

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Forging of Baptist Nation

In 1770 there were but 97 Baptist churches. The 34 churches in the Philadelphia Association averaged 69 and two-thirds members each. If the same average held throughout the 97 churches there were less than 6,800 members in the land. By 1784, there were 471 churches with 35,101 members.

Nothing is more plain, than that the Almighty has set up the government of the United States in answer to the prayers of all the saints, down from the first proclamation of the gospel. The earth, at last, has helped the woman.¹

John Leland

In 1774, according to Howison, the Baptists increased on every side; if one preacher was imprisoned, ten arose to take his place; if one congregation was dispersed, a larger assembled on the next opportunity. The influence of the denomination was strong among the common people, and was beginning to be felt in high places. In two points they were distinguished: first, in their love of freedom; and, secondly, in their hatred of the church establishment.

William Cathcart.

In January of 2002, our research took us to Lexington, Massachusetts, to the green, the sight of the supposed first battle of the American Revolution. As we were familiar with the story of the ringing of the bell to call out the men and gather the American militia in the church house, we desired to view those historic places. However, we soon discovered the church house had been destroyed years earlier, and the bell had been removed to a farm nearby, with no certain knowledge of its whereabouts.² Instead of a number of militia assembling from the meeting-house, as reported by Jonas Clark, pastor of the Congregational church at Lexington, we are now informed by official National Park publications that the first defenders of our liberty filed out of the local

tavern (no doubt some did) to take their stand. The tavern on Lexington green is of course, well preserved.

It is commonly reported that the first shots fired in the Revolutionary War were lobbed at Lexington green. But as we have discovered, this was not the case. Liberty began as a tax revolt, not just about tea or stamps, but concerning *forced tithes*. What began as a protest in New England, escalated into an exchange of lead at Alamance, North Carolina. Hostilities would eventually break out at Lexington and Concord; but first, a naval ambush engineered by the sons of America's original *baptized believers* would be executed along the New England coast.



The summer of 1772 in Providence, Rhode Island was filled with an angry heat. The British government intended to keep in check the industrious Rhode Islanders from shipping their goods without the stringent tariffs imposed upon their trade.

Not much action was taken to thwart the sea merchants until Lieutenant Duddingston took command of the armed schooner "Gaspee." The *Gaspee* and Duddingston created fear and intimidation as they began raids up and down the Rhode Island coast. Benjamin Andrew wrote, "The behavior of the Gaspee officers in Narragansett Bay, their illegal seizures, plundering expeditions on shore, and wanton manners in stopping and searching boats, illustrate the spirit of the king's hirelings in America at this time. At last the Rhode Islanders could endure it no longer."³

The *Gaspee* fired shells at any craft that would not submit to their search, and more often than not, seized goods; confiscating them along with fines and jail time to the ship owners. That is why the heat intensified in Providence and simmered into a patriot broil at the business of the irascible John Brown.

This John Brown was the great, great, grandson of Chad Brown, the first pastor of the first Baptist church in Providence, Rhode Island, the remnant of the group that Roger Williams tried to organize into a

church. Brown was the third of the famous four Brown brothers of Providence; he was the uncle of Nicolas Brown, for whom Brown University is named. John Brown was a Baptist of the Obadiah Holmes variety, and Holmes' ancestry and courage was in his bloodline. He was one of the first Americans to establish trade with China and the East Indies. With the British disrupting the shipping lines for no greater reason than punitive fees, all of the merchants of the New England coast, including Brown, were being run into the ground. Late spring and early summer he brooded over what opportunity may arise to stop the rude intrusion of the *Gaspee* into the free commerce of Rhode Island.

That opportunity came on June 9, 1772. Rhode Island captain Thomas Lindsey set out from Newport, sailing to Providence. Lindsey knew that the *Gaspee* would attempt to stop and search his vessel and this time, something in him would not allow that to happen. So when the warning shot came routinely from the deck of the *Gaspee*, Lindsey refused to stop. There would be no search, no seizure not this time.

Lindsey managed to make it around Namquit Point* with the *Gaspee* and Lieutenant Duddingston making a daring attempt to cut Lindsey off by sailing over the shallows of the point. As Divine Providence would have it, the *Gaspee* stuck fast in the shallows, at the mercy of low tide, and without the promise of high tide until 3:00 a.m. the next morning.

Captain Lindsey pushed hard to the port of Providence and immediately broke the news of the stranded and helpless *Gaspee* to the men and merchants of the harbor. He went first to John Brown, about 5:00 p.m. By sundown, a large crowd of men gathered at James Sabin's Inn.* Shot was prepared at the hearth. At 10:00 p.m., eight long boats were launched with muffled oars, and the first American naval assault against British forces began.

The Rhode Island Patriot flotilla was under the command of Captain Abraham Whipple, a ship captain in John Brown's merchant fleet. Rowing past Fox Point and Field's Point, they quietly drew along side the hated schooner.

* Now named Gaspee Point.

** Present day South Main and Planet Streets.

The battle was quick work. The guard on deck of the *Gaspee* cried out as the men of Providence boarded her, bringing Duddingston to the surface. He was quickly wounded and apprehended. In the next few moments, a fierce hand-to-hand fight took place, but the tired crew of the *Gaspee* was no match for the Patriots. Her crewmen were taken from the ship to the shore at Warwick and with that accomplished, Captain Whipple's men set fire to the *Gaspee*. She burned until her own powder blew her to pieces in Narragansett Bay. Benjamin Andrews wrote, "There would be much propriety in dating the Revolution from this daring act. On this we would concur."⁴

Although a great reward was offered by the King to any who could find Whipple's men, no one gave any information and even the identity of Whipple was kept secret for 67 years.⁵

The burning of the *Gaspee* had far reaching effects, not the least of which was the rekindling of patriot fire in the heart of John Adams.⁶ Page Smith wrote, "An Englishman in the company reprobated the action of the burners of the *Gaspee* and John discovered in himself the old warmth, heat, violence, acrimony, bitterness, sharpness of temper and expression. How ironic, that the sons of the renegade Baptists, so misunderstood by Adams, should help him get his bearings, and secure his place in history."



The Revolution was fought in two stages. There was a military war for political independence; and there was a spiritual war for religious independence. Those two stages began in the same place Rhode Island. They ended in the same place Virginia.

In March of 1775, Virginia's Revolutionary Convention met in Richmond at St. John's Church. The fervent Patrick Henry set his countrymen on fire with his now famous "Give me Liberty or Give me Death" speech, in which he called for war. The next month fighting

broke out at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. The British were humiliated at Bunker (Breeds) Hill.

Word among the Baptists in New Jersey spread rapidly. Hopewell Baptist Church, the home of the late Isaac Eaton was about to experience a mighty visit from God. Eaton had gone on to his reward and the old Hopewell Academy was now Rhode Island College. It would soon become known as Brown University. The Hopewell Church, through its pastor, had been instrumental in educating the majority of those men of renown among the baptized preachers of the Gospel. The Revolutionary War now visited the church. William Cathcart describes the scene:

Colonel Houghton was in the Hopewell Baptist meeting-house, at worship, when he received the first information of Concord and Lexington, and of the retreat of the British to Boston with such heavy loss. Stilling the breathless messenger, he sat quietly through the services, and when they were ended, he passed out, and mounting the great stone block in front of the meeting-house he beckoned to the people to stop. Men and women paused to hear, curious to know what so unusual a sequel to the service of the day could mean. At the first words a silence, stern as death, fell over all. The Sabbath quiet of the hour and of the place was deepened into a terrible solemnity. He told them all the story of the cowardly murder at Lexington by the royal troops; the heroic vengeance following hard upon it; the retreat of Percy; the gathering of the children of the Pilgrims around the beleaguered hills of Boston; then pausing, and looking over the silent throng, he said slowly, Men of New Jersey, the red coats are murdering our brethren of New England! Who follows me to Boston?

And every man of that audience stepped out into line, and answered
I. There was not a coward nor a traitor in old Hopewell Baptist meeting-house that day.⁷

* * *

The war in the north began in earnest. Ethan Allen led the Green Mountain Boys to surprise the British at Fort Ticonderoga. This victory, however, was followed by the folly of Benedict Arnold at Quebec, as noted in chapter six, and Canada was virtually lost to the British. In fact, Ticonderoga had to be abandoned.

In Virginia, in August of 1775, the Baptists of the Old Dominion made public their loyalty to the American cause in both stages of the war. In a letter to the Virginia Convention stating their desire to have Elijah and Lewis Craig, Jeremiah Walker and John Williams preach the gospel to Continental soldiers, the Virginia Baptist Association wrote:

After we had determined that in some Cases it was lawful to go to War, and also for us to make a Military resistance against Great Britain, our people were all left to act at discretion with respect to enlisting, without falling under the censure of our Community. And as some have enlisted, and many more likely so to do, who will have earnest desires for their ministers to preach to them during the campaign, we therefore delegate and appoint our well-beloved brethren in the ministry, Elijah Craig, Lewis Craig, Jeremiah Walker and John Williams to present this address and to petition you that they may have free liberty to preach to the troops at convenient times without molestation or abuse; and as we are conscious of their strong attachment to American liberty, as well as their soundness in the principles of the Christian religion, and great usefulness in the work of the ministry, we are willing they may come under your examination in any matters you may think requisite.

We conclude with our earnest prayers to Almighty God for His Divine Blessing on your patriotic and laudable resolves, for the good of mankind and American freedom, and for the success of our Armies in Defense of our lives, liberties and properties. Amen.

Sign d by order and in behalf of the Association the 14th August, 1775.

Sam l Harriss, Moderator
John Waller, Clerk⁸

Their request was granted.

* * *

Concerning both stages of the war, military and spiritual, the *baptized believers* fought on both fronts. They enthusiastically fought with

their countrymen for liberty, knowing that spiritually they were still encumbered by denominational establishment laws existing in most states.

Concerning the second stage of the war, the spiritual stage, the true sentiments of the *standing order* religious establishment in New England were clear.

In 1775 Asa Hunt, then pastor of third Baptist church in Middleborough, presented a letter to Isaac Backus with the written testimony of 80 church members who were refusing to pay minister tax rates. They put themselves in peril for the cause of liberty.

At the Boston election sermon of 1776, the Rev. Mr. West declared, The primitive Christians did not oppose the cruel persecutions that were inflicted upon them by the heathen magistrates; they were few compared with the heathen world, and for them to have attempted to resist their enemies by force, would have been like a small parcel of sheep endeavouring to oppose a large number of ravening wolves and savage beasts of prey; the wise and prudent advice of our Saviour to them was, When they persecute you in this city, flee ye to another. ⁹ Read the above quote again if you do not understand what the *standing order* preacher was saying. Mr. West was communicating that if some fellow American was being persecuted for his faith, then he should LEAVE! Such was the sentiment in New England. The patience of Isaac Backus was wearing thin.

* * *

A military victory would be required for our forefathers to sever their ties to Great Britain. The man prepared by God for this task was George Washington.

Washington was christened an Anglican, and grew up a planter in northern Virginia. He became a surveyor. Concerning those days, L. C. Barnes wrote:

The young man left the ruts of an old Virginia plantation, and flung himself into the wilderness as a surveyor of land among the new settlements. His first extant writings are journals of that work. He de-

scribes vividly how he roughed it, living with the settlers as they lived. We simply know three things. First, Washington surveyed those woods. Secondly, those woods were full of Baptists. Thirdly, Baptists in those days did not hide their light under a bushel.¹⁰

George Washington became a major in the Virginia Militia at the tender age of 19 and rode with Braddock into Pennsylvania four years later. It was there at Fort Duquesne in July of 1755, that Washington began his legendary service. At the battle, which quickly became a massacre of Braddock's British and militia forces, Washington was miraculously spared death. *Four musket shots passed through his coat and two horses were shot from under him.* This miracle was common knowledge among the Indians who fought in the battle. In Loyd Collins' *God and American Independence*, the legendary story is related by an old Indian chief, present at Fort Duquesne, who had come to pay his last respects to Washington:

Seeing you were under the special guardianship of the Great Spirit, we immediately ceased to fire at you. I am old and soon shall be gathered to the great council fire of my fathers in the land of shades, but ere I go, there is something bids me speak in the voice of prophecy. Listen! The Great Spirit protects that man [pointing at Washington], and guides his destinies he will become the chief of nations, and a people yet unborn will hail him as the founder of a mighty empire. I am come to pay homage to the man who is the particular favorite of Heaven, and who can never die in battle.¹¹

It must be noted that while on the battlefield during the French and Indian War, he could see the contempt of the British regular army against the American militia.¹² It irritated him as an *American* commander. As the swell of support for American independence began to gain momentum, he was decidedly patriot.

When Washington returned to Mount Vernon, Virginia after Braddock's defeat, he crossed the Shenandoah Valley in time to view the spectacle of the Separate Baptist revival and ensuing struggle for liberty. For 15 years he remained in Virginia as revival fires flamed the patriot ideal. During those years he lived in Mt. Vernon and had the oversight of his mother's farm near Fredericksburg. In addition to these du-

ties he often traveled to Williamsburg as a member of the House of Burgesses.

Then came the cyclone of the Separate Baptist revival. We know that they organized their first church in upper Virginia in November of 1767. Excitement, conviction, and outrageous activity followed the Separate Baptists as documented in this volume. The result was nothing less than the transformation of the colony, all of which Washington was an eyewitness.

Our reader may recall that the first instance of actual imprisonment of Baptists in Virginia took place in Spotsylvania County in the Fredericksburg jail. On the 4th of June, 1768, John Waller, Lewis Craig and James Childs and others, were seized by the sheriff, and haled before three magistrates. Barnes, again wrote:

Three days after their arrest Washington's diary reads, [June] 7. Went up to Alexandria to meet the Attorney-General and returned with him, his Lady and Daughter, Miss Corbin and Jennifer. 8. At home with above company. 9. The Attorney and [company] went away.^{13 14}

The above mentioned attorney was none other than John Blair, who endorsed the Baptist cause which led to the release of those preachers from the Fredericksburg jail.* George Washington's diary recorded:

1768, June, 28. Set out for and reached Fredricksburg. Began to cut the upper part of my Timothy Meadow. 29. Rid round and examined the wheat fields there, which were fine. 30. Went to Mr. Bouchers, dined there and left Jackey Curtis - returned to Fredericksburg in the aftern.

Barnes commented further, Did Washington on any of those days, hear Swearing Jack Waller, as he stood reverently and earnestly preaching through the barred window of Fredricksburg jail? We know not. But we do know that four days later one of the prisoners was re-

* Barnes wrote, Did the visit of the great landed proprietor, the already famous and influential Col. Washington have anything to do with that release? It is of course possible.

leased to go with a plea for his brethren to the Governor at Williamsburg.^{15 16}

There can be no doubt that Washington was repeatedly crossing the path of the Separate Baptist Revival at its beginning. Without controversy Washington was well aware of Baptist doctrine, polity and struggle as he entered into the most demanding and important time of his life. On June 15, 1775, the Continental Congress appointed Washington Commander-in-Chief of the American Army. He was 43 years of age.

His first assignment was Boston, sent to bolster and lead an army of just over 14,000 men to stand against a British force of 11,000. Eight months later, the British sailed out of Boston never to return to Massachusetts.

At this early stage of the war, the commander-in-chief made it plain that a well-paid staff of Bible believing chaplains should support the American Army. Some Protestant chaplains and their families were treated with devil-inspired hatred. Some were bayoneted, shot or mutilated. An examination of Headley's *Chaplains of the American Revolution* would be in order for any patriotic American. Our attention will be directed to the Baptist chaplains the most hated group of all. One of the first to serve was David Jones.

David Jones was born in New Castle, County, Delaware. His grandmother was the sister of Enoch and Abel Morgan, first generation Wales immigrants who came to America as Baptist refugees. They were part of the famous Welsh Tract Baptist Church. Jones' cousin was the Revolutionary era Abel Morgan under whom he studied theology. He was among the stellar students of the venerated Isaac Eaton, the founder of the Hopewell Academy, the first educational center for the Baptists in America.

Jones was ordained as pastor of the Freehold Baptist church, Monmouth County, New Jersey. He journeyed twice on missions to the American Indians.

During his pastorate at Freehold, he began public proclamations of the cause of independence and liberty. For this he was rejected at Freehold and in April of 1775, he began his ministry at Great Valley Baptist Church in Chester County, Pennsylvania.

When the Continental Congress met in 1775, one order of business was to proclaim a public fast in seeking the will of God for our nation. The cause of liberty was not universally accepted, but such days of fasting about what course to pursue caused many Americans to focus on the present need. God's men provided the issues to think upon. David Jones was one such man of God. In 1775, he was commissioned to preach before the regimental command of Colonel Dewees and delivered his famed *Defensive War in a Just Cause Sinless*. This message was printed and spread abroad, making it another great source of fuel upon the burning fires of patriotism.

When the war began, he was appointed chaplain in Col. St. Claire's regiment. He was everywhere during the war under Horatio Gates and Mad Anthony Wayne. He was at the suffering of the Paoli massacre and with the Army at Valley Forge.

Lemuel Call Barnes wrote:

Washington insisted on having good Chaplains, on having them adequately paid, and on having them diligently attend to their religious work. In 1776 he wrote to Congress. His *Orderly Book* shows the following order as issued July 9, 1776. The honorable Continental Congress having been pleased to allow a chaplain to each regiment, with the pay of thirty-three dollars and one third per month, the colonels or commanding officers of each are directed to procure chaplains accordingly, persons of good character and exemplary lives, and to see that all inferior officers and soldiers pay them a suitable respect. The blessing and protection of Heaven are at all times necessary, but especially so in times of public distress and danger. The General hopes and trusts, that every officer and man will endeavor so to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier, defending the dearest liberties and rites of his country.¹⁷

* * *

America began to declare herself independent. Not surprisingly, Rhode Island was first, severing ties with mother England on May 4, 1776. Directly on her heels was Virginia, on June 12.

In sharp contrast with the declaration of Rhode Island the religious sentiment of many New Englanders was illustrated in Pepperell, Massachusetts. On June 26, 1776,¹⁸ six persons were ready to be baptized publicly. Samuel Fletcher of Chelmsford, Massachusetts along with Elder Isaiah Parker of Harvard, Massachusetts, arrived to preach and baptize. A church was forming around these new converts and news spread that the *baptized believers* were going to do some dipping.

The chief thugs met the group of believers and mocked them, threatening them with bodily harm. They baptized a dog in derision. Undaunted, Fletcher and Parker moved the meeting to a home of a friend. The thugs were equally undaunted and met them with two more poor dogs and dipped them, threatening the church and the preachers with *death*. They finally found a place of secrecy and six souls finally followed the Lord in beautiful believer's baptism. News of this was published in Boston to the shame of the town of Pepperell.

Just a few days later, the congress of the United States, upon a motion made by Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, signed the Declaration of Independence.

At least one Episcopalian clergyman knew the ramifications. Thomas Barton, missionary for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (Church of England) wrote:

The Church of England has now no longer an existence in the United Colonies of America. I look upon the King's supremacy and the constitution of the Church of England to be so intimately blended together that whenever the supremacy is either suspended or abrogated the fences of the Church are then broken down, and its visibility is destroyed. On the second day of July the Congress at Philadelphia were pleased to declare the Colonies Free and independent states. Upon this Declaration it was judged incompatible with the present policy that his Majesty's authority within the new States should any longer be recognized.¹⁹

In July, 1776, a large contingency of British soldiers landed at Staten Island. General Howe, bolstered by a powerful fleet commanded by his brother, Sir Richard Howe, also landed. That group of British soldiers was comprised of the number that had left Boston in the face of Washington's bayonets. Those British regulars, along with 2,500 Eng-

lish; 8,000 German Hessians; and other reinforcements, made the British force at New York close to 25,000. Washington countered by placing 10,000 Continentals at New York City.

The Northern Campaign now flared. Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne's pursuit of American troops through the thickets of New York ended in a series of defeats. Herkimer at Oriskany, Stark at Bennington, and the advance of Schuyler with his ever-increasing American reinforcements brought Burgoyne's mission to a halt. This coupled with the field heroics of Morgan and Arnold forced Burgoyne to retreat. On October 17, just three months and thirteen days after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Burgoyne surrendered to the American General Horatio Gates at Saratoga. The first stage of the war in the north was essentially over.

The British plan of attack now was to isolate New England from the rest of the North and invade the middle states to split the North from the South.

As Washington began to fortify New York he assigned John Gano, pastor of the Baptist church in New York City, to be Chaplain of the Army. As the British drove the American army off of Long Island, Gano's church was abandoned and he took to his duties on the field of battle. Barnes describes the withdrawal and subsequent battle:

The Americans were forced northward from point to point after they left the town. Finally the chief stand was made near White Plains, and a sharp battle was fought, the thickest of it being on a bluff, called Chattertons Hill. J. T. Headley, the historian of Generals and battles, thus describes this conflict and Chaplain Gano's part in it; As soon as (the British General) got his twelve or fifteen pieces of artillery within range he fired on the American lines. The heavy thunder rolling over the heights carried consternation into the ranks of the militia, and as a round shot struck one of their number, mangling him frightfully, the whole turned and fled. Colonel Harlet tried in vain to induce them to drag forward the field pieces so as to sweep the ascending columns, but he was able to man only one, and that so poorly that he was compelled to seize the drag ropes himself. But he was denied the gratification of using even his one gun for as it was being slowly trundled to the front, a ball from the enemies batteries struck the carriage, scattering the shot in every direction, and setting fire to a wad of

tow. In an instant the piece was abandoned in terror. Only one man had the courage to remain and tread out the fire and collect the shot. After a little time McDougal found only six hundred of the fifteen hundred, with which he commenced the fight left to sustain the shock of the whole British army it was on such a sight as this the fearless chaplain gazed with a bursting heart. As he saw more than half the army fleeing from the sound of cannon-others abandoning their pieces without firing a shot, and a brave band of only six hundred manfully sustaining the whole conflict, he forgot himself, and distressed at the cowardice of his countrymen, and filled with chivalrous and patriotic sympathy for the little band that scorned to fly, he could not resist the strong desire to share their perils, and eagerly yet involuntarily pushed forward to the front.

Gano himself describes the event very modestly almost deprecatingly. My station, in time of action, I knew to be among the surgeons; but in this battle, I, somehow got in the front of the regiment; yet I durst not quit my place, for fear of dampening the spirits of the soldiers, or of bringing on me an imputation of cowardice. Rather than do either, I chose to risk my fate. This circumstance gave an opportunity to the young officers of talking; and I believe it had a good effect on some of them.²⁰

The British had too much firepower for the Continentals in New York. Washington left Manhattan Island and escaped through New Jersey into Pennsylvania in early December 1776.

Being reinforced from there, Washington made his famous crossing of the Delaware back into New Jersey late on Christmas night and totally surprised the Hessians at Trenton. He took over 1,000 German prisoners. Washington and his army skirted the British columns under Lord Cornwallis and wintered in Morristown in 1776-77.

In 1777, Congress limited the number of chaplains, but elevated their importance and rank. The resolution of Congress, May 27, 1777, read:

Resolved, that for the future, there be only one chaplain allowed in each brigade of the army and that such chaplain be appointed by Congress; That each brigade chaplain be allowed the same pay, rations and forage allowed to a colonel in said corps; That each brigadier-

general be requested to nominate and recommend to Congress a proper person for chaplain to his brigade; and that they recommend none but such as are clergymen of experience, and established public character for piety, virtue and learning.

Barnes remarked, In that day of established churches in many of the States, we shall expect to see most of the chaplains drawn from the ranks of these churches. If any Baptist [was] chosen it must be because of such preeminent fitness to minister in the patriot army as to outweigh every ordinary and lower consideration.²¹ In a list of 21 Brigadier-chaplains more were Baptist than any other denomination. Five were Congregationalists. Three were Presbyterians. Two were Episcopalians. Six were Baptists. Those Baptist brigade chaplains were: Hezekiah Smith, William Vanhorn, Charles Thompson, John Gano, David Jones, and William Rogers.²²

Time and space do not permit us to even outline the great accomplishments of other Baptist preachers during the war such as Samuel Stillman, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Boston; Dr. Samuel Jones; or Edmund Lily.



Not until August of 1777, did the army spring back into action and it was defeated at Philadelphia leading to a demoralizing retreat into Valley Forge, 21 miles west into Pennsylvania. They were encouraged there by the ministry of David Jones.

1778 found the Americans chasing the British back into New York avoiding the traitorous actions of General Charles Lee. They took positions at White Plains.

The cause of the Revolution was suffering in Rhode Island. Charles Thompson became pastor of the Baptist church at Warren. This church became a particular target for the British, for Elder Thompson became a

chaplain and served faithfully for three years. On May 25, 1778, British troops marched to Warren, burned the meeting-house, burned the parsonage, and burned several private homes around the church. They also took Thompson prisoner.²³ Through some miracle of God, Thompson was released one month later, but the British occupation of Rhode Island continued for several years.

The same year 1778, a new plan of government for Massachusetts was proposed. This plan had a provision to re-enact the old taxing laws for support of *standing order* ministers. At first the plan failed. The *standing order* mouthpiece, Charles Chauncy, said that the failure of the passage of the ministerial tax was the reason for the Continental Army's defeat in Rhode Island.²⁴

Obviously the prejudices were still in place in Massachusetts and on one occasion a constable came to remove Hezekiah Smith from his preaching station. Even after three years of service as chaplain in the Continental Army, Smith was deprived the respect of a patriot. Guild relates:

The constable of a neighboring town, to which Dr. Smith had gone to preach, was a weak and inferior-looking person, but he was full of self-importance; and armed with the authority of the law. He came to warn the stranger out of the place. But when he saw the imposing appearance of the [preacher] he was confused and stammered out: I warn you off God's earth.

Smith replied, My good sir, where shall I go to?
Go anywhere. Go to the Isle of Shoals.²⁵

This left Elder Smith perplexed but he remained at his post.

* * *

The Ten-thousand Name Petition, was presented to the first Virginia General Assembly session on October 16, 1776. The document consisted of 125 pages joined together with wax seals, and was signed by an unprecedented 10,000 Virginia citizens. It boldly and specifically asked that sects be exempted from legal taxation for the support of a state

church. It was so effective it resulted in the suspension of Episcopal clerical salaries.

The way was made for a bill of rights and a constitution for Virginia. The Virginia Declaration of Rights contained a revision by James Madison which said, "**All men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion.**" This phrase replaced George Mason's, all men should enjoy the fullest **toleration*** in the exercise of religion. The marriage of church and state in Virginia was irreparably damaged. Yet, it would take nine more years of debate, petition and legislative action to insure an unequivocal separation.

The state of religion in the Virginia of 1776 was low, due to the distraction of the war. Help was on the way, however. In September, John Leland married Sally Devine and immediately set out for Virginia.

* * *

Sometime in 1778, Elijah Baker, a Baptist preacher from Lunenburg County, Virginia was imprisoned for *disturbing the peace*. Baker had been converted in 1769 and was baptized that same year by Samuel Harris. Baker set out to do God's work with what little he had and soon became a firebrand for Jesus Christ. He preached throughout eastern Virginia. J. B. Taylor wrote of him: It is doubtful whether any other man in the state has been as successful within the same length of time.²⁶

After establishing a number of churches on the mainland in Virginia, Baker sailed to the Eastern Shore, becoming the first Baptist preacher on the peninsula. He preached at the Episcopal Church in Northampton causing no small stir. His converts in that county were formed into a church of which he took the charge in 1778. It was from there he was jailed in the Accomack County gaol.

Elijah Baker, like so many before him, preached through the jail windows. Thomas Batston, heard him gladly, and became burdened for his home state of Delaware. He pressed upon Baker to join him in

* We trust our readers will comprehend the difference between liberty and toleration.

Delaware to do a work in that place. Obviously, Baker was in no position to accept the invitation, so Batston returned to Delaware to pray and hope. Morgan Edwards wrote, "The rude Virginians (in order to silence [Baker]) took him out of jail and put him on board a privateer, with orders to land him on any coast out of America. Here he was compelled to work, and for his refusing and praying and preaching and singing was ill-used. The privateer put him on board another ship, that other ship put him on board a third, and the third put him ashore.²⁷ Not knowing where he was, Baker made inquiry, and to his astonishment, found himself in Delaware. He went to the home of an amazed Thomas Batston and soon began preaching. Philip Hughes from Virginia joined him in the work. Through their labor, *ten churches were formed.*

* * *

The northern part of Virginia, known as the Northern Neck, exists by the intrusion of the Rappahannock River into the Virginia piedmont. In 1778, the Holy Ghost through the ministry of Lewis Lunsford visited it.

Lunsford began preaching at the tender age of 19. He was so successful so quickly, that the people of the Northern Neck took to calling him the boy wonderful. He was baptized by William Fristoe and began his work as an itinerant evangelist. His preaching birthed the Moritico Church in 1778 and he joined them as their pastor. J. B. Taylor paints a vivid picture of revival in that place:

Once when he had preached an evening sermon in a barn, many having eaten the spices of the garden of the Lord, they seemed unwilling to close the service. After they had remained awhile longer there, and it was concluded they must part, they commenced singing in a body, in the yard of the dwelling-house. When Mr. Lunsford was on the steps, going into the house, he discovered the people stood still in the yard, unwilling to depart, and turning, addressed them once more, by the light of the candle; and, as rain falls freely in a wet season, so from this after-cloud showers soon fell, not only of grace, but of tears. He said, I must confess, this is more like enthusiasm than anything I

have lately seen, but whether we be beside ourselves it is to God, or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.²⁸

Lunsford was typical of the Virginia Baptists he was an untiring labourer for God. He was in great demand riding hour upon hour just to be at an appointment. He said of his own life, My life is a continual chase through the world.²⁹ Indeed, it was a chase after souls. It was said of Lunsford:

[His] zeal in the Redeemer's cause has been to me among the most pleasing qualities I saw in him. His Lord well knew what had been given him to do, and seemed, out of peculiar love, to hasten him in his work, quickly to ripen him for heavenly rest. Being thus quickened, he spared no pains in seeking the salvation of souls, and the prosperity of the churches, labouring more abundantly with the people, at all seasons, not in a confined set of forms, but accommodating his seasons and places of meeting, his subjects and methods; he thus hoisted and managed his sails, so as to receive the advantage from any heavenly wind that blew. One evening, preaching from the text, As for me, God forbid that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. He said, he was at a loss to know whether to preach or pray, and wished the people to signify which they chose. A number of weeping souls were soon on their knees, and he turned his preaching into praying.³⁰

To say Lunsford was tireless would be an understatement. He crossed the rivers of Northern Virginia countless times including once by paddling across a three mile stretch using a small pail.

Inevitably, Lunsford and the established church were on a collision course. Semple wrote:

A constable was sent with a warrant to arrest him. The constable, with more politeness than is usual on such occasions, waited until Mr. Lunsford had preached. His fascinating powers palsied the constable's hand. He would not, he said, serve a warrant on so good a man.³¹

The next time Lunsford, preached a riot broke out similar to the type which visited the ministry of Samuel Harriss. But Lunsford escaped

to preach again. Lunsford's preaching ability was noteworthy. J. B. Taylor wrote:

In his best strains he was more like an angel than a man. His countenance, lighted up by an inward flame, seemed to shed beams of light wherever he turned. His voice, always harmonious, often seemed to be tuned by descending seraphs. His style and his manner were so sublime and so energetic that he was indeed like an ambassador of the skies, sent down to command all men everywhere to repent.³²

John Taylor was now in the Northern Neck in 1779. He saw the results of Lunsford's ministry and the open hearts in that part of Virginia:

It was more than a year before I paid my uncle, in the northern neck another visit; at which time I found a great revival of religion through the country, where he lived; himself with many others had been baptized: and [there was] Lewis Lunsford, now living in that part of the world. In every direction there was now such a call for preaching, day and night, that it required the best of lungs in the preacher, to bear the service; though the nights were short, the houses would often not hold the people, when I have known the preacher stand in the yard, by bright moon light, and the sand on which he stood in a manner, white as snow, and the light such, without a candle, that the preacher was capable to read, and hundreds, perhaps half a thousand, attentive to the sweet voice of the gospel, while their sighs, groans and cries for mercy would oblige every spectator to say that God is here of a truth.³³

In case the reader would wonder if a few years of persecution should cool the warmth of their preaching, Taylor comments:

[My uncle Carter] being very zealous in religion, my preaching passed better with him than might be expected for if nothing else attended it, there was plenty of noise; hence, after preaching one night in his hall, his [wife] remarked that before I came again, she must remove her great candle glass, lest the sound should break it to shivers.³⁴

At this juncture of time, the work of God in the rest of Virginia, was slow. John Leland wrote of his efforts:

Now, for the first time, I knew what it was to travail in birth for the conversion of sinners. The words of Rachel to Jacob were the words of my heart to God: Give me children or else I die. One night, as I lay on my bed weeping and praying, I thought if it was spring instead of autumn, I would spend all my time at the feet of Jesus in prayer, and at the feet of sinners, praying them to be reconciled to God; but winter was coming on, the summer was ended, and the opportunity past.³⁵

Leland did see some fruit, albeit a bit dangerous:

In September, this year (1779), I was likewise returning from Bedford, and had an evening meeting at a place called the North Garden. After preaching was over, a Mrs. Bailey informed me that she had a desire to be baptized, but her husband had told her, if she was ever baptized he would whip her within an inch of her life, and kill the man that should baptize her. That he had once seen me, and liked me so well, that he said if Leland should come that way he might baptize her; and now she wished to embrace the opportunity. I asked her if she was willing to suffer, on supposition her husband should revolt to his first resolution. Yes, said she, if I am whipped, my Saviour had long furrows ploughed upon his back.

Well, said I, if you will venture your back, I will venture my head. Accordingly, the candles were lighted—we went to the water, and she was baptized. My engagements called me to start very early next morning. I heard afterwards that he whipped her, but the head of John the Baptist is not taken off yet.³⁶

Like a rising sunlight began to break through for Leland and Virginia began once again to blossom as a rose:

For eight months after this, I had the spirit of prayer to a degree beyond what I ever had it in my life; and, if I mistake not, my preaching savored a little of the same spirit. My field of preaching was from Orange down to York, about one hundred and twenty miles. From November, 1779, to July, 1780, I baptized one hundred and thirty, the chiefest of whom professed to be the seals of my ministry. As this was the first time that ever such a work attended my ministry, it was refreshing **indeed; nor can I think of it now, without soft emotions of heart.**³⁷

Wonderful works followed Leland. In York, he baptized the wife of Captain Robert Howard, who was an Episcopalian vestryman. Leland recalled what happened next:

When [Captain Howard] heard of it, he called for his carriage, and took his cow-skin, and said he would lash me out of the county. His sister replied, Brother Bobby, Mr. Leland is a large man, and will be too much for you.

I know it, said the Captain, but he will not fight.

His wife made answer, Perhaps he may he goes well armed; and if he should wound you in the heart, you would fall before him.

Ah! said the Captain, I know nothing about this heart-work. Afterwards he became serious, penitent, believing and was baptized.³⁸

Leland recalled that the uncle of Captain Howard mocked the new convert saying, Nephew Bobby, I pity you in my heart, to see you following that deluded people, and wasting your time so much, that you will raise no corn this year.

My Uncle, said the captain, I wish you had pitied me as much two years ago, when you cheated me out of my mill.³⁹

It was time for Thomas Jefferson to introduce his masterpiece, *The Virginia Act for Religious Liberty* in 1779.* It was received under scrutiny and was widely debated but it did not pass into law. God's timetable was not in favor but it was approaching.



William Tryon was a veteran of intimidation and colonial scare tactics. As documented in chapter eight, his attack on the Baptist dissenters in North Carolina drove them over the mountains. He took his Episcopalian act to New York just in time for the Revolution. British General

* See Appendix F for the text of the act.

Clinton assigned him to scare tactic duty for the state of Connecticut. From July 5-11, 1779, he torched farms, villages, and generally inflamed hatred for the royal government. Clinton was not pleased with the surprising cruelty of Tryon. Washington pressed Tryon out of Connecticut and with swift action, Tryon was shipped back to England. Thus ended his infamous career. It was fortunate for him for his neck would have been in a noose if he had tarried much longer.

A convention was called on September 1, 1779 for the new Massachusetts government. On September 10 an article was discussed to give rulers power to support ministers by forced taxes. John Adams, reopening a can of bitter worms, accused the Baptists of sending an agent to the first national Congress in Philadelphia in 1774 to try to break the resolve of the union. It was the same lie.

On this occasion, Isaac Backus answered his accuser by publishing his account of the Philadelphia trip in the *Boston Chronicle* on December 2, 1779.

Even in the midst of accusations, the Baptist churches of New England had a powerful revival in 1779. The revival held sway for three years, and greatly increased the old Baptist churches, and *more than thirty new ones were planted in one year in New-England alone.*⁴⁰

Mr. Cooper preached the election sermon in Massachusetts on October 25, 1780. He pleaded for mutual candor and love among the dissenters. Whereupon, Isaac Backus rebuked in writing:

But do any men plead conscience for violating their own promises? Or are any conscientious in denying *all* the country the liberty which they have long enjoyed in Boston? Yea, what do they do with their consciences in Boston, where the laws are made, since they are not enforced there? And if men call interest conscience, where is their religion?

A just answer to these questions may be very serviceable. Paul says, The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ: 2Cor. 10:4-5.

Therefore, all use of carnal weapons to support religious ministers that ever has been in the world, has been a violation of the laws of Christ; for He is the only head of His church, and each church that supports her ministers in the name of any earthly head, is a harlot.⁴¹