

A HISTORY OF BAPTIST FRONTIER CHURCH PLANTING

A Research Paper

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Whether strategically intentional or simply as a result of Christian believers moving to a new location, church planting continues to be the most effective method of expanding the kingdom of God. The beginning of this methodology dates back to the New Testament period. Driven by the mandate of the Great Commission at the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel (28:18-20) which Jesus entrusted to his disciples before his ascension, the propagation of the gospel has ridden on the back of the establishment of new churches made up of disciples, led by the Holy Spirit, who operated under the authority of Christ. In this text, Jesus declares that all authority has been given to him. As the resurrected Lord who conquered death and the grave, he holds all authority.

The primary command of Christ's commission is to "make disciples" (*mathēteusate*). To fulfill this commission, followers of Christ must be actively involved in both evangelism and discipleship. By proclaiming the gospel and calling people to repentance and faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, the first aspect of disciple-making is addressed. This style of evangelism does not end at conversion, but leads to spiritual development through discipleship. The second goal of disciple-making is accomplished by teaching new believers to obey all Christ has commanded, a "perennially incomplete, life long task" according to New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg.¹ Evangelism and discipleship are inseparable in Christ's commission; they are two sides of the same coin. This two-pronged disciple-making task has been the mission of the local church since the New Testament period. The growth and multiplication of local churches has proven to be a most effective strategy to carry out the commission, one that Paul

¹Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 431.

implemented in the book of Acts.² The purpose of this paper is to present a biblical model for church planting and to examine the rapid expansion of Baptist churches on the American frontier in light of this model, especially through the church planting movement that grew from the evangelistic fervor of the Sandy Creek Church in North Carolina and the impact of Baptist farmer-preachers who spread out in all directions across the American frontier.

A Biblical Model of Church Planting

The New Testament pattern of church planting and the expansion of the faith found in the book of Acts established an effective model for reaching and nurturing people in Christ. Acts 1:8 (CSB) states, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The global nature of Christianity is clear in this text. New Testament scholar John Stott points out that “the kingdom of God is not a territorial concept.”³ The equipping and enabling power to evangelize and make disciples and the commission that Christ entrusted to his followers comes from the Holy Spirit. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples are commissioned to take the gospel of Christ to the whole world. The strategy for achieving this global mission is clear. The witnesses began where they lived, in Jerusalem. From there, they moved to the surrounding regions of Judea and Samaria. Their final assignment was to take the gospel to the entire world. John Pohill, an educator and New Testament scholar, argues that this geographical strategy serves as a rough outline for the entire book of Acts: Jerusalem (1-7), Judea and Samaria (8-12), and the ends of the earth (13-28).⁴

²J. D. Payne, “The Great Commission and Church Planting,” 1, [on-line] (accessed 5 March 2007); available from <http://northamericanmissions.org/files/The-Great-Commission-and-Church-Planting-Final.pdf>; Internet. This article originally appeared in Chuck Lawless and Thom S. Rainer, *The Challenge of the Great Commission: Essays on God’s Mandate for the Local Church* (n.p.: Pinnacle Publishers, 2005), 107-20.

³John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 41.

⁴John B. Pohill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 85-86.

The book of Acts chronicles the expansion of the gospel as the Lord added new believers to the community of faith. Acts 2:41 reports that as a result of the Holy Spirit's work through Peter's sermon on Pentecost, three thousand people were baptized and added to the apostolic band. In Acts 2:47, Luke states that the Lord added new believers to their number daily. After Peter's sermon at Solomon's Colonnade the number of believers grew to five thousand (Acts 4:4). Believing men and women were added to the Lord in increasing numbers according to Acts 5:14. When Philip went to Samaria because of the persecution of believers in Jerusalem, a great awakening broke out among the Samaritans as great crowds responded to the gospel (Acts 8:4-8). When Saul, the persecutor of Christians, was miraculously converted to faith in Christ on the Damascus Road, he was called to be a missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 8:15). Most of the remaining biblical record in Acts chronicles Paul's missionary journeys, taking the gospel to all the known world.

Wherever the gospel was proclaimed churches were planted. Educator, author, and church planting practitioner J. D. Payne states that "biblical church planting is evangelism resulting in congregationalization."⁵ This is the normal pattern that results from evangelism in the Scriptures. Certainly evangelism is the first, necessary step in making disciples, but the process is incomplete if it stops with conversion. While the church is charged with the imperative of evangelism, it must also nurture new believers through discipleship, teaching obedience to all that Christ taught (Matt 28:18-20). New Testament churches reproduced themselves by taking the gospel to new areas, evangelizing the lost, and discipling new believers through the establishment of local churches.

The Sandy Creek Church Planting Movement

The biblical method of spontaneous growth through intentional evangelism and church planting outlined above served as the model for expansion and carrying out the Great

⁵Payne, "The Great Commission and Church Planting," 12.

Commission, whether it was intended or not, for the Separate Baptists who shaped much of the spiritual development of the southern United States in the 1750s.⁶ Separate Baptists tended to be informal, evangelistic, and emotional according to historian Leon McBeth. The Separate Baptists were influenced by the evangelistic preaching of George Whitefield and other prominent itinerant preachers of the mid-eighteenth century. At first these reformers were called New Lights, but subsequently they became known as Separate Baptists. One aspect of the Separate Baptist movement was the strategic role of women who often prayed and spoke in public.⁷ This practice among Separate Baptists created division among other Baptist bodies. While “Regular” Baptists had a strong Calvinistic influence and tended to shy away from revival emotionalism, “Separate” Baptists rejected strong Calvinism, tended to be more rural, and embraced revivalism as a genuine movement of God.⁸

Separate Baptists who settled in North Carolina initiated a rapid expansion of the gospel that began at Sandy Creek Church. The primary human force behind the Sandy Creek church planting movement was Shubal Stearns, a native of Boston.⁹ He was converted to Christ under the gospel preaching of George Whitefield in 1745 and embraced the New Lights. After continuing with this group for six years, he was convicted from his study of the Scriptures that infant baptism was a human invention. Salvation comes only through professing faith in Christ, not by the ritual of baptism. Stearns submitted to believer’s baptism by immersion and was ordained as a Baptist minister. He had little formal education, but was “pretty well acquainted

⁶These Separate Baptists were sometimes simply referred to as Separates. It is clear from the historical sources cited in the bibliography of this paper that these terms clearly refer to the same group of people. For the purpose of clarity, the terminology of “Separate Baptists” is used throughout this paper.

⁷H. Leon McBeth, *A Source Book for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), 162.

⁸H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 204.

⁹There are variations of the spelling of Shubal Stearns in the resources used in this paper. Sometimes is appears as Shubael, see Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America*, vol. 2 (Boston: Lincoln and Edmunds, 1813), 38, while others spell it Shubal, see Morgan Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists*, vol. 2, compiled by Eve B. Weeks and Mary B. Warren (Danielsville, GA: Heritage Papers, 1984), 80. It is clear from the contexts that these various spellings in fact refer to the same man.

with books.”¹⁰ He became a powerful Baptist preacher who was used by God to initiate a church planting movement. In 1754, Stearns felt a burden from the Lord to take the gospel to other regions. He was passionate about spreading the gospel.¹¹ This passion led him southward with a band of people from Connecticut to Virginia where he was joined by his brother-in-law, Daniel Marshall. Marshall, a former Presbyterian minister who converted to the Baptist tradition after examining the Scriptures, had married Stearns’ sister, Martha.¹² They settled in Cacapou, in Hampshire County, about thirty miles from Winchester.¹³

Stearns soon became restless in Virginia due to his disappointment that more people did not respond to the gospel in Cacapou. He led those who had moved with him from New England to relocate their work about 200 miles southwest to Sandy Creek, in Guilford County, North Carolina. The people who settled in the Sandy Creek area were “destitute of religious privileges, but ready to listen to the earnest proclamation of the truth.”¹⁴ Morgan Edwards who became pastor of the Baptist Church in Philadelphia in 1761 and the founder of the first Baptist college in America, Rhode Island College (currently Brown University), referred to North Carolina as “a poor and unhappy province.”¹⁵ Historian William Lumpkin referred to the region as “a veritable religious vacuum.”¹⁶ The people were uneducated and in great spiritual need.

¹⁰Morgan Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists*, vol. 2, compiled by Eve B. Weeks and Mary B. Warren (Danielsville, GA: Heritage Papers, 1984), 93.

¹¹Albert Henry Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States*, 6th ed. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1915), 292.

¹²Thomas Amitage, *A History of Baptists: Traced by Their Vital Principles and Practices from The Time of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the Year 1886* (New York: Bryan, Taylor, and Company, 1887), 727-28.

¹³David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America*, vol. 2 (Boston: Lincoln and Edmunds, 1813), 37-38.

¹⁴Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the U. S.*, 293.

¹⁵Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists*, vol. 2, 79.

¹⁶William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist History in the South: Tracing through the Separate Baptists the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754-1787* (St. John, IN: Larry Harrison, 1995), 36.

Their lack of belief as well as their lawlessness made them fertile soil for the seed of the gospel that was presented with passion by Stearns' group. On the other hand, the Sandy Creek area experienced an influx of English speaking settlers about this time.

Three paths converged at Sandy Creek. Settlers Road ran from Pennsylvania all the way to South Carolina. Another trail that later became known as the Boone Trail ran from Wilmington westward to Yadkin. The third, called Trading Path, ran from southeastern Virginia to the Waxhaw area. People traveling on these trails were exposed to the gospel through the ministry of Sandy Creek Church.¹⁷ McBeth states, "Perhaps the most dynamic event among North Carolina Baptists in the eighteenth century was the coming of the Separate Baptists in 1755."¹⁸ Shubal Stearns and Daniel Marshall led this group of Baptists to build a small meeting house soon after they arrived at Sandy Creek. Together they founded Sandy Creek Church with a charter membership of sixteen people. Stearns was chosen to be their pastor and he soon earned the reputation of being a powerful preacher. Historian Albert Newman notes that other than Whitefield, Stearns was unsurpassed in the magnetic command he exerted over his audiences. He states, "His tones were peculiarly impressive and captivating, and his eyes seem to have had almost magical power over those upon whom they were fixed."¹⁹ Those who heard his passionate sermons were often moved to tears over their sin. As he preached, Stearns was often moved to tears himself, expressing his message with quiet tears as well as emotional outbursts of both grief over his sin and joy over his salvation. His emotion-charged style of preaching was new to the settlers of Sandy Creek. Baptist historian David Benedict notes,

Many mocked, but the power of God attending them, many also trembled. In the process of time, some of the inhabitants became converts, and bowed obedience to the Redeemer's scepter. These uniting their labours [sic] with the others, a powerful and extensive work commenced, and Sandy-creek church [sic] soon swelled from 16 to 606 members.²⁰

¹⁷Ibid., 38.

¹⁸McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 222.

¹⁹Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the U. S.*, 293.

²⁰Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination*, 39.

In addition to Stearns and Marshall, Philip Mulkey became a prominent leader in the Sandy Creek expansion. He was born near Halifax, North Carolina. He was raised in the Anglican Church, but embraced Baptist principles under the ministry of Shubal Stearns at the Sandy Creek Church where he was called to the ministry. He was ordained in 1757 and led a group of thirteen to South Carolina where they organized Deep River Church with Mulkey as their pastor. Edwards refers to Mulkey's "surprising success" as the Deep River Church became the mother church of all Baptist churches in that part of the country.²¹ In a short period of time the church grew to a hundred members. Two years later these same thirteen settlers moved with Mulkey to what is now Union County between Fairforest Creek and Tyger River to establish another church.²²

Daniel Marshall labored in neighborhoods that surrounded Sandy Creek, sharing the gospel of Christ in what he characterized as many of Satan's strongholds. A large number of settlers responded to the gospel through his witness at Abbot's Creek, about thirty miles from Sandy Creek. Marshall's success was somewhat surprising, since he was not particularly bright, lacking formal education, nor was he eloquent in speech.²³ Historian Albert Newman notes that Marshall was also converted under the preaching of Whitefield. Marshall caught Whitefield's enthusiasm and was compelled to share the gospel with unbelievers. He was instrumental in leading multitudes to faith in Christ and in planting Baptist churches in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.²⁴ The new converts of Abbot's Creek petitioned Sandy Creek, whom they considered their mother church, to be constituted as an autonomous church and called Daniel Marshall to serve as their pastor. Ordination required a plurality of elders and Stearns had some difficulty in locating another pastor to assist him in the ordination of Marshall.

²¹Edwards, *Materials Toward a History of the Baptists*, vol. 2, 141.

²²Loulie Latimer Owens, *Saints of Clay: The Shaping of South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia, SC: The South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1971), 41.

²³Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists*, vol. 2, 144.

²⁴Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the U.S.*, 292-93.

Stearns contacted a pastor on the Peedee River in South Carolina, but he refused to assist because Separate Baptists “allowed women to pray in public and illiterate men to preach, and encouraged noise and confusion in their meetings.”²⁵ Stearns contacted Henry Ledbetter, another of Marshall’s brother-in-laws who was serving as pastor of a church in South Carolina, and he agreed to assist with Marshall’s ordination.

As the pastor of Abbot’s Creek Church, Marshall continued to evangelize neighboring areas, baptizing several persons in the region just south of Virginia near Abbot’s Creek during some of his first visits. One of these early converts was Dutton Lane who began to preach the gospel shortly after his baptism. As the gospel spread, an awakening began in that region resulting in Marshall baptizing 42 people at one time. In 1760, the first Separate Baptist church in Virginia, the Dan River Church, was duly constituted with Lane becoming their first pastor.²⁶ McBeth gives Philip Mulkey partial credit for the establishment of this church.²⁷ Edwards states that the Dan River Church was in some way the mother of all the rest of the Separate Baptist churches in Virginia.²⁸ The Separate Baptists were often persecuted by Anglicans because of their emotional preaching, insistence on believer’s baptism, and their intense propagation of the gospel. The Anglicans imposed severe restrictions upon “Dissenters” and non-believers, but God caused these Separate Baptist churches to grow as he delivered them from the hands of their enemies.

McBeth reports that Virginia had the largest Baptist population of any state in America by the end of the 18th century. There were 210 churches with a total of 20,861 members by 1790. McBeth credits the evangelistic activity of the Separate Baptists for much of this growth, but also cites the awakening of the 1780s as a contributing factor. The growth of

²⁵Ibid., 294.

²⁶Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists*, vol. 2, 44-45.

²⁷McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 222.

²⁸Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of Baptist*, vol. 2, 45.

Baptists in Virginia swelled to as much as elevenfold in a single decade during this period.

McBeth also points out that there was a peculiar mix of Regular Baptists and Separate Baptists in Virginia:

While the Separates had formed numerous churches, by 1790 about 98 percent of the churches were Regular; all but three of the Separate churches had made the transition to modified Calvinism. About 57 percent of Regular churches and 71 percent of Regular members came from a Separate background, indicating that Separate emphases were not lost.²⁹

The Sandy Creek Church experienced phenomenal growth and became the center of an evangelistic movement that stretched in every direction.³⁰ Author and veteran missionary David Garrison argues that the church planting movement and the resulting expansion that grew out of the Sandy Creek Church was no accident. He points to a definite missionary strategy where Stearns worked primarily in eastern North Carolina, Marshall led the expansion of the gospel to the north, and Mulkey focused on the southeast.³¹ Lumpkin agrees that the Sandy Creek Church leaders had a definite missionary strategy, although the details of this strategy remain largely unknown, but it seems evident that these three men put a plan in place to preach the gospel in all regions that surrounded them.³² Edwards calls the Sandy Creek Church the mother of all Separate Baptists. In just 17 years, the Sandy Creek Church spread its branches to plant churches westward as far as the Mississippi River, southward as far as Georgia, eastward to the Atlantic Ocean, and northward to the waters of the Potomac River. In this period, Sandy Creek became the mother, grandmother, and great grandmother to 42 churches from which 125 ministers responded to God's call.³³

²⁹McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 222.

³⁰William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 357.

³¹David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 157.

³²Lumpkin, *Baptist History in the South*, 47.

³³Edwards, *Materials Towards A History of the Baptists*, vol. 2, 92.

Baptist Expansion on the American Frontier

While it could be rightly argued that the Sandy Creek church planting movement took place on the American frontier among farmers, some of whom became preachers, this section focuses on the frontier expansion beyond the Allegheny and Blue Ridge mountain ranges and the role of the Baptist farmer-preacher in the western frontier. As the Revolutionary War drew to a successful conclusion, farmers expanded their lands and invested heavily in agricultural equipment. The harvest was large and successful, but the farmers could not find markets for their goods. The West Indies, which had been the greatest consumer market for produce from the farms of America, was now closed to American agricultural exports because it was controlled by the British. In addition, English merchant ships no longer frequented American ports. Many farmers lost their holdings to bankruptcy. In the face of this economic depression, many farmers felt they had only one option. They migrated to the west where land was cheaper and they could make a new start. Lumpkin states that the primary draw of Baptists to the frontier was the promise of true democracy. Democratic idealism was denied in the colonies on the east coast due to the class-consciousness of wealthy settlers in many of the cities who came from an aristocratic background. In the western frontier, such social distinctions did not apply.³⁴

Baptists from Virginia and North Carolina, many with roots in the Sandy Creek movement, were among the early settlers who crossed the mountains to make a new start in Tennessee and Kentucky. Many Baptists moved west to escape government and religious persecution. In some ways, the expansion of Baptists on the frontier paralleled the expansion of the church in the book of Acts. The Anglican persecution of the Separate Baptists only succeeded in spreading the gospel all along the southern and western frontier.³⁵ Whether their migration was to escape persecution, find freedom, make a new start, purchase cheap land, or as a part of a mission strategy as Lumpkin and Garrison suggest, they were led by the providence of God and the work of the Holy Spirit to expand their faith in God and to plant new churches.

³⁴Lumpkin, *Baptist History in the South*, 124.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 72.

Historian William Sweet identified Baptist preachers of this era as people of the people. They were often poor, yet self-supporting. They were attracted to the frontier by the lure of cheap land. The pure democracy of Baptist church government drew Baptists to the frontier where they could enjoy greater freedom and less governmental oppression. The preachers came as fellow farmers on the lookout for better land and greater freedom. Sweet concludes, “Thus the Baptists were particularly well suited in their ideas of government, in their economic status, and in their form of church government to become the ideal western immigrants.”³⁶

Most Baptist preachers on the frontier were farmers who worked the land five or six days every week. Occasionally their work schedule was interrupted for special meetings or funerals with the church. Most of them were lacking in formal education. These frontier preachers shared a deep-seated distrust of educated ministers who drew salaries for their work in the ministry. Many of them had roots in Virginia where Baptists were taxed in order to support clergymen of other traditions, many of whom had questionable character, simply because they had received a university education. Baptists on the frontier were suspicious of the highly educated. They preferred ministers who paid their own way through secular labor.³⁷ Often there were several preachers in a single congregation, but usually one was designated as the pastor of the church. Sweet points out that there were two categories of Baptist preachers on the frontier. Licensed preachers were those who had exercised their gifts of ministry in a congregational context and their gifts had been affirmed by a vote of the church body. Ordained preachers consisted of those who were chosen to be pastors for local congregations. Normally ordination followed the call to serve as pastor of a local church. Sweet argues further that frontier Baptists generally accepted a mild or modified version of Calvinism, while strongly condemning strict

³⁶William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1930), 215.

³⁷Newman, *A History of the Baptist Church in the U. S.*, 336.

Arminianism. Yet he concluded there was usually very little doctrinal dispute among Baptists on the American frontier.³⁸

New churches were generally planted in the frontier when a licensed or ordained farmer-preacher settled in a community. Once organized, these churches held monthly business meetings, primarily for the purpose of disciplining members with questionable behavior. Sweet notes that old church records offer consistent evidence that frontier churches were a major factor in maintaining civil order in these young settlements. Sweet observed, “Discipline was meted out to members for drinking, fighting, harmful gossip, lying, stealing, immoral relation between the sexes, gambling and horse racing. Even business dealings and intimate family affairs, such as the relation between parents and children, were considered matters for church discipline.”³⁹

Baptists on the frontier worshipped in the rugged cabins of settlers for the first several years after a church was planted. Membership in these churches was usually small; many churches began with six to ten members. Sweet maintains that the average membership in these frontier churches was not more than twenty people.

Of all the Baptists who crossed the mountain ranges to settle in the western frontier, John Taylor was perhaps the most influential. Not only was Taylor recognized as a resourceful Baptist leader, he also contributed *A History of Ten Baptist Churches of Which the Author Has Been Alternately a Member, in Which Will Be Seen Something of a Journal of the Author’s Life for more than Fifty Years; Also a Comment on Some Parts of Scripture in Which the Author Takes the Liberty to Differ from Other Expositors*. Sweet refers to this work as “by far the most illuminating description of how the Baptists functioned in the West.”⁴⁰ This historical document offers insight on how Baptists expanded and functioned in pioneer territory. Taylor was a farmer-preacher who grew up in Virginia prior to the Revolutionary War. Born in 1752, Taylor

³⁸Sweet, *The Story of Religion in American*, 217.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 216.

was raised an Anglican. He was born again in 1769 under the preaching of William Marshall, a Baptist farmer-preacher of the Separate Baptist tradition. He then embarked on his career as an itinerant preacher.⁴¹ Soon after marrying a Baptist wife, he set out for Kentucky in 1783. Like many Baptists in the 18th century, the need for a greater family income was a primary factor in Taylor's move to the western frontier. It took three months to travel down the Ohio River on a flatboat and through the unsettled and sometimes hostile country on horseback.

The Taylors settled in a community with several other Baptist farmer-preachers in Woodward County. Together with other settlers, they soon founded the Clear Creek Baptist Church. John Taylor served as pastor of this frontier church for nine years. He, along with his sons and slaves, cleared enough land for a large farm where he became wealthy. In the years that followed, Taylor helped found seven other Baptist churches in Kentucky as well as others in western Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia. He was a prominent leader and popular speaker at Baptist Associations across the region. Each year at the end of the summer, he would travel to eight or ten Associations for their regular meetings. He was in demand as a preacher, having somewhere to preach each Sunday. Sweet notes, "All this labor was performed of his own volition without compensation or overhead direction. But this was not peculiar to John Taylor; rather he is the prototype of the fearless and self-reliant farmer-preachers who planted Baptist churches throughout the length and breadth of the new West."⁴²

Like most early Kentucky Baptist preachers, Taylor never pretended to be a scholar because of his distrust of educated ministers. Yet Taylor possessed common sense, a deep spirituality, and an uncommon ability to reason and understand. He was friendly by nature and

⁴¹Chester Raymond Young, ed., *Baptists on the American Frontier: A History of Ten Baptist Churches of Which the Author Has Been Alternately a Member*, 3rd ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), xi, 94. The original edition of John Taylor's *A History of Ten Baptist Churches on Which the Author Has Been Alternately a Member, in Which Will Be Seen Something of a Journal of the Author's Life for more than Fifty Years; Also a Comment on Some Parts of Scripture in Which the Author Takes the Liberty to Differ from Other Expositors* appeared in 1823, published by Jacob Harrod Holeman in Frankfort, Kentucky. The second edition was printed by William H. Holmes in 1827 in Bloomfield, Kentucky. In the annotated third edition, Young introduces the work and edits it.

⁴²Sweet, *The Story of Religion in American*, 216.

never seemed to meet a stranger. He was well known for his friendly posture toward younger preachers in whom he hoped to encourage in their ministries and inspire confidence. He would greet them warmly with an extended hand or a warm embrace in the pulpit, providing opportunities for these young ministers to preach. He insisted that timid young preachers take a stand before the congregation and proclaim the gospel. He praised them through public affirmations and prayers. Taylor had a firm grasp of the responsibility of each generation of ministers to help call out and encourage those who would succeed them.⁴³

While Taylor encouraged young preachers, he was not averse to calling them to task, sometimes in an abrasive way, publicly correcting what he perceived to be their faults. Chester Young in his introduction to Taylor's *History of Ten Baptist Churches* reports an account of one such instance. It occurred when the Elkhorn Association was in session at Stamping Ground Church. A young preacher was speaking on the subject "What Is Man?" He announced three points and took more than an hour on the first point. When the preacher announced his second point, Taylor, who was sitting on the platform behind the preacher, slowly rose from his seat and deliberately took out his pocket watch. He moved to the front of the stage and spoke loudly enough for the large audience to hear him, "One hour gone, and gone forever, and nothing said."⁴⁴ After a painful dramatic pause, Taylor turned and walked slowly back to his chair, returning the watch to his pocket, and took his seat. The young preacher apologized for taking so long and abruptly took his seat. Another time at the end of a long-winded sermon, Taylor shared a pointed prayer, "Oh, Lord, teach Brother Joe what to preach, and how to preach and to quit when he is done. Amen."⁴⁵

⁴³Young, *Baptists on the American Frontier*, 45-48.

⁴⁴Samuel Howard Ford, "Pioneer Preachers: John Taylor," *Christian Repository* 8 (June 1859): 407 quoted in Young, *Baptists on the American Frontier*, 49.

⁴⁵Thomas M. Vaughan, *Memoirs of Rev. William Vaughan* (Louisville, KY: n.p., 1878), 270 quoted in Young, *Baptists on the American Frontier*, 49.

Even though John Taylor did not accept compensation for his ministry, he was able to provide very well for his family. His wealth grew through the acquisition of land, farming, and land speculation that often resulted in an excellent profit. His business success increased his opposition to salaried ministers. He gathered his children around him and divided his abundant wealth with them several years prior to his death. He wanted to share his blessings with his family.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, Taylor developed suspicion toward the mission movements of his day. His views were hardened by at least two incidents that occurred on the frontier. First, Taylor was offended by the statements of James Mason Peck and others involved in the home missions movement denouncing Baptists efforts in the frontier and predicting their failure due to the absence of duly appointed missionaries and the poor quality of Baptist preachers in the region. The second incident involved Taylor's adverse encounter with two young missionaries who boldly asked him how much income he received from his preaching. Of course Taylor responded that he did not receive anything for his services as a minister. They proceeded to argue that if Taylor were to preach more on missions he could raise enough money to provide a good salary for himself. They told him that this strategy had been proven in other areas. Taylor was also critical of Luther Rice's fund raising efforts for missions, feeling that the joy of doing the Lord's work was payment enough.⁴⁷ It was unfortunate indeed that he could not grasp the impact of a cooperative, financed effort to reach the world with the gospel through missions.

Conclusion

It is difficult to fully grasp the pervasive influence of Baptists on the American frontier and the lingering impact of churches that were planted everywhere these Baptists settled. Churches were planted across the frontier in every direction in a way that was faithful to the Great Commission and was consistent with the New Testament model presented in Acts. With a

⁴⁶Young, *Baptists on the American Frontier*, 45.

⁴⁷McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 373-74.

strong commitment to biblical authority, Baptists sought to carry out the Great Commission of the Lord by making disciples through evangelism and discipleship which led to responsible church membership on the American frontier. Shubal Stearns, Daniel Marshall, Philip Mulkey, and the multitude of preachers that were called out of the Sandy Creek church planting movement were used by God to plant churches all across the American frontier in a very short period of time. Many of the farmer-preachers who traveled to the frontier came to know Christ through the influence of the Sandy Creek Church. These farmer-preachers, though they lacked theological training, not only evangelized the lost, disciplined new believers, and planted churches in new areas across the frontier, they were also responsible for bringing and maintaining civil order and discipline to the lives of those on the American frontier. Through their simple organization and passionate, evangelistic fervor they reached many fellow pioneers on the American frontier. Farmer-preachers like John Taylor also recognized their responsibility to nurture the next generation of preachers and Christian leaders, an important function of the discipling task. From these roots it is now up to the current generation of Baptists to follow the examples of these Baptist pioneers and seek to carry out the Great Commission in their generation by making disciples through evangelism and discipleship and planting New Testament churches wherever they go.

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