

## George Washington Carver Transformed the Economy of the South by Applying Biblical Truth

Stephen McDowell

George W. Carver was born into slavery just before the close of the Civil War. His mom was a slave, but after emancipation she stayed in Missouri with the family who had owned her. George and his mother were carried off from the Carver family by raiders when he was just a baby. Mose Carver offered 40 acres and a horse (since he had no cash) to a man to find the



George Washington Carver

mother and child. He brought back George, but was unable to find the mother. George, therefore, grew up on the Carver farm, but in relative poverty.

As a child he loved the woods and plants and things related to botany. He was very observant of nature and always asked questions. He also enjoyed using his hands. At about age ten he left the farm and worked his way through high school. As a young man he worked hard and saved money to go to a certain college, but was not allowed to attend. A couple helped him to go to an artist school, but he found there were no jobs for an artist. He eventually was able to study his first love, agriculture.

After obtaining his university degree, Carver was invited by Booker T. Washington to teach at his newly formed Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. His work while there transformed the economy of the South and affected many nations as well.

Carver would rise every morning at 4:00 AM, read the Bible, and seek God concerning what He wanted him to do. Toward the end of his life Carver remarked: “The secret of my success? It is simple. It is found in the Bible, ‘In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.’”<sup>1</sup>

One thing Carver sought God concerning was how to improve the economy of the southeastern part of the United States. Continual planting of cotton had depleted the soil and the invasion of the boll weevil was destroying much of the cotton crop.

Biographer Rackham Holt wrote that, “He devoutly believed that a personal relationship with the Creator of all things was the only foundation for the abundant life. He had a little story in which he related his experience:

I asked the Great Creator what the universe was made for.

“Ask for something more in keeping with that little mind of yours,” He replied.

“What was man made for?”

“Little man, you still want to know too much. Cut down the extent of your request and improve the intent.”

Then I told the Creator I wanted to know all about the peanut. He replied that my mind was too small to know all about the peanut, but He said He would give me a handful of peanuts. And God said, “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth ... to you it shall be for meat.... I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.”

I carried the peanuts into my laboratory and the Creator told me to take them apart and resolve them into their elements. With such knowledge as I had of chemistry and physics I set to work to take them apart. I separated the water, the fats, the oils, the gums, the resins, sugars, starches, pectoses, pentosans, amino acids. There! I had the parts of the peanuts all spread out before me.<sup>2</sup>

Carver's story teaches us the importance of preparation in fulfilling God's plan for our lives. Carver had labored hard to develop his skills of chemistry. Consequently, God could answer the question Carver posed to Him. God could not reveal the answer to this question to me today; I would need much preparation before I would be in a position to understand and act upon the answer. Diligent preparation is vital to understand and fulfill our calling. God may not answer many of our inquiries or lead us deeper into our providential purpose because we have not learned enough or been properly prepared to hear and understand what He may say. It is important to learn this lesson. To continue with Carver's story, he relates:

I looked at Him and He looked at me. "Now, you know what the peanut is."

"Why did you make the peanut?"

The Creator said, "I have given you three laws; namely, compatibility, temperature, and pressure. All you have to do is take these constituents and put them together, observing these laws, and I will show you why I made the peanut."

I therefore went on to try different combinations of the parts under different conditions of temperature and pressure, and the result was what you see.<sup>3</sup>

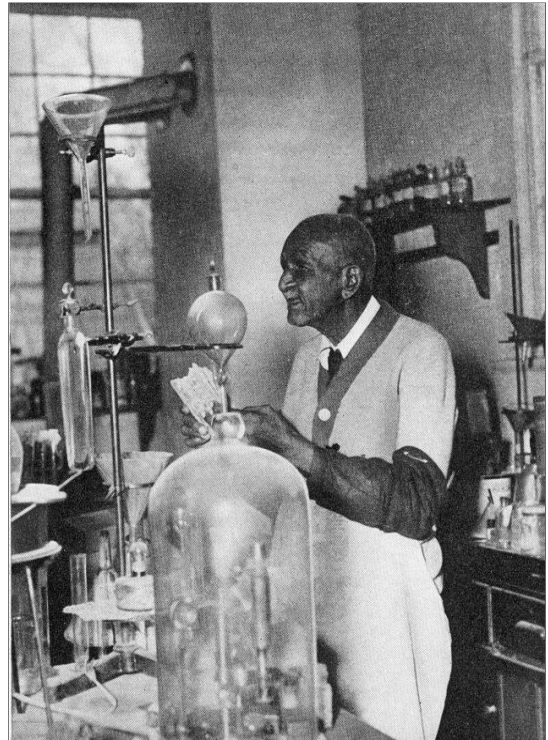
The results: Carver discovered over 300 uses for the peanut. Food items included nuts, soup, a dozen beverages, mixed pickles, sauces, meal, instant and dry coffee. Other items included: salve, bleach, tan remover, wood filler, washing powder, metal polish, paper, ink, plastics, shaving cream, rubbing oil, linoleum, shampoo, axle grease, synthetic rubber.

He produced milk which would not curdle in cooking or when acids were added. Long-lasting cream and cheese could be made from this milk. "This milk proved to be truly a lifesaver in the Belgian Congo. Cows could not be kept there because of leopards and flies, so if a mother died her baby was buried with her; there was nothing to nourish it. Missionaries fed the infants peanut milk, and they flourished."<sup>4</sup>

George worked with many other plants and items — making 107 products from sweet potatoes; making synthetic marble from sawdust; and making wallboard from many different Southern plants.

For his work, Carver received many awards and became the advisor to many world leaders, including President Franklin Roosevelt, Mahatma Gandhi, and Thomas Edison. In all his work he never failed to acknowledge God. In 1921 when he testified before a committee of Congress, he was asked by the Chairman:

"Dr. Carver, how did you learn all of these things?"



George Washington Carver said: "My purpose alone must be God's purpose — to increase the welfare and happiness of His people."

Carver answered: “From an old book.”

“What book?” asked the Senator.

Carver replied, “The Bible.”

The Senator inquired, “Does the Bible tell about peanuts?”

“No Sir” Dr. Carver replied, “But it tells about the God who made the peanut. I asked Him to show me what to do with the peanut, and he did.”<sup>5</sup>

Carver looked for divine direction and saw God as the revealer of truth. He said:

I discover nothing in my laboratory. If I come here of myself I am lost. But I can do all things through Christ. I am God’s servant, His agent, for here God and I are alone. I am just the instrument through which He speaks, and I would be able to do more if I were to stay in closer touch with Him. With my prayers I mix my labors, and sometimes God is pleased to bless the results.<sup>6</sup>

He knew his purpose in life: “My purpose alone must be God’s purpose — to increase the welfare and happiness of His people.”<sup>7</sup> Godly service, not money or fame, was his primary motivation. In fact, Edison offered him a job with a six-figure income, a fortune in those times, but he turned it down so he could continue his agricultural work in his laboratory that he called “God’s little workshop.” “George Washington Carver worked for the riches of God rather than the wealth of this world.”<sup>8</sup>

Carver helped transform the economy of the South, and affected agriculture all over the world. Carver had to overcome all kinds of obstacles to fulfill his destiny (only a few have been mentioned here). In all of these he persevered, labored hard, and pursued the desires in his heart. He had a great impact upon many people, upon agriculture, and the economy at large.



To read about other Christians who applied Biblical truth in their vocations see Stephen McDowell, *Building Godly Nations*, Chapter 1.

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Federer, *America’s God and Country*, Coppell, Tex: FAME Publishing, Inc., 1994, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Rackham Holt, *George Washington Carver, An American Biography*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., Inc., 1943, pp. 226-227.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>5</sup> Charles E. Jones, *The Books You Read*, Harrisburg, PA: Executive Books, 1985, 132. Quoted in Federer, p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> Holt, p. 220.

<sup>7</sup> Federer, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> James Manship, “George Washington Carver,” notes of speech, 1998.