

COLONIAL BAPTISTS

THE FAITH AND CHARACTER THAT FOUNDED A NATION

Pastor Dalton W. Robertson wrote:

As we look at our nation at this point in time there is an amazing amount of history that is being re-written. Even though scripture and biblical phraseology is still on national monuments in Washington, D.C. the pamphlets and information flyers about each historical site tells a different story with God removed. The public schools are teaching a global thinking instead of a nationalism or a healthy pride in our nation. When a young man joins the military he has to wear the UN symbol as well as the American flag on his uniform to show his global thinking instead of his national patriotism. Because of the humanistic “Tower of Babel” that is forming I thought it would help to give a brief history of each of the early colonies and their Baptist heritage. May we not forget what God gave us here in this nation. I know this article is a little lengthy but in our day and age you can’t find our true Godly heritage in too many places.

Thousands of years of burnt, beaten and banished believers around the world are a testimony to the firmness with which Baptists hold their principles. They actually die for them. This strenuous faith has always led Bible-believing Baptists to act upon principle, leaving the results to God. Pragmatic empire-builders do not go to the stake for taking stands. Instead, their market-driven, “vision casting” keeps them well within the boundaries of the mainstream and moving fast down the progressive road to “relevance.” After all, you have to “do what it takes” to reach more people they say. The genuine Baptist; however, is shaped in faith and practice by the clear teachings of Scripture, not seeker-sensitive, market research and cutting edge, ministry innovation.

The earliest days of colonial America were influenced by the kind of Baptists who were well acquainted with the apostles’ declaration that, **“We ought to obey God rather than men”**. They came to this country with their cherished doctrines deeply set and their hearts aflame for God. They were a marginalized, persecuted people. It is not possible that they could have envisioned the effect that their sacrifices would have.

A handful of colonial Baptists planted seed that literally sprang up into a harvest of sturdy souls who changed the face of history. Baptist principles led to the establishment of the first human government in the history of the world that would grant complete religious liberty (Rhode Island). By the Revolutionary era, there were enough Baptists in the colonies to fan the flames of revolution and provide impetus to the formulation of the Bill of Rights, guaranteeing complete religious freedom in the new nation. Three components contributed to the unique faith of those colonial Baptists: a conscientious maintenance of their principles, a commitment to preaching the gospel, and the constraint of persecution. These three components led to the production of churches and the harvest of souls that provided the New World with a host of courageous believers who would support the American Revolution and undergird democracy with the Baptist principle of religious liberty. The ultimate result of faith and character forged in hardship, edified in New Testament churches and multiplied in evangelism is the cultivation of a very biblical nation.

The moral of this story is that there is not the slightest indication of those old Baptists envisioning these great results and accomplishments. Rather, they were simplistic in their biblical faith and fastidious in their commitment to it. Faithful labor of this nature always results in dying seed bringing forth fruit. As we take a short look at the first Baptists in each of the thirteen original colonies, we will see these three components at work together: 1) A strict adherence to Baptist principles, 2) The planting of many churches, and 3) The endurance of hardships and persecutions. Rightly ordered Baptists have always been those whose successes were the fruitful result of their labor. Their primary goal was obedience for God’s glory. Zealous commitment is the only lasting prevention of compromise and apostasy.

Everyday life was, in a word, hard in colonial America. Through often romanticized by our drama-crazed culture, life in those days was a difficult existence at best and characterized by ominous adversity at

worst. Just “getting by” was a hardship. Ruminating over the journal entries written by the Puritan governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop, historian Edmund S. Morgan says:

The journal is worth reading simply for the sense it conveys of what it took just to stay alive in seventeenth century Massachusetts. If Winthrop was a great man, he was not above recording the tribulations of everyday life for everyday people in a new world: they got lost in the woods, they drowned in storms as they traveled up and down in coasts in small boats, their crude dwellings caught fire and burned down and so did their haystacks, they fell through ice, droughts spoiled their crops, wolves ate their cattle.

Travel was of course, beyond difficult, as confirmed by John R. Alden, in *A History of the American Revolution*:

Emigration across the Atlantic in a small and crowded wooden ship was also a daunting prospect. Battling the prevailing Atlantic winds and currents, the slow-moving vessels usually took eight to twelve weeks to cross. Few of the Puritans who were mostly artisans and farmers, or their wives and children had traveled by ship. Aboard the standard vessel, about one-hundred passengers shared the cold, damp and cramped hold with their property, including some noisy and rank livestock. The emigrants consumed barreled water, salt meat and hard bread, a fate that worsened as the voyage proceeded: the food spoiled, worms proliferated and the water turned foul. Only in relatively calm weather, and only a few hours a day, could the passengers partake of the fresh air and distant views from the deck. Most of the time they huddled below as the pitching vessel churned through the cold and stormy waters.

These kinds of difficulties made life in general a trial for all. We find that the Puritans were a gritty sort, determined to reform the Anglican Establishment. Many of them came to the New World to seek the liberty to pursue their beliefs and were willing to brave the inconveniences and dangerous conditions to do so. What is often overlooked, however, was their reluctance to grant that liberty to anyone else but themselves. Dissenters were not treated with tolerance by New England’s “black hat establishment.” According to one Massachusetts Puritan, all dissenters have “free liberty to keep away from us.”

In Connecticut and Massachusetts, The Puritans prosecuted, tried, convicted, and exiled religious dissenters. Exiles who returned risked execution-the fate of four Quakers in Massachusetts between 1659 and 1661. The Massachusetts authorities also followed English precedent and established a board of censures to ensure that only orthodox Puritanism appeared in local print. And they ordered the destruction of Quaker tracts brought into the Colony.

The living conditions of the Chesapeake Bay Colonies were no better and in some ways worse. This is the world in which colonial Baptists lived, suffered and served the Lord. Their daily routine was fraught with hardship; but their commitment to principle becomes even more apparent when viewed against the backdrop of Puritanical oppression. In spite of these difficulties, the earliest American Baptists held firm to their New Testament convictions and planted churches throughout the colonies.

Rhode Island

Much has been written about John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes, and the first Baptist church in American history. This great first among American churches demonstrates each of the three components mentioned in the introduction: those of the First Baptist church were firm Baptists, starting many churches as a direct result of their faith and effort, consequently facing horrible hardship and persecution.

John Challenger affirms both the nature of things in New England and that Roger Williams and John Clarke (the first Baptist pastor in American history), were the chief architects of the Rhode Island colony and its unique and “lively” experiment in liberty:

In reality, the true grounds of liberty of conscience were not then known, or embraced by any sect or party of Christians; all parties seemed to think that as they only were in the possession of the truth, so they alone had a right to restrain, and crush all other opinions, which they respectively called error and heresy, where they were the most numerous and powerful; and in

other places they pleaded a title to liberty and freedom of their consciences... Mr. R. Williams and Mr. J. Clarke, two fathers of this Colony, appear among the first who publically avowed that Jesus Christ is King in his own Kingdom, and that no others had authority over his subjects, in the affairs of conscience and eternal salvation.

When John Clarke arrived in Boston in 1637, the colony was astir with theological controversy. The Puritans were actively oppressing any dissent that reared its head in Massachusetts; therefore, John Clarke, the “Baptist refugee,” led a group of dissenters into the New Hampshire wilderness. Thomas Bickness said, “Little is known of the early years of Dr. Clarke, but it is absolutely certain that they were devoted to the acquisition of learning under the best conditions of that period of English life as we find him at the age of twenty-eight holding two professions, that of a physician and also an ordained minister of the Baptist faith.” Louis Franklin Asher said, “Pastor Wilbur Cheesman Nelson further claimed that good reasons exist to believe that Clarke was a Baptist before he left England and that he came to this country as ‘a Baptist refugee.’”

John Clarke, the learned minister and devoted Baptist preacher, established the first Baptist church in America in 1638 in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. From the beginning, Clarke and his brethren at the first church were active, preaching the gospel and building a church according to strict Baptist principles. The fact that Clarke and the Rhode Island Baptists were strenuously committed to right order is demonstrated in their doctrine and practice. Asher said that Clarke “publically decried the baptisms, ordinations, and church order of the Puritans.” Clarke believed that the nature of the New Testament church required a regenerated membership secured by proper baptism. This baptism required a “three-fold prerequisite: a proper subject, a believer; a proper design, immersion in water following a profession of faith in Christ; a proper administrator, a duly baptized, divinely called and Spirit-led disciple who stands in the faithful exercise of the ministerial office properly ordained and appointed.”

Not only were these Rhode Island men strict in faith, but they were passionate in labor for the gospel’s sake. Asher said, “Clarke believed in and practiced missionary work. His method of spreading the ‘Good News’ was through preaching and teaching. He was persuaded that coercion would not accomplish what the power of the gospel through preaching could.” Clarke himself said, “Although God can bring men to Christ and cause them to believe in him for life, yet he hath appointed an ordinary way to effect that great work of faith, which is by means of sending a ministry into the world.” Such impassioned urgency is the spirit that took John Clarke, John Crandall and Obadiah Holmes to Lynn, Massachusetts, in order to worship with the ailing William Witter. The arduous thirty mile trip along with the peril of braving the Puritan Establishment was indicative of the fervency with which they went about the Lord’s work.

The faith and practice of these earliest of American Baptists proved to be fruitful not only in the establishment of the Portsmouth Newport¹⁶ church, but also in the organization of other churches as well. Through the direct efforts of Obadiah Holmes, the First Baptist Church of Boston was founded (1665), as well as the first in Pennsylvania (Cold Springs, circa 1684 Pastor Thomas Dungan) and New Jersey (Middletown, 1666).

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts was ground zero for Puritanical oppression. These Congregationalists guarded their theocracy with a vengeance. John T. Christian says this about Massachusetts:

For more than forty years after the landing of the Pilgrims there was no Baptist church in Massachusetts. The first Baptist church constituted in that State was at Swansea, on the south side, near the Rhode Island line.

The First Baptist Church of Swansea, Massachusetts was the first in the colony and the fourth in America. The scene which has this assembly rising out of the rubble of persecution, is one played with some of American Baptist history’s most exciting characters. In 1649, the esteemed Obadiah Holmes was living in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. He was a member of the Congregational Church there under the pastoral

leadership of Mr. Newman, a fierce adversary of any kind of dissent. At some point, Obadiah Holmes, along with eight others, “imbibed Baptist principles” and began holding a meeting of their own. The growing Baptist efforts incurred the opposition of the Massachusetts courts and provided cause for Holmes and his brethren to remove to Newport, joining the First Baptist Church there. Holmes assisted John Clarke and eventually became the pastor.

Stifling oppression was the atmosphere that prevailed in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the mid-17th century. The establishment was aggressive and thoroughly Puritan. Meanwhile, in 1662, the Act of Uniformity was passed in England under Charles II; and 2,000 ministers were ejected. As a result, John Miles gathered his imperiled flock and church records, and became the first Welsh Baptist preacher to cross the Atlantic. He brought his congregation with him to Rehoboth, arriving in 1663 acquiring a grant of land where they settled the new township of Swansea church:

The Church multiplied and became strong, taking deep root in the colony. They built their first meeting-house about three miles north-east of Warren, and in 1679 a new one at Kelley’s Bridge, with a parsonage for Miles. But they were strongly opposed, until the whole region became Baptist.

Many noteworthy men and events become key components in a study of the Massachusetts Baptists. This is where William Witter so famously opposed the Establishment, calling infant baptism “the badge of the whore.” This is where Obadiah Holmes was cruelly beaten with thirty stripes from a three-corded whip for preaching to a sick and dying man. This is where Henry Dunster, the first president of Harvard, was fired for opposing infant baptism. This is where Thomas Gould, in exile on Noodle Island over two years, preached to all who would cross over in row boats- many were saved and First Baptist Boston eventually gained the freedom to worship according to their conscience. This is where a Baptist preacher named William Milburne, courageously opposed the atrocity of the Salem witch trials and wrote a book against it that, as Christian suggests, “probably broke the power of the Theocracy.”

NEW JERSEY

The mention of New Jersey conjures many images; but few would put the Baptists and “The Garden State” together. Few states are so rich with Baptist history. Baptists were among the earliest settlers of the New Jersey colony, which was due in part to the unusual freedoms extended to its citizens. Only Rhode Island and Pennsylvania offered similar privileges. The venerable Thomas S. Griffiths demonstrated the distinction between Baptist freedom and Congregational despotism in his excellent work entitled, *A History of the Baptists in New Jersey*. He wrote:

Only Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Rhode Island were colonies that never knew a persecution. In New Jersey as in Rhode Island there were historic facts that distinguished the source of the nation’s constitutional liberties. About 1664-5, Obadiah Holmes, Sr., a victim of Puritanical persecution in Massachusetts came with other Baptists and some “Friends” (Quakers) and took up a large tract of land in East Jersey. These guaranteed in their patent:

“Unto any and all who shall plant and inhabit any of the lands aforesaid, they shall have free liberty of conscience without any molestation or disturbance whatsoever in their way of worship.”

In 1666, a colony of Congregationalists from Connecticut founded Newark, New Jersey. These resolved that:

“None should be admitted freemen, or free Burgesses, save such as were members of one or the other of the Congregational Churches, and determined as a fundamental agreement and order that any who might differ in religious opinion from them and who would not keep their views to themselves should be compelled to leave the place.”

These provisions show whence the nation’s liberties came.

Thomas Griffiths makes it clear – the source for America’s doctrine of complete religious liberty is the teachings of the Baptists, not the Congregationalists.

Historian Norman H. Maring said, “Baptists were in the vanguard of New Jersey’s English colonists, constituting the pioneers who carved out farms while Indians still roved the forests.” One of New Jersey’s earlier settlements was Monmouth County. Among the original thirty-six to sign the Monmouth Patent, eighteen were Baptists, including Obadiah Holmes Jr., the son of the Boston sufferer. Baptists were so prolific in what is now called Holmdel that it was once known as Baptisttown! The great men of God who labored in New Jersey are too numerous to list in this short article.

The first Baptist church in New Jersey was the Baptist church at Middletown. There is a good deal of confusion concerning the actual date of the origin of this church. If you were to visit this church you would see over the entrance is the date of 1688 denoting its establishment. The original “Middletown” church was located in Baptisttown (Holmdel). Middletown referred to a much larger area that is now three different counties. The Middletown church of today took the name when they were established and the original church would now be known as the Baptist church at Holmdel. The point to be made here is that a Baptist church was organized and functioning in New Jersey much earlier than 1688. This amazing church was conscientious in faith and practice, blessed with the leadership of exceptional men of God through the years and a participant in the spread of Baptist churches throughout the region.

At the inception of Baptist labors in New Jersey, numerous churches were active in preaching the gospel in many itinerate missions that were eventually established as churches. The first churches in New Jersey were Middletown, instrumental in the organization of more than a hundred churches and one of the first five churches to found the Philadelphia Association in 1707; Piscataway, “with its lineage of Scotch Plains and Morristown, covered a territory where are now more than a hundred churches; Cohansie, the immigrated assembly from Tipperary County, Ireland; along with Hopewell, the church whose men marched off together to fight in the American Revolution; along with Hightstown, Salem and others who nursed mission ministries that became established churches.

PENNSYLVANIA

The first Baptist church in Pennsylvania is another example of how the first churches in America were active in sending men to preach and plant new works. Thomas Dungan, the first Baptist pastor in the colony, came from Rhode Island and was most likely a member of the First Baptist Church. Dungan started the Cold Spring church circa 1684 and was used of the Lord, even though the church ceased to exist by 1770, according to Morgan Edwards.

In 1686, a man named Elias Keach, the son of England’s notable Baptist pastor, Benjamin Keach, came to America from London, described by Cathcart as “a wild young man.” Elias was not a preacher, but for some reason, he pretended to be so and acquired the opportunity to preach in the home of a local Baptist. In the midst of his sermon, he was struck with the conviction that he himself was lost and on his way to hell. The listeners assumed that he had been seized with some disorder. He departed with weeping and found his way to Thomas Dungan, who “encouraged him to take his guilty soul to the sin-cleansing Redeemer.” Keach was subsequently baptized and ordained by Dungan. With twelve people, Keach organized the Pennepek Baptist Church in January, 1688. While traveling with the Baptist History Preservation Society’s annual tour, I had the unforgettable privilege of preaching there during the 300th anniversary of the Philadelphia Association! One of the old meeting houses still stands at the creek where their converts were baptized in a short walk away.

Keach traveled all over Pennsylvania and the surrounding colonies preaching; many were saved, baptized and placed into New Testament churches. He established missions at the Falls (Trenton), Burlington, Cohansie, Salem, Pennsneck, Chester and Philadelphia.

SOUTH CAROLINA

The exciting story of the first Baptist church in the colony of South Carolina is also the story of the first Baptist church established in the American south. It is believed that by the early 1680's, William Screven was the pastor of the Baptist congregation at Kittery, Maine. Due to his own opposition to infant baptism, being accused of "blasphemous speeches about the holy ordinance of baptism," Screven began to face persecution by the Maine authorities. This persecution was described by David Benedict as "storm and violence, fines and imprisonment," resulting in the Kittery congregation being "scattered like sheep upon the mountains." Consequently, Screven, along with a remnant of his dispersed congregation, removed to Charleston, South Carolina. They first traveled to Somerton in 1683 and then to Charleston in 1693. Christian puts the date of the South Carolina church at 1690. About Screven, Townsend summarized, "Driven by intolerance from England to Maine, and from the colony to Carolina, he finally succeeded in establishing upon a firm foundation the first Baptist church in the South."

The Charleston church provided the south with a strong ecclesiastical anchor and a litany of pastors to be ranked among American's most celebrated Baptists. Men like the persecuted Screven as well as Oliver Hart, Richard Furman, and Basil Manly led the faithful congregation. A history of gospel preaching and mission work in the south was instigated by the ruthless arm of religious despotism.

DELAWARE

The first Baptist church in Delaware was the Welsh Tract Baptist Church. Thirty thousand acres of land were granted by William Penn to David Evans and William Davis and were deeded to settlers from south Wales. Christian writes that the Baptists who established the first Baptist church among the Welsh immigrants were prominent leaders. Thomas Griffiths was the first pastor, arriving in 1701 from south Wales. Soon after his arrival, a log meeting house was erected. It was the third Baptist meeting house built in America. The preaching was done in the Welsh language here until 1800.

Elijah Baker and Philip Hughes labored together as traveling evangelists with "many converts" baptized. They "prepared material and resolved to build churches." Though not without enduring the stinging rebuff of opposition, these two men were instrumental in starting twenty-two churches in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. Cathcart said, "In this work these ministers received the hearty co-operation of the Baptist pastors and churches." Clearly, the early colonial Baptists were zealous in their efforts to preach the gospel and plant churches according to the New Testament pattern. To view them, as some do, as rigid, staid Calvinists is incorrect. Whatever their confessions may have stated, their practices were light years apart from the baby-sprinkling, state-church system of Calvinism that leaves the "predetermined elect" to be drawn to God without the use of means. However, in the next century, the anti-mission, Calvinistic error would destroy many of the churches that these men started. This is demonstrated in Richard B. Cooks, *The Early and Later Delaware Baptists*.

CONNECTICUT

The unrelenting ferocity of establishment persecution is found to be present in Connecticut, as other colonies. Their laws were "rigid against all sectaries." A Harrowing story of persecution in the American Colonies occurred in 1744 in Saybrook. Fourteen persons were arrested for holding a Baptist meeting. Christian cites Trumbull:

They were arraigned, tried, fined, and driven on foot, through a deep mud, to New London jail, a distance of twenty-five miles, where they were thrust into prison, without food, fire, or beds, and kept in dreadful sufferings for several weeks, and probably would have perished had not some Baptist brethren, residing in New London, Great Neck, carried them provisions.

One of the imprisoned was an infant, who afterwards became the wife of Mr. Stephen Webb, of Chester. Another was an unconverted man by the name of Job Buckley; the prayers and Christian patience with which these Christians bore their sufferings in jail were blessed to his conversion: when they were released they formed a church in [Saybrook], placed his name first on the list of constituent members.

The effect of these kinds of hardships was typical. The crushed church only spread beneath the grinding heel of religious despotism. Baptist churches spread throughout the colony and great revival was experienced there by God's people. Cathcart said, "The colony was in a ferment from 1740 to 1760. About forty separate churches were started.

The first Baptist church to be established in Connecticut was started in Groten by the highly regarded Valentine Wightman in 1705. Valentine was the grandson of the last martyr to be burned at the stake in England, the Baptist preacher, Edward Whitman (Executed in Lichfield, England in 1612). He was used mightily of God throughout the region.

VIRGINIA

No colony is more significant to Baptist history than Virginia. Volumes have been written on the Virginia Baptists alone. The first know church was established in 1714 by Robert Nordin. According to Cathcart, "From labors in this vicinity several churches were formed, which in part composed the Kehukee Association, organized in 1765. Everywhere Baptist churches are found in proper order, there is the natural tendency to spread, to reproduce. Virginia had churches as members of the Kehukee, Philadelphia and Sandy Creek associations.

The laws against dissenters were so rigid in the Virginia colony that the jails were often inhabited by Baptists. Jeremiah Jeter said that, "The old Virginia Baptists laid the foundation of our faith in the old common, as their songs of praise rang out from many an old jail." Cathcart summarizes the Virginia contribution well:

The Baptists of Virginia, in patriotism, in heroic sufferings for Christ, in zeal to spread the gospel in their own and in other states, and in success, have made for themselves a glorious record; Virginia Baptists have given to several other states their divine principles and preachers who constructed a multitude of Baptist churches.

NEW YORK

Numerous men of God preached in New York under the duress of opposition, one of which was William Wickenden of Rhode Island. He faced discouragement and persecution for two years. Regarded as a law-breaker, he languished in prison for months. For some time, New York had no Baptist preacher and no New Testament church. In 1712, Valentine Wightman traveled to New York for a short time, during which "about a dozen persons were baptized." Nicolas Evers preached to Wightman's converts and others for a number of years, but the church lost their building and eventually disbanded.

Through a series of twists and turns organizationally (and due to a faithful few), Benjamin Miller, pastor of the Scotch Plains Baptist Church in New Jersey, assisted the New York Baptists in securing a meeting place in a rigging-loft on William Street. In time, they erected their first meeting house on Gold Street, which was opened in 1760. In 1762, twenty-seven persons received their letters of dismissal from the Scotch Plains Church in order to join with the First Baptist Church of New York City. The giant of a preacher and leader, John Gano, was installed as their first official pastor.

During the Revolutionary War, the church was dispersed and "baptism was not administered from April, 1776, to September, 1784. Gano, the patriot and preacher, returned and reorganized his bedraggled congregation, finding thirty-seven of its members eager to begin worship and service. In two years their numbers reached more than two hundred.

MARYLAND

Maryland was the only Roman Catholic colony; and therefore, Rome received the strong protests of the Baptists. An English General Baptist named Henry Sater, “appears to have formed the first Baptist church in the colony, at Chestnut Ridge, near Baltimore, in 1742. Cathcart records:

It has ever since been known as “Sater’s” church. It has a small brick meeting-house in a beautiful grove of about four acres, containing numerous graves of the Baptist fathers and their descendants. This church at first increased rapidly. In four years it numbered 181 members, and extended into Opeckon and Ketockton, in Virginia. In 1754 a church, principally originating from Sater’s, was founded at Winter Run, in Hartford County, which has since borne the name of the Hartford church. For forty years it was under the pastoral care of the Rev. John Davis, who died in 1809, in the eighty-eighth year of his age, venerated and beloved.

David Benedict offered this information:

In 1794, (Asplund’s Register) Maryland contained 17 churches, in which were about 950 members. There had been a gradual increase of the denomination since, so that now, as near as can be ascertained, there are in this State, two Associations, viz. the Baltimore and Salisbury, about 23 churches, and about 12 or 1400 communicants.

NORTH CAROLINA

The colony of North Carolina was characterized by ruggedness, both in landscape and citizenry. These hard-edged, earnest people were described by Lumpkin as having a rough exterior, a lack of religiosity, as well as grosser forms of lawlessness. Those living in the remote, interior region of the colony traveled on “footpaths running from settlement to settlement, marked by notches and trees.” North Carolina was growing rapidly, with immigrants of various origins moving into its jurisdiction.

The first Baptists know to have organized churches in North Carolina were the General Baptists. William Lumpkin said:

Paul Palmer, of Maryland, a General Baptist, settled in Perquiman’s Precinct by 1720, and within a few years he was engaging in evangelistic labors in Chowen Country, North Carolina. Here he organized a short-lived church at Cisco. Palmer helped to form Shiloh Church in 1729, which continued....The group began a very promising movement of evangelization using itinerate preachers. Between 1727 and 1750 about sixteen General Baptist Churches were established in North Carolina, some of which had over 200 members each.

In this author’s opinion; however, the most amazing work of God in the history of America took place in North Carolina – the Separate Baptist Revival. In 1755, sixteen people including Shubal Stearns and wife, Stearns’ brother-in-law, Daniel Marshall and wife, organized the Sandy Creek church in what was then Orange County. These two men were greatly influenced by the preaching of the Anglican evangelist, George Whitfield concerning “experimental religion.” In faithfulness to the Scriptures, Stearns and Marshall found their way to firm Baptist principles, consummated by New Testament Believer’s baptism and local church ordination. These men were used of God in an amazing way. Again, Lumpkin records:

The mother church at Sandy Creek set the pace of growth at the outset. Within a few years, how many is unknown, the membership climbed from the original sixteen to over six hundred. But the missionary outreach of the church was even more remarkable than its growth.

In three years, this group of sixteen people grew into three churches with a combined membership of over 900!

When the Stearns group arrived at the Sandy Creek location, there were few Baptist churches in the south. In a short time, winds of Baptist revival would blow south, west and north, leaving churches in its path. Baptist pastor, church planter and historian, James R. Beller identifies this amazing revival of evangelism

across the southland as “the roots of the OLD TIME RELIGION.” Morgan Edwards said, “... in 17 years Sandy Creek has spread its branches westward as far as the great river Mississippi; southward as far as Georgia; eastward to the sea and Chesapeake Bay; and northward to the waters of the Potomac; it, in 17 years, is become mother, grandmother, and great grandmother to 42 churches, from which sprang 125 ministers.”

NEW HAMPSHIRE

In 1638, Hanserd Knollys founded the first Baptist church of New Hampshire in Dover. He returned to England later and the Baptists of Dover fled to Long Island and at some point to New Brunswick, New Jersey, due to persecution. The first Baptist church formed in New Hampshire about whose origin there is no dispute, would be the Baptist church at Newton, organized in 1755. One of New Hampshire’s most active and useful men of God was Hezekiah Smith, a man whose labors contributed not only to converts, but churches and associations of churches as well.

Georgia

The south burned brightly with revival fires in the 1760’s and 1770’s. In 1771, an embattled, sixty-five year old preacher named Daniel Marshall settled in Georgia – then the only ordained preacher in the state. James R. Beller said, Daniel Marshall “ought to be remembered as one of the greatest missionaries of the 18th Century.”

If you were to travel to a little town in northeast Georgia called Appling, you would be thrilled to find a monument to the memory of Daniel Marshall in the grassy, narrow median that meanders through the tiny town. Someone cared enough to memorialize such a faithful life. A few miles away you would find the old Kiokee meeting house built in 1808. There may not be a more beautiful and spiritually impressive site than the old Marshall home place. There stands a marker on this knoll that reads:

MARSHALL CEMETERY

Some Marshall family graves may have purposely been left unmarked.

Abraham Marshall wrote about his father, Daniel:

No monumental pile or letter’d stone

His virtue to posterity reveals:

His name and character are better known

By holy truth and ministerial seals.

A Marker dedicated to Daniel Marshall stands there on the old home place and reads, “Georgia Baptists are indebted to him for nurturing many men who contributed to the movement’s early growth.”

This amazing church, Kiokee, was the first church in Georgia and is still meeting today, making it Georgia’s oldest continuing church. Thomas Ray said concerning Marshall, “From his headquarters at Kiokee, he went forth in all directions, preaching and planting churches in the darkest corners of Georgia.”

TIMELESS PRINCIPLES NEEDED TODAY

We have taken a quick glance at the first Baptist churches organized in the thirteen original colonies. In 175 years (from 1638 to 1812), the number of Baptist churches in America rose from one to 2,633. Any student of history and advocate of Baptist principles would thrill to consider the faith and fortitude of those special saints. They were sturdy souls, dedicated in faith and practice in a way that is needed in every era.

Their beliefs and actions as the people of God were timeless in their relevance because they were rooted deeply in the soil of Scripture.

In conclusion, I remind you of the three important traits of these colonial Baptists – traits that we need today. First, they were conscientious about their principles. This is demonstrated in their doctrinal confessions, but even more so in their ecclesiastical behavior. They honored the Lord and His commandments, guarding their churches with a careful adherence to the ordinances and a biblical application of discipline.

Second, they were committed to preaching the gospel. They braved all kinds of weather, traversed land and sea, and worked tirelessly to establish churches. Thousands of stories are yet untold about Baptists throughout this nation and throughout history who were willing to **“spend and be spent”** for God and others.

Finally, the colonial Baptists were constrained by persecution. Imagine the people of God standing outside a Virginia jail to sing together and listen to their “imprisoned preacher” preach through the grates! Stories abound concerning entire congregations relocating due to persecution. Though Satan has always meant this for evil, God’s work has spread like a windblown prairie fire when despotism has attempted to blow it out!

The sad reality is that while the Baptists of yesteryear were persecuted and still prospered in the Lord, today’s Baptists are enjoying the benefits of materialism and sliding unchecked into apostasy every day. Baptists discarded their principles for admiration and advantage in the 19th century by working in union with pedo-baptists. They became ecumenical fundamentalists instead of New Testament Baptists. They discarded their Bibles during the same period, taken up by the apostate spirit of Christian scholarship. What is left are a host of professing Baptists who are planting corrupt seed and praying for a healthy harvest. Now is the time for Bible-believing Baptists to hold their principles dear and double their efforts to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. The results are God’s business. While we do not face the peril of violent opposition currently, we are far too easily swayed by the threat of lost privileges. May we never be moved from the truth by the desire to accomplish any end. May we never exchange our hard-fought ground for the easy places of theological compromise. May we never lose heart for the irreplaceable priority of rightly ordered New Testament churches.

COLONIAL BAPTISTS

THE FAITH AND CHARACTER THAT FOUNDED A NATION

As we look at our nation at this point in time there is an amazing amount of history that is being re-written. Even though Scripture and biblical phraseology is still on national monuments in Washington, D.C., the pamphlets and informational flyers about each historical site tells a different story with God removed. The public schools are teaching a global thinking instead of nationalism or a healthy pride in our nation. When a young man joins the military he has to wear the UN symbol as well as the American flag on his uniform to show his global thinking instead of his national patriotism. Because of the humanistic “Tower of Babel” that is forming, I thought it would help to give a brief history of each of the early colonies and their Baptist heritage. May we not forget what God gave us here in this nation. I know this article is a little lengthy, but in our day and age you can’t find our true godly heritage in too many places.

Thousands of years of burnt, beaten and banished believers around the world are a testimony to the firmness with which Baptists hold to their principles. They actually die for them. This strenuous faith has always led Bible-believing Baptists to act upon principle, leaving the results to God. Pragmatic empire-builders do not go to the stake for taking stands. Instead, their market-driven, “vision casting” keeps them well within the boundaries of the mainstream and moving fast down the progressive road to “relevance.” After all, you have to “do what it takes” to reach more people they say. The genuine Baptist; however, is shaped in faith and practice by the clear teachings of Scripture, not seeker-sensitive, market research and cutting edge, ministry innovation.

The earliest days of colonial America were influenced by the kind of Baptists who were well acquainted with the apostles’ declaration that, ***“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*** They came to this country with their cherished doctrines deeply set and their hearts aflame for God. They were a marginalized, persecuted people. It is not possible that they could have envisioned the affect that their sacrifices would have.

A handful of colonial Baptists planted seed that literally sprang up into a harvest of sturdy souls who changed the face of history. Baptist principles led to the establishment of the first human government in the history of the world that would grant complete religious liberty (Rhode Island). By the Revolutionary era, there were enough Baptists in the colonies to fan the flames of revolution and provide impetus to the formulation of the Bill of Rights, guaranteeing complete religious freedom in the new nation. Three components contributed to the unique faith of those colonial Baptists: a conscientious maintenance of their principles, a commitment to preaching the Gospel, and the constraint of persecution. These three components led to the production of churches and the harvest of souls that provided the New World with a host of

courageous believers who would support the American Revolution and undergird democracy with the Baptist principle of religious liberty. The ultimate result of faith and character forged in hardship, edified in New Testament churches, and multiplied in evangelism is the cultivation of a very biblical nation.

The moral of this story is that there is not the slightest indication of those old Baptists envisioning these great results and accomplishments. Rather, they were simplistic in their biblical faith and fastidious in their commitment to it. Faithful labor of this nature always results in dying seed bringing forth fruit. As we take a short look at the first Baptists in each of the thirteen original colonies, we will see these three components at work together: 1) A strict adherence to Baptist principles, 2) The planting of many churches, and 3) The endurance of hardships and persecutions. Rightly ordered Baptists have always been those whose successes were the fruitful result of their labor. Their primary goal was obedience for God's glory. Zealous commitment is the only lasting prevention of compromise and apostasy.

Everyday life was, in a word, hard in colonial America. Though often romanticized by our drama-crazed culture, life in those days was a difficult existence at best and characterized by ominous adversity at worst. Just "getting by" was a hardship. Ruminating over the journal entries written by the Puritan governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop, historian Edmund S. Morgan says:

The journal is worth reading simply for the sense it conveys of what it took just to stay alive in seventeenth century Massachusetts. If Winthrop was a great man, he was not above recording the tribulations of everyday life for everyday people in a new world: they got lost in the woods, they drowned in storms as they traveled up and down the coasts in small boats, their crude dwellings caught fire and burned down, and so did their haystacks, they fell through ice, droughts spoiled their crops and wolves ate their cattle.

Travel was of course, beyond difficult, as confirmed by John R. Alden, in "A History of the American Revolution:"

Emigration across the Atlantic in a small and crowded wooden ship was also a daunting prospect. Battling the prevailing Atlantic winds and currents, the slow-moving vessels usually took eight to twelve weeks to cross. Few of the Puritans who were mostly artisans and farmers, or their wives and children had traveled by ship. Aboard the standard vessel, about one-hundred passengers shared the cold, damp and cramped hold with their property, including some noisy and rank livestock. The emigrants consumed barreled water, salt meat and hard bread, a fate that worsened as the voyage proceeded: the food spoiled, worms proliferated and the water turned foul. Only in relatively in calm weather, and only a few hours a day, could the passengers partake of the fresh air and distant views from the deck. Most of the time they huddled below as the pitching vessel churned through the cold and stormy waters.

These kinds of difficulties made life in general a trial for all. We find that the Puritans were a gritty sort, determined to reform the Anglican Establishment. Many of them came to the New World to seek the liberty to pursue their beliefs and were willing to brave the inconveniences and dangerous conditions to do so. What is often overlooked, however, was their reluctance to grant that liberty to anyone else but themselves. Dissenters were not treated with tolerance by New England's "black-hat establishment." According to one Massachusetts Puritan, all dissenters have "free liberty to keep away from us."

In Connecticut and Massachusetts, The Puritans prosecuted, tried, convicted, and exiled religious dissenters. Exiles who returned risked execution - the fate of four Quakers in Massachusetts between 1659 and 1661. The Massachusetts authorities also followed English precedent and established a board of censures to ensure that only orthodox Puritanism appeared in local print. And they ordered the destruction of Quaker tracts brought into the Colony.

The living conditions of the Chesapeake Bay Colonies were no better and in some ways worse. This is the world in which colonial Baptists lived, suffered and served the Lord. Their daily routine was fraught with hardship; but their commitment to principle becomes even more apparent when viewed against the backdrop of Puritanical oppression. In spite of these difficulties, the earliest American Baptists held firm to their New Testament convictions and planted churches throughout the colonies.

Rhode Island

Much has been written about John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes, and the first Baptist church in American history. This great first among American churches demonstrates each of the three components mentioned in the introduction: those of the First Baptist church were firm Baptists, starting many churches as a direct result of their faith and effort, consequently facing horrible hardship and persecution.

John Challenger affirms both the nature of things in New England and that Roger Williams and John Clarke (the first Baptist pastor in American history), were the chief architects of the Rhode Island colony and its unique and "lively" experiment in liberty:

In reality, the true grounds of liberty of conscience were not then known, or embraced by any sect or party of Christians; all parties seemed to think that as they only were in the possession of the truth, so they alone had a right to restrain, and crush all other opinions, which they respectively called error and heresy, where they were the most numerous and powerful; and in other places they pleaded a title to liberty and freedom of their consciences... Mr. R. Williams and Mr. J. Clarke, two fathers of this Colony, appear among the first who publically avowed that Jesus Christ

is King in his own Kingdom, and that no others had authority over his subjects, in the affairs of conscience and eternal salvation.

When John Clarke arrived in Boston in 1637, the colony was astir with theological controversy. The Puritans were actively oppressing any dissent that reared its head in Massachusetts; therefore, John Clarke, the “Baptist refugee,” led a group of dissenters into the New Hampshire wilderness. Thomas Bickness said, “Little is known of the early years of Dr. Clarke, but it is absolutely certain that they were devoted to the acquisition of learning under the best conditions of that period of English life as we find him at the age of twenty-eight holding two professions, that of a physician and also an ordained minister of the Baptist faith.” Louis Franklin Asher said, “Pastor Wilbur Cheesman Nelson further claimed that good reasons exist to believe that Clarke was a Baptist before he left England and that he came to this country as ‘a Baptist refugee.’”

John Clarke, the learned minister and devoted Baptist preacher, established the first Baptist church in America in 1638 in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. From the beginning, Clarke and his brethren at the first church were active, preaching the Gospel and building a church according to strict Baptist principles. The fact that Clarke and the Rhode Island Baptists were strenuously committed to right order is demonstrated in their doctrine and practice. Asher said that Clarke “publically decried the baptisms, ordinations, and church order of the Puritans.” Clarke believed that the nature of the New Testament church required a regenerated membership secured by proper baptism. This baptism required a “three-fold prerequisite: a proper subject, a believer; a proper design, immersion in water following a profession of faith in Christ; a proper administrator, a duly baptized, divinely called and Spirit-led disciple who stands in the faithful exercise of the ministerial office properly ordained and appointed.”

Not only were these Rhode Island men strict in faith, but they were passionate in labor for the Gospel’s sake. Asher said, “Clarke believed in and practiced missionary work. His method of spreading the ‘Good News’ was through preaching and teaching. He was persuaded that coercion would not accomplish what the power of the Gospel through preaching could.” Clarke himself said, “Although God can bring men to Christ and cause them to believe in Him for life, yet He hath appointed an ordinary way to effect that great work of faith, which is by means of sending a ministry into the world.” Such impassioned urgency is the spirit that took John Clarke, John Crandall and Obadiah Holmes to Lynn, Massachusetts, in order to worship with the ailing William Witter. The arduous thirty-mile trip along with the peril of braving the Puritan Establishment was indicative of the fervency with which they went about the Lord’s work.

The faith and practice of these earliest of American Baptists proved to be fruitful not only in the establishment of the Portsmouth Newport 16 church, but also in the organization of other churches as well. Through the direct efforts of Obadiah Holmes, the First Baptist Church of Boston was founded (1665), as well as the first in Pennsylvania (Cold Springs, circa 1684 Pastor Thomas Dungan) and New Jersey (Middletown, 1666).

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts was ground zero for Puritanical oppression. These Congregationalists guarded their theocracy with a vengeance. John T. Christian says this about Massachusetts:

For more than forty years after the landing of the Pilgrims there was no Baptist church in Massachusetts. The first Baptist church constituted in that State was at Swansea, on the south side, near the Rhode Island line.

The First Baptist Church of Swansea, Massachusetts was the first in the colony and the fourth in America. The scene which has this assembly rising out of the rubble of persecution, is one played with some of American Baptist history's most exciting characters. In 1649, the esteemed Obadiah Holmes was living in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. He was a member of the Congregational Church there under the pastoral leadership of Mr. Newman, a fierce adversary of any kind of dissent. At some point, Obadiah Holmes, along with eight others, "imbibed Baptist principles" and began holding a meeting of their own. The growing Baptist efforts incurred the opposition of the Massachusetts courts and provided cause for Holmes and his brethren to remove to Newport, joining the First Baptist Church there. Holmes assisted John Clarke and eventually became the pastor.

Stifling oppression was the atmosphere that prevailed in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the mid-17th century. The establishment was aggressive and thoroughly Puritan. Meanwhile, in 1662, the Act of Uniformity was passed in England under Charles II; and 2,000 ministers were ejected. As a result, John Miles gathered his imperiled flock and church records, and became the first Welsh Baptist preacher to cross the Atlantic. He brought his congregation with him to Rehoboth, arriving in 1663 acquiring a grant of land where they settled the new township of Swansea church:

The Church multiplied and became strong, taking deep root in the colony. They built their first meeting-house about three miles north-east of Warren, and in 1679 a new one at Kelley's Bridge, with a parsonage for Miles. But they were strongly opposed, until the whole region became Baptist.

Many noteworthy men and events become key components in a study of the Massachusetts Baptists. This is where William Witter so famously opposed the Establishment, calling infant baptism "the badge of the whore." This is where Obadiah Holmes was cruelly beaten with thirty stripes from a three-corded whip for preaching to a sick and dying man. This is where Henry Dunster, the first president of Harvard, was fired for opposing infant baptism. This is where Thomas Gould, in exile on Noodle Island over two years, preached to all who would cross over in row boats- many were saved and First Baptist Boston eventually gained the freedom to worship according to their conscience. This is where a Baptist preacher named William Milburne, courageously opposed the atrocity of the Salem witch trials and wrote a book against it that, as Christian suggests, "probably broke the power of the Theocracy."

NEW JERSEY

The mention of New Jersey conjures many images; but few would put the Baptists and “The Garden State” together. Few states are so rich with Baptist history. Baptists were among the earliest settlers of the New Jersey colony, which was due in part to the unusual freedoms extended to its citizens. Only Rhode Island and Pennsylvania offered similar privileges. The venerable Thomas S. Griffiths demonstrated the distinction between Baptist freedom and Congregational despotism in his excellent work entitled, *A History of the Baptists in New Jersey*. He wrote:

Only Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Rhode Island were colonies that never knew a persecution. In New Jersey as in Rhode Island there were historic facts that distinguished the source of the nation’s constitutional liberties. About 1664-5, Obadiah Holmes, Sr., a victim of Puritanical persecution in Massachusetts came with other Baptists and some “Friends” (Quakers) and took up a large tract of land in East Jersey. These guaranteed in their patent:

“Unto any and all who shall plant and inhabit any of the lands aforesaid, they shall have free liberty of conscience without any molestation or disturbance whatsoever in their way of worship.”

In 1666, a colony of Congregationalists from Connecticut founded Newark, New Jersey. These resolved that:

“None should be admitted freemen, or free Burgesses, save such as were members of one or the other of the Congregational Churches, and determined as a fundamental agreement and order that any who might differ in religious opinion from them and who would not keep their views to themselves should be compelled to leave the place.”

These provisions show whence the nation’s liberties came.

Thomas Griffiths makes it clear – the source for America’s doctrine of complete religious liberty is the teachings of the Baptists, not the Congregationalists.

Historian Norman H. Maring said, “Baptists were in the vanguard of New Jersey’s English colonists, constituting the pioneers who carved out farms while Indians still roved the forests.” One of New Jersey’s earlier settlements was Monmouth County. Among the original thirty-six to sign the Monmouth Patent, eighteen were Baptists, including Obadiah Holmes Jr., the son of the Boston sufferer. Baptists were so prolific in what is now called Holmdel that it was once known as Baptisttown! The great men of God who labored in New Jersey are too numerous to list in this short article.

The first Baptist church in New Jersey was the Baptist church at Middletown. There is a good deal of confusion concerning the actual date of the origin of this church. If you were to visit this church you would see over the entrance is the date of 1688 denoting its establishment. The original "Middletown" church was located in Baptisttown (Holmdel). Middletown referred to a much larger area that is now three different counties. The Middletown church of today took the name when they were established and the original church would now be known as the Baptist church at Holmdel. The point to be made here is that a Baptist church was organized and functioning in New Jersey much earlier than 1688. This amazing church was conscientious in faith and practice, blessed with the leadership of exceptional men of God through the years and a participant in the spread of Baptist churches throughout the region.

At the inception of Baptist labors in New Jersey, numerous churches were active in preaching the Gospel in many itinerate missions that were eventually established as churches. The first churches in New Jersey were Middletown, instrumental in the organization of more than a hundred churches and one of the first five churches to found the Philadelphia Association in 1707; Piscataway, "with its lineage of Scotch Plains and Morristown, covered a territory where are now more than a hundred churches; Cohansie, the immigrated assembly from Tipperary County, Ireland; along with Hopewell, the church whose men marched off together to fight in the American Revolution; along with Hightstown, Salem and others who nursed mission ministries that became established churches."

PENNSYLVANIA

The first Baptist church in Pennsylvania is another example of how the first churches in America were active in sending men to preach and plant new works. Thomas Dungan, the first Baptist pastor in the colony, came from Rhode Island and was most likely a member of the First Baptist Church. Dungan started the Cold Spring church circa 1684 and was used of the Lord, even though the church ceased to exist by 1770, according to Morgan Edwards.

In 1686, a man named Elias Keach, the son of England's notable Baptist pastor, Benjamin Keach, came to America from London, described by Cathcart as "a wild young man." Elias was not a preacher, but for some reason, he pretended to be so and acquired the opportunity to preach in the home of a local Baptist. In the midst of his sermon, he was struck with the conviction that he himself was lost and on his way to Hell. The listeners assumed that he had been seized with some disorder. He departed with weeping and found his way to Thomas Dungan, who "encouraged him to take his guilty soul to the sin-cleansing Redeemer." Keach was subsequently baptized and ordained by Dungan. With twelve people, Keach organized the Pennepek Baptist Church in January, 1688. One of the old meeting houses still stands at the creek where their converts were baptized in a short walk away.

Keach traveled all over Pennsylvania and the surrounding colonies preaching; many were saved, baptized and placed into New Testament churches. He established missions at the Falls (Trenton), Burlington, Cohansie, Salem, Pennsneck, Chester and Philadelphia.

SOUTH CAROLINA

The exciting story of the first Baptist church in the colony of South Carolina is also the story of the first Baptist church established in the American south. It is believed that by the early 1680's, William Screven was the pastor of the Baptist congregation at Kittery, Maine. Due to his own opposition to infant baptism, being accused of "blasphemous speeches about the holy ordinance of baptism," Screven began to face persecution by the Maine authorities. This persecution was described by David Benedict as "storm and violence, fines and imprisonment," resulting in the Kittery congregation being "scattered like sheep upon the mountains." Consequently, Screven, along with a remnant of his dispersed congregation, removed to Charleston, South Carolina. They first traveled to Somerton in 1683 and then to Charleston in 1693. Christian puts the date of the South Carolina church at 1690. About Screven, Townsend summarized, "Driven by intolerance from England to Maine, and from the colony to Carolina, he finally succeeded in establishing upon a firm foundation the first Baptist church in the South."

The Charleston church provided the south with a strong ecclesiastical anchor and a litany of pastors to be ranked among American's most celebrated Baptists. Men like the persecuted Screven as well as Oliver Hart, Richard Furman, and Basil Manly led the faithful congregation. A history of Gospel preaching and mission work in the south was instigated by the ruthless arm of religious despotism.

DELAWARE

The first Baptist church in Delaware was the Welsh Tract Baptist Church. Thirty thousand acres of land were granted by William Penn to David Evans and William Davis and were deeded to settlers from south Wales. Christian writes that the Baptists who established the first Baptist church among the Welsh immigrants were prominent leaders. Thomas Griffiths was the first pastor, arriving in 1701 from south Wales. Soon after his arrival, a log meeting house was erected. It was the third Baptist meeting house built in America. The preaching was done in the Welsh language here until 1800.

Elijah Baker and Philip Hughes labored together as traveling evangelists with "many converts" baptized. They "prepared material and resolved to build churches." Though not without enduring the stinging rebuff of opposition, these two men were instrumental in starting twenty-two churches in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. Cathcart said, "In this work these ministers received the hearty co-operation of the Baptist pastors and churches." Clearly, the early colonial Baptists were zealous in their efforts to preach the Gospel and plant churches according to the New Testament pattern. To view them, as some do, as rigid, staid Calvinists is incorrect. Whatever their confessions may have stated, their practices were light years apart from the baby-sprinkling, state-church system of Calvinism that leaves the "predetermined elect" to be drawn to God without the use of means. However, in the next century, the anti-mission, Calvinistic error would destroy many of the churches that these men started. This is demonstrated in Richard B. Cooks, *The Early and Later Delaware Baptists*.

CONNECTICUT

The unrelenting ferocity of establishment persecution is found to be present in Connecticut, as other colonies. Their laws were “rigid against all sectaries.” A Harrowing story of persecution in the American Colonies occurred in 1744 in Saybrook. Fourteen persons were arrested for holding a Baptist meeting. Christian cites Trumbull:

They were arraigned, tried, fined, and driven on foot, through a deep mud, to New London jail, a distance of twenty-five miles, where they were thrust into prison, without food, fire, or beds, and kept in dreadful sufferings for several weeks, and probably would have perished had not some Baptist brethren, residing in New London, Great Neck, carried them provisions. One of the imprisoned was an infant, who afterwards became the wife of Mr. Stephen Webb, of Chester. Another was an unconverted man by the name of Job Buckley; the prayers and Christian patience with which these Christians bore their sufferings in jail were blessed to his conversion: when they were released they formed a church in [Saybrook], placed his name first on the list of constituent members.

The effect of these kinds of hardships was typical. The crushed church only spread beneath the grinding heel of religious despotism. Baptist churches spread throughout the colony and great revival was experienced there by God’s people. Cathcart said, “The colony was in a ferment from 1740 to 1760. About forty separate churches were started.”

The first Baptist church to be established in Connecticut was started in Groten by the highly regarded Valentine Wightman in 1705. Valentine was the grandson of the last martyr to be burned at the stake in England, the Baptist preacher, Edward Whitman (Executed in Lichfield, England in 1612). He was used mightily of God throughout the region.

VIRGINIA

No colony is more significant to Baptist history than Virginia. Volumes have been written on the Virginia Baptists alone. The first know church was established in 1714 by Robert Nordin. According to Cathcart, “From labors in this vicinity several churches were formed, which in part composed the Kehukee Association, organized in 1765. Everywhere Baptist churches are found in proper order, there is the natural tendency to spread, to reproduce.” Virginia had churches as members of the Kehukee, Philadelphia and Sandy Creek associations.

The laws against dissenters were so rigid in the Virginia colony that the jails were often inhabited by Baptists. Jeremiah Jeter said that, “The old Virginia Baptists laid the foundation of our faith in the old common, as their songs of praise rang out from many an old jail.” Cathcart summarizes the Virginia contribution well:

The Baptists of Virginia, in patriotism, in heroic sufferings for Christ, in zeal to spread the gospel in their own and in other states, and in success, have made for themselves a glorious record; Virginia Baptists have given to several other states their divine principles and preachers who constructed a multitude of Baptist churches.

Numerous men of God preached in New York under the duress of opposition, one of which was William Wickenden of Rhode Island. He faced discouragement and persecution for two years. Regarded as a law-breaker, he languished in prison for months. For some time, New York had no Baptist preacher and no New Testament church. In 1712, Valentine Wightman traveled to New York for a short time, during which "about a dozen persons were baptized." Nicolas Eyers preached to Wightman's converts and others for a number of years, but the church lost their building and eventually disbanded.

Through a series of twists and turns organizationally (and due to a faithful few), Benjamin Miller, pastor of the Scotch Plains Baptist Church in New Jersey, assisted the New York Baptists in securing a meeting place in a rigging-loft on William Street. In time, they erected their first meeting house on Gold Street, which was opened in 1760. In 1762, twenty-seven persons received their letters of dismissal from the Scotch Plains Church in order to join with the First Baptist Church of New York City. The giant of a preacher and leader, John Gano, was installed as their first official pastor.

During the Revolutionary War, the church was dispersed and "baptism was not administered from April, 1776, to September, 1784." Gano, the patriot and preacher, returned and reorganized his bedraggled congregation, finding thirty-seven of its members eager to begin worship and service. In two years their numbers reached more than two hundred.

MARYLAND

Maryland was the only Roman Catholic colony; and therefore, Rome received the strong protests of the Baptists. An English General Baptist named Henry Sater, "appears to have formed the first Baptist church in the colony, at Chestnut Ridge, near Baltimore, in 1742. Cathcart records:

It has ever since been known as "Sater's" church. It has a small brick meeting-house in a beautiful grove of about four acres, containing numerous graves of the Baptist fathers and their descendants. This church at first increased rapidly. In four years it numbered 181 members, and extended into Opeckon and Ketockton, in Virginia. In 1754 a church, principally originating from Sater's, was founded at Winter Run, in Hartford County, which has since borne the name of the Hartford church. For forty years it was under the pastoral care of the Rev. John Davis, who died in 1809, in the eighty-eighth year of his age, venerated and beloved.

David Benedict offered this information:

In 1794, (Asplund's Register) Maryland contained 17 churches, in which were about 950 members. There had been a gradual increase of the denomination since, so that now, as near as can be ascertained, there are in this State, two Associations, viz. the Baltimore and Salisbury, about 23 churches, and about 12 or 1400 communicants.

NORTH CAROLINA

The colony of North Carolina was characterized by ruggedness, both in landscape and citizenry. These hard-edged, earnest people were described by Lumpkin as having a rough exterior, a lack of religiosity, as well as grosser forms of lawlessness. Those living in the remote, interior region of the colony traveled on "footpaths running from settlement to settlement, marked by notches and trees." North Carolina was growing rapidly, with immigrants of various origins moving into its jurisdiction.

The first Baptists know to have organized churches in North Carolina were the General Baptists. William Lumpkin said:

Paul Palmer, of Maryland, a General Baptist, settled in Perquiman's Precinct by 1720, and within a few years he was engaging in evangelistic labors in Chowen Country, North Carolina. Here he organized a short-lived church at Cisco. Palmer helped to form Shiloh Church in 1729, which continued....The group began a very promising movement of evangelization using itinerate preachers. Between 1727 and 1750 about sixteen General Baptist Churches were established in North Carolina, some of which had over 200 members each.

In this author's opinion; however, the most amazing work of God in the history of America took place in North Carolina – the Separate Baptist Revival. In 1755, sixteen people including Shubal Stearns and wife, Stearns' brother-in-law, Daniel Marshall and wife, organized the Sandy Creek church in what was then Orange County. These two men were greatly influenced by the preaching of the Anglican evangelist, George Whitfield concerning "experimental religion." In faithfulness to the Scriptures, Stearns and Marshall found their way to firm Baptist principles, consummated by New Testament Believer's baptism and local church ordination. These men were used of God in an amazing way. Again, Lumpkin records:

The mother church at Sandy Creek set the pace of growth at the outset. Within a few years, how many is unknown, the membership climbed from the original sixteen to over six hundred. But the missionary outreach of the church was even more remarkable than its growth.

In three years, this group of sixteen people grew into three churches with a combined membership of over 900!

When the Stearns group arrived at the Sandy Creek location, there were few Baptist churches in the south. In a short time, winds of Baptist revival would blow south, west and north, leaving churches in its path. Baptist pastor, church

planter and historian, James R. Beller identifies this amazing revival of evangelism across the southland as “the roots of the OLD TIME RELIGION.” Morgan Edwards said, “... in 17 years Sandy Creek has spread its branches westward as far as the great river Mississippi; southward as far as Georgia; eastward to the sea and Chesapeake Bay; and northward to the waters of the Potomac; it, in 17 years, is become mother, grandmother, and great grandmother to 42 churches, from which sprang 125 ministers.”

NEW HAMPSHIRE

In 1638, Hanserd Knollys founded the first Baptist church of New Hampshire in Dover. He returned to England later and the Baptists of Dover fled to Long Island and at some point to New Brunswick, New Jersey, due to persecution. The first Baptist church formed in New Hampshire about whose origin there is no dispute, would be the Baptist church at Newton, organized in 1755. One of New Hampshire’s most active and useful men of God was Hezekiah Smith, a man whose labors contributed not only to converts, but churches and associations of churches as well.

Georgia

The south burned brightly with revival fires in the 1760’s and 1770’s. In 1771, an embattled, sixty-five year old preacher named Daniel Marshall settled in Georgia – then the only ordained preacher in the state. James R. Beller said, Daniel Marshall “ought to be remembered as one of the greatest missionaries of the 18th Century.”

If you were to travel to a little town in northeast Georgia called Appling, you would be thrilled to find a monument to the memory of Daniel Marshall in the grassy, narrow median that meanders through the tiny town. Someone cared enough to memorialize such a faithful life. A few miles away you would find the old Kiokee meeting house built in 1808. There may not be a more beautiful and spiritually impressive site than the old Marshall home place. There stands a marker on this knoll that reads:

MARSHALL CEMETERY

Some Marshall family graves may have purposely been left unmarked.

Abraham Marshall wrote about his father, Daniel:

No monumental pile or letter’d stone

His virtue to posterity reveals:

His name and character are better known

By holy truth and ministerial seals.

A Marker dedicated to Daniel Marshall stands there on the old home place and reads, "Georgia Baptists are indebted to him for nurturing many men who contributed to the movement's early growth."

This amazing church, Kiokee, was the first church in Georgia and is still meeting today, making it Georgia's oldest continuing church. Thomas Ray said concerning Marshall, "From his headquarters at Kiokee, he went forth in all directions, preaching and planting churches in the darkest corners of Georgia."

TIMELESS PRINCIPLES NEEDED TODAY

We have taken a quick glance at the first Baptist churches organized in the thirteen original colonies. In 175 years (from 1638 to 1812), the number of Baptist churches in America rose from one to 2,633. Any student of history and advocate of Baptist principles would thrill to consider the faith and fortitude of those special saints. They were sturdy souls, dedicated in faith and practice in a way that is needed in every era. Their beliefs and actions as the people of God were timeless in their relevance because they were rooted deeply in the soil of Scripture.

In conclusion, I remind you of the three important traits of these colonial Baptists – traits that we need today. First, they were conscientious about their principles. This is demonstrated in their doctrinal confessions, but even more so in their ecclesiastical behavior. They honored the Lord and His commandments, guarding their churches with a careful adherence to the ordinances and a biblical application of discipline.

Second, they were committed to preaching the Gospel. They braved all kinds of weather, traversed land and sea, and worked tirelessly to establish churches. Thousands of stories are yet untold about Baptists throughout this nation and throughout history who were willing to "*spend and be spent*" for God and others.

Finally, the colonial Baptists were constrained by persecution. Imagine the people of God standing outside a Virginia jail to sing together and listen to their "imprisoned preacher" preach through the grates! Stories abound concerning entire congregations relocating due to persecution. Though Satan has always meant this for evil, God's work has spread like a windblown prairie fire when despotism has attempted to blow it out!

The sad reality is that while the Baptists of yesteryear were persecuted and still prospered in the Lord, today's Baptists are enjoying the benefits of materialism and sliding unchecked into apostasy every day. Baptists discarded their principles for admiration and advantage in the 19th century by working in union with pedo-baptists. They became ecumenical fundamentalists instead of New Testament Baptists. They discarded their Bibles during the same period, taken up by the apostate spirit of Christian scholarship. What is left are a host of professing Baptists who are planting corrupt seed and praying for a healthy harvest. Now is the time for Bible-believing Baptists to hold their principles dear and double their efforts to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The results are God's business. While we do not currently

face the peril of violent opposition, we are far too easily swayed by the threat of lost privileges. May we never be moved from the truth by the desire to accomplish any end. May we never exchange our hard-fought ground for the easy places of theological compromise. May we never lose heart for the irreplaceable priority of rightly ordered New Testament churches.