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# CHURCH HISTORY MONTHLY

May 2021, Vol. 1, no. 5, Page 1/2

## Timeline of Topics

- Extra: Funny answers to test questions over the years
- Middle Ages
- Quote from Mechthild
- American Church History
- One reason there are so many denominations: American land
- Global South
- William Carey: "Father of Modern Missions"



Comparing the size of Texas with western Europe

<https://francistapon.com/Travels/Western-Europe/Defending-American-Ignorance>



Comparing the size of western Europe and the USA

<https://www.17thshard.com/forum/topic/55518-trans-oceanic-knowledge-exchange/>

## Why do Christians do that?: Why so many denominations but only one Bible?

Many Christians ask: if we have one Bible, why so many groups? Part of the answer lies in the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s, the limited amount of land in Europe, and the vast amount of land in America.

Look at where the different parts of the Reformation occurred: Luther in Germany; Zwingli and Calvin in Switzerland; Henry VIII in England; and Catholics remained in France, Spain, and Italy. (Anabaptists were small in number and did not control a region.) Each branch of Christianity in Europe (except for Anabaptists) controlled its own region, so new movements were difficult to create or even exist in those regions. Switch to the American colonies. The new colonists in America mimicked the situation they knew in Europe, which was all they knew. If you were Puritan, you lived in Massachusetts; Catholic in Maryland; Anglican in Virginia; and on and on. It worked in Europe, why not in America?

Yet this situation failed. Why? Because of all the land. Europe is small compared to the USA (see the maps). On the other hand, America was large and uncontrollable. Consider the Puritans as an example. The Puritans in the 1600s controlled Massachusetts. Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, while in Massachusetts, both taught ideas contrary to Puritan theology. After getting in trouble, they both did what Europeans could not do: they simply moved 100 miles away and continued practicing their beliefs and the Puritans could do nothing about it. And this is the key: the Anglicans back in England were effective in silencing the Puritans because they controlled the England. This caused many Puritans to leave England. Yet, because of the vastness of American land, the Puritans could not do the same to opposing voices in the American colonies. In the 1600s, the Puritans only had enough strength to control what occurred in Massachusetts; so Williams and Hutchinson simply moved beyond the control of the Puritans. This example illustrates how the European containment of new Christian movements was effective because of limited space, yet there was so much space in America no one group could control it all; therefore new groups sprung up like rabbits. If you disagreed strongly enough with your Christian group, you started your own and moved to another part of America. And no one could do anything about it, unlike in Europe. And this is one reason why there are so many denominations/groups in America today. The vast space in America led directly to numerous groups developing. And once the new nation of USA was formed, the idea of freedom of religion continued to impact the development of even more new Christian groups. If you disagree strongly enough with your denomination/group, you start your own and stay put. And so today we have hundreds of denominations/groups, with more developing each year.

[Based on Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis of 1893: "Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development."]

**"I cannot dance, Lord, unless you lead me.  
If you want me to leap with abandon,  
You must sing the song.  
Then I shall leap into love,  
From love into knowledge,  
From knowledge into enjoyment,  
And from enjoyment beyond all human sensations.  
There I want to remain, yet want also to circle higher  
still."**

**Mechthild of Magdeburg (d. 1280), "The Flowing  
Light of the Godhead"**

### **Funny answers to questions I have received on tests over the years**

1. List one miracle of Jesus: feeding the hungry fish
3. What is a psalm? An angel sent by god
4. Why did God tell Noah to build the Ark? To wash away the sins of the world.
5. Why did Jesus not baptize anyone? He was hydrophobic (afraid of water).
6. Abraham was circumcised after he was crucified.
7. How was Paul killed? Correct answer: beheaded. One student wrote "deheaded." (Basically, she was right, and so I gave her credit.)
9. In Titus, what did Paul say to do with a person who likes to argue?  
--Correct Answer: warn once, twice, and ask to leave  
--Student's answer: rapture him.
10. Student could not think of the phrase "The Good Samaritan" and so wrote "The story of the Jew on the ground."
11. One of the basic beliefs of Christianity: Mary had a virgin baby. (All babies are virgins.)
12. Jesus was born and placed in a bucket of hay (student could not remember "manger").
13. At the Last Supper, Jesus began what Christian ceremony?  
--Correct Answer: Communion.  
--Student's answer: Communism
14. What does incarnation mean? God was humanized. (This answer was also basically right.)

### **Free summer online classes:**

May 31: 3 weeks: How we got the NT

June 28: 3 weeks: Books not in the NT

July 26: 4 weeks: How we got the OT

plus the books not in the OT

---More info? go here

Questions, comments, or want to join  
a free class contact Mark at  
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### **Global Christianity: "The Father of Modern Missions": William Carey and India**

Missionary work is commonplace in Christianity today, either long term or "short-term" mission trips of a week or two. This is possible for one reason: the low cost of air travel.

But things have not always been so. Fifty years ago, overseas mission work meant you would be gone for at least several months. A hundred years ago, overseas mission work meant that you would probably be gone at least several years. And 200 years ago, overseas mission work meant that you might die and be buried wherever you did your mission work.

That was the situation facing William Carey (1761-1834). He is known as the "Father of Modern Missions." Over 200 years ago, Protestant mission work was rare (in 1800 there were an estimated 100 Protestant foreign missionaries), especially the mission work that he did: places that had limited contact with Westerners, like India. And India is where he chose to work. But that is getting ahead of the story.

Carey was born in England and had an amazing ability to learn languages: he learned Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, and Dutch over a seven-year period before he was a missionary. Once he decided to do overseas mission work, he helped form the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 (which still exists today). The next year, he and John Thomas, a surgeon, were sent by the Society to India. At that time, the British East India Company controlled much of India, and they did not want missionaries "confusing" the native Indians. But Thomas was able to get in since he was a surgeon, and Carey was able to get in after agreeing to supervise an indigo factory.

The factory closed in 1799, and Carey purchased a different small indigo plantation. Now that he was his own boss, he began focusing on his mission work. Yet this time he ran into opposition from the Indian government. Therefore, in 1800 he moved to a Danish settlement. The Danes were welcoming of Carey's mission work, and he began to use his special gift in languages.

In 1801, he and Thomas printed a Bengali New Testament. His language ability gained fame, and he was asked to be a professor of Oriental Languages at a new college in Calcutta, India: Fort William College. He held this position for thirty years and taught Bengali, Mahrati, and Sanskrit.

But it was his Bible translation work for which he is the most famous. Either by himself or with others, he translated the Bible or New Testament into twenty-six languages. It is estimated that, in the early 1800s, Carey had a hand in translating the Bible into languages for up to 1/3 of the earth's population at that time.

In that whole time, he never went back to England. He died in India and was buried there.

And, as a measure of his influence today, much of the information for this summary comes from the Center for the Life and Study of William Carey, D.D., located at William Carey University, a 2600-student university located in Mississippi.