

The Lord kept saying within me, "Since none better qualified can be got, rise and offer yourself!" Almost overpowering was the impulse to answer aloud, "Here am I, send me!" But I was dreadfully afraid of mistaking my own emotions for the will of GOD.

So I resolved to make it a subject of close deliberation and prayer for a few days longer, and to look at the proposal from every possible aspect.

From every aspect at which I could look the whole facts in the face, the voice within me sounded like a voice from GOD.

JAMES CHALMERS

"Tamate," the natives called him. "The Great Heart of New Guinea," said Robert Louis Stevenson. And certainly no one had a wilder field, nor one that called for a greater heart. His first ten years in the islands farther east were tame in comparison with the years on the southeast coast of New Guinea. He lived continually in the shadow of death. A man's man. And, unlike Paton, he was finally killed and eaten by the cannibals.

Chalmers says that it was in his teens that he came to the great decision of his life:

I remember it well. Our Sunday school class had been held in the vestry as usual. The lesson was finished, and we had marched back into the chapel to sing, answer questions, and to listen to a short address.

I was sitting at the head of the seat, and can even now see Mr. Meikle taking from his breast-pocket a copy of the United Presbyterian Record, and hear him say that he was going to read an interesting letter to us from a missionary in Fiji.

The letter was read. It spoke of cannibalism, and of the power of the Gospel, and at the close of the reading, looking over his spectacles, and with wet eyes, he said, "I wonder if there is a boy

here this afternoon who will yet become a missionary, and by-and-by bring the Gospel to cannibals?" And the response of my heart was, "Yes, GOD helping me, and I will."

The unusual thing about Chalmers' call was that it came, as he says, several years before his conversion. He forgot his decision for a time and wandered far from CHRIST. Then came his conversion, his preparation for the ministry, and his city missionary work in Glasgow. He remembered his youthful vow, and after several talks with Dr. Turner of Samoa he applied to be sent to the South Pacific.

ADONIRAM JUDSON

Every American Baptist knows Judson's name. Not only was he one of the first party of missionaries to go out from the United States, but he later inspired the beginning of what is now the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. Burma was his field. He could scarcely have hit upon a harder one. Yet he came to be called "the Apostle of Burma."

According to his son, two things moved Judson to go to the mission field. After his striking conversion, he had entered Andover Seminary to prepare for the ministry. There he came in touch with Samuel Mills and other missionary-minded students. They were just a small group, but deadly in earnest. And Judson soon became as zealous as the others for the starting of an American mission society.

But it was not only the fellowship with these other students. It was also a sermon. He had already finished his first year at the seminary when he read it. The sermon had been preached in England by Dr. Claudius Buchanan, a chaplain of the British East India Company. It had for its title "*The Star in the East*" and spoke of the power and progress of the Gospel in India. Judson's son says that "this sermon fell like a spark into the tinder of Judson's soul." Six months later he made his final decision to serve CHRIST as a foreign missionary.

JOHN SCUDDER

John Scudder was the first American medical missionary to India. He went out under the earliest American society, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. But he later opened the Arcot field of the Reformed Church in America. He was also the head of one of the most remarkable missionary families in history, whose members through half a dozen generations have served as missionaries on many fields.

Scudder wanted to be a minister. But when his father strongly opposed the idea, he turned to medicine. In this field he did such good work that he soon built up a good practice and began to prosper financially. Then one day the course of his life was suddenly changed.

In the course of his practice he went to attend a Christian woman who was ill. In her room he saw a tract, *The Conversion of the World, or the Claims of Six Hundred Millions*. He became interested and asked to borrow it. At home he read it over and over, until finally he fell to his knees saying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He didn't hear an audible voice, but in his heart he knew the answer was, "Go and preach the gospel to the heathen."

But Scudder couldn't make the final decision alone. He had a wife to think of. He said to himself, "I have one to consult whose interests are blended with my own, and whose happiness may be seriously affected by my decision. I will lay the subject before her mind as it lies before mine. If she say nay, I shall regard it as settling the question of duty."

"From love to CHRIST," he added, "and a sense of duty, she decided for the life of a missionary. That purpose never gave way. It never even faltered."

At about that time the American Board advertised for a doctor who would be willing to go as a missionary, Dr. Scudder applied and was sent out.

JAMES M. THOBURN

James M. Thoburn, later Bishop Thoburn of the Methodist Episcopal Church in India, was one of the most illustrious missionaries of that Church. No one ever did more to promote the expansion of his Church in the Indian peninsula. And his efforts extended beyond India itself to other lands.

From shortly after his conversion, Thoburn says that he was repeatedly faced with the challenge of the mission field. He became a minister and was appointed to a circuit of churches. Then one day, after he had preached for about a year, the challenge came again with increased force. He had sat down to read his Church paper and was struck by the leading editorial. It was an appeal for six young men to go to India.

He writes:

"I was powerfully moved by the appeal, not so much by anything it contained as by a strong impression that I ought to be one of the six young men to go forth. I dropped the paper and fell upon my knees and promised GOD that I would accept the call if only He would make it clear that He was sending me. I asked for some token, for some definite indication that I was called from above, not only in a general way to become a missionary, but to that special field and at that special time."

Thoburn made up his mind to ask the advice of his presiding elder as soon as he saw him. When they met, the elder, not knowing what was on the young preacher's mind, remarked, "I met Bishop Janes on the train this morning."

"Bishop Janes!" Thoburn replied. "What can he be doing out here?"

"He is on his way west, looking for missionaries for India. He wants six immediately."

Thoburn's heart leaped into his throat. But before he could reply, the elder continued, "James, how would you like to go?"

"It is very singular," the young preacher replied, "but I have come here with the special purpose of asking your advice about going to India."

"Well, I must tell you that you have been in my mind all morning. I incline to think you ought to go. I have felt so ever since the bishop told me his errand."

Going to a little "prophet-chamber," Thoburn prayed for guidance. He says:

"I did not receive any message, or realize any new conviction, or come down from my sacred audience with GOD feeling that the matter was forever settled, and yet that hour stands out in my life as the burning bush must have stood in the memory of Moses. It was my burning bush. It has followed me through all the years which have passed."

ALEXANDER M. MACKAY

It was once said that Uganda was "the brightest spot on the map of Africa." The man who first sowed the Gospel in that central African kingdom was Alexander Mackay, of the Church Missionary Society. He did not live to see the great harvest, but few tales of dauntless courage and persistence are more inspiring than his life.

Mackay prepared himself to become a civil engineer. Missions was not in his mind when he left Britain for Germany to continue his studies. But he was a sincere Christian, so he was not deaf to the Lord's call when it came. And it came in a most unusual way. In a letter to his sister from Berlin he wrote:

"Well, it is through you, or what you wrote me on December 11 last, that what I now have to write you exists.

You told me then that you had been at a social meeting of our Literary Association in Chalmers Memorial Church; that there you heard Dr. Burns Thomson . . . urge young men of the Association to give themselves to the work and go out as medical missionaries. . . to Madagascar . . .

Well, I am not a doctor, and therefore cannot go as such; but I am an engineer, and propose, if the Lord will, to go as an engineering missionary. Miserable chimera you will no doubt call such an idea. Yet immediately on the receipt of your letter I wrote Dr. Bonar, offering myself to such work, and asking his advice."

A couple of months later he wrote to his father:

"Man is a violent being, by virtue of what GOD has made him. Yet man is inwardly swayed by external circumstances.

Now if to my ears or hands there comes the message, "Who will go to preach the gospel in Madagascar?" how can I, except in unbelief, say otherwise than that GOD caused that message to come to me? And if it is of GOD, must I not say, "Here am I; send me"?

The London Missionary Society was not able to use Mackay in Madagascar at the time, but in 1875 the Church Missionary Society appealed for a worker of Mackay's qualifications for East Africa near Mombasa. He saw the appeal and wrote home,

"Remembering that Duff first thought of Africa as a mission field, but was sent to India, and that Livingstone originally intended to evangelize China, but the Lord willed he should spend his life in Africa, so perhaps the Lord means me, after all, to turn my attention to the Dark Continent; accordingly I have offered my services to the C.M.S. - the greatest missionary society in the world - for Mombasa."

The C.M.S., however, had already engaged another man. But a little later there appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* Stanley's letter describing his visit to Mtesa, king of Uganda, and challenging Christendom to send missionaries to that land. The C.M.S. took up the challenge and accepted Mackay for the work.

SUMMARY

These, then, were the missionary calls of seven really great missionaries of CHRIST. No one would question that they were truly called, though the circumstances of their calling were so different from one another. In fact, one great lesson that we can learn from their testimonies is the diversity of ways in which GOD may lead.

Notice well the following facts. Not one of these missionaries saw a vision, dreamed a dream, or heard an audible voice calling him to go. All of them were influenced by reading or hearing an appeal for willing workers. Yet the appeal was general. Only Thoburn had a personal appeal made to him, and it was just one of the confirmations of his call.

But most of these men were in places where they could readily hear the call when it came. Paton, Thoburn and Chalmers were ministering at home. Judson was studying for the ministry, and Scudder had wanted to do so. Judson was also influenced by missionary-minded companions.

In six cases the call had some connection with a definite field. Yet only three actually served in those fields. The others went to different places.

From this we can see that the missionary call is not likely to come in a miraculous way. Neither does it come to all people in the same way. Rather, if we wanted to define it we should probably have to say that **the missionary call is the "great commission," plus the assurance in your heart, no matter how it comes, that GOD wants you as His witness abroad.**

~ end of chapter 10 ~
