

Robert Morrison was born January 1782 in Northumberland of a Scottish father and English mother who were both active members of the Church of Scotland.

Conversion

Although raised in a God fearing home by devout Christian parents, schooled in the Westminster Catechism and memorising the Psalms Robert Morrison, the youngest of eight children, was converted from a purposeless life of drunkenness at age 15. He immediately came to love the Bible so much that people always found him with a Bible at hand, and he began to teach himself Latin, Greek and Hebrew. His love for books so consumed him that he read into the early hours of the morning.

Called to Missions

Among the most influential literature that he read were missionary newsletters, speaking of William Carey's pioneer work in India. Robert determined to be a missionary and prayed that God would send him to the most difficult part of the unevangelised world. He wrote of his aim: "*To preach the Gospel to the heathen and convert them from satan to God.*"

London Missionary Society

In 1803, he attended a missionary academy and joined the London Missionary Society. He then pursued medical studies in London and began to diligently learn Chinese. His prayer was: "*that God would station me in that part of the Mission field where the difficulties are the greatest and the most insurmountable (to human appearances)!*"

In 1807, Morrison was ordained as a Congregational Minister and received into the London Missionary Society. He determined that his ultimate calling was to translate the Bible into Chinese. Despite pressure from his family not to go, and the steadfast refusal of the East India Company to provide any passage for those in the service of the Gospel, Robert was undeterred.

Opposition

After Henry Martyn had landed in Calcutta in 1806 as Chaplain, the East India Company had banned all new missionaries from India. The East India Company, with its control of India and its increasing power in China, considered that the wholesome influence of Christianity would have an adverse effect on its trading ventures!

Scorn and Derision

The only course open to Morrison was to sail to America, and then from there to Asia. The owner of the ship, the Trident, which was to take him across the Pacific was openly scornful:

“And so Mr. Morrison,”

he asked,

“do you really expect to make an impression on the idolatry of the great Chinese Empire?”

Morrison’s steadfast reply was:

“No, Sir, but I expect that

God will

.”

The First Protestant Missionary to China

In September 1807, after 113 days at sea, at age 25, Robert Morrison landed at Canton. It was a hostile environment for the Gospel. There were dangers, difficulties and restrictions on every side. To the Chinese, all foreigners were *“barbarians”* and *“foreign devils.”* Foreign women were not allowed in Canton. There was a ban on any Chinese teaching their language to foreigners. Those found teaching Chinese to foreigners were to be executed. Both the Chinese government and the East India Company banned all evangelism.

Marriage

When Robert Morrison married Mary Morton, the daughter of a doctor, in 1809, they were forced to live most of their lives apart, because the Chinese forbade foreign women. So Mary had to stay in Macao, a Portuguese colony off the coast of China, which being Roman Catholic was also hostile to the work of Protestant Missions.

Covert Ministry

However, the East India Company, discovering his skills in languages, employed Robert as their Chinese secretary and translator. His salary from the EIC was a tremendous help. However, if either the company or the Chinese authorities had discovered the nature of his covert Bible translation activities, he would have been deported, at the least. Morrison's two Chinese tutors lived in fear of torture by the Chinese authorities. They carried poison on their bodies so that if they were discovered they could end their lives quickly and escape torture.

Heart Breaking Loss

The inhospitable territory to which they were called was even more forcefully brought home when their first child died on the day he was born. The Chinese would not allow a foreign child to be buried on their soil! Theft and abuse by the Chinese was a constant affliction.

Faithfulness Amidst Secrecy

Morrison corresponded with Carey, Ward and Marshman in India, but had to maintain the utmost secrecy in his translation work and distribution of Christian literature, as this was a capital offense in China. It was 7 years before Morrison saw the first Chinese convert. At this, Morrison wrote: *"May he be the first fruits of a great harvest; one of millions who shall believe and be saved!"*

Laying Foundations for the Future

In fact, during the next 20 years, he was only to see nine more converted and baptised. However, Robert Morrison's contribution to Missions in China was incalculable; he laboured industriously to translate the entire **Bible** into Chinese and to produce a six volume **English - Chinese Dictionary** and a **Chinese Grammar**.

Separation, Education and Medical Ministry

After 6 years of marriage, his wife Mary's ill health forced a 6-year separation, as she and their two surviving children had to go to Britain. Robert started an Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca and opened a dispensary.

Breach of Security Brings Destruction

When some supporters in England ignored his request for secrecy and published the work he was doing, the East India Company decided to dismiss him and the Chinese broke into his printing press, destroying much of his work in progress.

Death and Destruction

In 1821, his wife, Mary, and the baby to whom she had just given birth, both died. Once again, he had the distress of having to fight for a place where they could be buried. The two surviving children had to be sent back to England, and his friend and co-worker, William Milne, died. A fire in Canton caused much destruction and in 1823, he took his only furlough during 27 years in China, home to Scotland.

Promoting Missions in Britain

For two years he laboured unrelentingly in Britain, promoting the missionary challenge of China, and urging unmarried women to consider serving God as missionaries. He set up a training programme for them in his home. The University of Glasgow awarded him an honorary doctorate, and King George IV met with him. In 1826, Robert returned to China with a new wife, Elizabeth, and his two children. He was blessed with four more children with Elizabeth.

Against all Opposition

The circumstances to which he returned were even more difficult than before: the East India Company was hostile to evangelical activities and the Chinese, as a whole, vehemently rejected all attempts to help them. When he was challenged: *"What do the Chinese, with all their ancient civilisation and wisdom require from Europe?"*

Morrison replied:

"The knowledge of Christ!"

Faith of His Father

Robert gained great encouragement that his son, John Robert Morrison, poured heart and soul into the work, fully committed to bringing the Gospel to the people of China. His only daughter married Medical missionary Benjamin Hobson.

Working in the Light of Eternity

Two months after William Carey went to glory, in 1834 Robert Morrison passed into eternity. By this time, his fame had grown so greatly and so many Evangelicals were Members of Parliament that when his name was mentioned in the Parliament, *“the House broke into cheers.”*

A Legacy of Faith and Education

Robert Morrison produced a Chinese translation of the Bible and a Chinese Dictionary. He established schools for Chinese and Malay children and a medical dispensary. He built an Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca. Morrison laid solid foundations for future Missionaries to China and for the subsequent spectacular growth of the Church in China.

“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His Name in that you ministered to the saints, and do minister” Hebrews 6:10

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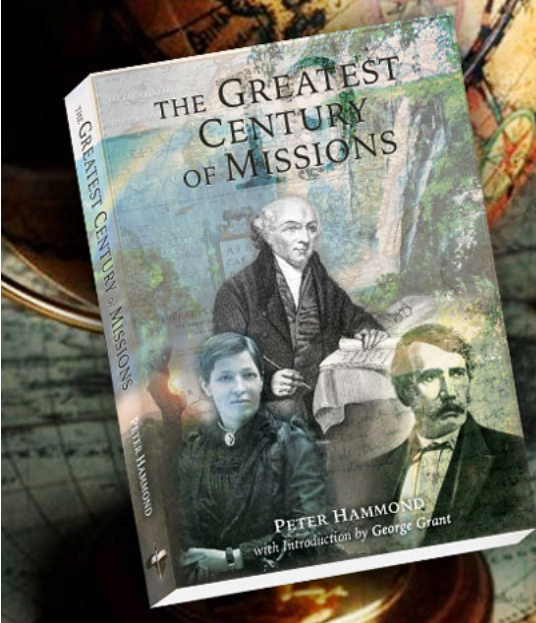
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