

PORTRAITS OF COURAGE



STORIES OF
BAPTIST HEROES



Julie Whidden Long

JIMMY CARTER BAPTIST PEACEMAKER



Who: Jimmy Carter

Where: Georgia

When: 1924-present

What he did and does: President of the United States, works for human rights around the world

James Earl Carter, Jr., is most well-known for the four years of his life that he served as the thirty-ninth president of the United States, but before he was president, he was a Baptist, and he still is! Jimmy Carter's Baptist roots were an important part of his life as President. Jimmy's Baptist heritage continues to influence his own life and the lives of others around the world.

Jimmy was born October 1, 1924, in the small farming town of Plains, Georgia. He grew up in the nearby town of Archery. Jimmy's father was a farmer. He grew peanuts, fruit, and vegetables, and he raised animals for their milk, meat, and wool. Jimmy's mother worked as a nurse. As



a boy, Jimmy and his three younger siblings helped on the farm, gathering eggs and milking cows. He was a good student and enjoyed reading and learning.

Jimmy's family attended Plains Baptist

Church, where he studied the Bible and learned about Jesus. At church and at home, his faith was molded by prayers and Bible readings. When he was eleven years old, he committed his life to Jesus, became a member of the church, and was baptized. From then on, Jimmy loved going to church and wanted others to love church, too. He even borrowed his mother's car to drive around looking for boys his age whom he could take to church.

After graduating from high school in Plains, Jimmy went to Georgia Southwestern College. In the midst of World War II, he took courses at the Georgia Institute of Technology in order to prepare for an appointment to the United States Naval Academy. He graduated from the Naval Academy and served as a submariner in the Navy. In 1946, he married a young woman from Plains, Rosalynn Smith, who had been a friend of his sister.

In 1953, Jimmy's father grew sick and died, and Jimmy and Rosalynn decided to leave the Navy and return to Plains to take over the family farm and business. Together, they ran Carter's Warehouse, a farming supply store.

Jimmy quickly got involved in the community and returned to Plains Baptist Church as a Sunday School teacher.

In 1962, Jimmy decided to enter politics. He won an election to the Georgia Senate. In 1966, he ran for governor and lost. He won the next election in 1970, becoming Georgia's seventy-sixth governor. As governor, he tried to help those whom others did not care for. He provided more school funding to both the rich and the poor. He hired black employees for state jobs. He improved prisons and mental health facilities, and he worked to protect the environment. The biggest issue Jimmy faced as governor, however, was **racial discrimination**.

In the 1960s, leaders in Georgia and other southern states had struggled to break down segregation laws. In those days, people were treated differently because of the color of their skin. Black people and white people had been separated from each other in public



Jimmy when he was governor

Racial discrimination is the act of treating a person or group of people differently or unfairly because of their skin color or appearance.

places, like schools, churches, buses, and even public restrooms. Leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., were working to change the way society treated African Americans unfairly.

Jimmy's father had believed in segregation, but his mother did not. As a boy growing up on the farm, Jimmy had many black friends with whom he played and worked. He remembered, "We ran, swam, rode horses, drove wagons, and floated on rafts together. We misbehaved together and shared the same punishments. We built and lived in the same tree houses and played cards and ate at the same table. But we never went to the same church or school."

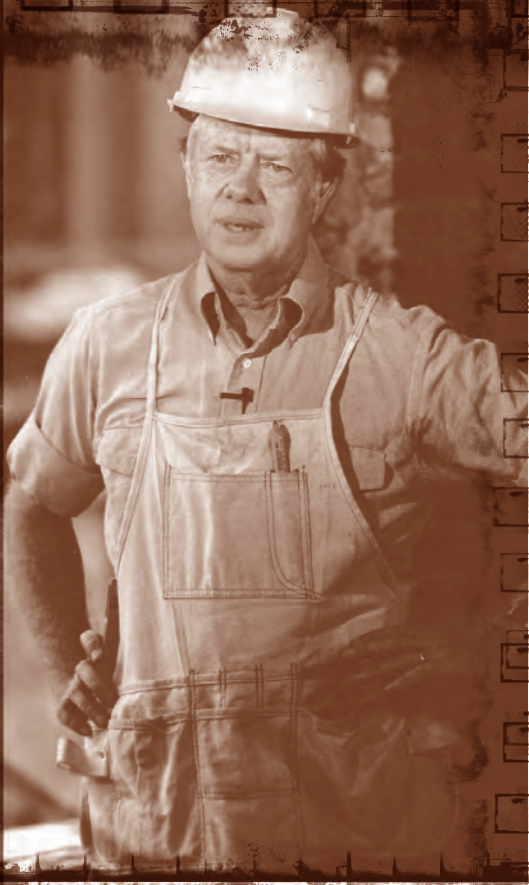
Because Jimmy's mother had taught him that treating people unfairly because of the color of their skin was wrong, he tried to make changes in the state. He also spoke out against segregation in his community. In 1965, the pastor and eleven deacons of Plains Baptist Church voted that blacks should not be allowed to worship there on Sundays. Jimmy, the twelfth deacon, had missed the meeting due to a trip to Atlanta. When he returned, he stood up on Sunday morning and urged the church to vote against the deacons' decision. Jimmy told the congregation that the church was God's house, not theirs. Sadly, most members of the church voted with the deacons. Later, when another minister tried to allow blacks to attend and was fired, Jimmy's family joined other families in beginning a new church that would accept all people, Maranatha Baptist Church.

In 1976, Jimmy Carter was elected president of the United States. As president, Jimmy thought of himself as a servant of the nation, and he wanted to make a positive impact on America and on the world. He promised never to lie to the people. He tried to lead the government to be caring and compassionate to people and nations.

Human rights sat at the top of Jimmy's list of priorities. He worked to stop governments that abused people. He worked for equal rights for women and African Americans. He created an energy plan to help take care of the environment. He tried to help create peace in fighting countries, and he was the first president in a long time not to send troops to fight in a war.

Jimmy believed strongly in the Baptist heritage of religious liberty for all people. He refused to treat people unfairly who did not follow his religion. He believed that the government should be separate from churches and that the government should not sponsor religious events. Some people grew angry that he would not approve of teachers leading prayers in public schools. He would not hold worship services in the White House. Jimmy worked hard to follow in the footsteps of his Baptist ancestors, like Roger

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that all people have because they were created by God. Some of these rights include the right to live and think freely, the right to be treated with equality, and the right of dignity.



Jimmy helping with Habitat for Humanity

Rosalynn returned to Plains. He began to use his influence as the former president to get involved in many other positive causes. He continued to work for peace and human rights, and he created a place where unfriendly groups could work out their problems. The Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, was created as a place to address health, peace, and political issues from around the world. Through

Williams and John Clarke, who worked to protect religious freedom for people of all religions in the United States.

Jimmy upset some people who did not agree with his positions on race, religion, or other political issues. Yet, he believed that he was doing what was right. His actions were motivated by his faith, his Christian principles, and his Baptist heritage.

After Jimmy lost the presidential election in 1980, he and

the Carter Center, Jimmy Carter has personally worked with world leaders to end wars, promote human rights, free prisoners jailed for their political beliefs, provide food for the hungry, and prevent disease around the world.

The Carters have also given much time after his presidency to working with Habitat for Humanity. Habitat is an organization that helps poor people in the United States and around the world by building houses for them. The Carters help to raise money and advertise for the organization, helping Habitat spread to ninety-two countries, but the Carters also hammer nails and saw wood. They volunteer a week of each year to work on Habitat houses.

Throughout his life, Jimmy has also remained a faithful Baptist. He has been a Sunday School teacher since 1936 and a deacon since 1958. He is still a member of Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia. He regularly teaches Sunday School at the church to a large group of visitors from around the world.

During most of his life, Jimmy was most closely identified with the Southern Baptist Convention. He now identifies himself with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance. Most recently, Jimmy helped to organize the New Baptist Covenant Celebration, a gathering of different Baptist groups from across North America. The goals of the covenant are to unite Baptists on the issues of poverty, peace, and justice around the world.

In 2002, Jimmy Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to find peaceful solutions to conflicts

around the world. Jimmy has been a champion of the Baptist idea that every individual is a child of God and has the right to live freely and safely. He works hard to ensure that those basic human rights are protected. He loves people, no matter if they are male or female, black or white, rich or poor, powerful or lowly.

Jimmy Carter is a Baptist hero because he is a Baptist peacemaker, fighting the evils of our world with love, respect, kindness, and compassion. He has worked for peace between individuals and nations. He has offered a sense of peace to the poor and the neglected by providing for their basic needs. He has been a voice of freedom in our world, bringing peace to the hearts of people created by God to live freely.

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Written by Julie Whidden Long, this 128-page book, designed especially for younger youth and older children, presents the stories of Baptist heroes. These heroes lived in various countries and centuries and represent many phases of Baptist life. By highlighting the biographical dimension of the Baptist past, these inspiring stories help readers appreciate the personal contributions of heroic Baptist men and women.



Rev. Julie Whidden Long is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Georgia. She previously served as minister of children and families (2005–2013) and associate pastor (2013–2018) at FBCX Macon. Additionally, Rev. Long was the associate director of Baptist Women in Ministry (2018–2019) and launched a coaching and consulting practice in 2020. A native of Fitzgerald, Georgia, she is a two-time graduate of Mercer University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Christianity and History from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in 2002 and a Master of Divinity from McAfee School of Theology in 2005. She is married to Jody Long, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia, and they have two children.