

# Edmund Hamer Broadbent

by John Bjorlie

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*Edmund Hamer Broadbent was a Christian missionary who traveled extensively throughout Europe and beyond, establishing hundreds of New Testament churches and leaving a lasting impact on the Christian community.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:35, 1 Peter 4:16

**Topics:** "Missionary Work", "Persecution Faith"

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## Description

John Bjorlie preaches about the remarkable missionary journeys and ministry of E. H. Broadbent, a humble and fearless ambassador for Christ who traveled extensively throughout Europe, Russia, and beyond, spreading the gospel in multiple languages and facing various challenges and persecutions. Broadbent's dedication to teaching New Testament doctrine and preparing believers for persecution, his unwavering faith in the midst of trials, and his commitment to serving others selflessly for the sake of Christ are highlighted in his impactful life story.

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## Transcript

Edmund Hamer Broadbent (1861-1945) was the tidy-looking English gentleman with a bookish side who discovered ways of slipping into and out of countries that others just assumed were "closed doors." He was not a big man, and his pleasant, easygoing manner would not have conjured in your mind the picture of the fearless missionary.

Evidently God called just such a mild-mannered ambassador to witness for the Prince of Peace in the uncertain days that led up to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and to Nazism in Germany.

G. H. Lang indicates that brother Broadbent was converted in his youth, and began traveling with Frederick W. Baedeker when he was in his twenties. Early in his travels, he made a thorough study of German and French. His studies took on real earnestness after he arrived in Germany and realized that he did not know how to order a cup of coffee. Most of his preaching in Europe was in the German or French tongues. He was fluent in them, and in conversation could move effortlessly from one language to another. In his extensive travels he also learned some Russian. On one occasion in Germany, someone wondered if the speaker who was to preach at the gospel meeting would be "the Englishman."

"No," was the answer, "it is not the Englishman." The fact was, the speaker was E. H. Broadbent.

Broadbent was an encourager. You cannot consider his ministry without noting those he helped. Whether serving the aging F. W. Baedeker in those extraordinary errands across Russia, helping W. H. Bennet in Germany, or teaching the Bible to Professor Ferenc Kiss, the renowned anatomy professor at Budapest University who spent months in prison for his gospel work in Rumania, Broadbent was a true help. Whether advising James Lees about open doors in Poland and Lithuania, or comforting the converts in Baku on the west shore of the Caspian Sea (where Patwakan Tarajanz and his wife and ten children became not only survivors, but also bold witnesses for Christ during the fierce Armenian massacre in 1916), to all these the polite man with blue eyes and a sunny smile became their servant for Jesus' sake.

E. H. Broadbent frequently visited the assemblies in Poland along with Adolphus Eoll, Ransome Cooper, and George Goodman. This became one of his most encouraging fields of labor. In 1922, Broadbent wrote, "In Eastern Poland, about 800 new assemblies have been formed within the last two years, and the work goes on increasingly. In Western Poland also, there are districts where there is great blessing. Throughout the country the openings are innumerable. Some fifteen men are desirous of giving all or much of their time as evangelists."

Meeting places were often packed. The first problem was to get everyone squeezed in and quieted down. Then the next problem was to keep from fainting. Perhaps their municipalities were rationing bath water in those days; whatever the cause, the proper Englishman had to quickly adjust to new and strange smells. One meeting in Poland was so crowded that the little flames in their kerosene lamps sputtered for lack of oxygen.

Ransome Cooper related how "E. H. Broadbent told me once, when we were travelling together, of one such conference which had lasted the full twelve hours. At 9 p.m., a number of workmen came to him and said, 'We are not due in the factory before 7 o'clock tomorrow morning; will you give us a Bible Reading through the night on the book of Daniel?' And he did.

"Only special grace can keep a man going on year after year along such lines, ministering God's Word in one of three languages, submitting to the limitations of interpretation, always fresh and gracious in spirit, always receiving the inflow of spiritual power to guarantee a fresh outflow."

One observant brother explained it this way: "Well, you see, he prays much, and talks much with his Father in heaven. Have you not noticed how often he snatches occasions to be alone with his Master, and then how fresh he is afterwards to talk with us, all crowded into a little cottage for hours!"

One of the preachers who went into eastern Europe with Broadbent told about being shown his lodging for the night. The house was small, but the bed was very large. He went to bed, and not long after, his host came in and climbed into the same bed. In another few minutes the hostess tiptoed in and climbed in next to her husband.

Broadbent encountered so many surprises, and in them the only change on his face would be that smile peaking out shyly from behind his mustache. He ate their food, slept on their rough beds, discussed their farming methods, and played with their children. And when the sun went down and the lamps were lit, "the Book" was opened and in a clear, kindly way, the Scriptures became understandable and living to his hearers. Many quickly saw the contrast with the village priest who "always made everything obscure and difficult, and seemed to be irritated and vexed when anyone came to him with questions." One brother, as he listened to brother Broadbent, whispered to his neighbor, "How all this makes one long and pray to be a better Christian!"

In the Balkans, a young brother was in a "stormy, muddled, hotheaded meeting" to deal with a local problem. On and on this miserable meeting went until the young brother rose, weeping, and said, "Oh, my brothers, do we not need Mr. Broadbent with us! How different everything would have been! Can you not realize, can you not picture how he would have handled things tonight!"

E. H. Broadbent had an ability to travel and not unravel. He trained himself to sleep in odd places and positions. In jarring coach rides, he would relax every muscle until all his limbs would hang limp.

It would be difficult to retrace Broadbent's journeys. Most of his personal correspondence was unfortunately destroyed before he died. We do have some general idea of the extent of his ministry. Besides Belgium, Poland, Germany, Austria, the Baltics, Russia, and Turkey, he also preached in Egypt, and North and South America. One of his most farflung journeys was to Turkestan. Broadbent went in 1900 and in 1907, visiting the major cities of Uzbekistan, preaching the gospel. On his first visit, he related how he stood in crowded bazaars, being jostled by the turbaned salesmen as they carted their merchandise about. Beside the rows of camels, mules, and horses, he could identify Jews, Hindus, Afghans, and Muslims all mingling together. Every other religion was represented, but he could not see any witness for Christ, or any evidence that any had ever existed there.

Is it legitimate for a family man to travel? Obviously, most believers are not called to a traveling ministry. One can wonder what might become of the local churches if the believers were all gadding about hither and yon, from week to week. So, though most of us are not called too far beyond the county line in our spiritual ministries, still there are others who can say, as our Lord once did, "I must preach in other cities also."

Dora Broadbent accompanied her husband on many of his journeys. But most of her ministry involved raising their eight children and being hostess in their home at Gislingham, England, where it was not uncommon for the Broadbents to serve eighteen around their supper table. Their home at times served as a wayside stop for beleaguered brethren (such as the Russian Mennonites) who fled the persecutions and travelled to a friendlier North America. Whether Edmund Broadbent should have conducted his travels differently I cannot tell. We are told that he and Dora were in full fellowship in his work, and that Dora's children rose up to "call her blessed."

Brother Broadbent was especially burdened about setting local congregations on the firm footing of New Testament doctrine and practice that would prepare the saints for persecution. It was a critical matter to know biblically how to respond to the governing authorities. In Bavaria, the attitude was so oppressive that laws were instituted prohibiting unauthorized Christian meetings, especially those meeting for prayer.

Broadbent had been in such illegal meetings; in 1913 he wrote that the framers of those laws perceived that there was a power in prayer whose influence they wished to avoid. In Germany, assemblies were asked to form a confederation that complied with state requirements. But worse than the imposition of a denominational structure were the horrors of genocide. Many of Broadbent's hearers died under state persecutions in Russia and in the Nazi death camps. Passages such as Romans 8:35-39 took on an urgency in Broadbent's ministry.

As Broadbent neared the end of his ministry, he was constantly grieved to see that the truths he had labored to teach to the scattered saints in Europe were being systematically denied back in the United Kingdom. Broadbent was convinced that the New Testament pattern for missionary work and church order was being undermined by unscriptural missionary and funding organizations. His concerns are fully

expressed in his book, *The Pilgrim Church*, which is a classic treatment of the history of Christian gatherings which have remained true to New Testament doctrines since Pentecost.

At the time of Broadbent's death, G. H. Lang penned a sixty-page review of his life, in which he says, "The simple fact is that in central, eastern, and south-eastern Europe there are (or, at least, there were before the late devastating war) hundreds upon hundreds of such Christian churches as he regarded as of a New Testament type which came into existence through his journeys. Not that he founded them all, of course; but it was he who visited regions where there were no such churches and taught children of God the principles of the Word, which by following, they were enabled by the power of the Spirit of God to multiply, and to survive the opposition of the world and of apostate religious systems."

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