

Kingdom Missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman

The Founding of the Oregon Territory

Marcus Whitman, a medical missionary and Christian patriot, was the man who saved the Oregon Territory and assured it would be a part of the United States. Called to the Northwest by a desire to see the Indians taught the liberating principles of the Bible, the daring action of this “man of destiny” paved the way for the establishment of the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Biographer William Mowry writes:

Braving the cold and the snows of the Rocky Mountains, he crossed the continent on horseback to warn our government at Washington and to encourage the hardy pioneers of the frontier to emigrate to Oregon, assuring them that they could carry their wagons and their families through to the Columbia, for he had gone there himself with his wife and his wagon.¹

The tragic and sad end of the story of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman reminds us that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Their story clearly reveals the providence of God in the march of history — that nations do not, in the words of historian George Bancroft, “float darkling down the stream of the ages without hope or consolation, swaying with every wind and ignorant whither they are drifting” but that “there is a superior intelligence and love, which is moved by justice and shapes their courses.” The Whitman’s story will also inspire us to practice “heroic, patriotic, and Christian virtues.”

The Macedonian Call

The origin of civilization in the Oregon country “was due to missionary spirit and enterprise, and this missionary spirit was aroused by the action of the Indians themselves.”²

In the autumn of 1832 four Nez Percés (some say Flathead) Indians walked into St. Louis, having traveled for many months and nearly two thousand miles, looking for the white man’s “Book from Heaven” that would tell them how to live in order to be happy. In years past, through encounters with early American explorers, they had heard of “the White Man’s Book of Life.” “These red men came to believe that their white brethren were the favorite

children of the Great Spirit who alone rules the world,”³ and desiring to learn the truth in this book, a council of chiefs met in the spring of 1832 and decided to send a delegation of four chiefs over the mountains to hunt for the book in the villages of the white men and ask for teachers to be sent to their tribe to instruct them in what the Great Spirit taught in the book from heaven.

These Indians remained several months with General William Clarke, who was then Superintendent of Indian Affairs and had originally explored the Louisiana Territory with Meriwether Lewis almost thirty years before. Clarke did all he could to inform these sincere searchers after truth of the gospel message. He taught them “a succinct history of man from his creation down to the advent of the Savior; explained to them all the moral precepts contained in the Bible, expounded to them the decalogue, informed them of the advent of the Savior, his life, precepts, his death, resurrection, ascension, and the relation he now stands to man as a mediator — that he will judge the world, etc.”⁴

Clarke took them to churches in the area, both Protestant and Catholic. He also took them “to theaters and shows of every kind.”⁵ The next spring, two Indians set out on the long journey home (two had died from sickness while in St. Louis). They were favorably impressed and highly gratified with the kind treatment they received, but the knowledge they acquired of the white man’s God and His book were very limited due to the difficulty of communication and the lack of time to impart knowledge of the English language, which was necessary for teaching the fundamental truths of Christianity. The Indians had no written language of their own and they could not read English, therefore there was no way to give them a Bible that they could read. Thus, they carried back to their nation a very imperfect sketch of the Christian religion.

Before their return, one of the Indian chiefs spoke at a banquet of their failure to find that which was the object of their journey. This speech would come to fire “the Christian hearts of the Nation into a new life.”⁶ The chief said:

I come to you over the trail of many moons from the setting sun. You were the friends of my fathers, who have all gone the long way. I came with an eye partly open for my people, who sit in darkness. I go back with both eyes closed. How can I go back blind, to my blind people? I made my way to you with strong arms through many enemies and strange lands that I might carry back much to them. I go back with both arms broken and empty. Two fathers came with us, they were the braves of many winters and wars. We leave them asleep here by your great water and wigwams. They were tired in many moons and their moccasins wore out.

My people sent me to get the “White Man’s Book of Heaven.” You took me to where you allow your women to dance as we do not ours, and the book was not there. You took me to where they worship the Great Spirit with candles and the book was not there. You showed me images of the good spirits

and the pictures of the good land beyond, but the book was not among them to tell us the way. I am going back the long and sad trail to my people in the dark land. You make my feet heavy with gifts and my moccasins will grow old in carrying them, yet the book is not among them. When I tell my poor blind people after one more snow, in the big council, that I did not bring the book, no word will be spoken by our old men or by our young braves. One by one they will rise up and go out in silence. My people will die in darkness, and they will go a long path to other hunting grounds. No white man will go with them, and no White Man's Book to make the way plain. I have no more words.⁷

This speech was published in the *Christian Advocate* in March, 1833, with the editorial cry, "Who will respond to go beyond the Rocky Mountains and carry the Book of Heaven?"⁸ This speech was a Macedonian cry of "Come over and help us." It stirred many in the church into activity, including Rev. Jason Lee, Rev. Daniel Lee, Rev. Samuel Parker, Narcissa Prentiss, and Doctor Marcus Whitman. It also resulted in the organization of the Oregon Methodist mission and inspired the joint Presbyterian and Congregational mission board (the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) to action in the northwest.

Meetings throughout the States called for pioneers to go out and carry the gospel to those lost and seeking the truth. Such action would not only transform the Indians, but "by establishing schools and sending good men to instruct the Indians in the principles of the Christian religion and in the arts of civilized life, it will contribute to the safety and prosperity of all our frontier settlers."⁹

The Northwest Missions Movement

The Methodist Church sent Jason Lee and a few other missionaries to Oregon in 1834. That same year the American Board of Missions decided to send Rev. Samuel Parker and Marcus Whitman, M.D., (who was then 33 years old) to the Oregon territory as their "Caleb and Joshua" to spy out the land and see if the country was a fruitful field for Christian missions. They started on the long journey early in the spring of 1835 and reached the Continental Divide by way of the South Pass on August 10. Two days later they were at the Green River, a branch of the Colorado (in the western part of present day Wyoming), where they met and interviewed many chiefs of the Nez Percés and Flathead Indians. Mr. Parker wrote of this meeting:

We laid before them the object of our appointment, and explained to them the benevolent desires of Christians concerning them. We then inquired whether they wished to have teachers come among them, and instruct them in the knowledge of God, His worship, and the way to be saved; . . . The oldest

chief arose, and said . . . his heart was made glad, very glad, to see what he had never seen before, a man near to God, meaning a minister of the Gospel. . . .

The first chief of the Nez Percés, Tai-quin-sa-watish, arose and said that he had heard from white men a little about God, which had only gone into his ears; he wished to know enough to have it go down into his heart, to influence his life and to teach his people. Others spoke to the same import.¹⁰

The eager response of these Indians to obtain Christian knowledge made clear to Whitman and Parker the “indications of divine Providence” in regard to setting up missions in the area. Whitman was so eager to begin this work and enlist others that he proposed returning immediately to the east so as to “save at least a year in bringing the Gospel among them.”¹¹ While Parker continued west, Whitman returned with a fur trading caravan, taking with him by the consent of the chiefs two Indian boys, Tuetakes and Ites, whom Dr. Whitman called Richard and John.

Marriage of Marcus and Narcissa

Upon returning to the East, Whitman reported to the churches and the American Board “that according to the best information we get, almost all the Indian tribes west and far west present fields ripe for the harvest.”¹² In response to the report, the Board decided to establish missions in the Northwest among the Indians. Whitman and the Board began to raise funds and find people called to this mission field. One lady who felt called some years earlier, and who was planning to go to the mission field as Marcus’ wife, was Narcissa Prentiss.

Earlier in the year, as Whitman was leaving for the frontier, he had written to his fiancée, Miss Prentiss:

I feel greatly encouraged to go on in every sense, only, I feel my unfitness for the work; but I know in whom I have trusted, and with whom are the fountains of wisdom. O that I may always look to this source for wisdom and grace. May the Lord grant you favor and consolation. How can Christians ever become indifferent in their Master’s service? You need not be anxious especially for your health or safety, but for your usefulness to the cause of Missions and the souls of our benighted fellow men.¹³

Both Marcus and Narcissa had been prepared by God and were eager to enter into their Master’s service. Marcus Whitman was born in Rushville, New York, September 4, 1802. As an infant, “he was providentially saved from death by burning. While her child was asleep in the cradle, the mother stepped across the road to spend an hour with her husband, who was working in the shop. On returning to the humble log cabin, she was startled to find that a burning brand had rolled out from the fireplace, and, coming in contact with the

cradle, had set it on fire. She was just in season to rescue Marcus from suffocation.”¹⁴

“His boyhood was spent in a pioneer home with many privations; but this life was such as to give him the best preparation for heroic and manly deeds.”¹⁵ His father died when he was eight which forced him to take on more of a manly role in helping his mother and helped build in him a great self-reliance. From a young age Marcus was fond of adventure and exploration. His parents and grandparents gave him a strong Christian upbringing, and from early childhood he was a great reader of the Bible. He was converted at seventeen years and while in his home town was a member of the Congregational church. Whitman attended a common school and received other training from two ministers in the area. He initially intended to enter the ministry, but some physical ailment led him to study medicine. After medical college he practiced medicine in Canada for four years, and on returning to his home he intended to continue his practice, but became part owner in a sawmill with his brother. We can again see God’s hand in this, for the business life and knowledge of the working of a mill would be of great usefulness to his future mission. Historian William Mowry writes:

Dr. Whitman was a strong man, earnest, decided, aggressive. He was sincere and kind, generous to a fault, and from the time he took up the missionary work to the Indians, he devoted every energy of his mind and body to the welfare of the Indian and the objects of the mission. He was fearless of danger, strong in purpose, resolute and unflinching in the face of difficulties.¹⁶

Narcissa Prentiss was raised in a Christian home and from her early years showed a great interest in the things of God. Her sister wrote that Narcissa “joined the church when eleven years old, and from her early years expressed a desire to be a missionary.”¹⁷ When she was sixteen she decided “to consecrate myself without reserve to the Missionary work waiting the leadings of Providence concerning me.”¹⁸ Some ten years later the “leadings of Providence” stirred her to answer the call as a missionary to the northwest after she heard the report of the Indians who came to St. Louis looking for “the White Man’s Book of Life.” After living as a missionary in the Oregon Territory for many years “there was never a word of regret or repining at the life she had chosen.”¹⁹

In response to reading about the Indians’ request, Narcissa wrote to the American Board on Feb. 23, 1835:

Permit an unworthy sister to address you. Having obtained favor of the Lord and desiring to live for the conversion of the world, I now offer myself to the American Board to be employed in their service among the heathen, if counted worthy. . . .

I frequently desired to go to the heathen but only half-heartedly—and it was not until the first Monday in January 1824 that I felt to consecrate myself without reserve to the Missionary work. . . . Feeling it more my privilege than duty to labor for the conversion of the heathen, I respectfully submit myself to your direction.”²⁰

Marcus and Narcissa were married in February 1836. Her strength of character can be seen in their marriage and farewell ceremony. Knowing this may be the last time they see their relative and friend, all in the congregation except the bride broke down in tears as they sang the missionary hymn. “The last stanza was sung by the sweet voice of Mrs. Whitman alone, clear, musical and unwavering.”²¹

In encouraging God’s people to enter the mission field to the Indians, assisting them in spiritual and practical matters, Whitman said “if good men do not occupy these stations bad men will, and do great harm.”²² God spoke to other good people to join the missionary team, including Rev. and Mrs. H.H. Spalding and H.H. Gray. Rev. Spalding would prove to be zealous and persevering in his labors for the Indians and Mrs. Spalding would be the first to translate Bible truths and Christian songs into the Indian language.

When they started for the northwest in the spring of 1836 the company consisted of Dr. and Mrs. Whitman, Rev. and Mrs. Spalding, Gray, two teamsters and the two Indian boys, who had learned much English by attending school during the winter.

The First American Women to Cross the Rockies

Narcissa Whitman and Mrs. Spalding were to be the first American women to cross the Rocky Mountains. This was only accomplished with great hardships. Mrs. Spalding was very sick much of the first part of the journey, at one point thinking she was about to die, telling the others to “leave me and save yourselves.”²³ But she revived and on July 4th they reached the Continental Divide at the South Pass. Rev. Spalding wrote that six years before Fremont followed in these ladies’ footsteps (and gained the name of “Pathfinder”),

they alighted from their horses and kneeling on the other half of the continent, with the Bible in one hand and the American flag in the other, took possession of it as the home of American mothers and of the Church of Christ.²⁴

Dr. Jonathan Edwards described the incident at the South Pass this way:

They spread their blankets carefully on the grass, and lifted the American flag to wave gracefully in the breeze, and with the Bible in the center, they knelt, and with prayer and praise on their lips, they take possession of the western side of the American continent in His name who proclaimed “Peace on earth and good will toward men.” How strongly it evidences their faith in their

mission and the conquering power of the King of Peace. What a soul-inspiring scene.²⁵

The missionary band traveled with a group of traders making their annual journey. At first these men were skeptical of women on the trip, but the ladies' perseverance, strength of character, and Christian convictions won them over. The trip was extremely difficult. They faced scorching sun with no shade in sight, roaring rivers, "steep mountains in many places so narrow that the animal would scarcely find room to place his foot,"²⁶ deep crevices, such steep terrain that the wagon often turned somersaults, clay salt pits that swallowed up man and animal, sage covered land that brought the wagons to a stand still, and often scanty provisions. At times there was dust that tormented the face and eyes, and made the throat and lungs raw. And the insects often made their lives miserable. "The mosquitoes were so thick that we could hardly breathe," Narcissa wrote. "The fleas covered all our garments."²⁷ The lack of complaints in her diary of the journey is a great testimony to Mrs. Whitman's character.

In addition, in all these challenges, Narcissa's faith and hope shone through. She wrote in her diary: "We feel that the good Father has blessed us beyond our most sanguine expectations. It is good to feel that He is all I want and if I had ten thousand lives I would give them all to Him."²⁸ She recognized God's hand upon their journey, writing in her diary, "Surely the children of Israel could not have been more sensible of the pillar of fire by night than we have been of that hand that has led us thus safely on."²⁹ The successful journey of these women "was an event unparalleled in real or romantic literature, and so pure and exalted in its motives, and prosecuted so unostentatiously, as to honor true womanhood for all time to come."³⁰

At the time of this journey there was no wagon road over the Rockies and no one had ever taken a wagon into Oregon. Marcus Whitman was determined to show "the practicability of a wagon road over the Rocky Mountains"³¹ and no matter how difficult take a wagon into Oregon. Concerning Whitman taking the wagon from Fort Hall (in what is today eastern Idaho) into Oregon, Mr. Gray said that "his labor was immense, yet he overcame every difficulty and brought it safely through. I have thrice since traveled the same route, and confess I cannot see how he did it, notwithstanding I was with him, and know he brought the wagon through."³² Since Whitman succeeded at both opening a wagon road through the Rockies and showing that a wagon could be taken all the way to the west, he opened the way for the great migrations that followed years later, thus assuring the area would be a part of America.

Whitman was told he could not take a wagon into Oregon, but he refused to believe the "impossible." Nixon wrote:

It looked like a small event to take a wagon to Oregon, shattered and battered by the rocks and besetments of the long three thousand mile journey. The good wife many times mourned that the doctor should “Wear himself out in getting that wagon through.” “Yesterday,” she says, “it was upset in the river and he was wet from head to foot getting it out; today it was upset on the mountain side, and it was hard work to save it.” The dear woman did not know it was an inspired wagon, the very implement upon which the fate of Oregon would turn. Small events are sometimes portentous, and the wagon that Whitman wheeled into Oregon . . . was of this character.³³

Upon hearing of the arrival of women in the Oregon Territory, the British Hudson Bay Company, who had in the past discouraged American immigration into the area because they wanted to control the territory for themselves, knew that “they had come to stay.”³⁴ Mowry writes, “Their journey across the mountains was the first link in the chain of events which finally bound Oregon to our country with indissoluble bonds.”³⁵

Mr. Spalding wrote:

They were now at home amid a nation that had no homes. They found a resting-place among restless wanderers. But faith had become sight. The first battle had been fought and won. White women had come safely over the mountains. Cattle and horses had been kept secure from the Indian raiders. A wagon had been brought through, — “the first wheel that had ever pressed the sage.” Whitman had demonstrated to himself that an emigration could cross from Missouri to Oregon; and when, seven years afterwards, he led a company of a thousand along the same track, he demonstrated it to the world and gained Oregon, and with it California, to the United States.³⁶

The Oregon Missions

The newly arrived Americans started two mission homes — Dr. Whitman located at Waiilatpu (named for the rye grass in the area) near Walla Walla, among the Cayuse Indians, and Mr. Spalding 120 miles eastward up the Clearwater River, among the Nez Percés. They immediately set to work educating the Indians (young and old), learning the language, printing materials in the Indian dialects, cultivating the land, and building homes, a mill, a blacksmith shop and other buildings. Dr. Whitman was an incessant toiler, a good example for the Indian men of God’s command to work six days.

The Cayuse Indians were delighted to have a mission church and school, but thought it was disgraceful for them to work. Imparting a Biblical view of work to the Indians was a great challenge to the missionaries. One of the first efforts of Dr. Whitman was to convince them to build permanent homes and to plant crops. The fruit of his labor was a great example. The Whitmans brought with them a quart of wheat. Eleven years later they harvested between twenty and thirty thousand bushels of grain.³⁷ Their few cows and sheep multiplied

into large numbers. Their gardens and orchards prospered. Within 3 years Dr. Whitman had 250 acres enclosed and 200 acres under cultivation. He had also learned an Indian language and performed the duties of a physician to the Indians and the two other mission stations.

In 1839, three years after their arrival, there were about 50 Indian children in the school run by Mrs. Whitman.³⁸ Mrs. Spalding's school had 500 Indian pupils in 1847.³⁹ Indian church members were growing at both missions. The first printing press west of the Rocky Mountains (presented as a gift from the American Board mission church at Honolulu) was run by the missionaries. They did the type-setting, printing and binding of "a few school books, the native code of laws, a small collection of hymns, and the Gospel of Matthew."⁴⁰

Over the years other missionaries came to the northwest to assist in converting and educating the Indians, and to show them how to build permanent homes and live in a secure and prosperous manner. While progress was made among many different tribes, the Nez Percés especially embraced the Christian religion. Newcomb's *Cyclopedia of Missions* says of the three tribes in the area (the Nez Percés, Cayuses, and Flatheads):

Their desire for religious instruction exceeded anything ever before met with among the North American Indians. "Among the Nez Percés," says the report of 1840, "the congregation had increased from such a number as could be accommodated in a school-house, to between one and two thousand, many coming from the adjacent bands. All seemed eager for religious instruction, and it was believed that the Spirit of the Lord was working on the hearts of many. As many as two thousand made a public confession of sin, and promised to serve God. Doubtless many did this with a very imperfect idea of what was involved in it, though not a few were thought to give evidence of saving conversion." A similar religious interest was manifested among the Cayuses.⁴¹

While much progress was made, it required much sacrifice and labor. The lifestyle and worldview of the Indians was completely contrary to what the missionaries considered Biblical. Not that the Indians were without some good qualities. Mrs. Whitman said of the Cayuse Indians that "there are no thieves among them."⁴² And many of them recognized their need to learn. One missionary wrote: "They say they are glad we have come to teach them; that their mind is dark, that they know but little, and that their children will know more."⁴³

In all their labors, the missionaries relied upon God. The wife of Rev. Cushing Eells writes:

We feel that we are a small band of missionaries in a heathen land, far removed from the luxuries and many of the comforts of life, and we feel more keenly the absence of civilized and Christian society; but we trust we have

been sent here on errands of mercy, that we are and shall be sustained in every trial by the same Almighty arm as in a Christian land. It is true that the field is large and but few laborers are in it, yet we pray that we may do, and do cheerfully, what we have to do to bring the heathen to Christ, — knowing that our reward will be great if we are faithful.⁴⁴

To their great joy, the Whitmans had a daughter in 1837, the first white American born in that country. When she was two years old, she accidentally drowned in the Walla Walla River. This was a horrible blow to Marcus and Narcissa. Yet, Narcissa's strong faith is evidence in how she dealt with this situation. She wrote in her diary how they buried their daughter within site of their home, so that every time she walked out the door her thoughts were drawn to her young child, but not in grief. "I look above with unspeakable delight, and contemplate her as enjoying the full delights of that bright world where her joys are perfect."⁴⁵ Earlier she had written:

Lord, it is right; it is right. She is not mine, but thine; she was only lent to me to comfort me for a little season, and now, dear Savior, Thou hast the best right to her. Thy will, not mine, be done.⁴⁶

Whitman's Ride to Save Oregon

To discourage American settlement, person's associated with the Hudson Bay Company were circulating stories that the mountains were impassable to wagons and that women and children could never make the trip into the northwest. The Company wanted the Oregon Territory to be under British control and with existing treaties it was believed that whichever nationality settled and organized the territory, that nation would hold it.

The Oregon missionaries — including Methodists Jason Lee and others who were in the Willamette Valley, in addition to those sent by the American Board — were not only working to convert the Indians, but were also loyal Americans who believed the Oregon Territory rightly belonged to the United States (by right of first discovery and exploration) and would be of great benefit to the nation. Historian Oliver Nixon wrote, "They thought it no abuse of their Christianity to carry the banner of the Cross in one hand and the banner of their country in the other."⁴⁷ Thus they wanted to encourage good Americans to immigrate.

In the fall of 1842, Marcus Whitman learned of a plan of the Hudson Bay Company to bring in new English settlers. This could result in British sovereignty in the territory unless something was done to inform the U.S. government of the situation and get them to act. Whitman had heard that Congress was considering a treaty with Britain in relation to the northwest territory and thus there was no time to spare. In addition, new American settlers needed to be encouraged to immigrate and informed that they could take wagons into the

territory. While others had said it could not be done, Whitman was the man to prove otherwise, for he had done it. He could lead them.

Fellow missionary, Dr. Eells, later wrote:

[T]he single object of Dr. Whitman in attempting to cross the continent in the winter of 1842-43, amid mighty peril and suffering, was to make a desperate effort to save this country to the United States. On reaching Washington he learned that representations had been made there corresponding to those which had been often repeated on this coast. "Oregon," it was said, "would most likely be unimportant to the United States. It was difficult of access. A wagon road thither was an impossibility." . . .

His next object was to expose the falsity of the statement that the Rocky and Blue Mountains could not be passed by immigrant wagons. . . . [T]he success of the expedition depended upon the knowledge, skill, energy, and perseverance of Dr. Whitman.⁴⁸

Whitman was convinced he must leave at once, even though he would be traveling in the winter over the mountains, a dangerous and almost impossible task. Whitman called a meeting of the five American Board missionaries in the region to inform them of his intent and get their approval, which was necessary for him to leave his station. While on this trip, Whitman would also meet with the American Board to seek a change of a resolution the Board had passed earlier in the year to close one of the mission stations. The missionaries met at the end of September at Waiilatpu. After Whitman informed them of his plans, some objected to his going saying they thought he had better attend to his missionary duties and let politics alone. To this Whitman responded, "I was a man before I became a missionary, and when I became a missionary I did not expatriate myself. I shall go to the States if I have to sever my connection with the mission."⁴⁹

The dangers of such a trip were pointed out to Whitman, but to all these pleadings his response was, "I must go."⁵⁰ Seeing his resolve, they all finally consented. They saw him as too important to the mission to lose. "Besides, they became thoroughly convinced that the man and the missionary had received a call from a higher source than an earthly one."⁵¹ Not wanting him to travel alone, they sought to find someone to make the journey with him. "Again the unseen power was experienced when General Lovejoy said: 'I will go with Dr. Whitman.' The man seems to have been sent for just such a purpose."⁵² Lovejoy had just arrived from the east after traveling five months, and was not yet rested, but he was the perfect companion for such a journey. In addition to being accustomed to such travel, "he was an educated, Christian gentleman, full of cheerfulness, brave, cautious, and a true friend."⁵³ In her diary, Mrs. Whitman "breaks forth in thanksgiving to the good Father above, who has sent so good and true a companion for the long and dangerous journey."⁵⁴

After making the necessary preparations, being careful to keep his purpose secret, Whitman set off October 3, 1842, on that memorable and historic journey. Upon tracing their travels, everyone can see “the heroism of such an undertaking under such circumstances, but the old plainsman and the mountaineer who know the terrors of the journey, will point to it as without a parallel in all history. It was surmised by most that it was ‘A ride down to the valley of the shadow of death.’”⁵⁵ Mrs. Whitman expressed confidence in her diary in “the belief that an Almighty Arm is guiding her loved one in safety through all perils.”⁵⁶ Without the Lord’s Almighty arm, Whitman would have most assuredly not succeeded.

After eleven days of rapid riding, they reached Fort Hall. Perceiving Whitman’s mission was possibly of importance in relation to who would govern the northwest, the British Captain in charge did all he could to discourage them from continuing. (This same Captain Grant in years past had persuaded all American settlers to leave their wagons at the Fort, saying it was impossible to take them any further. It was a determined Whitman who six years earlier rejected Grant’s advise and took the first wagon into Oregon that ever crossed the Rockies.) The Captain informed him snow was already 20 feet deep in the mountains, making the journey impossible. In addition, the Sioux and Pawnee Indians were at war and passage through their lands would mean certain death. But Whitman was a determined man on an inspired mission. If he could not travel east over the South Pass, he would make a new route to the States, so he headed out to the southeast to find a way through Spanish country.

He knew of the general layout of the mountains, but knew of no trail, as he had never heard of any white man going this way before. His plan was to travel to the Spanish Forts Uintah (in what is today Utah), then Uncompahgra (in western Colorado), down to Taos and Santa Fe (in New Mexico), then head back northeast into American territory, then east to Kansas City and St. Louis. It would turn out to be a ride of nearly 3000 miles, taking almost 5 months, in weather so treacherous he almost died a number of times. Mowry writes:

Ah, what a journey was that! What heroism, what endurance, what persistence, what energy it required; what suffering it entailed, what hunger and freezing cold! The long snowstorms, the chilling blizzard, the swimming of frozen streams, these are words easy to speak, simple to read, but do they convey to our minds any adequate idea of the reality?⁵⁷

General Lovejoy wrote of their journey in his diary and in later letters. The following excerpts show some of the enormous struggles they faced.

From Fort Hall to Fort Uintah we met with terribly severe weather. The deep snow caused us to lose much time. Here we took a new guide to Fort

Uncompahgra on Grand River in Spanish country, which we safely reached and employed a new guide there.⁵⁸

When we had been out four or five days and were passing over high tablelands we encountered a most terrific snow storm, which forced us to seek shelter at once. A deep ravine being near by, we quickly made for it, but the snow fell so rapidly, and the wind blew with such violence, that it was almost impossible to reach it. After reaching the ravine, and cutting some cotton-wood trees for our animals, we attempted such arrangements for camp as best we could under the circumstances, and remained snowed in for some three or four days, when the storm subsided, and it cleared off intensely cold. It was with much difficulty that we made our way up upon the high lands; the snow was so deep and the wind so piercing and cold, that we felt compelled to return to camp and wait a few days for a change of weather.

Our next effort was more successful, and after spending several days wandering round in the snow, without making much headway, and greatly fatiguing our animals, to little or no purpose, our guide informed us that the deep snows had so changed the face of the country, that he was completely lost, and could take us no farther.

This was a terrible blow to the Doctor. He was determined not to give up without another effort. And we at once agreed that the Doctor should take the guide and make his way back to the fort, and procure a new guide, and that I should remain in camp with the animals until his return, which was on the seventh day, with a new guide.

We were soon under way on our route, traveling through the snows at rather a snail's pace. Nothing occurred of much importance other than hard and slow traveling until we reached, as our guide informed us, the Grand River, which was frozen, on either side, about one third across. The current was so very rapid that the center of the stream remained open, although the weather was intensely cold.

This stream was one hundred and fifty, or two hundred yards wide, and looked upon by our guide as very dangerous to cross in its present condition. But the Doctor, nothing daunted, was the first to take the water. He mounted his horse, and the guide and myself pushed them off the ice into the boiling, foaming stream. Away they went completely under water,—horse and all; but directly came up, and after buffeting the waves and foaming current, he made his way to the ice on the opposite side, a long way down the stream, — leaped from his horse upon the ice, and soon had his noble animal by his side. The guide and myself forced in the pack animals, followed the Doctor's example, and were soon drying our frozen clothes by a comfortable fire.⁵⁹

Their severest trial, and one certainly revealing the Providence of God, occurred in January. Lovejoy writes:

On that terrible 13th of January, 1843, when so many in all parts of our country froze to death, the Doctor, against the advice of his Mexican guide,

left his camp in a deep gorge of the mountains of New Mexico, in the morning, to pursue his journey. But on reaching the divide, the cold became so intense, and the animals actually becoming maddened by the driving snows, the Doctor saw his peril, and attempted to retrace his steps, and, if possible, to find his camp, as the only hope of saving their lives. But the drifting snow had totally obliterated every trace, and the air becoming almost as dark as night by the maddening storm, the Doctor saw that it would be impossible for any human being to find camp, and commending himself and distant wife to his covenant-keeping God, he gave himself, his faithful guide, and animals up to their snowy grave, which was fast closing about them, when the guide, observing the ears of one of the mules intently bent forward, sprang upon him, giving him the reins, exclaiming: "This mule will find the camp if he can live to reach it." The Doctor mounted another and followed. The faithful animal kept down the divide a short distance, and then turned square down the steep mountain. Through deep snow drifts, over frightful precipices, down, down, he pushed, unguided and unurged, — as if he knew the lives of the two men and the fate of the great expedition depended upon his endurance and his faithfulness,— and into the thick timber, and stopped suddenly over a bare spot, and as the Doctor dismounted, — the Mexican was too far gone, — behold the very fireplace of their morning camp! Two brands of fire were yet alive and smoking; plenty of timber in reach. The buffalo hides had done much to protect the Doctor, and providentially he could move about and collect dry limbs, and soon had a rousing fire. The guide revived, but both were badly frozen. They remained in this secluded hole in the mountains several days, till the cold and the storm abated.⁶⁰

While Whitman and Lovejoy suffered greatly from the cold, it would have actually been worse had they taken the normal direct route to the States. "The winter of 1842-43 was very cold, and the snow throughout the West was heavy. From many of these storms they were protected by the ranges of high mountains, and what was of great value, had plenty of firewood; while on the other route for a thousand miles they would have had to depend mainly upon buffalo chips for fire, which it would have been impossible to find when the ground was covered with snow. To the traveler good fires in camp are a great comfort."⁶¹ Thus God in His providence used the ill attempts of Captain Grant for the good of Whitman and his inspired journey, and the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan for the Oregon Territory. Even so, they still suffered greatly from the cold. Whitman carried the effects of frost bite on his feet, hands, and ears throughout his stay in the East and for months that followed.

As the trip progressed, they ran out of food and were forced to eat their faithful dog, pack mules, and other animals. When they arrived at Fort Taos, they were completely exhausted and were compelled to stay for two weeks to gain enough energy to travel on to Santa Fe. After getting some supplies and a

new guide at this old Spanish town, they headed northeast toward Bent's Fort. On the way an incident occurred which may seem small but was really quite large — they lost their ax. Lovejoy writes:

At another time, with another guide, on the head waters of the Arkansas, after traveling all day in a terrible storm, they reached a small river for camp, but without a stick of wood anywhere to be had except on the other side of the stream, which was covered with ice, but too thin to support a man erect. The storm cleared away, and the night bade fair to be intensely cold; besides, they must have fire to prepare bread and food. The Doctor took his ax in one hand and a willow stick in the other, laid himself upon the thin ice, and spreading his legs and arms he worked himself over, and returned the same way.

That was the last time the Doctor enjoyed the luxury of his ax — so indispensable at that season of the year, in such a country. That night a wolf poked his nose under the foot of the bed where the ax had been placed for safe-keeping, and took it off for a leather string that had been wrapped around the split helve.⁶²

Fortunately, this incident did not occur earlier in the journey. Had it been so, it might have thwarted the entire enterprise.

Though Whitman was often exhausted after a day's long journey, he nonetheless was faithful to regularly seek God. "During the whole trip," Lovejoy wrote, "he was very regular in his morning and evening devotions."⁶³ Though Whitman was in a hurry to reach the States, he never traveled on the Sabbath, except one time. When they were within four days of Fort Bent, they meet a small caravan traveling to Santa Fe who told them of a party of mountain men who would leave the fort in a few days for St. Louis. The slowness of the pack animals would prohibit the Whitman group from getting to the fort in time to join with the party going east. Whitman was very anxious to join with them since this would be the safest way to travel east, so he took the fastest horse and only a few provisions and took off on his own. But in doing this he would have to travel on the Sabbath, something he had not done before.

When Lovejoy and the guide reached Fort Bent four days later, they discovered to their surprise that Whitman had not been there and no one had heard from him. Lovejoy took off to search for him, traveling 100 miles up river. He learned from some Indians that a man had been there who was lost and looking for the fort. Since they gave him directions, Lovejoy returned to the fort, but Whitman had still not arrived. Lovejoy writes:

We had all become very anxious about him. Late in the afternoon he came in very much fatigued and desponding; said that he knew that God had bewildered him to punish him for traveling on the Sabbath. . . . That was the only time I ever knew him to travel on the Sabbath.⁶⁴

The next morning Dr. Whitman continued his journey east. He eventually caught the party of mountain men and traveled with them to St. Louis. Lovejoy was completely worn out by the hardships of the journey and remained at Fort Bent to recuperate. He later joined Whitman in the summer near Fort Laramie (Wyoming) as Marcus was leading the first train of emigrants to Oregon.

Whitman in Washington

Even though “his fingers, ears, nose and feet had been frost-bitten, and were giving him much trouble,”⁶⁵ Dr. Whitman proceeded to Washington as rapidly as possible. He was in such a hurry that he wore the clothes of his 4000 mile journey — “coarse fur garments with buckskin breeches. He had a buffalo overcoat, with a head hood for emergencies, with fur leggings and boot moccasins.”⁶⁶ He had prayed earnestly that he might reach the Capital before it was too late. Though he had no prior assurances of any meetings, he wanted to see President Tyler, Secretary of State Daniel Webster, and other government leaders, to plead his case for Oregon. The Lord Who had led him this far through so much made sure his trip was not in vain. Opportunities opened for him to meet with many leaders in Washington.

Lovejoy wrote: “Dr. Whitman often related to me during our homeward journey the incidents of his reception by the President and his Secretary. He had several interviews with both of them, as well as with many of the leading senators and members of Congress.”⁶⁷ His message to them all was to “immediately terminate the treaty of 1818 and 1828, and extend the laws of the United States over Oregon.”⁶⁸

The view that Webster and some other leaders had of the Oregon Territory was that presented by British interests, which was that “Oregon was a barren worthless country, fit only for wild beasts and wild men.”⁶⁹ In one discussion where Whitman was giving glowing descriptions of Oregon, Webster countered that “Oregon was shut off by impassable mountains and a great desert, which made a wagon road impossible. Then, says Whitman, I replied:

Mr. Secretary, that is the grand mistake that has been made by listening to the enemies of American interests in Oregon. Six years ago I was told there was no wagon road to Oregon, and it was impossible to take a wagon there, and yet in despite of pleadings and almost threats, I took a wagon over the road, and have it now.”⁷⁰

Nixon writes that “the Doctor took it into Oregon on two wheels, but he carefully hauled the other two wheels inside as precious treasures. He seems to have had a prophetic view of the value of the first incoming wagon from the United States.”⁷¹

In Whitman's discussions with the President and Secretary they agreed that the ownership of Oregon likely depended upon who would settle it first. Whitman thus pleaded: "All I ask is that you won't barter away Oregon, or allow English interference until I can lead a band of stalwart American settlers across the plains: for this I will try to do."⁷² Though Whitman's representations of the Oregon Territory were in direct contradiction to others, including the Governor of the territory, President Tyler said Whitman's

frozen limbs were sufficient proof of his sincerity, and his missionary character was sufficient guarantee of his honesty, and he would, therefore, as President, rest upon them and act accordingly. If the Doctor could establish a wagon route through the mountains to the Columbia River, hitherto pronounced impassable, he would use his influence to hold Oregon.⁷³

Whitman was thrilled with the President's support and filled with a strong conviction that "God giving him life and strength, he would connect the Missouri and Columbia with a wagon track so deep and plain that neither national envy nor sectional fanaticism would ever blot it out."⁷⁴ If he succeeded in this, he believed that Oregon would be held for America, "freedom and the Protestant religion."⁷⁵

Whitman would later write and present to members of the government a proposed bill for the organization of Oregon. It greatly influenced the development of posts on the Oregon Trail, the extension of American law into the Northwest, and the founding of the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. He also outlined a plan for a pony express.⁷⁶

In later years, Secretary Webster came to acknowledge the role Whitman played in settling the northwest, as he said:

It is safe to assert that our country owes it to Dr. Whitman and his associate missionaries that all the territory west of the Rocky Mountains and south as far as the Columbia River, is not now owned by England and held by the Hudson Bay Company.⁷⁷

From Washington, Whitman traveled to Boston to meet with the American Board and deal with a few situations. They were surprised to see him and received him rather coldly as they had not given their permission for him to leave his post. He convinced them to reverse their resolution to close one of the mission stations, but when he returned for the west, they gave him little financial support (beyond the regular support of the mission in Waiilatpu). "He had but money enough to buy only a single ham for his supplies."⁷⁸ They could not see, as Christian people saw later, "that Whitman was an inspired man, and a man about his Father's business."⁷⁹ Nonetheless, the general support the American Board supplied for missions in the northwest was instrumental in not only converting many Indians, but in extending Protestant Christianity and

American liberty into the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho — and this in large part due to the efforts of Marcus Whitman.

The Opening of the Oregon Trail, 1843

Many people besides Whitman had seen the importance of and been promoting emigration to the Oregon Territory. Whitman especially saw the need for Christians to go. He wrote: “It is requisite that more good, pious men and ministers go to Oregon without delay, as citizens, or our hope there is greatly clouded if not destroyed.”⁸⁰ Many responded, some for the cause of Christianity as Whitman had presented, some in hopes of obtaining free land, some to make a better way in life. They began to gather in western Missouri in the spring of 1843, some 1000 men, women, and children with 120 wagons and 5000 loose cattle and horses. This was the first large migration on the Oregon Trail.

The great drawback for many would-be emigrants had been that they did not think they could take their wagons and families over the mountains into Oregon Territory. The great Rocky Mountains and the Blue Mountains were supposedly impassable for wagons. Whitman’s experience six years before and his presence with the emigrant train in 1843 did much to overcome that fear.

The train left Independence, Missouri, in late spring and would arrive in the Willamette Valley of Oregon (most of the members settled here) in November, having traveled 2000 miles in six months, at times with superhuman efforts. While many men provided leadership, the presence and advice of Dr. Whitman was invaluable. The leader of the “cow column,” Jesse Applegate, wrote “that to no other individual are the emigrants of 1843 so much indebted for the successful conclusion of their journey as to Dr. Marcus Whitman.”⁸¹

Through the summer they traveled over open plains, forded rivers, ascended the South Pass crossing the continental divide and the main range of the Rockies, and reached Fort Hall in late August. Upon reaching the fort that belonged to the Hudson Bay Company they were told it was futile to attempt to take their wagons through to Oregon, the terrain could hardly be traversed on foot. When Dr. Whitman rode up and learned of their concern, he reassured them by saying: “My countrymen, you have trusted me thus far. Believe me now and I will take your wagons to the Columbia River.”⁸² And he did, but not without great effort. In their journey they had traveled just over half of the distance, but certainly not half of the difficulties.

A member of the party, Burnett, wrote of their many concerns in getting their wagons through:

We had yet to accomplish the untried and most difficult portion of our long and exhaustive journey. . . . Dr. Whitman assured us that we could succeed, and encouraged and aided us with every means in his power. I consulted Mr. Grant as to his opinion of the practicability of taking our wagons through. He replied that, while he would not say it was impossible for us Americans to make the trip with our wagons, he could not himself see how it could be done. He had only traveled the pack-trail, and certainly no wagons could follow that route; but there might be a practical road found by leaving the trail at certain points.⁸³

They left Fort Hall on August 30 traveling on a new and untried, very rocky and extremely difficult road. “Up to this time no wagons had gone beyond Fort Hall, so far as known, except that single cart of Dr. Whitman’s, which he had taken in 1836 to Fort Boise,”⁸⁴ and later carried into Oregon. They encountered thick sage, deep ravines, treacherous rivers, narrow rocky passes, and a severe snowstorm, but they persevered and reached Whitman’s mission on October 10th. Dr. Whitman found his gristmill had been burned by the Indians during his absence, but he rebuilt it so that grinding could be done to prepare flour for the immigrants. After staying a brief time to recuperate from the exhausting journey, the majority of the settlers continued west to the Willamette Valley, which was to become their home.

In looking back at his trip to and from the States in 1842 and 1843, Whitman was satisfied that he accomplished his purposes of opening a route to the northwest over which American emigrants could travel and settle in Oregon, and thus assuring the northwest would be American and Protestant.

In a letter of 1847, Dr. Whitman wrote:

Two things were accomplished by my return to the United States. By the establishment of the wagon-road, due to that effort alone, the immigration was saved from disaster in 1843. Upon that event the present rights of the United States acquired by her citizens hung, and not less certainly upon the result of immigration to this country the existence of this mission and of Protestantism in general hung also.⁸⁵

Just after his arrival in Oregon, he wrote, November 1, 1843:

Great inconvenience and expense have been incurred by my absence, yet I do not regret having visited the States, for I feel that this country must either be American or foreign and mostly papal. If I never do more than to have established the first wagon-road to the Columbia River . . . I am satisfied.⁸⁶

Marcus Whitman succeeded in his mission “to lay the foundation of the speedy settlement of the country”⁸⁷ and see that it become a part of the United States. Looking back at the political events that followed, this may not have occurred had he delayed his trip til after winter. Nixon writes:

It would not have done for Whitman to have waited for next year and warm weather as his friends demanded. “I must go,” and “now,” and at this day it is easy to see from the light of history how God rules in the minds and hearts of men, as he rules nations. They, as men and nations, turn aside from His commands, but a man like Marcus Whitman obeys.⁸⁸

Martyrdom

The arrival of the Whitman caravan assured American rule in the Oregon Territory. With the nearly 1000 new settlers, the Americans outnumbered the English three to one. With the opening of the Oregon trail new American settlers kept coming. These settlers not only took possession of land and built homes, but they also set up a government and adopted a body of laws consistent with American ideals. In June of 1846 the United States and England entered into a treaty that set the boundary line for the northwest at latitude 49 degrees. A territorial government went into effect in 1849, and in 1859 Oregon was admitted as a state into the Union.

Many of the new settlers that streamed into the territory came to Whitman’s home and mission for help. Dr. Spalding says,

Immigrants, by hundreds and thousands, reached the Mission, way-worn, hungry, sick, and destitute, but he cared for all. Seven children of one family were left upon the hands of Dr. and Mrs. Whitman — one a babe four months old — and they cared for them all, giving food, clothing, and medicine without pay. Frequently, the Doctor would give away his entire food supply, and have to send to me for grain to get through the Winter.⁸⁹

In the years of the great settlement, Marcus and Narcissa continued to serve the Indians, as well as the settlers, in the same patient, quiet, uncomplaining, sacrificial manner that they had displayed since their arrival in 1836. Marcus was the “busiest of busy men up to the very date of the massacre” — he never stopped “building and planting, and sowing and teaching.”⁹⁰ The Whitman’s heart remained on God’s mission for their lives. Marcus wrote:

Our united choice would be to live and die here — to spend our lives for the salvation of this people. . . . We have ever been contented and happy, notwithstanding all our trials, and let come what will, we had rather die in the battle than to retreat, if the Lord will only appear for us and remove all that is in the way of His salvation; take up every stumbling block out of our hearts and from this mission, and prosper His own cause here. Our ardent prayer is, Lord let not this mission fail.⁹¹

They did not retreat from the battle and, consequently, ended up giving their lives.

Causes of the Massacre

Towards the end of 1847 events were building that led to a bloody massacre. When the treaty was signed in 1846 giving control of the Oregon Territory to the United States, both the Hudson Bay Company and some of the Indians in the area saw this as a threat to their way of life, and they considered Marcus Whitman as the man chiefly responsible. The fur monopoly held by the Hudson Bay Company would end south of latitude 49 degrees. With each new immigrant train, many Indians saw the potential for their lands to be overrun. Even while Whitman was gone on his journey east in 1842-43, word was spread among the Indians by English interests that he was going to return “with emigrants who would take all their lands from them.”⁹²

The truth is that Dr. Whitman “prevented settlers from taking the Indian lands, and sent them off to other sections.”⁹³ Dr. Eells said “he knew of no case in which an American family had taken any land in the Walla Walla Valley.”⁹⁴ In addition, at this time the Indian tribes west of the Rockies gladly gave or sold land to “any white man that would come and live in their country.”⁹⁵

From their first arrival, Protestant missionaries taught the Indians the high moral standards of the Bible and the Godly commission to take dominion over the earth — they taught that enslaving other Indians by requiring levies on weaker tribes was wrong; they taught the Biblical concept of work applied to men, who were averse to manual labor and made the women do all the menial tasks; they taught them the importance of building permanent homes, planting crops, and raising cattle as a means of provision for themselves. The Hudson Bay Company only wanted the furs that the Indians could get them, they were not concerned for their future well being. They did not attempt to teach the Indians Godly behavior, but gave them gifts to get them to assist in their business adventures. If they continued to gather furs, they gladly allowed them to continue in their savage customs. “The Jesuit priests who were attached to the Hudson Bay Company, seconded the interest of the Company, and attempted to teach religion to the Indian and still leave him a savage.”⁹⁶ Many Indians grew angry at the missionaries reminding them of their sins and teaching them things they did not want to hear.

Whitman saw the disaffection of some Indians on his return in 1843, as they had burned his mill and some grain. In the following years some Indians reported that Whitman was poisoning them. In addition, they held him responsible for the outbreak among some tribes of contagious diseases, such as measles and dysentery, brought by the white settlers. Though Dr. Whitman did all he could to treat sick Indians — saving many under his care — if any of them died the superstitious nature of a few caused them to blame the doctor.

After a full investigation, the Oregon Presbytery adopted a report saying:

The causes of the massacre were reducible to two, viz.: The purpose of the English Government, or of the Hudson's Bay Company, to exclude American settlers from the country; and the efforts of Catholic priests to prevent the introduction of education of Protestantism by preventing the settlement of American citizens: and the efforts which both parties made, operating on the ignorant and suspicious minds of the savages, led to the butchery in which twenty-five lives were destroyed and most dreadful sufferings and brutal injuries inflicted on the survivors.⁹⁷

These are some of the factors that caused a small group of Cayuse under the leadership of a half-breed, Joe Lewis, to rise up against the American missionaries. Some Christian Indians had warned Whitman of the threat to his life. He was aware of the dangers, but continued to serve those God had called him to, for the majority of the Indians wished them to stay. In fact when the massacre occurred, Marcus, Narcissa, and the other martyrs were devoting their energies to relieve the Indians from suffering due to an epidemic disease. Rev. Spalding writes:

They were inhumanly butchered by their own — up to the last moment — beloved Indians for whom their warm Christian hearts had prayed for eleven years, and during that period their unwearied hands had administered to their every want, in sickness and distress, and had bestowed unnumbered blessings.⁹⁸

The massacre began on November 29, 1847. At that time 72 people lived at Whitman's mission station. Fourteen persons, including Dr. and Mrs. Whitman, were killed; a few escaped and 48 were taken prisoner — these "were made slaves by the murderers, and treated in the most cruel and brutal manner."⁹⁹ Rev. Spalding, who was away from the mission at that time but upon his return was sought out to be killed, yet providentially escaped, writes of the events at that day.

Doct. Whitman had just returned from burying an Indian child, was engaged in reading. An Indian, to divert his attention was in the act of soliciting medicine while another came behind him and with a tomahawk struck him on the back of his head, a second blow on the top of the head laid him lifeless on the floor. Then Tilankait, a principal chief and who has ever received unnumbered favors of the Doct. and who was about to be received into the church, fell upon the dead body and mangled it horribly, cutting the face and head, ripping it open and taking out the heart, etc. etc. and scattering them in the mud. Other bodies were treated in the same brutal, savage manner. The little captive girls were compelled to pass over these mangled bodies frequently to torment them.¹⁰⁰

In a letter to Narcissa's parents, Rev. Spalding relates that after the initial two blows, yet before Dr. Whitman died and Tilankait mutilated his body,

Narcissa and another woman took him from the kitchen to the sitting room, while the Indians had left the house to murder others. Spalding writes:

His dear wife bent over him and mingled her flowing tears with his precious blood. It was all she could do. They were her last tears. . . . Sister Whitman, in anguish, now bending over her dying husband, now over the sick, and now comforting the flying, screaming children, was passing by the window when she received the first shot in her right breast, and fell to the floor. She immediately arose, and kneeling at the settee on which lay her bleeding husband, in humble prayer commended her soul to God. She prayed for her dear children who were about to be made a second time orphans and to fall into the hands of her cruel murderers, and I am certain that she prayed for her murderers too.¹⁰¹

Mrs. Whitman and some others took refuge in an upstairs room, but were later forced to come downstairs. The Indians, who now crowded the house holding guns ready to fire, said the children were to stay inside, while Narcissa and two other adults were made to go outside. Upon stepping through the doorway “guns were discharged from without and within, the powder actually burning the faces of the children.”¹⁰² All three were hit with numerous bullets.

All three now lay upon the ground, groaning, struggling, dying. As they groaned, the Indians beat them with their whips and clubs and tried to force their horses over them. Darkness dispersed the Indians, but the groans of the dying continued till in the night. Brother Rogers seemed to linger longest. A short time before Mr. Osborn and family left their hiding-place [under the floor of the house] he was heard to say, in a faint voice, “Lord Jesus, come quickly,” and all was silent.

The next morning they were seen to be dead by the children, but what a sight for those dear lambs, made a second time fatherless and motherless! . . .

The dead bodies were not allowed to be removed till Wednesday morning [the massacre began Monday], when they were gathered together. . . . [S]ome girls sewed sheets around them, a large pit was dug by a Frenchman and some friendly Indians, and they were buried together, but so slightly that when the army arrived at the station, they found that the wolves had dug them up and eaten their flesh, and scattered their bones upon the plains.¹⁰³

Forty-eight people, mostly women and children, were held captive for about one month, the women especially being subjected to horrible abuse. Thanks to the efforts of an officer of the Hudson Bay Company, all the captives were ransomed for blankets, shirts, guns, ammunition and tobacco.

In response to these tragic events, the Americans organized an armed force of about 500 men, pursued the Indians, and fought several battles, though they never could capture the fleeing Indians. However, they were eventually punished.

After the volunteers failed to apprehend the guilty Cayuses, the Nez Percés, at the request of the government, rushed through the wintry snows, overtook the savages on the upper John Day River, overcame the Cayuses in a long fight, killed some, took five of their principal leaders, delivered them to the government, and they were tried and executed at Oregon City.¹⁰⁴

Marcus and Narcissa were martyrs for the cause of God and their country — they were truly Christian heroes. Rev. Spalding gave this description of Dr. Whitman:

Emphatically a patriot without guile, a Christian whose faith was measured by his works; who counted not his life dear unto him if he might but do good to his fellow-beings, white or red; whose forethought, whose hazards, labors, and sufferings, self-devised, unsolicited, unrewarded, to reach Washington through the snows of New Mexico, did more for Oregon and this coast than the labors of any other man. Already are fulfilled your remarkable words, on the banks of the Umatilla, on that our last night: “My death may do as much good to Oregon as my life can.”¹⁰⁵

Lessons from the Whitman Story

Dr. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman did much good in their life and in their death. Their missionary work had not been in vain. Because of them, under the leading of Providence, the states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho were peacefully saved for the American Union. Their, and other missionary’s, work among the Indians bore lasting fruit. In 1855, seven years after the massacre, it was reported that “forty-five Cayuse and one thousand Nez Percés have kept up regular family and public worship, singing from the Nez Percés Hymn Book and reading the Gospel of Matthew, translated into Nez Percés, the work of Dr. and Mrs. Spalding.”¹⁰⁶

There is much we can learn from the story of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. A few of those lessons are:

1. God providentially prepares and uses inspired men to advance His purposes. He inspires, directs, and protects those as they work to fulfill His plan for them.

2. In following God’s plan for our lives, we need to respond to what He calls us to do, and also to when. When Marcus and Narcissa heard of the sad appeal from the Indian Chiefs for the “Book of Life,” their immediate response was, “Here am I, send me!” When events toward the end of 1842 convinced Whitman he must quickly travel to the east, he did not delay — “I must go,” he said — even though he would have to travel in the winter at risk of life. He had “heard a call to the duty from a higher source than any earthly potentate. . . . The act stands out clear and bold and strong, as one of the finest instances of unselfish patriotism recorded in all history.”¹⁰⁷

3. There is a price to pay to serve God and fulfill His plan for our lives. Many Christians today have embraced the idea of “cheap grace,” thinking they can slide into heaven without doing much on earth. Our salvation is a free gift of God through the atoning work of Christ, but He paid a great price and expects us to take up our cross and follow Him. We are saved to serve and must die to our self and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit wherever He takes us. Isaac Watts wrote in his hymn, “Am I a Soldier of the Cross,”

Must I be carried to the skies
On flow’ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?

The martyrdom of the Whitman’s reminds us that many have “sailed through bloody seas” in fulfilling God’s call upon their lives, and shows us there is a price we must pay to follow Him and be a part of bringing His kingdom to earth.

4. Fulfilling His missionary call involves affecting individuals and civil society. Whitman converted the lost and acted to secure Oregon as part of free America. Missionaries have often shaped the destinies of communities and states. “Perhaps no event in the history of missions will better illustrate this than the way in which Oregon and our whole Northwest Pacific Coast was saved to the United States.”¹⁰⁸ The banner of the cross and the banner of his country were united in the work of Dr. Marcus Whitman.

In considering the life of Marcus Whitman, Nixon provides a fitting conclusion (whose words apply to Narcissa as well).

In the timeliness of his acts, in the heroism with which they were carried out, in the unselfishness which marked every step of the way, and in the wide-reaching effects of his work, Dr. Marcus Whitman, as a man and patriot and national benefactor, was excelled by none.

Such unselfish devotion, such obedience to the call of duty, such love of “the flag that makes you free,” such heroism, which never even once had an outcropping of personal benefit, will forever stand, when fully understood, as among the brightest and most inspiring pages of American history.¹⁰⁹

* * * * *

End Notes

1. William A. Mowry, *Marcus Whitman and the Early Days of Oregon* (New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1901), p. vi.
2. Mowry, p. 36.
3. Ibid.

4. William Walker, Letter of January 19, 1833, in Mowry, p. 43. Walker was an explorer of Indian country, an interpreter, and met with Clarke while the Indians were visiting St. Louis.
5. Oliver W. Nixon, *How Marcus Whitman Saved Oregon* (Chicago: Star Publishing Co., 1895), p. 51.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
7. Nixon, pp. 52-53. Mowry, p. 46.
8. Nixon, p. 52.
9. *The Illinois Patriot*, October 12, 1833, in Mowry, p. 38.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
12. Letter from Samuel Parker, in Mowry, p. 58.
13. Mowry, p. 57.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
17. Letter of Mrs. H.P. Jackson, younger sister of Mrs. Whitman, in Nixon, 68.
18. James Daugherty, *Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, Pioneers of Oregon* (New York: The Viking Press, 1953), p. 15.
19. Letter of Mrs. H.P. Jackson, in Nixon, 68.
20. Daugherty, p. 19.
21. Nixon, pp. 66-67. Mowry, p. 66.
22. Letter of Dr. Whitman, June 21, 1835, in Mowry, p. 59.
23. Mowry, p. 72.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
25. Nixon, p. 25.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
29. Daugherty, p. 50.
30. Nixon, p. 82.
31. Mowry, p. 73.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
33. Nixon, pp. 115-116.
34. Mowry, p. 77.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
38. Nixon, p. 90.
39. Mowry, p. 80.
40. Mowry, p. 80.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
42. Nixon, p. 93.
43. Mowry, p. 102.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
45. Nixon, p. 94.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
48. Mowry, p. 123.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
50. Nixon, p. 104.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
57. Mowry, pp. 147-148.

58. Nixon, p. 111.
59. *Senate Ex. Doc. No. 37*, Forty-first Congress, Third Session, in Mowry, 157-159.
60. *Senate Ex. Doc. No. 37*, Forty-first Congress, Third Session, in Mowry, 159-160.
61. Nixon, p. 116.
62. *Senate Ex. Doc. No. 37*, Forty-first Congress, Third Session, in Mowry, p. 160.
63. Mowry, p. 163.
64. Lovejoy's Letter in Mowry, p. 163.
65. Rev. William Barrows, in the *New York Observer*, December 21, 1882, in Mowry, p. 168.
66. Nixon, p. 122.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
70. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
73. As reported by Rev. Spalding in Mowry, p. 171.
74. *Senate Ex. Doc. No. 37*, Forty-first Congress, Third Session, in Mowry, p. 172.
75. Mowry, p. 172.
76. See Nixon, pp. 315-332, for a copy of the proposed bill and Whitman's letter of explanation.
77. Nixon, p. 133.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
80. Mowry, p. 181.
81. Jesse Applegate, "A Day on the Oregon Trail," *The Annals of America*, vol. 7, 1841-1849 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1976), p. 94.
82. Mowry, p. 205.
83. Recollections, pp. 116-117, in Mowry, p. 206.
84. Mowry, 207. Dr. Edwards reported that "Dr. Robert Newell brought three wagons through to Walla Walla in 1840," Nixon, p. 191.
85. Mowry, p. 198.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
88. Nixon, p. 175.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
91. Daugherty, p. 72.
92. Mowry, p. 217.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
95. Gray, *History of Oregon*, in Mowry, p. 224.
96. Nixon, 218.
97. Spalding pamphlet, p. 63, in Mowry, p. 225.
98. Letter from Rev. H.H. Spalding to the Parents of Mrs. Whitman, from the "Geneva Courier," Extra, 1848, in Mowry, p. 324.
99. Letter from Rev. H.H. Spalding to Rev. David Greene, January 8, 1848, in Mowry, p. 301.
100. *Ibid.*, pp. 301-302.
101. Letter from Rev. H.H. Spalding to the Parents of Mrs. Whitman, from the "Geneva Courier," Extra, 1848, in Mowry, p. 328.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
103. *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330.
104. *Senate Ex. Doc. No. 37*, p. 77, Forty-first Congress, Third Session, in Mowry, p. 222.
105. Rev. Mr. Spalding, *Senate Ex. Doc. No. 37*, p. 31, Mowry, p. 219.
106. Nixon, p. 233.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
108. Dr. Barrows, *Oregon and the Struggles for Possession*, in Nixon, p. 136.
109. Nixon, p. 178.

Biblical Worldview University

Training leaders of education, business, and politics to transform their culture for Christ.

The Providence Foundation Biblical Worldview University (BWU) provides training for leaders of all ages and spheres of life in a curriculum of real-world topics, offered via distance learning and periodic live classes. BWU offers dozens of courses on providential history, the family and Christian education, the marketplace, and the state. Start your Biblical worldview training today. Order online:

www.providencefoundation.com

Call: 434-978-4535

or email us and request a catalog:

university@providencefoundation.com

A Few Resources

America's Providential History

Chronicles how the Lord guided our nation from the very beginning. Proof from history: our nation grew from Christian principles. How to bring them back into the mainstream.

Building Godly Nations

Lessons from the Bible and America's Christian History

Examines the mandate for building Godly nations and how to apply Biblical principles to governing the nations. Chapters include: Fulfilling the Cultural Mandate; Pastors and American Independence; Separation of Church and State; The Role of Women in History; The Bible, Slavery, and America's Founders; Biblical Principles of Business; Education & the Kingdom of God.

The Economy from a Biblical Perspective

A Christian economy will flow from the heart of man outward. The Bible speaks to all of life, teaching many principles about economics and business. To be able to assess our current economic situation and determine what

policies would be best to put the nation on a path of prosperity, we must know what the Bible teaches about economics.

Become a Member and Receive Great Benefits.

Providence Foundation Basic Member: receive our newsletters, a 30% discount on all our books, videos, and materials, plus discounts to our seminars. **Premium Member:** receive Basic Member benefits plus a free book, \$80 voucher toward one of our BWU Courses, personal coaching, and more.

To join or receive more information visit our website: providencefoundation.com

