

THE LAND MOURNETH: A STUDY OF THE HOMEFRONT  
BAPTIST CHURCHES IN VIRGINIA, 1861-1865

by

Jonathan E. Lee

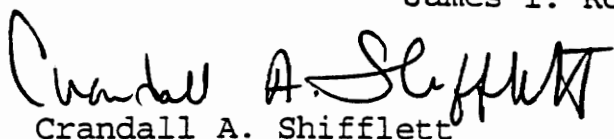
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(ABSTRACT)

Throughout the Civil War, Americans relied upon religion to shape their understanding of the conflict. As furious campaigns raged across the national landscape, Northerners and Southerners saw the hand of God at work in human history. Unfortunately, historians have not adequately dealt with this aspect of the conflict. In order to treat this historiographical void, this work focuses on the changes in religion wrought by civil war. More precisely, it concentrates on warfare's effects on Virginia's homefront Baptist churches and how these churches responded. This study, therefore, sheds light on the physical and spiritual ramifications that America's greatest trial had on Virginia's religious institutions.

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## ***Introduction***

In the spring of 1865, the Commonwealth of Virginia lay in ruins. Charred homes, dilapidated businesses, and abandoned fields bore witness to the devastation that four long years of warfare had caused. The beloved Old Dominion, "the birthplace of the heroes and statesmen of former days", was a shadow of its former self.<sup>1</sup>

That May, bands of forlorn Baptists from every corner of Virginia set out to traverse this ravaged landscape. As they trekked to the Baptist General Association meeting in Richmond, they witnessed the immense destruction that civil war had brought on their state. Then, upon their arrival in the famous capital of the commonwealth, they found a "scene of ruin and devastation" that was "beyond description."<sup>2</sup> Yet a glimmer of hope fell upon these religious travelers as they converged upon the war-torn state capital.

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1 *Minutes of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, for the sessions of 1861, 1862, and 1863* (Richmond, 1863), 16.

2 Edward Moseley, "English Views of the Civil War: A Unique Excursion to Virginia, April 2-8, 1865", edited by James I. Robertson, Jr. *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 77 (April 1969), 209.

On a hill high above the ruined city, a "tall steeple stood like a sentinel against the sky," perhaps signalling that Virginia's once-prosperous Baptist congregations had escaped the ravages of war. The truth became painfully clear, however, as they congregated underneath that tall steeple. Hope turned into mourning. Out of the smoldering ruins of Richmond, a lament rose to heaven: "Look on the fields.... Our Churches are enfeebled."<sup>3</sup>

Just five years earlier, it seemed impossible that the state's Baptist churches could undergo such deprivation.<sup>4</sup> In 1860, Virginia's congregations proudly proclaimed that they existed "in a healthy, thriving condition." Reports of vibrant and growing churches filled the pages of *The Religious Herald*, Virginia's Baptist newspaper. For example, in November, 1860, *The Religious Herald* noted that Mountain Plain Baptist Church in Albemarle County "enjoyed a delightful revival" as thirty individuals joined the

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3 Blanche Sydnor White, *First Baptist Church-Richmond, 1780-1955* (Richmond, 1955), 72; *Minutes of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, Held in Richmond, May 1865* (Richmond, 1865), 26: Henceforth all sources located at the Virginia Baptist Historical Society will be designated by the initials VBHS.

4 In this study, the terms "church" and "congregation" are used interchangeably. Both terms denote an organized body of believers. The term "church building" denotes the actual structure used by a body of believers.

congregation. In that same issue, the paper cheered the founding of a new church in Montgomery County. Such vitality, common throughout Virginia, led Baptist leaders to believe that spiritual verve permeated the churches of the Old Dominion. Moreover, the future seemed to promise only continued prosperity.<sup>5</sup>

Then in 1861, war swept over the land. The state's churches initially remained healthy, but 1862 and 1863 proved disastrous. In those years, the Civil War stripped Virginia's churches of their health and energy. As one district association reported in 1862, "never within our memory was the cause of Christ as languishing as it is now." By 1863, even once-prosperous Mountain Plain noted its own decline. Attendance plunged. "Lukewarmness prevails too much," it confessed.<sup>6</sup>

By 1864, Virginia's churches barely resembled their prewar condition. That year, Lower Northampton Baptist

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*5 Minutes of the 69th Anniversary of the Albemarle Baptist Association, Held in Albemarle County, Virginia on August 14-16, 1860 (Charlottesville, 1860), 24, VBHS; The Religious Herald, Nov. 22, 1860; Minutes of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, Held in Staunton, May, 1860, (Richmond, 1860), 58-59, VBHS.*

*6 Minutes of the 79th Annual Session of the Middle District Baptist Association, July 29-30, 1862 (Richmond, 1862), 10; Minutes of the 72nd Anniversary of the Albemarle Baptist Association, Held in Albemarle County, Virginia, August 15-17, 1863 (Charlottesville, 1863), 22.*

Church told its sister churches that "no glad tidings ... no refreshing season" could be reported. The Dover Baptist Association bemoaned the state of seven member churches, as "their congregations [are] broken up and their members refugees."<sup>7</sup>

This thesis focuses on these dramatic changes in religion wrought by civil war. In more precise terms, it concentrates on warfare's effects on Virginia's homefront Baptist churches and how these churches responded. Such an investigation is essential because of the church's key role during the crisis. As Emory Thomas noted, "Southern churches are the best place to look" in order to understand the creation and maintenance of Southern nationalism. Another historian declared that "among the institutions within the Confederate States of America, none did more than the churches to further the Southern cause."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Minutes of the 54th Session of the Accomac Baptist Association, Held in Accomac County, Virginia, October 14-15, 1864* (Baltimore, 1864), 8, VBHS; *Minutes of the 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, and 82nd Annual Meetings of the Dover Baptist Association* (Richmond, 1866), 20, VBHS.

<sup>8</sup> Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation, 1861-1865* (New York, 1979), 21; Willard E. Wight, "The Churches and the Confederate Cause," *Civil War History* 6 (1960), 373. In this study, a "homefront" church is defined as a church not created to serve a military populace but intended to serve civilians. Such churches often welcomed military visitors. On certain occasions, soldiers constituted a majority of those in attendance. Service to civilians, however, remained



Despite the churches' importance, in-depth studies of the institution during wartime are lacking. This void reflects the paucity of sufficient scholarship on southern religion during the war years. This problem is surprising because an impressive historiography on the general topic of nineteenth-century southern religion does exist. Scholars such as John Boles, Donald Mathews, and Samuel Hill have provided a knowledgeable portrait of Southern religious life. Within this field, various historians have noted the importance of the church to antebellum and postbellum Southern society. For example, Mathews described churches as "inextricable elements of the Southern social system," while another historian argued that the church served as the "greatest social institution" in the South.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to recognizing the church's importance to Southern society, historians point to the significant role that religion played in the coming of the Civil War. For example, Robert L. Stanton wrote in 1864 that he and most

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the founding principle of homefront churches.

<sup>9</sup> Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago, 1977), 82; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, 1972), 673. See also John B. Boles, ed., *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington, Ky., 1988); Samuel S. Hill, ed., *Religion in the Southern States* (Macon, Ga., 1983); Charles R. Wilson, ed., *Religion in the South* (Jackson, Miss., 1985).

Americans "freely lay the blame of this Rebellion, in great measure, or wholly, at the door of the Church."

Subsequent historians tended to agree. In the first half of the twentieth century, Allen Nevins, Charles Sydnor, and William Sweet all viewed religion on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line as a factor in America's march to war.

"There are good arguments," Sweet declared, "to support the claim that the split in the churches [North and South] was not only the first break between the sections, but the chief cause of the final break."<sup>10</sup>

In a more recent work, C. C. Goen argued Sweet's point more forcefully. Goen believed that the schisms of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist faiths served as a model for the separation of the United States. In *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*, Goen wrote: "The denominational schisms as irreversible steps along the nation's tortuous course to violence, were both portent and catalyst to the imminent

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10 Robert L. Stanton, *The Church and the Rebellion: A Consideration of the Rebellion Against the Government of the United States, and the Agency of the Church in Relation Thereto* (New York, 1864), vi; William W. Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York, 1950), 312; See also Allen Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union* (New York, 1947), 2:553; Charles S. Sydnor, *The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-1848* (Baton Rouge, 1934), 299-300.

national tragedy."<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the denominational schisms between North and South, other historians have noted Southern religion's unique contribution to the dissolution of the Union. In *Gospel and Disunion*, Mitchell Snay saw that "religion contributed much to the origins of Southern separatism." Moreover, Snay believed that "the importance of religion in the formation of antebellum Southern distinctiveness" has been underemphasized. This is true, but thankfully the historiography on religion's role in the formation of a distinct Southern society continues to expand and enlighten.<sup>12</sup>

While historians continue to delve more deeply into the antebellum church and antebellum Southern religion, many ignore or gloss over the crucial wartime era. This is unfortunate because in a real sense "the war was one between the churches of the North and those of the South." This thesis, therefore, sheds light on a vital yet underexposed

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11 C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation* (Macon, 1985), 6.

12 Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1993), 2, 5. For examples of other studies in this field, see Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, 1993), Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1980), and Kenneth Moore Startup, *The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South* (Athens, Ga., 1997).

area of scholarship.<sup>13</sup>

The topic of Southern religion during the war years has received attention. As early as 1876, William Bennett published *The Great Revival*. Soon afterward, J. William Jones produced *Christ in the Camp, or Religion in Lee's Army of Northern Virginia*. Both of these works, written by Civil War veterans, concentrated on religious concerns within the Confederate army itself.<sup>14</sup>

Jones's and Bennett's early writings reflect a general deficiency in the historiography of Confederate religion that continues today. Most works on the topic treat religion within the armed forces but ignore the religious history of homefront Confederates. Insightful books such as Gardiner Shattuck's *A Shield and Hiding Place* provide invaluable discussions on the ebb and flow of religion within a military context, but discussion of civilians is limited to the service they provided to the army's spiritual growth.<sup>15</sup>

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13 Richard Beringer, et al, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, 1986), 86.

14 William W. Bennett, *The Great Revival which Prevailed in the Southern Armies* (Philadelphia, 1877); J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp, or Religion in Lee's Army of Northern Virginia* (Richmond, 1887).

15 Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *A Shield and Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies* (Macon, 1987). See also Drew Gilpin Faust, "Christian Soldiers: The Meaning of Revivalism in the Confederate Army", *Journal of Southern*

In 1986, a book entitled *Why the South Lost the Civil War* sparked an increase in interest in Confederate religion. In this work, Richard Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William Still, Jr., argued that Confederate defeat owed much to a collapse of will, or morale, within the whole of Southern society. Moreover, they wrote religion played an important role in this collapse of will. "The campaigns of the Civil War did not alone produce its outcome" because "Southerners ... became gradually convinced that God willed they should not win."<sup>16</sup>

The theory propounded by these authors has generated a new interest in Confederate religion. Historians have begun to study the implications of religion on various aspects of the Confederacy, including nationalism and battlefield actions. Just as importantly, more writings address the issue of homefront religion.<sup>17</sup>

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*History* (February 1987), 63-90; Herman Norton, *Rebel Religion: The Story of Confederate Chaplains* (St. Louis, 1961).

<sup>16</sup> Beringer, *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, 102.

<sup>17</sup> David B. Chesebrough, ed., *"God Ordained This War": Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia, 1991); W. Harrison Daniel, *Southern Protestantism in the Confederacy* (Bedford, Va., 1989); Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, 1988); Samuel J. Watson, "Religion and Combat Motivation in the Confederate Armies", *Journal of Military History* (January 1994), 29-55.

Problems exist in this expanding historiography. First, many historians tend to use the religious views of the Confederacy's leadership as an indicator of religious feelings throughout Southern society. The religious proclamations of such leaders as Jefferson Davis, Leonidas Polk, and James Thornwell receive more attention and weight than that of ordinary civilians, whether clergy or lay.

Another problem that besets many authors is the habit of portraying a monolithic South. These works do not acknowledge differences between the Upper South and Lower South, or differences between individual states. This oversight could easily produce a skewed image of Confederate religion.

This thesis attempts to address these two historiographical deficiencies. First, it provides a discussion of the physical and spiritual conditions of homefront churches. By concentrating on homefront congregations, I hoped to avoid the trap of ignoring unrenowned civilians in favor of famous individuals.

To treat the second historiographical problem, the study focuses on one specific state (Virginia) in contrast to a monolithic South. Civil War-era Virginia possessed features some other Southern states did not. For example, the Old Dominion did not clamor to secede from the Union, but did so

as a last resort. Another important feature is that Virginia was the major battleground for the Civil War. Within its borders, large armies prosecuted major campaigns.

Such factors differentiated Virginia from other Confederate states and had important effects on its congregations. By focusing on the Commonwealth alone, this thesis was able to address these unique issues. Just as importantly, by maintaining a single-state focus this study could give attention to particular regions within the Commonwealth. Clearly the western and eastern portions of Virginia did not mirror each other, nor did the northern and southern portions. Therefore, this thesis discusses differences within the state. Yet the main emphasis remains the overwhelmingly similar conditions of Baptist churches throughout the Old Dominion.

I chose to concentrate on the Baptist denomination for several important reasons. The first was the size of the denomination in 1860. As the state's largest denomination, Baptist churches filled the Virginia countryside, whether in the far southwest or on the eastern shore. This quantity helped to provide a complete portrait of religious conditions throughout the state, not in one isolated region.

The independent ecclesiastical structure of the denomination also influenced my decision. Unlike churches in

the Methodist or Episcopalian ranks, each Baptist church remained an independent entity with autonomous decision-making power. This independence checked the creation of a centralized denominational elite with immense power and influence. Studying the actions and conditions of individual Baptist congregations, therefore, reveals the sentiments and welfare of a rather large group of people.

While Baptist churches remained autonomous institutions, they often joined larger organizations by choice. Dozens of district associations existed in Virginia at the time of the war. These associations were constituted of several churches in rather close proximity to one another. In addition, the Baptist formed the General Association of Virginia, the largest Baptist organization in the state. Delegates elected from congregations around the state formed the Association.

The denomination's independent ecclesiastical structure affected these larger organizations in important ways. Delegates who attended the district and general association meetings were elected by the entire church membership. These delegates usually received instructions from fellow congregants concerning what positions to take on important matters. Since they remained answerable to their home congregations, most delegates followed their instructions.

Just as importantly, the resolutions made by the larger



associations were not binding on its constituent churches. Rather, they were considered advisory. This policy allowed the larger organization to wield influence, but it also maintained the autonomy of individual congregations.

Another important factor in the decision to concentrate on Baptist congregations was the existence of a rather impressive quantity and quality of primary sources. The Virginia Baptist Historical Society in Richmond holds an excellent collection of Baptist records from the period. This collection includes the Minutes of the Virginia Baptist General Association, the minutes of the numerous Baptist district associations of Virginia, and various documents from individual churches.

The Library of Virginia contains another important collection of Baptist records. The Library's holdings include minute books and other documents from many individual congregations. This collection acted as a fine complement to the archives of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

An invaluable primary source was the *Religious Herald*, Virginia's Baptist newspaper. Despite the material deprivations experienced by its printers, the *Herald* remained in print until the last month of the war. This paper provided specific information concerning the state of the churches, and it also showed the general tone of Baptist

sentiment during the conflict.<sup>18</sup>

This study also investigates the spiritual and physical elements of Virginia's Baptist congregations. The terms physical and spiritual denote two broad, intertwined categories. Physical aspects include a church's membership levels, the actual condition of its building, the presence of a pastor, and similar elements. The spiritual aspects of a congregation consist in large part of the vitality of worship services and prayer meetings, attitudes toward various groups of people (including slaves, the North, and fellow Southerners), as well as attitudes about war and God.<sup>19</sup>

In this study, these two categories are complementary. For example, when an act of war destroyed a church building,

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18 For a discussion of this publication's wartime history, see Thomas E. Miller, Jr., "A Religious Press in Time of War: *The Religious Herald, 1860-1865*", *The Virginia Baptist Register* 23 (1984), 1139-1159.

19 For a helpful discussion on the usefulness of religious records as historical sources, see David B. Chesebrough, "The Civil War and the Use of Sermons as Historical Documents", *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 8 (Fall 1993), 26-30. As Chesebrough argues, and I agree, primary sources of a religious nature reveal the essence of society in the Civil War South. For example, pastor's sermons, church proclamations, associational resolutions, and other Baptist statements shed light on the hopes and fears of many Virginians. Attendance levels, the frequency of worship services, and the state of other church programs also reflect the sentiments of a rather large number of people. Thus these religious sources are valuable guides to understanding the Baptist denomination and the broader Virginia society.

a congregation typically lost its spiritual vitality. When a church believed that God did not favor the Confederate cause, membership levels dropped. Since one aspect relates to the other, this thesis investigates the interaction between the two and how warfare contributed to changes in this complementary system.

The study begins with the chapter entitled "The Days Before the Flood." This chapter discusses the condition of Virginia's Baptist churches in 1860 and the early part of 1861, before the onset of the Civil War. During this period, the churches experienced tremendous growth. Even as political issues began to consume their thoughts, Virginia's congregations remained healthy. This chapter provides a baseline by which to measure the actual impact of war.

Chapter 2, "The Moment the Torrent Struck," looks at the period beginning with the events at Fort Sumter and continuing to the end of that year. Most churches retained a sense of vitality during this initial phase. Immense problems awaited in the near future, however, as many of the seeds of subsequent decline were sown in this period.

The next chapter, "Among the Thorns," discusses the crucial years of 1862 and 1863. This period witnessed a tremendous decline in the condition of a vast majority of Virginia's churches. Several factors led to this change,

including vital Confederate defeats, the constant presence of enemy troops on Virginia soil, and, most importantly, institutional changes made earlier in the war.

The conditions of 1864 and early 1865 serve as the focus for the next chapter, "Only a Remnant." During this time, most churches barely resembled their prewar condition. Numbers dwindled through these dark days. Many congregations hoped for a renewed spirit in the pews and a reversal of fortune for the Confederacy. Such relief did not come.

Chapter 5, "Abraham's Seed," investigates the role of African Americans in the Baptist churches. It does so in two ways. First it looks at white attitudes and actions toward black congregants. In addition, it portrays African Americans as active agents themselves. In fact, the actions of black Baptists often reflected sentiments very different from fellow white Baptists. This is an intriguing aspect of the Civil War-era church, and thus merits its own chapter.

The epilogue treats of the collapse of the Confederacy and the initial months of peace. This was a crucial time for the churches as certain elements of their condition changed abruptly. The dream of a separate Southern nation died, the makeup of membership changed, and a new Northern rival entered the state religious arena. The churches had to address these issues in very short order. They did so with

tremendous faith.

These chapters produce an image of an institution in dire straits. Throughout the Old Dominion, congregations mourned their plight. The Civil War wreaked havoc on the churches and the decline in their physical and spiritual conditions reflected this. Yet this is also the story of perseverance. Surely the churches experienced a time of tribulation, but they survived the struggle. Though they were withered, they remained the cornerstone of Virginia society.

*For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.*

*Matthew 24: 38-39a (NIV)*

## **Chapter 1**

# **The Days Before the Flood**

The year 1860 dawned with promise for Virginia's Baptist congregations. During the past decade, the denomination had grown to become the largest denomination in the state. From the eastern shore to the far southwest corner of the Commonwealth, Baptist churches dotted the landscape. Each week, tens of thousands gathered in these churches and raised their voices to heaven as they gave thanks to God for the blessings He had bestowed upon them. It seemed that the age-old prophesy of Ezekiel had come true for Virginia's Baptists: "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout 1860, these showers of blessing poured upon the state's Baptists. For example, First Baptist Church of Richmond experienced a tremendous period of prosperity.

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1 Samuel S. Hill, Jr., ed., *Religion in the Southern States* (Macon, 1983), Chapter 7; Ezekiel 34:26 KJV.

Already one of the state's largest congregations, First Baptist welcomed 55 new members into its fold during the year. Thanks to these additions, the membership levels rose to well over 800 parishioners. Even Sunday School rolls swelled to an average of over 750, an amazing figure.<sup>2</sup>

Increased membership levels, however, did not tell the whole story of First Baptist's blessings. By 1860, the church had managed to expand its properties while ridding itself of debt. Moreover, the congregation was sponsoring a large and impressive choir. Prosperity dwelt with First Baptist Church in 1860.<sup>3</sup>

First Baptist did not hold a monopoly on prosperity. To the east, smaller Baptist congregations heralded glad tidings as well. Modestown Baptist Church baptized 23 individuals, bringing its total membership to nearly a hundred. On the Eastern Shore of Virginia, Bethel Baptist Church felt "grateful for the fine refreshing showers of grace which God has been pleased to send." Bethel told its fellow members of the Accomac Baptist Association that it had gained over 20 members during the year, and its Sunday school welcomed large

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2 Blanche Sydnor White, *First Baptist Church-Richmond, 1780-1955* (Richmond, 1955), 240.

3 *Ibid.*, 63, 66.

numbers each week.<sup>4</sup>

Baptist churches also prospered in the western portion of the state as well. *The Religious Herald* reported that the entire community of southwestern Virginia felt "deeply concerned" about the Christian message and the spread of Baptist influence. Mt. Neriah Baptist Church certainly seemed concerned. Over the course of the year, a spirit of revival so touched the church that it nearly doubled in size. Nearby, new Baptist converts founded a church in Montgomery County. While only 15 members attended the first service, *The Religious Herald* felt confident that greater things lay ahead for the tiny congregation.<sup>5</sup>

That year, the Baptist General Association of Virginia met in Staunton. Baptists from around the state shared information about the wonders that had occurred in their regions. It quickly became apparent to the delegates that the Lord had smiled upon the state. In a sermon to the

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4 *Minutes of the 51st and 52nd Sessions of the Accomac Baptist Association, August 17-20, 1860 and August 16-19, 1861* (Baltimore, 1862), 7, 16, VBHS. See also Betsy Fleet and John D. Fuller, eds., *A Virginia Plantation Family during the Civil War: Being the Journal of Benjamin Robert Fleet and Letters of his Family* (Lexington, Ky., 1962), 28.

5 *The Religious Herald*, November 15, 1860; November 22, 1860. See also *Minutes of the Lebanon District Baptist Association, September 13-15, 1860* (Marion, 1860), 5, VBHS. Five new churches arose in the Lebanon area and joined the district association.



Association, the moderator put such feelings into words by quoting Psalm 127: "For while they sleep, [the Lord] provides for those He loves."<sup>6</sup>

While the state's Baptists realized that God's power had led to a bountiful year, they also realized that they had a hand in the process. Baptist churches employed various means to increase their vitality and to spread their influence. One of the most important methods was the age-old approach of employing effective preachers. Virginia Baptists could boast of some of the most accomplished ministers in the state. Eminent men such as Jeremiah Jeter, William Broaddus, John Burrows, and James Taylor proclaimed the gospel message from the state's pulpits. Hundreds of other Baptist pastors also labored diligently for the Lord. Whether they proclaimed the work of God inside the church building or shared the gospel on home visits within the community, their efforts represented a major element in prewar Baptist prosperity.<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing the important role that ministers played, many Baptists supported educational efforts aimed at training ministers. Richmond College became a training ground for

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<sup>6</sup> *Minutes of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, Held in Staunton, May 1860* (Richmond, 1860), 15, VBHS.

<sup>7</sup> W. Harrison Daniel, *Virginia Baptists, 1860-1902* (Bedford, Va., 1987), Chapter 1.

many Baptist ministers and received support from the General Association as well as numerous congregations. The state's Baptists also supported a school in Greenville, South Carolina, which trained Virginia men to serve as pastors.<sup>8</sup>

Churches also increased their numbers by supporting another major program, colportage. In a strict sense, Baptist colporteurs were retailers of religious literature. Their main purpose was to travel and to sell books to individuals and congregations throughout the state. At this time, the General Association of Virginia employed over 20 young men to serve as colporteurs. Most served on a part-time basis. Each colporter covered a specific territory in the Commonwealth. In return for their services, they received a salary ranging from \$20 to \$300 annually.<sup>9</sup>

While the colporteur's official duty was to sell books, in practice he fulfilled many other responsibilities. Since

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8 Daniel, *Virginia Baptists*, 16 & 142-143. For contemporary examples of support, see *Minutes of the 69th Anniversary of the Albemarle Baptist Association in Albemarle County, Virginia, August 14-16, 1860* (Charlottesville, 1860), 16-18, VBHS; *Minute Book of Mill Creek Baptist Church, March 31, 1860*: Henceforth all sources located at the Virginia State Library, Archives Branch, will be designated by the initials VSL.

9 *Minutes of the General Association, 1860*, 34-35; *Minutes of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, for the sessions of 1861, 1862, and 1863* (Richmond, 1863), 23; See also W. Harrison Daniel, *Southern Protestantism in the Confederacy* (Bedford, Va., 1989), 116-118.

many of them were trained pastors, they often ministered to the communities they visited. On numerous occasions, colporteurs preached to a church, baptized converts, and visited with families in the area. Colporteurs even worked to establish Sunday schools. In 1860 alone, Virginia's "book pedlars" founded 40 Sunday schools across the state.<sup>10</sup>

Most Baptists greatly appreciated the colporteurs' labors. One church proclaimed that mid-nineteenth America was "a reading age and a reading country.... The only question for us to decide respects the character of the books" that individuals should read. The church believed that the state's colporteurs guaranteed a pious reading selection for Virginians. Moreover, *The Religious Herald* spoke to the overall contributions of colporteurs: "Who can estimate the good these dear brethren are doing in protracted meetings, in Sunday schools, around the fireside, among all classes and conditions of society."<sup>11</sup>

Just as colportage contributed to the vitality of the Baptist denomination in 1860, state missions also played a significant role. The state missions program aimed to establish new Baptist churches, produce converts, and, to a

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<sup>10</sup> *Minutes of the General Association, 1860*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 35; *The Religious Herald*, December 27, 1860.

lesser extent, distribute denominational literature. Baptist congregations from around the state collected money for the program and a State Missions Board administered it. During the prewar period, this home mission proved to be a very effective arm of Baptist evangelization.<sup>12</sup>

In 1860, over 60 missionaries carried the gospel, and the Baptist banner, throughout Virginia. A mix of part-time and full-time workers, these missionaries in 1860 canvassed the state and preached 6,320 sermons. In addition, they made 6,800 family visits over the course of the year. Their efforts reaped a substantial reward. Over 1,200 people received baptism. In addition, their work led to the founding of 12 new churches in the state.<sup>13</sup>

The western region of Virginia seemed to be a particularly fertile ground for state missions programs. While only a third of the missionaries served this region, their sermons produced tremendous effects. In the western portion of Virginia alone, 644 individuals were baptized. This number represented over half of the total baptisms by the home missionaries. It is little wonder that *The Herald*

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12 *Minutes of the General Association, 1860*, 54; See also *Minutes of the Albemarle Association, 1860*, 19; *Minutes of the Lebanon Association, 1860*, 8; Minute Book of Shiloh Baptist Church, June 23, 1860, VBHS.

13 *Minutes of the General Association, 1860*, 58-59.

saw western Virginia as a field ready for harvest.<sup>14</sup>

That year, however, also brought problems that could not be ignored. After decades of dispute and resentment, the sectional crisis in America reached a boiling point. America faced an uncertain future.

Virginia Baptists understood the severity of the crisis. In February, 1860, *The Herald* felt the growing threat of war and warned that Northern hostility portended violence. The paper blamed the sectional controversies on "Northern fanaticism," especially that of "rampant Abolitionists." If these Northern fanatics continued their constant attacks on the South, "disastrous consequences" awaited the Union. Yet *The Herald* believed that a majority of Northerners did not side with the radical abolitionists, and thus would "endeavor to put down agitation."<sup>15</sup>

The paper continued to decry the small group of fanatics who had created the sectional dispute. "When bad men combine," it declared, serious problems develop. *The Herald* stated that the wise leaders of the nation must unite to stop the agitators. Otherwise, the Union and its leaders "will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible

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14 Ibid., 55-56; *The Religious Herald*, November 15, 1860.

15 *The Religious Herald*, February 2, 1860.

struggle."<sup>16</sup>

Most Virginia Baptists in the early part of 1860 did not believe that civil war would come. In a letter to *The Herald*, a Mr. Nelson, a Baptist from northern Virginia, was emphatic on this point. "Dissolve this Union, the thing is impossible!" He described the unthinkable, two sectional armies arrayed against each other. If this occurred, Nelson believed that "as they approached each other, and heard the old familiar air, they would throw down their arms and rush into fraternal embrace." The editors of *The Herald* concurred with Mr. Nelson's "patriotic sentiments."<sup>17</sup>

The sentiments of *The Religious Herald* and Nelson represented the predominant viewpoint of local Baptists. These Virginians held the Union dear. Most believed that radical abolitionism had led to the growth of enmity between North and South. In response to this radicalism, a small strain of disunion sentiment had spread in the deep South. Yet Baptists considered it a minority position. If left unchecked, the Commonwealth's congregants worried that these "Southern disunionists and Northern fanatics" would lead the nation to separation and war. Most hoped and believed that

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16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., February 9, 1860.

the nation's leaders would compromise and keep the Union intact. In the end, reason would prevail.<sup>18</sup>

Even more powerful than human agency was the power of God. Where man failed, God provided. "Only the power of God can disperse the black and angry clouds of disunion." Few Baptists believed that God intended their beloved country to split. His divine plan called for a united nation.<sup>19</sup>

Anxiety increased as the presidential election of 1860 neared. When political parties chose their candidates, it seemed that sectional hostilities overcame reason. First the Republican party, nominating a presidential candidate for only the second time in its short history, chose Abraham Lincoln. Though a moderate on many issues, including slavery, Lincoln still appeared to be a major threat to the South because the Republican platform represented Northern interests.

Then the Democratic party met to choose its candidate. With only an unrenowned Republican candidate as opposition, it appeared that the Democratic choice would soon sit in the White House. Yet the party succumbed to sectional disputes and split into two factions. The northern wing selected

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18 Ibid., August 9, 1860. See also Daniel, *Virginia Baptists*, 1-3.

19 *The Religious Herald*, August 9, 1860.

Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas as its candidate. The southern wing of the party, hostile to Douglas, chose John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky.

Even a fourth party stepped into the fray. As the political atmosphere in America degenerated, a group from the border states formed their own independent party. Hoping for compromise and conciliation, this party selected John Bell of Tennessee as its candidate and placed him in the electoral mix.<sup>20</sup>

Most Baptists refused to use religious institutions as a forum for their political views. Pulpits remained rather quiet through the campaign. Ministers told their congregations to seek God's guidance, but they did not endorse specific candidates. Even the voice of the state's Baptists, *The Religious Herald*, refrained from declaring a position until the votes were cast.<sup>21</sup>

In November 1860, Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans won the election. Immediately, the South began to stir. Many southerners feared that Lincoln's election represented the first step toward their subjugation. It appeared as if the Southern way of life was in jeopardy.

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20 Bruce Catton, *The Civil War* (Boston, 1987), Ch. 1.

21 Daniel, *Southern Protestantism in the Confederacy*, 1-2.



Soon after the election, *The Religious Herald* began to note the "great discontent throughout the Southern states" that Lincoln's victory created. The editors feared that South Carolina, and perhaps others, would soon secede. "Cooler heads may yet prevail" *The Herald* hoped.<sup>22</sup>

As the "momentous question" of secession occupied the thoughts of more Americans, Baptists called for divine guidance. On several occasions the editors of *The Herald* asked all Baptist churches in the state to set aside a day of fasting and prayer. In this way, God would give his all-wise counsel to "our perturbed country."<sup>23</sup>

On December 6, 1860, *The Herald* pronounced its official position on the increased enmity between North and South. The editors wrote that they relied solely upon God's plan for the nation, and that all Baptists needed to do the same. They continued to hope that religious, level-headed leaders could lead the nation through the crisis. Yet they knew the Almighty directed the course of nations, and thus His will would be done.<sup>24</sup>

This position was a reflection of the evangelical world

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22 *The Religious Herald*, November 22, 1860.

23 *Ibid.*, November 22, 1860; December 6, 1860.

24 *Ibid.*, December 6, 1860.

of the nineteenth century South. Southern evangelicals believed that God guided human history. God played the crucial role, whether in the mundane events of everyday life or the momentous decisions that affected the course of nations. Human agency served a purpose in history, but human actions always fulfilled the Lord's will.<sup>25</sup>

On December 20, His will began to become clear. On that day, South Carolina seceded from the United States of America. "This day will be remembered by future generations of American citizens as one of the most important in the history of the United States", *The Herald* declared.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of this momentous decision, Baptists trusted in the Lord and hoped that the nation would enjoy continued peace. To strengthen their hopes, several churches in January 1861 held days of fasting and prayer. "In view of the national calamity now hanging over the United States," Kentuck Church in Pittsylvania County set aside January 4 as such a day. Ketoctin Church believed that "in view of the general distress of the country and threatening aspect of our public relations with each other," a day of fasting,

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25 David B. Chesebrough, ed., *"God Ordained This War": Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia, S.C., 1991), 1-17; Charles R. Wilson, ed., *Religion in the South* (Jackson, Miss., 1985), 13-34.

26 *The Religious Herald*, December 27, 1860.

humiliation, and prayer was much needed.<sup>27</sup>

Events in 1861 soon conspired against peace. In short order, six other Southern states followed South Carolina along the path of secession. On February 8, 1861, delegates from South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana met in Montgomery, Alabama, and established a new nation, the Confederate States of America. After the adoption of a constitution, the delegates chose Jefferson Davis to serve as president of this new entity.

The Union had been torn asunder, yet some hope remained. Politicians attempted to restore unity through compromise. A committee led by Kentucky senator John Crittenden formulated the last gasp effort to restore the Union in a peaceful manner. Known as the Crittenden Compromise, this plan basically proposed to ban slavery in the North and protect it in the South. When future states applied for statehood, the citizens of that state would decide on its status as free or slave.

The concept of popular sovereignty proved to be the downfall of the Compromise. Abraham Lincoln rejected it because it provided an opportunity for slavery to spread.

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27 Minute Book of Kentuck Baptist Church, December 26, 1860, VBHS; Minute Book of Ketocin Baptist Church, January 4, 1861, VSL. See also Minute Book of Colosse Baptist Church, December 9, 1860, VBHS; Minute Book of Meadows of Dan Baptist Church, December 22, 1860, VBHS.

While slavery could remain where it already existed, Lincoln refused to allow it to expand.<sup>28</sup>

As the last-minute attempts at political compromise failed, Virginia Baptists mourned the "utter inability of statesmanship to reconcile the antagonistic parties." Prayers ascended to heaven: "Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man." Similarly, others hoped the Lord would decree, "Peace! Be Still!" to the politicians of the day.<sup>29</sup>

Even as the national crisis reached a feverish pitch, Baptist congregations continued to enjoy prosperity in their affairs. Revivals occurred in several areas. For example, Copper Creek Church in Scott County enjoyed a "successful revival" in February. A month later, nearby West Fork also held a revival and welcomed numerous converts into the church.<sup>30</sup>

Baptist churches also remained vigorous to the east. In March, Upper King and Queen Baptist Church dedicated a new house of worship with large numbers in attendance. Throughout the first quarter of 1861, Richmond area churches

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28 Catton, 20-21.

29 *The Religious Herald*, March 7, 1861.

30 Minutes of Copper Creek Baptist Church, 71, VSL; Minutes of West Fork Baptist Church, March 1861, VSL.

welcomed large numbers of Sunday school scholars to their buildings.<sup>31</sup>

The State Missions Board enjoyed particular success during the first few months of the year. Home missionaries helped found eleven new churches and twenty-six new Sunday schools. In the western portion of the state alone, missionaries baptized 804 individuals. It seemed that Baptist vitality overcame all obstacles, whether it be "Satan ... the roaring lion" or the present political crisis.<sup>32</sup>

Then on April 12, 1861, in Charleston, South Carolina, civil war exploded in America. Confederate forces under the command of Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter, a Federal stronghold in Charleston harbor. A long bombardment ensued, and the next day Federal troops surrendered the fort. Soon the flag of the United States descended from atop the stronghold; the Confederate flag ascended to its place.

The bombardment of Fort Sumter realized the worst fears of Virginia Baptists. Clearly, the time for compromise had passed and the time for war had arrived. Months before, *The*

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31 Minute Book of Upper King and Queen Baptist Church, February 16, 1861, VBHS; *The Religious Herald*, April 18, 1861.

32 *Minutes of the General Association, 1861*, 33; *The Religious Herald*, March 14, 1861.

*Religious Herald* prophesied about the consequences of such a procession of events. In times of war, *The Herald* warned, "The gospel gain[s] a more uncertain access to the bosoms of men." When this occurred, *The Herald* believed that many congregations would succumb to "the night of this desertion" and disappear from the land. Now only time would tell if the prophecy rang true.<sup>33</sup>

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33 *The Religious Herald*, January 24, 1861; December 6, 1860.

*But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.*

*Luke 6:49 (NIV)*

## **Chapter 2**

# **The Moment the Torrent Struck**

On April 15, 1861, just days after the firing on Fort Sumter, Abraham Lincoln issued a call for troops from those states still in the Union. That included Virginia. With this call, it became very clear that Lincoln intended to use military force to bring the seceded Southern states back into the Union. This threat of force compelled Virginia to join its southern kinsmen, and on April 17, the Commonwealth withdrew from the United States.

After Virginia seceded, Baptists around the state pledged their allegiance to a new principality, the Confederate States of America. Once staunch proponents of unity, Virginia Baptists now proclaimed: "[W]e rejoice in the existence of the Government of the Confederate States of America." Moreover, Baptist congregants were pleased that "our own interests ... have become identified with" the

Confederate cause.<sup>1</sup>

Several factors lay behind this dramatic shift. First, Baptists came to the conclusion that the North had produced the calamity of disunion. On April 25, 1861, David Shaver and William Sands, editors of *The Religious Herald*, printed a lengthy article explaining Virginia's course of action and the Baptist reaction to it. They declared:

We write with the tramp of armed men in our ears; and who can say of what horrors this sound shall not prove the prelude? But if 'bloody waves inundate the land', there is at least one ray of light to relieve the gloom--no fault of Virginia brought this calamity upon us. She bore the olive branch until it was stricken from her hand with the drawn sword. Meeting intimidation with defiance, she only accepts the stern arbitrament thrust upon her. She would have ceased to be *herself* if she had not done so.<sup>2</sup>

James Madison Broaddus concurred with this declaration. A pillar of the Alexandria Baptist Church, Broaddus wrote to his brother in South Carolina: "I am not a secessionist ... but I am a Virginian. Virginia in the Union ... is my favorite idea--but if Virginia cannot belong to the Union without servile degradation from Northern aggression and domination, then I am for Virginia and nothing else at

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1 *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1861*, 16. See also *Minutes of the Goshen Baptist Association, Sept. 1861* (Fredricksburg, 1861), 3.

2 *The Religious Herald*, Apr. 25, 1861.



present."<sup>3</sup>

A theological understanding of the nation's crisis was the second important factor in the Baptist willingness to accept disunity. Baptists truly believed that God took a hand in human events, whether great or small. This shaped Baptist understanding of the times tremendously. While they recognized that Northern aggression acted as a human catalyst, Baptists also realized that a more powerful agent lay behind the recent course of events.

Shaver and Sands explained this viewpoint very clearly in the May 2 issue of *The Herald*. According to the two editors, humans did not always understand God's will. Despite this lack of understanding, Christians needed to remember the "glorious origins" of the national crisis. "Nothing transpires," they wrote, "which is not either the appointment or the permission of God." Recent events constituted part of "a plan which was devised by infinite intelligence, and can be comprehended by no other."<sup>4</sup>

Although God's plan was incomprehensible to mere mortals, many churches felt confident about the South's

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3 James M. Broadus to John A. Broadus, Apr. 27, 1861, in Archibald T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus* (Philadelphia, 1901), 183.

4 *The Religious Herald*, May 2, 1861.

chance for independence. At Straightstone Baptist Church in Pittsylvania County, Charles C. Chaplin delivered a sermon on the future of the Confederacy. Relying on Daniel 2:44, Chaplin declared: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."<sup>5</sup>

Such positivism pervaded the state. Although the North possessed great material advantages, Virginia Baptists entertained no doubt "as to the final result." At Mount Zion Church in Essex County, Alfred Bagby took God's promise of aid literally when he quoted from Zechariah 4:6: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of hosts." Through the Lord's will, the South would overcome the materially superior enemy and enjoy independence.<sup>6</sup>

In a letter to *The Herald*, one Baptist congregant chided Abraham Lincoln's confident attitude. In a speech, Lincoln had declared that the North would not relent until it had wrested the entire South from "the [Southern] traitors" and placed the region under the Federal flag. The Baptist writer responded: "Very well, we shall see whether there is not a

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<sup>5</sup> *Minutes of the 72nd Annual Session of the Roanoke Baptist Association, Aug. 20-22, 1861 (Danville, 1861), 3.*

<sup>6</sup> *The Religious Herald, May 30, 1861; Minutes of the 19th Annual Session of the Rappahannock Baptist Association, July 23-24, 1861 (Richmond, 1861), 3.*

let-down of the war for the Union before that time."<sup>7</sup>

At the General Association meeting in June, James B. Solomon was asked to report on the current affairs of the state. To the delegates he eloquently summarized the sentiments of his fellow believers:

Although Virginia has used every honorable means of averting war and restoring the Union to its pristine integrity ... the unprovoked hate of the Government at Washington seems doubly to curse her.... Already the booming of cannon proclaim their determination to afflict and subjugate her manly sons, and bring misery, if not ruin, upon her fair daughters. Her soil, hallowed as the birthplace of the heroes and statesmen of former days, is invaded by the armed soldiery of the Northern states. But we thank God that ... the Bible teaches us that the issue of battles is with the God of heaven and earth. And we rejoice that we are permitted to appeal to Him for the justice of our cause and the success of our arms.<sup>8</sup>

Baptists around the state did more than pay lip service to the Confederate cause. Numerous congregations displayed their patriotism through action. For example, Stony Creek Baptist Church in Scott County voted to exclude any member who supported the Union cause or broke a Confederate law. In mid-spring, First Baptist in Richmond held a rally to raise money for colportage work among the Confederate forces. Believing that the most religious army would prove victorious, the church raised over \$1200 in this single

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<sup>7</sup> *The Religious Herald*, May 30, 1861.

<sup>8</sup> *Minutes of the General Assoc.*, 1861, 16.

rally.<sup>9</sup>

First Baptist's outpouring of support toward missionary work among the soldiers reflected an overwhelming trend among Virginia's congregations. As thousands of troops rolled into the Old Dominion, Baptists turned their evangelistic zeal toward the military. In this way, they hoped to combine "the dictates of religion and the suggestions of patriotism."<sup>10</sup>

In June 1861, the General Association took the first major step in this process. During its annual meeting, the Association asked the Committee on Colportage to make a recommendation on the proper role of colportage during a time of war. The committee, headed by Andrew Dickinson, recommended that colporteurs be assigned to work among the army and that colportage labors on the homefront be suspended. The entire Association accepted this recommendation.<sup>11</sup>

This decision created a dramatic shift in Baptist efforts. During the early period of 1861, twenty-seven young ministers had served as colporteurs. They had travelled the

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9 Minute Book of Stony Creek Baptist Church, 43, VSL; White, *First Baptist Church, Richmond*, 67. See also Fleet, *A Virginia Plantation Family*, 61.

10 *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1861*, 24.

11 *Ibid.*, 18.

countryside in order to spread Baptist influence. These ministers visited over 42,000 families during the last portion of 1860 and the early months of 1861. This prodigious effort now became refocused on the Southern armies within Virginia's borders.<sup>12</sup>

The churches comprising the Albemarle Baptist Association welcomed this shift. Meeting in Nelson County, this collection of churches saw a tremendous opportunity for Christian evangelization among the Confederate armies. Colportage seemed the best method to take advantage of the opportunity. Thus, Abram B. Brown, Samuel Rice, and several other pastors asked their churches to "neglect not this great field for religious labor."<sup>13</sup>

Churches from around the state heeded their request. Mt. Hermon Baptist raised funds throughout the summer in order to buy religious tracts and fund the colportage program. Kentuck Baptist did the same, except that they sent Bibles rather than tracts. Army colportage soon became the top priority of numerous Baptist congregations.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Ibid.

13 *Minutes of the 70th Anniversary of the Albemarle Baptist Association, Aug. 13-15, 1861* (Charlottesville, 1861), 12.

14 Minute Book of Mt. Hermon Baptist Church, Oct. 1861, VBHS; Minute Book of Kentuck Baptist Church, July 27, 1861, VBHS. See also Minute Book of Upper King and Queen Baptist Church,

Many other denominations also became interested in this program. The Soldier's Tract Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, operated its own colportage department, employing twenty-five full-time colporteurs. These men worked throughout the various divisions of the Confederate army. Another organization, the Evangelical Tract Society, ran the largest colportage program in the South. This non-denominational organization, based in Petersburg, employed 150 colporteurs. This entire corps of religious workers dedicated themselves to serving the Confederate troops, especially those located in Virginia.<sup>15</sup>

While the Baptist colportage program evolved, the state missions program underwent a more radical change. At the General Association meeting in June, the state missions board reported tremendous success. Sixty-six missionaries had canvassed the state and preached over 6,000 sermons. These religious workers also helped to organize eleven new churches and twenty-six Sunday schools.<sup>16</sup>

With the arrival of war, however, this in-state outreach program entered dire straits. The State Missions Board of

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Aug. 17, 1861, VBHS.

15 Daniel, *Southern Protestantism*, 116-118.

16 *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1861*, 33.

the General Association expected "every man in our denomination, worthy a place among the successors of the Virginia Baptist fathers of 1776, will be found in the foremost ranks of those who are ready to devote their lives and their fortunes to the defense of the state."

Thus, the Association voted to disband the state missions program for the duration of the war. With this decision, the now unemployed missionaries either joined the ranks of the soldiers or served the armies as colporteurs or chaplains.<sup>17</sup>

John B. Hardwick, a pastor from the Norfolk area, deeply lamented this development. While he understood the reasons behind it, he bemoaned "the necessity for the entire suspension of a work endeared ... to the hearts of thousands who have been rescued by it from the dangers and consequences of sin."<sup>18</sup>

Thomas H. Facer agreed. In an address to the Appomattox Baptist Association, he recounted: "Houses of worship have been built, churches have been organized, Sabbath schools have been put into operation, and above all, many precious souls have been converted to Christ through the

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17 Ibid.

18 *Minutes of the 71st Session of the Virginia Portsmouth Baptist Association, Oct. 2-3, 1861* (Petersburg, 1861), 9.

instrumentality of our missionaries." "Other topics of present concern have thrust these [Christian] subjects aside," Facer realized. He worried that Baptists had "reason to tremble for the Ark of God, when we see it tossed upon this stormy sea."<sup>19</sup>

The decision to halt the evangelistic programs aimed at civilians represented a major change in Baptist policy. Before the war, Baptist churches around the state hoped to win Virginia for the denomination. The employment of colporteurs and state missionaries represented two of the most productive means by which to reach ordinary Virginians and turn them to Christ. By mid-1861, however, the Civil War transformed Baptist goals. While winning civilian souls and founding civilian churches still represented important projects, they were pushed aside by the great desire to minister to the incoming waves of Confederate troops.

Just as the war changed the focus of the outreach programs that Baptist churches supported, it profoundly affected the churches themselves. Local programs, membership levels, leadership networks, and certain church attitudes began to adapt to the new situation of war. As time passed in 1861, the seeds of future decline were sown.

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19 *Minutes of the Appomattox Baptist Association, Aug. 6-7, 1861* (Richmond, 1861), 15.



One important change was the departure of ministers. For example, Charlottesville Baptist Church lost its minister, Elder Crank, to "the Army of his country." Lebanon Grove and Mount Hope in Loudoun County experienced a similar fate. In fact, this process occurred in many localities, as pastors felt called to fulfill a duty to their new nation.<sup>20</sup>

In late April, the Virginia legislature passed an ordinance that opened a door to service for pastors. This law allowed the governor to appoint a chaplain for each Virginia brigade. It provided chaplains with a salary of \$150 per month, the equivalent of an infantry major's salary. Moreover, chaplains received the rank of major.<sup>21</sup>

This arrangement, however, did not remain in effect for long. In May 1861, the Confederate Congress enacted its own laws regarding chaplains. The Confederate ordinances did not officially designate a rank for chaplains. In addition, the new ordinance slashed chaplains' salaries to \$50 per month, little more than half of a second lieutenant's salary, and a third of the pay that chaplains had received under Virginia

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<sup>20</sup> *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1861*, 18; *Minutes of the 6th Annual Meeting of the Potomac Baptist Association, Aug. 7-9, 1861* (Richmond, 1861), 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> *The Religious Herald*, May 2, 1861. See also Daniel, *Southern Protestantism*, 56.

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These pecuniary differences deterred some Baptists from joining the ranks of army chaplains. Pastors with families could not meet their obligations on a salary of \$50 per month. Such pastors, therefore, chose to remain on the homefront.

Several submissions to *The Herald* castigated the Confederate government for making these changes. According to one unnamed Baptist, the reduction of chaplains' salaries represented "a penny-wise and pound-foolish policy." Such a policy promised to produce negative results because "the most valuable of the married clergy [must] leave the army."<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, not all Baptists believed that their denomination's ministers should serve as chaplains. Virginia Baptists had long held to a strict separation of church and state, and the duties of a chaplain seemed to mix the two spheres. Government oversight of religious officials could threaten the sanctity of the Christian message. As Shaver and Sands explained, "those who fill it [the chaplaincy] must often find themselves embarrassed by the attempt to trace the exact line" that divided their military and religious duties.

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22 Ibid., 56-58.

23 *The Religious Herald*, Sept. 26, 1861.

They worried that such difficulties could cause "the restriction of their labors within too narrow a circle."<sup>24</sup>

Another article in *The Herald* adamantly opposed "the appointment of Chaplains by Government." The writer argued that government-sponsored chaplains gave their first loyalty to the government, and that Christianity came in second. Thus, the letter-writer recommended that the soldiers in each regiment select their own chaplain and pay him with voluntary contributions. This policy, the writer hoped, would alleviate the negative outcomes of the chaplains' position.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these ideological and material problems, some Baptist preachers felt compelled to leave their home churches in order to serve God and country as a chaplain. In Northern Virginia, four churches lost their pastor in one fell swoop as J. William Jones left to serve the Army of Northern Virginia. The churches that comprised the Albemarle Association noted that "many of our most active and useful ministers" entered the army chaplaincy.<sup>26</sup>

The Baptist denomination never truly overcame its

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24 Ibid., Sept. 12, 1861.

25 Ibid., Oct. 17, 1861.

26 *Minutes of the Potomac Assoc., 1861*, 6-8; *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1861*, 12.

apprehensions. Hence, Baptist chaplains remained a rather small group. Pastors from other denominations, however, became chaplains in large numbers. For example, the Methodist Church sent twice as many chaplains to the front as did the Baptist denomination. Meanwhile, the number of Presbyterian and Episcopal chaplains nearly equaled Baptist numbers. The Presbyterian and Episcopal contributions were truly impressive when one considers how much larger the Baptist denomination in Virginia was at the time.<sup>27</sup>

Rather than serve as chaplains, many Baptist ministers chose to serve the soldiers as visiting evangelists. One important aspect differentiated the two positions. Chaplains became a part of the army and intended to remain with the troops throughout the war's duration. Evangelists, meanwhile, worked in the camps for a limited amount of time, usually from a few weeks to a few months.

These visiting evangelists filled various roles during their stays with the soldiers. Their primary duty was to deliver sermons. Yet they also counseled troops, baptized converts, and visited the wounded. By performing such varied tasks, they raised the spirit of Confederate camps and gained

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<sup>27</sup> Herman Norton, *Rebel Religion: The Story of Confederate Chaplains* (St. Louis, 1961), 115-134. See also Daniel, *Southern Protestantism*, 60-61.

the respect of the troops.<sup>28</sup>

The departure of ministers to the army camps, whether as chaplain or evangelist, harmed homefront congregations. When a minister left for the front, his church often cancelled its regular program of services. One prime example was the Sunday worship service. For Baptists, worship time on Sundays revolved around the sermon. Without a minister available to provide this key component, churches faced a difficult decision. They either cancelled the Sunday service until a minister became available or welcomed smaller crowds to the service.<sup>29</sup>

The absence of a minister affected more than the schedule of church events. It also took a toll on the psyche of the Baptist community. Ministers played an important role in nineteenth-century Virginia society. They served as leaders and examples to their congregants. Individuals within the church community held their ministers in high esteem and often relied upon his guidance in earthly and spiritual matters. When a body of believers lost its

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28 Ibid., 82-84.

29 Minute Book of Lower Northampton Baptist Church, July 5, 1861, VBHS; Minute Book of Mt. Hermon Baptist Church, Nov. 1861, VBHS. See also Kenneth Startup, *The Root of All Evil* (Athens, 1997), 4-5.



shepherd, spiritual decline often followed.<sup>30</sup>

The departure of ministers to the army, however, did not affect the churches as greatly as did the departure of thousands of Baptist congregants. Once their state and their new nation called upon them, men from congregations throughout the Commonwealth left to join the military. As New Prospect Baptist reported: "Nearly all of our brethren of a proper age have gone into the service of our country." By summertime, *The Herald* reported that a third of the churches' membership had gone to fight in the war.<sup>31</sup>

The absence of such a large number of men produced tremendous changes in the churches they left. Obviously, attendance declined. Chestnut Grove Church's clerk, John McLeod, reported that attendance dipped sharply as church members felt "compelled to forsake their homes and their places in the house of God" to journey to the sound of battle.<sup>32</sup>

The absence of large numbers of men, especially younger

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30 See David B. Chesebrough, "The Civil War and the Use of Sermons as Historical Documents," *OAH Magazine of History* 8 (Fall 1993), 26-30; Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion* (New York, 1993), 6-8.

31 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1861*, 21; *The Religious Herald*, May 30, 1861.

32 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1861*, 18.

men, also had an impact on Sunday school programs. The younger members of a congregation often formed the majority of students in these programs intended to serve as a sphere of Christian education. When the young men left to become soldiers, J. Franklin Kerfoot announced that Sunday schools "suffered from the blighting influence." At Ballenger's Creek Baptist, the congregation decided to forego the opening of a planned Sunday School because of the loss of so many men. On the eastern shore, Union Baptist closed its Sabbath school, and did others in the area.<sup>33</sup>

The loss of such large numbers led to other problems. Before the war, Preddie's Creek Church planned to build a new meeting house. Over the course of several decades, their existing church building had deteriorated. Moreover, thanks to the popular preaching of William Farish, the congregation had grown immensely and desperately needed space. Once the war began and a large portion of its male membership joined the army, Preddie's Creek cancelled the building project.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these problems, 1861 still bore promise for some Baptists. The Valley Association in western Virginia cheered

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33 *Minutes of the Potomac Assoc., 1861*, 14; *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1861*, 17; *Minutes of the 51st and 52nd Sessions of the Accomac Baptist Association, Aug. 17-20, 1860, and Aug. 16-19, 1861* (Baltimore, 1862), 15, VBHS.

34 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1861*, 22.



the founding of Mt. Calvary Baptist church and welcomed it into the association. In Northern Virginia, the Potomac Association also gave praise for a newly founded member church, Greenwich Baptist in Prince William County.<sup>35</sup>

New churches were not the only source of promise. Many established churches continued to enjoy a level of prosperity. The Accomac Association noted that most of its member churches worshipped regularly and remained in good physical and spiritual condition. In Fauquier County, Long Branch Baptist Church enjoyed a successful revival, as their pastors George W. Harris and Benjamin H. Benton baptized 37 new members. Danville Baptist increased its membership rolls by more than 30%, as Pastor J. R. Lipscomb and the congregation welcomed 76 individuals into the fold.<sup>36</sup>

A major reason that Baptists remained well-spirited during the initial year of war was their faith that God willed a quick Confederate victory. Like many Southerners, they naively believed the war would end quickly. As the editors of *The Religious Herald* stated briefly and clearly:

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35 *Minutes of the Valley Baptist Association, Sessions 1861 and 1862* (Lynchburg, 1862), 2; *Minutes of the Potomac Assoc., 1861*, 10.

36 *Minutes of the Accomac Assoc., 1861*, 16; *Minutes of the Potomac Assoc., 1861*, 6; *Minutes of the Roanoke Assoc., 1861*, 17.

"We are convinced, for numerous reasons, that such a contest ... will be of very short duration."<sup>37</sup>

In a separate article, the paper elaborated on the reasons for their belief in quick and total victory. Shaver and Sands believed that the Confederate cause compared favorably with Revolution of 1776. "Our cause corresponds ... to the cause of our fathers." Like the Revolutionaries, the Confederates "with the Divine blessing and assistance, shall establish the right to govern ourselves."<sup>38</sup>

The belief that victory would come quickly rested on much more than equating the Confederates with the founding fathers. Most Virginia Baptists felt confident in their cause for the same reason they embraced the creation of a Southern nation. They truly believed that Virginia, and the South, had not caused the war. Baptist congregations maintained a world view in which the North filled the role of sinful aggressor and the South appeared as humble defender of hearth and home.

The delegates to the Goshen Association meeting described this belief in vivid terms. Since the South had been "forced to take up arms for defense against the

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37 *The Religious Herald*, May 23, 1861.

38 *Ibid.*

usurpations of the United States," the churches firmly believed that "the God of nations ... [shall] grant us speedily an honorable peace." Sands and Shaver seconded this opinion in the pages of *The Herald*. Since the North breathed out "slaughter, inciting to fury passions ... seemingly thirsty for fratricidal carnage," God would deal with the United States quickly and thoroughly.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the North's culpability, religious Virginians preached forgiveness in the face of violence. Following the teaching of Jesus to "pray for those who mistreat you," Baptists attempted to maintain a spirit of mercy during the trying times of war. According to *The Religious Herald*, Christian soldiers and civilians needed to speak of their enemies in an honorable manner. "Christians of the South [must] beat back the wave of invasion which menaces her borders," while "not reviling our enemies." On the contrary, Christians needed to offer "prayer for their salvation." Through this merciful spirit, civilians and troops would "cause the hand of Christ to fight for us."<sup>40</sup>

In the summer of 1861, a crucial event seemed to prove

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39 *Minutes of the Goshen Assoc., 1861*, 3; *The Religious Herald*, May 16, 1861.

40 Luke 6:28, KJV; *The Religious Herald*, May 16, 1861; May 23, 1861.

that God favored the South. On July 21, the Confederacy won the first major battle, near Manassas, Virginia. The Southern nation rejoiced over the victory and believed a true and honorable independence would follow.

James Madison Broadus of Alexandria received news of the victory while on a visit to the Baptist church in Culpeper. He quickly relayed the news to his brother in South Carolina. "You will have heard it, but you must have my word for it, that on the twenty-first the Confederate army met a grand attack of the Federals and gained what might be called a glorious victory. Glorious in the honor it attaches to our nation, and in its present and prospective results." After giving a detailed account of the battle, Broadus declared: "How plain it is to any that the God of battles disposed for us.... Verily God is with us." He then predicted that the Southern forces would soon take Washington and the war would end in Southern triumph.<sup>41</sup>

Baptist churches throughout Virginia also reveled in the victory. Soon after the battle, the member institutions of the Potomac Association offered sincere thanks to God "for the signal victory and gracious deliverance recently granted us in the battle near Manassas." Joseph T. Brightwell and his

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41 James M. Broadus to John A. Broadus, July 23, 1861, in Robertson, *Broadus*, 186-187.

Kentuck Baptist congregation went a step further in their praise. The church dedicated several Sundays in August for the sole purpose of giving thanks to the Almighty.<sup>42</sup>

As the summer drew to a close, *The Religious Herald* surveyed the course of the war thus far and found cause for gratitude. According to Sands and Shaver, the Lord granted "decisive and glorious" victories at Big Bethel, Manassas, Wilson's Creek, and other locales. While human effort played a role in these successes, they believed the true source of victory was God's mighty hand. Thus did the editors proclaim: "We lay the national tribute of gratitude upon the altar of Jehovah."<sup>43</sup>

Even as Confederate spirits soared with military triumphs, some Baptists worried about the condition of religion on the homefront. According to one letter to *The Herald*, Virginia's churches needed to remain on guard. "Amid the distracting and absorbing interest of our public affairs," the letter warned, "they [may] relax their efforts for the salvation of souls." In addition, the writer worried that Christians may be "tempted by the suggestion that

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42 *Minutes of the Potomac Assoc., 1861*, 13; *Minute Book of Kentuck Baptist Church, July 27, 1861*, VBHS. See also *Minutes of the Rappahannock Assoc., 1861*, 13.

43 *The Religious Herald*, Aug. 15, 1861.

nothing more can now be hoped for than to keep the Church together and preserve its present condition, if even that can be expected." Staunch Christians needed to reject such ideas and work diligently on the homefront for the gospel cause.<sup>44</sup>

As 1861 drew to a close, it seemed that the state's Baptists had heeded this warning. A season of revivals settled upon the land. In the far southwest corner of the state, Clear Spring Church in Lee County gave thanks because "the good Lord revived His work in our midst, notwithstanding the great confusion and distraction of our country."<sup>45</sup>

Similar reports poured in from south-central Virginia. Hunting Creek Church in Halifax and Walker's Church in Appomattox each welcomed over thirty new converts during protracted meetings that autumn. The revival spirit also touched Antioch Baptist in Charlotte County, as Thomas W. Greer baptized over 50 individuals.<sup>46</sup>

This fruitful season, however, would prove to be only a respite from the effects of war. The first year of the Civil War had caused a drastic change in the nature of Virginia's

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44 Ibid., Sept. 12, 1861.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., Sept. 19, 1861; *Minutes of the Concord Baptist Association, Oct. 1861* (Richmond, 1861), 11.

Baptist churches. Once determined to win the countryside for Christ and the Baptist denomination, congregations and evangelistic efforts now concentrated almost exclusively on the thousands of soldiers camped within Virginia's borders. Large numbers of pastors and laity left homefront churches to march to the sound of battle. Virginia's churches could weather these changes for a time, but over a long period they would serve to wither homefront congregations.

In addition, Virginia Baptists continued to believe that as righteous defenders of freedom and hearth, God favored their cause. God not only willed Southern success, but He willed a swift and total Confederate triumph. As the General Association confidently proclaimed: "Soon ... Victory shall perch on our banners ... and we shall be recognized--as we shall inevitably be - by European Powers and the United States, as a distinct Confederacy."

Once this occurred, Abram M. Poindexter and James C. Luck of Burruss Baptist Church believed that "our armies may be disbanded and our patriotic fellow-citizens be permitted to return to the peaceful avocations of domestic life." Yet the immediate future did not hold a swift victory for the Southern nation. The seeds of decline sown in the first year of war promised to grow stronger and more pernicious.

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world ... choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Matthew 13:22 (KJV)

### Chapter 3

## Among the Thorns

The years 1862 and 1863 proved crucial to Virginia's Baptist churches. During that period, the Commonwealth's congregations could no longer withstand the changes that warfare wrought. The prosperity of former days faded into a distant memory as civil war choked the spirit from the state's congregations.

This decline was noticeable by the early months of 1862. In March, William Sands and David Shaver printed a report on the health of Virginia churches. They found little to cheer. Most churches barely observed the Sabbath, if they observed it at all. Prayer meetings were no longer held. Congregations had lost their evangelistic zeal. Moreover, Sands and Shaver feared, "the hope of revival is surrendered until peace returns."<sup>1</sup>

Evidence abounded to support *The Herald's* findings.

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1 The Religious Herald, Mar. 6, 1862.



Church after church noted decline. James's Square Baptist Church in Brunswick County recorded that "an unusually small number" attended its recent meetings. Berryville Church in Clarke County held only one meeting throughout 1862. Such decline seemed to touch every part of the state.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Baptists were forced to deal with the sagging fortunes of the Confederate army. Throughout 1861, Baptists had believed that ultimate Southern victory would come quickly. When the Confederacy won early victories at Manassas, Big Bethel, and other locales, this opinion became entrenched. By the early months of 1862, however, it became apparent to Virginia Baptists that God did not will a swift Southern success.

Baptists finally came to this realization when they received continuous reports of Confederate defeats. During the early portion of 1862, the Confederate armies suffered numerous setbacks, particularly in the western theater. First, Union forces under U. S. Grant captured Forts Henry and Donelson. The unconditional surrender of 15,000 troops at Fort Donelson delivered a particularly severe blow to morale, as it seemed that the South's forces did not even

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2 Minute Book of James's Square Baptist Church, March 1862, VBHS; Minute Book of Berryville Baptist Church, Feb. 14, 1862 and Oct. 18, 1863, VBHS. See also Minute Book of Lower Northampton Baptist Church, May 3, 1862, VBHS and Minute Book of Neriah Baptist Church, August 1862, VBHS.

possess the ability to fight. Soon after that catastrophe, Confederate forces in the West lost battles in Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee.<sup>3</sup>

Other fronts provided little encouragement. In Florida, Jacksonville fell to Union forces. In North Carolina, Roanoke Island and New Bern surrendered. As the Federal blockade tightened, the Confederate seaboard seemed to be collapsing.

Amidst these military concerns, Virginia Baptists found only one bright spot. In early March, the *CSS Virginia* steamed into Hampton Roads to engage a Union fleet. An ironclad vessel, the *Virginia* wreaked havoc on the Federal Navy in Hampton Roads, destroying or damaging three warships in a single day.

The following day, the *Virginia* battled the Union ironclad, the *Monitor*, to a draw. Despite the inconclusiveness of this latter engagement, Virginia Baptists and non-Baptists alike were abuzz. According to *The Herald*, this was a "magnificent engagement." After giving a full report of the incident, the paper declared its hope that the *Virginia* might drive the Union Navy from the Commonwealth's

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3 *The Religious Herald*, Feb. 27, 1862.

shores.<sup>4</sup>

Andrew Broaddus, pastor of Upper King and Queen Baptist Church, shared in this excitement. As he received news of the battle, he relayed it to a Baptist minister in South Carolina. "The brilliant naval victory off 'Newport News' has brightened many a countenance," he wrote. It seemed that his fellow congregants rose "above the depression caused by our recent reverses."<sup>5</sup>

Yet the *Virginia's* exploits did not lead Baptists to return to the optimism they held in the first months of the war. By the spring of 1862, realism had permanently replaced the earlier naive hopes of the Commonwealth's Baptists. Though they still thought victory would come, they now realized that the war promised to be a lengthy and costly affair.

Andrew Dickinson gave voice to this change of sentiment in his letters to *The Religious Herald*. Like most Baptists, Dickinson had once believed that God willed a swift Southern victory. By early 1862, however, this delegate to the General Association saw a different future. He knew the Lord would end the war eventually, but he did not predict a

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4 *The Religious Herald*, Mar. 13, 1862.

5 Andrew Broaddus to John A. Broadus, Mar. 10, 1862, in Robertson, *John Albert Broadus*, 191.

timetable. Perhaps "within a few years ... Peace will again smile upon us," Dickinson hoped, but even this was not assured.<sup>6</sup>

The editors of *The Herald* seconded Dickinson's sentiments. In the first months of war, *The Herald* predicted "a contest ... of very short duration." By May, however, Sands and Shaver pondered "the reverses with which Providence has recently visited Southern arms." They sullenly concluded: "We are in the midst of a war, the end of which no one can foresee." The two editors warned the state's churches to expect a long period of war.<sup>7</sup>

A new military development soon clouded the future even further. In early April, an immense Union army under the command of Gen. George B. McClellan initiated a campaign against Richmond. With a huge, well-drilled force, McClellan planned to advance on Richmond from the east. Virginians worried that this Peninsula Campaign could actually do the unthinkable, capture the Confederate capital.

As McClellan made an agonizingly slow march up the peninsula, contributors from around the state began to voice

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6 *The Religious Herald*, Mar. 20, 1862. See also Minute Book of Mount Carmel Baptist Church, 98, VSL.

7 *The Religious Herald*, May 23, 1861; Mar. 6, 1862; Feb. 27, 1862.

their concerns in *The Herald*. One unidentified writer asked: "How long shall war's ensanguined banner be unfurled over our once peaceful and happy, but now agitated and suffering country?" Another wrote: "We are in a measure dispirited by our recent reversals." Yet this writer realized that "the inquiry, 'How long O! Lord, how long,' cannot yet be answered.... To us short-sighted mortals is denied the privilege of unclasping the mysterious volumes of Fate, and scanning the page marked with our Country's destiny."<sup>8</sup>

In mid-May, *The Herald* printed a proclamation from Confederate President Jefferson Davis. In this statement, Davis asked all churches on May 16, 1862, to hold a day of prayer, fasting, and humiliation. "Recent disaster has spread gloom over the land, " Davis wrote, "and sorrow sits at the hearth-stones of our countrymen." Yet he believed that through humble prayer God would shower blessings on the South. Baptists around the state agreed with Davis's sentiments, and many observed the day of prayer.<sup>9</sup>

While Baptist attention focused on the military plight of the nation, a handful of Baptists called attention to the churches' greater problem. According to one anonymous

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8 *The Religious Herald*, May 8, 1862.

9 *Ibid.*; May 22, 1862.

congregant: "Religion is at its lowest ebb. Such a thing as the conversion of souls seems scarcely to enter into the mind either of clergy or laity." With the war mesmerizing the state's congregants, the churches began both physically and spiritually to deteriorate. Thus the writer asked: "May we not well mourn over the waste places of Zion, than over the temporal calamities of war?"<sup>10</sup>

Few Baptists paid heed to this lonely voice calling in the wilderness because soon after this pleading question, General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson initiated his campaign in the Shenandoah Valley. After successive victories at Front Royal, Winchester, Cross Keys, and Port Republic, the military plight of the South did not seem totally bleak. According to *The Herald*, "Stonewall Jackson is in every one's thoughts just now" as they celebrated the "whippings" he administered in the Valley.<sup>11</sup>

Immediately following Jackson's exploits, reports of J. E. B. Stuart's ride around McClellan's army produced additional excitement among Baptist believers. "We have the pleasure this morning," *The Herald* wrote, "of chronicling one of the most brilliant affairs of the war, bold in its

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10 Ibid., May 8, 1862.

11 Ibid., June 5 and 12, 1862.

inception and most brilliant in its execution." Thanks to these events, McClellan's mighty army did not seem invincible. Baptist attention remained riveted on the concerns of war.<sup>12</sup>

Then in late June and early July, a new hero appeared at the gates of Richmond. General Robert E. Lee, the new commander of the Confederate forces defending the capital, engaged McClellan's invading army. After seven days of fierce fighting at the edge of Richmond, the Confederates held the field. The capital, and the nation, had been saved.

"We are a jubilant people," Robert Shaver remarked in *The Herald* after the Seven Days' battles. With these latest victories, it seemed that "the inauguration of a new art of war" had begun. The Confederate army now possessed the daring of the French and the courage of the British. Yet Shaver also warned his fellow Baptists to be mindful of the true source of victory. "Let us be also a GRATEFUL people. The Lord interposed for us. 'He breathed upon' the army of invasion, 'and it was scattered abroad.'" The land, therefore, needed to give thanks to God and avoid self-aggrandizement.<sup>13</sup>

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12 Ibid., June 19, 1862.

13 Ibid., July 10, 1862.

In August, even more good news reached Baptist ears. First, Confederate forces in the West took the initiative and moved into Kentucky. Then Virginia Baptists learned of a "signal victory" near the historic "Plains of Manassas." *The Herald* soon noted that the victorious Army of Northern Virginia was marching into Maryland. With these developments in mind, the paper called for a day of thanksgiving.<sup>14</sup>

While Confederate arms enjoyed success during the summer of 1862, Virginia's congregations sank into a deeper malaise. Few churches reported any spiritual warmth in the pews. As the cause of Christ continued to suffer, even Shaver and Sands asked the state's churches: "Is the Lord among us, or not?"<sup>15</sup>

This question began to worry Baptists around the state. At the annual meeting of the Middle District Association in Powhatan County, a committee on Christian duty, chaired by William E. Hatcher, presented the following report:

Your letters furnish mournful evidence that never within our memory, was the cause of Christ as languishing as it now is. We are pained to know that many of our churches have almost abandoned every enterprise by which the world is to be converted.... During the year, there have not been as many additions among the whites, as there have been deaths. Now all this is an alarming falling off in the duties we owe to

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14 Ibid., Sept. 4 and 11, 1862.

15 Ibid., Sept. 4, 1862.



the cause of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Similar jeremiads emanated from other portions of the state. The Albemarle Association noted that a general religious depression and an "alarming increase of stagnation ... seems to have taken possession of the district." For example, John Townley of Pine Grove Church lamented the "dead coldness pervading our congregation," while John Vaughn, clerk of St. Stephen's, remarked that "great coldness and indifference to religion have prevailed in our Church and congregation."<sup>17</sup>

To the south, the Roanoke Association, meeting in Pittsylvania County, also saw tremendous religious problems in its district. Delegates set out to improve the situation. In order to spark "a revival of religion" in this distracted and lethargic area of the state, the association resolved to hold special days of fasting and prayer during the summer and autumn.<sup>18</sup>

The most important factor causing problems in homefront religion was the Baptist mindset. During this period, the

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*16 Minutes of the 79th Annual Session of the Middle District Baptist Association, July 29-30, 1862 (Richmond, 1862), 10.*

*17 Minutes of the 71st Anniversary of the Albemarle Baptist Association, Aug. 12-14, 1862 (Richmond, 1862), 19; 22; 23.*

*18 Minutes of the 73rd Annual Session of the Roanoke Baptist Association, Aug. 19-21, 1862 (Danville, 1862), 6.*

Baptists focused all of their evangelistic zeal on the Southern soldiers. This change began in 1861, but it did not truly take hold and its full repercussions did not become noticeable for up to two years.

At the General Association meeting in 1862, delegates argued: "From the first, Virginia has, to a large extent, been the battlefield of the struggle for our independence. It seemed, therefore, that we ... were called of God to engage in the work which had been brought to our very door." The association merged its Sunday School Board into the colportage mission, with a single purpose of raising more money and attracting more workers for army colportage.<sup>19</sup>

Many Baptists continued to applaud the increased attention given to the army. The member churches of the Dover Association believed that proselytizing soldiers was the "most important cause" Baptists needed to pursue, while Peter C. Hoge of Augusta County believed it to be "the great work of the age." Churches gave liberally, and each week *The Religious Herald* recounted the successes of Baptist efforts.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Minutes of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, for the sessions 1861, 1862, and 1863* (Richmond, 1863), 46.

<sup>20</sup> *Minutes of the 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, and 82nd Annual Meetings of the Dover Baptist Association* (Richmond, 1866), 7; *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1862*, 16. See also Minute Book of Northwest Baptist Church, Apr. 26, 1862, VSL; *Minutes of the 95th Annual Meeting of the Strawberry Baptist*

A few Baptists, however, slowly began to realize that the increased emphasis on army missions produced negative effects on the homefront. One contributor to *The Herald* recognized the importance of army evangelization, but worried that an overemphasis weakened homefront programs, such as prayer meetings and Sabbath schools. Another article in the same issue argued that churches gave too much attention to the armies and too little to the Lord's work at home.<sup>21</sup>

Delegates David B. Winfree and Jeremiah M. Whitlock of the Middle District Association best articulated the problem. Its member churches in Powhatan, Chesterfield, and Amelia counties had supported the military programs with tremendous zeal, and the Association applauded their support. "But, dear brethren, while you have been doing thus nobly for our country, you have neglected our beloved Zion.... We are pained to know that many of our churches have almost abandoned every enterprise.... We are [thus] reminding you of your higher and prior obligations to the churches of Jesus Christ."<sup>22</sup>

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*Association, Aug. 1862* (Lynchburg, 1862), 7; *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1862*, 11; Daniel, *Southern Protestantism*, 115-119.

<sup>21</sup> *The Religious Herald*, May 8, 1862.

<sup>22</sup> *Minutes of the Middle District Association, 1862*, 10.

Other institutional problems stemmed from the Baptists overcommitment to the soldiers. By the second year of the war, an increasing number of Baptist pastors had left their churches to minister to the troops. Many churches could no longer overcome this loss. Staunton Baptist Church reported the departure of its minister, George Taylor, to the army and a subsequent decline in the frequency of religious services and spiritual verve. Charlottesville Church complained of a similar fate. Without Pastor Alexander B. Brown, the "times of refreshing ... have been greatly withheld from us."<sup>23</sup>

Richmond-area churches noticed a similar connection between the presence of a minister and the fluctuations of religious energy. Churches often became "enfeebled" when "destitute of the regular preaching of the Word." Thus ministers needed to be found for all congregations.<sup>24</sup>

The problem was exacerbated by the closing of Baptist institutions for ministerial training. The General Association decided to close Richmond College, the only Baptist institution of higher learning in Virginia, and convert it into a hospital. Baptist Theological Seminary in

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<sup>23</sup> *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1862*, 20; 23. See also Minute Book of Kettoctin Baptist Church, May 3, 1862, VSL and Minute Book of Neriah Baptist Church, Aug. 9, 1862, VBHS.

<sup>24</sup> *Minutes of the Dover Assoc., 1862*, 8.

Greenville, South Carolina, also closed until the end of the war. With the loss of these schools, very few new Baptist ministers were ordained. Thus, it became exceedingly difficult to replace a minister who decided to visit or serve the army.<sup>25</sup>

Understanding the high cost of losing a minister, Mill Swamp Baptist Church labored to keep its pastor. During the summer of 1862, John W. Ward, Mill Swamp's pastor, tendered his resignation in order to become a full-time chaplain. The church, however, refused to accept Ward's resignation. The church and pastor haggled over the situation until October, when they reached a compromise. Ward decided to remain as pastor and the church agreed to let him serve in the army for short periods of time.<sup>26</sup>

Not all pastors left their congregations by choice. Since nineteenth-century ministers possessed tremendous influence in their communities, some Union commanders favored arresting them as political prisoners. For example, in June, *The Herald* reported the imprisonment of Eli H. Nourse, a

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25 Daniel, *Virginia Baptists*, 143; Robertson, *John Albert Broadus*, 196.

26 Minute Book of Mill Swamp Baptist Church, Sept. 6, 1862; Oct. 4, 1862, VBHS.

minister in Leesburg.<sup>27</sup>

William F. Broaddus, one of the state's most renowned ministers, suffered this fate in July. Union authorities arrested the pastor of Fredricksburg Baptist Church in the hopes of gaining political leverage for the release of Union sympathizers held in Richmond. Broaddus soon found himself carried away to Old Capitol Prison in Washington, D. C.<sup>28</sup>

During the next few months, Broaddus's imprisonment produced great sadness in his soul. Sundays proved particularly difficult. As he recorded in his diary, he found himself "unconsciously conning a sermon" to his only listeners, the "dark walls and iron bars" of his cell. Such times led him to declare that a Sabbath in prison "passed heavily away so unlike the previous Lord's days that I can scarcely realize that the blessed Sabbath has been upon us."<sup>29</sup>

While Broaddus mourned his own plight, he also worried about the effects of his absence on his home congregation. He realized that without a minister's care, Fredricksburg Baptist could easily wither and die. He prayed, therefore,

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27 *The Religious Herald*, June 26, 1862.

28 W. Harrison Daniel, ed., "The Prison Diary of William F. Broaddus," *The Virginia Baptist Register* (1982), 998.

29 *Ibid.*, 1002.

that "some shepherd will be sent to feed them." On September 7, his prayer was answered as Rev. Franklin T. Kregel ministered to the church. Just a few weeks later, Union authorities released Broaddus and he resumed his pastoral duties.<sup>30</sup>

The warring armies' policies took away more than ministers. Many churches in and around war zones underwent physical deprivations. For example, during the summer of 1862, the Confederacy commandeered First Baptist in Richmond and used it as an emergency hospital. Throughout that period, the church suspended all religious services.<sup>31</sup>

Broad Run Baptist Church suffered a more ignominious fate. In 1862, Broad Run's "house of worship that had existed for nearly 100 years was entirely destroyed by the U. S. Army." Though the congregation met occasionally at a nearby Brethren Church or "at arbors erected in the woods," clerk Andrew Utterback admitted that the "preaching and business of the church was ... suspended."<sup>32</sup>

Other Baptist churches suffered in less drastic, yet

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30 Ibid., 1005; 1013; 1017.

31 White, *First Baptist Church, Richmond*, 67.

32 Minute Book of Broad Run Baptist Church, Spring 1866, VBHS.

still damaging ways. Battle Run Church in Rappahannock County complained that various items from the church were "stolen from here by the Yankees." Churches in the Shenandoah Valley canceled services because of "the excitement from the invading Federal Army."<sup>33</sup>

In the midst of these problems, Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation. This document concerned and enraged the Commonwealth's Baptists. On October 9, 1862, Shaver described the Proclamation as little more than the "offspring of desperate counsels." Lincoln's decision, Shaver warned, "thrust four million people into a state of freedom for which they have no fitness; a state therefore which must be marked for them, by poverty, want, disease, ignorance and vice. No worse blow has been aimed ... against the prompting of benevolence and the dictates of Christianity. If successful it would create a new Pariah race to curse the world, and to be itself accursed of God and man."<sup>34</sup>

At the same time Lincoln issued the Proclamation, the season for protracted meeting arrived at many churches. During these last months of 1862, a mixture of hope and

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33 Minute Book of Battle Run Baptist Church, Sept. 13, 1862, VSL; Minute Book of Luray, Main Street Baptist Church, Apr. 5, 1862, VSL.

34 *The Religious Herald*, Oct. 9, 1862.



lukewarmness filled the believers. A few congregations experienced revival. "During these times which are paralyzing so many of the churches," Azariah F. Scott reported that the Rappahannock District experienced several revivals with encouraging results. In Patrick County, however, Pastor Lee Fitzgerald held a protracted meeting at Meadows of Dan Church and reported very few, if any, true converts.<sup>35</sup>

*The Herald's* editors captured this mixture of hope and despair. As 1862 came to a close, Shaver and Sands reported that the year "has been pre-eminently a year of conflict and a year of trial." They continued: "It has been in the case of most churches a season of crisis and probation." Yet the editors also realized that some congregations remained true to the gospel, and they "have been 'purified as gold that is tried in fire.'"<sup>36</sup>

With the dawning of a new year, vitality seemed to fill a few churches. At Lynchburg Baptist Church, a large, extended revival began that eventually produced 73 converts to Christ. Pastor Henry W. Dodge and his congregation glowed

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35 Ibid., Oct. 2, 1862; Minute Book of Meadows of Dan Baptist Church, Sept. 4, 1862, VBHS. For other examples of unsuccessful revivals, see *The Religious Herald*, Oct. 9, and Nov. 6, 1862.

36 Ibid., Oct. 23, 1862.

with the success.

In a letter to *The Herald*, a member of Lynchburg Baptist (who called himself "A Hearer") explained why the church succeeded while others seemed to languish. The most important factor was the "untiring zeal of the pastor." Rev. Dodge initiated the revival and he maintained it with his constant labor and prayer. Without Dodge's efforts, Lynchburg would not have enjoyed this renewal.

The writer also praised the willingness of outside pastors to come and speak at Lynchburg. Well-known ministers such as Robert Ryland, John Burrows, and J. William Jones all spoke to the congregation during its spiritual revival. Their efforts kept the revival from becoming stale by adding variety to the proceedings.

"A Hearer" also noted the importance of the congregants themselves. In many communities, Baptists seemed too concerned with the affairs of the military to give proper attention to the spiritual concerns of the homefront. At Lynchburg Baptist, this was not the case. Those with the greatest interest in the outside world made tremendous efforts to attend revival meetings and to labor for God's cause. When the homefront church came first, great things happened.

One final element contributed to Lynchburg's success.

Other denominations in the area, especially the Presbyterians, provided aid to the church by attending meetings, offering prayer, and creating a godly atmosphere. According to the writer, more localities needed to embrace this ecumenical spirit to escape their doldrums.<sup>37</sup>

In the Richmond area, the Port Mayo community took advantage of a diligent pastor and a dedicated membership to generate a revival. In January, John E. King was ordained into the ministry in Richmond and began serving the Port Mayo chapel. Through his tireless efforts and the zeal of the congregation, the church baptized 25 individuals.<sup>38</sup>

Other events also cheered the Baptists. Early in 1863, the full magnitude of Lee's victory at Fredricksburg became known. Baptists gave thanks for the overwhelming victory. Moreover, they cheered the fact that the battle cast a pall over the North. *The Herald* noted that Northern newspapers called the day after Fredricksburg "the gloomiest of all days in the history of the nation in Washington."<sup>39</sup>

Even the Emancipation Proclamation became a source of

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37 *The Religious Herald*, Jan. 22, 1863. See also Fleet, *A Virginia Plantation Family*, 167.

38 *Ibid.* See also Jan. 29, 1863 and Minute Book of Mill Creek Baptist Church, Feb. 28, 1863, VSL.

39 *The Religious Herald*, Jan. 1, 1863.

hope. By early 1863, Shaver and Sands reversed their course and gave thanks for the document. In their opinion, the Proclamation gave the war a purpose greater than just the independence of a nation. It now promised to decide the course of Christianity. Through the war, God would decide whether Christianity would resemble the apostolic church of old with "hereditary service in our midst" or the anti-scriptural humanism of the North. Amazingly, Shaver and Sands did not doubt that God favored the Southern way of life.<sup>40</sup>

These men also saw the Emancipation Proclamation as a boon for the South because it created discord in the North. According to *The Herald*, many Northern Baptist ministers disapproved of Lincoln's plan. For example, J. Newton Brown questioned Lincoln's proposal to free the slaves in rebellious regions but not in loyal areas. Brown believed such a plan was based on purely political motives, not on God's will. Another northern minister, a Rev. Jeffrey, completely disagreed with the plan. Jeffrey decreed: "A worse thing than death may happen to a man, and Lincoln is reserved for that."<sup>41</sup>

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40 Ibid., Jan. 29, 1863.

41 Ibid., Jan. 22, 1863.

Despite the promise that Southern victories, Northern dissension, and the occasional example of church growth produced, the refiner's fire burned as hot in 1863 as it had in the previous year. Throughout 1863, the Baptist overemphasis on converting the military continued to harm the churches. One of the most important victims of this policy was educational programs, especially Sunday schools.

Baptists had taken great pride in their Sunday schools. These highly successful programs acted primarily as centers for religious education, but also taught a limited amount of reading and writing skills. During 1861 and 1862, many Sabbath schools remained in operation, albeit somewhat reduced. By 1863, however, something was truly amiss. Sunday school programs around the state declined tremendously. In the Appomattox District, only 13 Sunday schools existed, less than half of the prewar level. In the Accomac District, only two churches claimed to have Sunday schools in operating condition.<sup>42</sup>

The General Association addressed the Sabbath school issue at its annual meeting that summer. "The work of

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42 *Minutes of the Appomattox Baptist Association, Aug. 8-9, 1862 and Aug. 4-5, 1863* (Petersburg, 1864), 11; *Minutes of the 54th Session of the Accomac Baptist Association, Aug. 14-17, 1863* (Baltimore, 1863), 8, VBHS. See also *Minutes of the 20th and 21st Annual Sessions of the Rappahannock Baptist Association* (Richmond, 1863), 21.

actively promoting the interest of Sabbath schools has been almost suspended by the war," a committee report declared, and "the Christian heart saddens at the sight." The committee realized that part of the cause for Sunday school decline was the departure of many young men to the army. Yet plenty of members remained to fill the schools.<sup>43</sup>

The committee worried that the policy of concentrating on army missions to the exclusion of the homefront served as the most important factor in Sunday school decline. Most congregants spent their time and energy bolstering support for army missions, while ignoring the needs in their community. To help the situation, the report recommended that the General Association and individual congregations become more interested in the homefront Sabbath schools. In doing so, they would stave off the moral degradation of Virginia's civilians and thus receive blessings from the Lord.<sup>44</sup>

As the Sunday school example indicates, a growing number of Baptists in 1863 came to realize that extreme dedication to army missions, to the exclusion of homefront programs, truly harmed civilian religion. With this in mind, a call

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43 *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1863*, 71.

44 *Ibid.*, 72.

went up from various corners to reinstate the State Missions program that had been so successful prior to the war. That summer, the General Association agreed. Upon reviewing the great decline of the state's churches, the Association hoped that the state missions program could reinvigorate the homefront and "aid feeble churches."<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately for civilian churches, army programs continued to receive the lion's share of Baptist attention. In the same meeting that saw the reinstatement of state missions, Andrew Dickinson and other members of the General Association resolved to persuade dedicated homefront pastors to serve as temporary, voluntary evangelists to the army. *The Herald* made similar appeals. The paper asked the churches to send the best ministers in the state to serve the Army of Northern Virginia for two months at a time. The General Association and *The Herald* did not seem to recognize the positive correlation between the regular presence of a minister and the vigor of a congregation.<sup>46</sup>

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45 Ibid., 75. For examples of the demand to reinstate state missions, see *Minutes of the 72nd Anniversary of the Albemarle Association, Aug. 11-13, 1863* (Richmond, 1863), 9; *Minutes of the Appomattox Assoc., 1863*, 13; *The Religious Herald*, June 18, 1863.

46 *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1863*, 61; *The Religious Herald*, May 21, 1863. See also *The Religious Herald*, Apr. 9, 1863 and Minute Book of Mill Swamp Baptist Church, Dec. 5, 1863, VBHS.

In addition, most churches continued to view army missions, especially colportage, as the greatest work of the time. Numerous churches held fund-raisers and special prayer meetings for army colportage. On a more frequent basis, well-known ministers such as William F. and Andrew Broaddus, Robert Ryland, and others canvassed the Commonwealth to drum up support for evangelization of the military. Most Baptists never truly reoriented their aims, despite the realization that an over-emphasis on the military weakened homefront congregations.<sup>47</sup>

While programmatic concerns continued to dog Baptist churches in 1863, military fortunes tested their spirit as well. In May, the Army of Northern Virginia won a stellar victory at Chancellorsville, but the victory came at a high price. Stonewall Jackson suffered fatal wounds in the battle.

The battle, therefore, produced mixed emotions among the state's Baptists. While they cheered the victory, they mourned the loss of a great military leader and religious man. As *The Herald* declared: "The sun arose yesterday upon a mourning city [Richmond], and as the telegraph sent the sorrowful intelligence of the death of Jackson over the

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<sup>47</sup> See *The Religious Herald*, Jan. 29, Feb. 5, and May 21, 1863.



South, it beamed upon a nation to whom its light, brilliantly and beautifully as it shone, became suddenly veiled and opaque, shedding gloom instead of gladness, and starting tears instead of happiness and joy."<sup>48</sup>

While the nation mourned, Robert E. Lee began his second invasion of the North. In early July, Union and Confederate forces met on the fields of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. After a three-day battle, the Confederate army was forced to withdraw and return to Virginia.

In the West, the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg surrendered to Union forces under U. S. Grant. Vicksburg represented the best Confederate hope of holding onto the Mississippi River. When it fell, the Union controlled the great river and the Confederacy was cut in two.

These devastating defeats caused a shift in Baptist attitudes. Prior to these losses, Virginia Baptists believed that God would grant victory to the South, whether sooner or later. After Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Baptists began to doubt the righteousness of their cause. It seemed that the hand of God had truly turned against them. As Robert W. Cole explained to the Rappahannock Association in late July, the "chastening hand of our Heavenly Father" led to the

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48 Ibid., May 14, 1863.

Confederate failures.<sup>49</sup>

As Baptists began to feel that God's favor had left them, many Baptists attempted to understand why. Some, such as Pastor John L. Burrows of First Baptist Church in Richmond, saw the problem in terms of Southern sinfulness. In a sermon entitled *The New Richmond Theatre: A Discourse*, Burrows argued that the opening of a new theater in Richmond during the early months of 1863 constituted a grave sin against God and the Southern cause. While the "cheerful inviting aspect" of a theater may appeal to citizens, "behind all these allurements, horrible death is lurking." Burrows believed that the theater housed sin and vice. The nation needed to rid itself of such an institution in this time of struggle. Unless civilians turned from their worldly amusements, Burrows warned, "the horror of infernal woes" awaited the nation.<sup>50</sup>

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49 *Minutes of the Rappahannock Assoc., 1863*, 28. See also Eleanor P. Cross and Charles B. Cross, Jr., eds., *Glencoe Diary: The War-Time Journal of Elizabeth Curtis Wallace* (Chesapeake, 1968), 73; *Minutes of the Dan River Baptist Association, July 28-30, 1863*, title page missing, 14; *Minutes of the 80th Annual Session of the Middle District Baptist Association, July 28-29, 1863* (Richmond, 1863), 8; *Minutes of the 96th Annual Meeting of the Strawberry Baptist Association, July-Aug., 1863* (Lynchburg, 1863), 7.

50 John L. Burrows, *The New Richmond Theater: A Discourse* (Richmond, 1863), 16, 18. For a similar opinion on the theater, see *The Religious Herald*, Oct. 15, 1863.

Others harped upon the evils of intemperance. According to the Accomac Association, "the present war is a fruitful source of evil in this respect." In the delegates' opinions, too many Confederates used liquor, and too many sold it to turn a quick profit. Even Christians fell to the temptations of alcohol. This sin needed to be alleviated before God would return His blessings.<sup>51</sup>

Others slowly began to acknowledge the South's sinful ways, and a call for repentance filled the land. In an open letter to Baptist churches across the state, Pastor Everett Dodson challenged them to properly honor God. He believed that too many Virginians looked to the Confederate armies, and thus human strength, for salvation. This sin needed to be confessed, and the churches needed to acknowledge "the first cause" of all events, the Lord Almighty.<sup>52</sup>

Even Confederate soldiers hoped that the homefront churches would repent of their sins. According to a war correspondent for *The Herald*, the troops which returned from Pennsylvania viewed the worldly pleasure-seeking and the spiritual lukewarmness of the civilian population as a major factor in the army's failure at Gettysburg. The soldiers

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51 *Minutes of the Accomac Assoc., 1863*, 8. See also *Minutes of the Appomattox Assoc., 1863*, 14.

52 *The Religious Herald*, July 23, 1863.

believed repentance would lead to revival, and revival to victory.<sup>53</sup>

With this in mind, Baptists did not completely lose their hope in ultimate victory. If only they and the rest of the nation would repent and do the Lord's will, victory remained possible. Thus in spite of the belief that God ordained Confederate failures, Rev. Henry H. Wyer and the Goshen Association declared in September that "nothing in our recent experiences ought to discourage us, or diminish our confidence in the cause in which we have so freely made so many sacrifices."<sup>54</sup>

To the west, the churches of the Albemarle Association seconded this declaration. The delegates stated: "[N]othing in our recent experiences is calculated to diminish our confidence in the final triumph of our cause, or to abate in the slightest degree our ardor in the great struggle in which we ... are engaged." As long as God granted "his gracious interposition in our behalf," Baptists retained a measure of

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53 Ibid. For other examples of calls to repentance, see *Minutes of the Appomattox Assoc., 1863*, 14; *Minutes of the Dan River Assoc., 1863*, 14; *Minutes of the Dover Assoc., 1863*, 15; *Minutes of the Strawberry Assoc., 1863*, 7.

54 *Minutes of the Goshen Baptist Association, 1863* (Richmond, 1863), 10.

faith.<sup>55</sup>

The years of 1862 and 1863, therefore, served to winnow the Baptist churches and to create a sense of doubt in regard to the nation's chances for ultimate victory. Yet these years did not totally destroy Baptist hope. According to the churches, the tribulations on the homefront and the battlefield would prove temporary, and in time God would relieve the South of its burdens if the nation repented of its sins. As a delegation of Baptist ministers, including such notables as Jeremiah Jeter and Jabez L. M. Curry, made clear: "The separation of the Southern states is universally regarded ... as final ... promising in no respect a restoration of the former Union."<sup>56</sup>

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55 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1863*, 19; *Minutes of the Dover Assoc., 1863*, 15.

56 *The Religious Herald*, Aug. 30, 1863.

*Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea,  
only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed,  
overwhelming and righteous.*

*Isaiah 10:22 (NIV)*

#### **Chapter 4**

### **Only a Remnant**

During the harsh winter of 1863-1864, Virginia Baptists recalled that in the early days of war, they had favorably compared their new Southern nation with ancient Israel. The Confederacy was God's new chosen people, just as the Israelite nation had once been. As they studied the scriptures in 1861, Baptists admitted: "We linger with peculiar pleasure upon the promises to God's chosen people, his providential dealings" with Israel. Now three years later, Baptists rethought their similarities with the ancient Jewish nation.<sup>1</sup>

In early 1864, Baptists inspected the history of Israel in the light of Confederate woes. They found a recurrent theme in the Old Testament. When Israel remained faithful to God's word, it flourished. When it became sinful, God rebuked the Israelite nation.

Baptists came to believe that this theme held the key to Confederate fortunes. After the losses at Gettysburg and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Religious Herald*, May 7, 1861.

Vicksburg in 1863, some had concluded that God allowed suffering to overtake the land because of the South's sinfulness. Throughout 1864, more Baptists accepted this notion. Thus, calls to repentance resounded from pulpits, prayer meetings, and conference tables around the state.

In the first month of 1864, a correspondent to *The Religious Herald* wrote a lengthy article relating the religious character of the Confederate nation with that of Israel. The writer, designated by the pseudonym "Athanasius," provided his readers with a history lesson on the Israelite nation of old. According to the writer, Egypt had once enslaved the Israelites. Then God brought His people out of Egyptian bondage and into the Promised Land, where they became an independent nation. The Lord granted them great blessings. Yet the Israelites turned from the path of the Almighty. As the writer explained:

Though God failed not to shower his bounties upon them, so long as they confided in his promises and obeyed his laws, these bounties even turned their hearts away from Him, and caused them to attribute their successes to man.... And when the reward of their iniquity came upon them, instead of repenting and turning to God, they ... longed again for the land of their bondage.... Thus the Devil used their richest blessings to render them vain and forgetful of God, and their calamities to engender discontent, dissatisfaction, and open rebellion.<sup>2</sup>

"Athanasius" saw a similar dynamic at work within the

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2 Ibid., Jan. 28, 1864.

South. After the great Southern victories early in the war, "songs of gratitude and praise to God rose from a nation's heart. But alas! The Devil soon interposed, and induced the people ... to attribute to Southern chivalry the happy issue of the bloody contest." The result of this sin could be seen in the defeats of 1862 and 1863. Yet the writer knew that total defeat could be avoided by repentance. He wrote:

Oh! My countrymen, forget not the history of Israel of old.... Let us not stumble at the same stumbling stone and perish as they did.... Oh! people of God, give your hearts to fasting, humiliation, and prayer, that thy faith fail not in this terrible conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Other Baptist believers echoed this call for confession and repentance. In fact, this became so prevalent that it seemed that the prophets of old had returned to the Earth. In January, the editors of *The Herald* called on all Virginians to inspect their own lives. "If we share in the sins on account of which the nation suffers the stroke of the Lord," Sands and Shaver wrote, "perhaps He will give us the grace of conviction that we may forsake them." Moreover, they hoped that by "putting them away, we may abate the fierceness of His anger toward our people."<sup>4</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the congregations at Lyles and Kentuck Baptist Churches voted to set aside a day of

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3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., Jan. 14, 1864.



humiliation in order to confess their sins and avert God's wrath. In Lancaster County, Thomas S. Dunaway stood before his congregation at Coan Baptist Church and declared that the nation must repent. Dunaway explained to his audience that God had allowed calamity to befall the Confederacy because of national sins. For too long, the South had relied upon its own strength, the ability of its generals, or the hope of foreign recognition rather than on the "God of Battles." According to Dunaway, only God "shall be successful in sheathing the sword, all reaking with blood, and heralding the glad tidings of peace through our land."<sup>5</sup>

God, however, would not send peace without cause. Southerners first needed to repent of their sins before prosperity could return. "When the people shall turn away from their wickedness," Dunaway explained, "He will remove this terrible scourge."<sup>6</sup>

While most Baptists focused on abstract national sins, *The Religious Herald* actually confronted one concrete problem. Early in the year, Shaver and Sands reported that several members of the Confederate House of Representatives

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5 Minute Book of Lyles Baptist Church, Jan. 1864, VBHS; Minute Book of Kentuck Baptist Church, Mar. 20, 1864, VBHS; Thomas S. Dunaway, *A Sermon* (Richmond, 1864), 9.

6 Ibid., 14.

met on the Sabbath to discuss national issues and conduct their business affairs. The editors rebuked the members for this profane act. "Shame on this outrage to the day of the Lord, and the Christian sentiment of the nation," they cried. In their view, the nation's leaders needed to set a better example for the people.<sup>7</sup>

Upper King and Queen Baptist Church confronted another concrete example of sin: dancing. Several members of the congregation had danced openly; thus, the church felt it needed to take a stand. Led by Pastor Andrew Broaddus, Jr., the church declared dancing to be sinful at any time. Yet Broaddus and the congregation believed that dancing "is peculiarly deserving of censure when so large a portion of the land is wrapped in mourning, when so many thousands of our countrymen are suffering from want and other causes, and when the political condition of the country is so critical."

Such transgression angered the Lord and damaged the Confederate cause. The church, therefore, voted to exclude the dancers from membership until they acknowledged their sin and turned from it.<sup>8</sup>

The Baptists who remained in the pews in 1864 hoped that

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<sup>7</sup> *The Religious Herald*, Jan. 28, 1864.

<sup>8</sup> Minute Book of Upper King and Queen Baptist Church, Feb. 20, 1864, VBHS.

revival would accompany humble repentance. In a few cases, this occurred. In Staunton, Pastor George Taylor reported that his congregation began to reacknowledge the Lord's will. Soon after, his church welcomed several converts. J. D. Leachman reported a similar occurrence in Bath County. After years of religious indifference, the county's congregations began to recall their spiritual duties. Reawakening followed.<sup>9</sup>

Despite these examples, revival on the homefront in early 1864 proved to be the exception, not the rule. "Lamentation and mourning are heard in our once happy ... churches," one Association reported, "and congregations are being rapidly thinned." It was apparent that homefront religion was continuing to deteriorate.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, during the winter of 1863-1864 and continuing into the spring, an amazing season of revival swept through the Army of Northern Virginia. Thousands of Southern troops gave their lives to Christ. Reports estimated that over 10% of Lee's army converted in that short amount of time. As war-hardened veterans gathered to hear God's word, Chaplain J. William Jones declared: "There were times when there was

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9 *The Religious Herald*, Feb. 4, 1864 and March 3, 1864.

10 *Minutes of the Appomattox Baptist Association*, Aug. 9-10, 1864 (Petersburg, 1864), 8-9.

scarcely a dry eye among those gathered thousands."<sup>11</sup>

This "Great Revival" pleased Virginia Baptists. According to Jones, "it was touching to see ... men trembling and not ashamed to weep under the power of ... the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus." The Baptists' tremendous evangelistic efforts toward the army had reaped a bountiful harvest. Unfortunately, Baptists did not see such manifestations of spiritual renewal on the homefront. The army revival, therefore, only highlighted the religious woes at home.<sup>12</sup>

The "Great Revival" lasted until May, 1864, when a new campaign season brought it to a close. When this season came, a new Union commander arrived with it. Ulysses S. Grant, the hero of the West, now led the Federal forces on Virginia's soil.

Grant's arrival initiated a new style of fighting in Virginia. Realizing that his forces possessed tremendous advantages in manpower and material, Grant decided to exert constant pressure on the Confederate forces in Virginia. Thus, as he advanced with the Army of the Potomac, he ordered simultaneous expeditions in the Shenandoah Valley and on the

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11 Quoted in Robertson, *John Albert Broadus*, 209.

12 Ibid.

Peninsula. By trapping the Army of Northern Virginia in this wise, Grant believed the great Confederate army would succumb to overwhelming numbers.

On May 5, the campaign began with the Battle of the Wilderness. Lee's forces won a victory, but Grant refused to retreat like so many prior Federal commanders. Instead, he continued to march against Lee. The entire spring became an almost continuous battle, with fighting at places such as Spotsylvania, Yellow Tavern, and Cold Harbor.

Finally, on June 18, Lee arrived at Petersburg and his forces entrenched. Grant then opened a siege on the vital railroad junction just south of Richmond. For the next ten months, the two armies faced each other in a manner that foreshadowed the trench warfare of World War I.

By autumn, the plight of the Confederacy held little promise. Grant continued to besiege Petersburg and to threaten Richmond. In the Shenandoah Valley, General Philip Sheridan initiated a truly destructive campaign. Hundreds of miles to the south, General William T. Sherman captured Atlanta, Georgia, and began his march to the sea.

To some Virginia Baptists, these events portended final defeat. During a sermon at Centenary Baptist Church in Richmond, David S. Doggett proclaimed: "The period of the war is near its termination." Thanks to the moral decay of the

Confederacy, Doggett believed the Southern nation would soon fall to its powerful enemy.<sup>13</sup>

The editors of *The Herald* worried that these feelings of despair seemed to be growing among the believers. They pleaded with Baptists not to allow such negativity to completely dominate their thoughts. With the presidential election in the United States nearing, Sands and Shaver saw reason for hope.<sup>14</sup>

At the time, the election promised to be tightly contested. Abraham Lincoln faced a formidable opponent in his bid for re-election, George McClellan. McClellan, the former commander of the Army of the Potomac, centered his campaign on a platform of peace. If McClellan won the election in November, Sands and Shaver thought that the Confederacy could achieve its independence.

With this in mind, the two editors asked all Baptists to spend the next sixty days in prayer. Although Shaver and Sands refused to endorse a specific candidate, their hopes seemed clear. "Can we not have a concert of supplication, morning and evening, that this election may be used in His hands to seal up the rivers of blood which the election of

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13 *The Religious Herald*, July 21, 1864.

14 *Ibid.*, Sept. 8, 1864.

four years ago poured out over the land?"<sup>15</sup>

This hope proved short-lived. By the time the election came, Sherman had marched to the sea and Sheridan had experienced great success in the Valley. Northerners finally believed that victory was near. Voters swept Lincoln back into office.

During those crucial campaign months, Virginia Baptists also addressed many non-political issues, especially the plight of children. Over the course of the war, many children in the state had become fatherless as thousands of Virginia men fell on the battlefield. In the summer of 1864, the General Association decided that something needed to be done to improve the future of such children. Delegates appointed a new committee and gave it the task of developing a plan to fill the tremendous educational needs of the children of deceased Confederate soldiers.<sup>16</sup>

In order to save veterans' children "from ruin and degradation," the committee recommended that local congregations raise money for the orphans in their area. This money would then be used to pay for the best education possible in the locality. The committee also suggested that

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15 Ibid.

16 *Minutes of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, June, 1864* (Richmond, 1866), 5.

children of all denominational backgrounds be allowed to receive support from this program.<sup>17</sup>

The General Association also took another step toward improving the lot of Virginia's children. Believing that Sunday schools represented the best method of saving young souls from "this war with all of its evil influences," delegates acted to revive the languishing program. They created a new position, Sunday School Missionary of Virginia. In June, they hired William L. Hatcher to fill the post.<sup>18</sup>

Hatcher began a vigorous campaign to reinvigorate the Sabbath school program in every corner of the state. To increase support for the schools, he crisscrossed the Commonwealth and delivered addresses to gatherings of Baptists. He even wrote an open letter to his fellow believers and challenged them to establish Sunday schools in every congregation by the spring of 1865.<sup>19</sup>

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17 Ibid. For example of state-wide support for this program, see *Minutes of the Albemarle Baptist Association, Aug. 16-18, 1864* (Charlottesville, 1864), 16; *Minutes of the 6th Annual Session of the Blue Ridge Baptist Association, Aug. 26-27, 1864* (Richmond, 1864), 3; *Minutes of the 33rd Annual Session of the Concord Baptist Association* (Petersburg, 1864), 8.

18 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1864*, 15; *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1864*, 11.

19 *The Religious Herald*, Dec. 1, 1864. See also *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1864*, 11.



In 1864, Virginia Baptists also reinstated state missions, thus finally fulfilling their promises of the previous year. During the summer, the General Association appointed five missionaries. Though this was a far cry from the prewar period, it was a start toward rebuilding the program.<sup>20</sup>

In the western part of the state, several districts tired of waiting for the General Association to take action. These associations hired their own missionaries. In late autumn, Charles Cocke, the clerk of the Western District Association, wrote a letter to *The Herald* that explained this decision. According to Cocke, the vicissitudes of war made the decision to hire missionaries of vital importance. He stated:

Much of the ground embraced [by the association] is now trodden by hostile armies ... churches are scattered, ministers driven from the flocks, and the people left to wander as sheep without a shepherd.... The churches thus neglected and virtually disbanded will soon be known neither by place nor by name, and the labors of years ... totally and irretrievably lost.

To combat this gloomy fate, Cocke argued that it was imperative to employ missionaries in the region.<sup>21</sup>

Cocke and his Western Association cohorts were not alone

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20 Ibid., 12.

21 *The Religious Herald*, Dec. 1, 1864.

in this belief. In far southwest Virginia, the Lebanon Association agreed and hired John Kitzmiller and Matthew F. Noffsinger to serve as missionaries. Hoping to alleviate the "great destitution ... in the bounds of our own association," the Roanoke District vowed to raise money for similar purposes.<sup>22</sup>

William Fisher, a pastor in Bedford County, praised the Baptists of western Virginia for their initiative. At the same time, he chastised the larger, more financially blessed associations to the east for failing to follow the lead of their western brethren. According to Fisher, if the smaller, weaker associations of the west could gather a substantial collection for state missions, those in the east certainly could.<sup>23</sup>

This new emphasis on evangelizing the homefront generated a season of renewal in the western portion of the state. In the mountains of Craig and Giles Counties, missionary Abner D. Bolton led revivals at several Baptist churches. Matthew Noffsinger joined with Peter Terrill to awaken the spirit in Smyth County. Though they initially held meetings in private homes around the community, the two

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22 Ibid.; *Minutes of the Roanoke Baptist Association*, Aug. 23-25, 1864 (Danville, 1864), 7.

23 *The Religious Herald*, Sept. 22, 1864.

men soon converted so many people that they found it necessary to establish a new church, Blue Springs Baptist. In December, Terrill chose to remain as pastor while Noffsinger moved to Floyd County. Within weeks, he sparked a revival at Floyd's New Haven Church.<sup>24</sup>

These developments led the Baptists of the west to rejoice. According to an Elder Thrasher of the Valley Association, the churches in his area had "been greatly blessed, as clearly evinced by ... the large ingathering of converts." Even more amazing to Thrasher, this occurred in spite of "the sore distresses and discouragements occasioned by the war."<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, the blessings experienced by western Virginia did not extend across the state. Beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains, Robert Shaver reported that "such [glad] tidings as these ... are sadly infrequent at present." Rather than improving, conditions continued to decline.<sup>26</sup>

The most important factor that led to this regional diversity was the difference in priorities between the two

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24 *Minutes of the Valley Baptist Association, Session 1864* (Lynchburg, 1864), 3, 6; *The Religious Herald*, Sept. 8, 1864, Dec. 1, 1864, and Jan. 5, 1865.

25 *Minutes of the Valley Assoc.*, 1864, 7.

26 *The Religious Herald*, Aug. 25, 1864.

areas. By 1864, the churches in western Virginia had finally reoriented their goals. They knew that more effort needed to be spent on proselytizing the homefront, so they willingly employed missionaries in order to aid civilian congregations. The churches to the east, however, continued to emphasize army missions.

A second factor also played a role. In late 1864, the major Confederate and Union armies stood in the east. These warring parties wreaked havoc on the churches' physical conditions. Meanwhile, most congregations in western Virginia experienced less dramatic physical deprivations at the hands of large warring parties.

In November, Andrew Dickinson grasped the correlation between the physical destruction caused by the armies and the spiritual zeal of the churches. When he attended the Goshen District Association meeting, he found that many churches had disbanded. Few of those remaining intact sent delegates. Dickinson placed the blame for these developments on recent Union campaigns in the bounds of the Goshen, especially in Orange, Spotsylvania, and Caroline counties. Moreover, he worried that these locales had been "so torn to pieces, that for long years to come" their churches would be "comparatively feeble."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Nov. 10, 1864.

Similar physical deprivations occurred in Loudoun County. In December, Federal cavalry rode through the vicinity of Kettoctin Baptist Church and "burnt nearly all our barns with their contents ... [and] several valuable dwelling houses." Moreover, the church's pastor, George W. Harris, was "carried off and detained as a prisoner by the Yankees." Surrounded by destruction and without its pastor, Kettoctin's members felt compelled to cancel services for several months.<sup>28</sup>

Union soldiers were not the only perpetrators. According to *The Herald*, congregations of all denominations in Northern Virginia "have been dispersed because the houses [of worship] at which they assembled have been rendered unfit." Both Confederate and Union troops "enter and pollute houses of worship with an impunity which should not be permitted."<sup>29</sup>

The physical deprivations of war did have some impact west of the Blue Ridge, especially in the lower Shenandoah Valley. Union Gen. Philip Sheridan's devastating campaign in

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28 Minute Book of Kettoctin Baptist Church, Dec. 3, 1864, VSL. See also Cross, *Glencoe Diary*, 146; Minute Book of Mattaponi Baptist Church, July 9, 1864, VSL; Minute Book of Northwest Baptist Church, Aug. 1864, VSL; Minute Book of Upper King and Queen, July 16, 1864; *The Religious Herald*, Sept. 22, 1864.

29 *The Religious Herald*, Apr. 21, 1864.

the region dampened any spirit of revival. For example, during the autumn, a revival began at Main Street Baptist in Luray. "Good congregations" came to hear "interesting sermons," and the church began to welcome converts into the fold. Then, in early October, Sheridan's forces marched into the town during a revival meeting. The service quickly disbanded, and the spirit of renewal disappeared.<sup>30</sup>

By early 1865, nearly all Baptist hopes for a successful conclusion to the war disappeared as well. Sheridan controlled the Shenandoah Valley. Sherman controlled Georgia and began his invasion of the Carolinas. Grant remained entrenched at Petersburg, dangerously close to Richmond.

In late January, Sands and Shaver admitted that "a feeling of despondency with regard to the issue of the struggle for Southern independence has gone abroad among our people." Some believed total defeat loomed, while others thought the war would never end. "We do not share" these sentiments, the editors claimed, because they still held to a slim hope for independence.<sup>31</sup>

Diplomacy generated their only source of worldly hope.

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30 Minute Book of Main Street Baptist Church, Oct. 2, 1864, VSL. See also Minute Book of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, 105, VSL.

31 *The Religious Herald*, Jan. 19, 1865.

In early February, 1865, a peace conference was held in Hampton Roads. Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens, Senator R. M. T. Hunter, and Assistant Secretary of War Judge Campbell met with President Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward to discuss the possibility of ending the Civil War. However, these men failed to find any common ground. The conflict continued.

The failure of the Hampton Roads Peace Conference was a great disappointment to Sands and Shaver. The conference had appeared to be a possible means of salvation for the Confederacy. Lincoln's stern demands for "unconditional submission," which "really nobody expected," ruined the editors' hopes. Soon even they began to acknowledge the hopelessness of the Southern cause.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the failure of the peace conference, churchgoers were forced to worry about the breakdown of law and order across the state. An article in the February 9 issue of *The Religious Herald* reported that several men broke into Pastor Moses Hoge's church in Richmond and stole numerous items. The article also noted that the nearby Second Presbyterian Church of Rev. Dr. Read suffered a

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32 Ibid., Feb. 9, 1865.

similar fate.<sup>33</sup>

In the same issue, Sands and Shaver notified readers that a group of villains attacked the minister of the Baptist Church in Nuttwood, Rev. Milton R. Grimsley. After beating Grimsley, the attackers stole his money and his horse. "We have fallen upon evil times," the editors moaned. "Not only do thieves invade our churches by night and steal therefrom, but they attack and rob clergymen in the day time."<sup>34</sup>

Two weeks later, the situation worsened. Robert H. Boykin, a pastor in Norfolk, was gunned down in the streets of that city. The Commonwealth seemed to be collapsing into chaos.<sup>35</sup>

In the midst of this turmoil, "Athanasius" contributed another article to *The Herald*. Once again, he turned to the history of the ancient Israelites to find a precedent for the Confederate plight. During the reign of King Hezekiah, the Assyrian army had besieged Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern Jewish kingdom of Judah, with overwhelming numbers. The besieged Jews, however, called upon the Lord in faith and became obedient to His law. Once they did so, God smote

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33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., Feb. 23, 1865.



185,000 Assyrian warriors in one night. Jerusalem was saved. "As it was with Judah," the writer proclaimed, "so it will be with us, if we do as Judah did. May the example of Judah, under Hezekiah, be followed by the South."<sup>36</sup>

Such declarations now rang hollow in the ears of Virginia Baptists. Very few any longer found hope in the examples of ancient Israel. By 1865, a victorious peace seemed unattainable. As Pastor John A. Broadus wrote to a friend in South Carolina: "I take it there will now be war in this country fully as long as you or I will live." Other Baptists believed defeat was inevitable, but only wondered: "How long, O Lord?"<sup>37</sup>

On March 10, 1865, Richard A. Fox stood before his congregation at Mount Horeb Baptist and attempted "to penetrate this mantle of gloom." Fox still found hope in his faith.

By Faith kingdoms have been subdued, Righteousness wrought, Promise obtained, Mouths of lions stopped, Violence of fire quenched, The edge of the sword escaped, Weakness made strength, Armies turned to flight, Dead raised to life, And it is declared by the Savior that all things are possible to him that believeth." In faith, Fox believed "the gallant ship of state launched amid the howlings of one of the most

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36 Ibid., Feb. 16, 1865.

37 John A. Broadus to Basil Manly, Apr. 11, 1865, in Robertson, *John Albert Broadus*, 211; *The Religious Herald*, Mar. 9, 1865. See also Minute Book of Zion Hill Baptist Church, March 1865, VSL.

appalling storms, and which has so fearfully increased with every evolution -- And though every stick of timber constituting her noble hull has been made to tremble under the mighty pressure, will ride successfully through this awful gale.<sup>38</sup>

Yet even Fox admitted doubts as to the eventual outcome of the war. Defeat was possible. "If subjugation ever should be our sad lot," Fox declared, the war still produced one positive result. It caused thousands of soldiers to commit to Christ. Moreover, in the eternal scheme, the war's outcome did not matter, because "by and by we shall be gathered to an Eternal Home where pain and sorrow are never known, and wars and Revolutions forever cease."<sup>39</sup>

Three weeks after Fox delivered his sermon, Grant's Union army broke through at Petersburg. Two days later, Abraham Lincoln entered the Confederate capital of Richmond as its conqueror. Then on April 9, 1865, at Appomattox, Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia. Finally, the Civil War had ceased, and peace came upon the land.

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38 Nelson D. Lankford, ed., "'If Subjugation Ever Should Be Our Sad Lot, A Sermon by Richard Andrew Fox," *The Virginia Baptist Register* (1987), 1305; 1307.

39 *Ibid.*, 1308.

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

*Galatians 3:28-29 (KJV)*

## **Chapter 5**

# **Abraham's Seed**

Just prior to the end of the war, John Townley, clerk of Pine Grove Baptist Church, wrote a letter to his Baptist brethren in Virginia. Townley lamented the spiritual malaise that had settled over the state's Baptist churches. The affairs of God had received "no special interest during the war," he remarked, and God would hold the believers accountable for this neglect. Yet one bright spot existed. According to Townley, "the colored church" embraced God with increased zeal during the conflict. Thus their numbers grew and their countenances appeared refreshed.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter focuses on the relationship between enslaved African Americans and the Baptist churches of Virginia. Such an investigation is essential because the war years played a crucial role in the destiny of African

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<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1864, 23.*

Americans. To use biblical terminology, those tempestuous years bridged the gap between eternal bondage and the Promised Land of freedom.

In order to understand thoroughly the importance of this crucial period, this chapter employs a dualistic method that incorporates the perspectives of both white and black Baptists. Several reasons exist to recommend this approach.

First, since white Baptists wielded the vast majority of influence and power within the churches, it is vital to understand their attitudes and actions toward their black brethren. Yet it is also important to incorporate the African-American perspective. Enslaved blacks constituted a large portion of Baptist membership in Virginia. In fact, in 1860, enslaved African Americans constituted over 40% of the Commonwealth's Baptist membership. With tens of thousands of African-American members, the Baptist denomination claimed the largest black membership of any religious group in the state. Moreover, as the war progressed, this large enslaved constituency found opportunities to exercise influence in the church setting.<sup>2</sup>

Another factor also makes the dualistic method vital to a study of the relationship between enslaved blacks and Virginia's churches. As many recent scholars have noted,

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<sup>2</sup> Hill, *Religion in the Southern States*, 344.

prior to emancipation the normative slave religious experience was biracial. This was definitely true within the borders of Virginia.<sup>3</sup>

Most of Virginia's enslaved Baptists worshipped in one of two ways. The first method was to join white congregants in a so-called white service. In such a service, blacks either sit in specially-designated areas or with their masters. The sermon they heard focused on the needs of the white membership. Only occasional exhortations were directed toward the slaves themselves.<sup>4</sup>

The second method concentrated somewhat more attention on black congregants. Baptist churches that used this approach held separate services for their African-American members, often directly after the service for whites. In this service, the pastor delivered a sermon with themes that seemed more relevant to the enslaved listeners. Of course, several white Baptists remained in the pews during these services. Their purpose was to maintain order and to uphold Virginia's legal code, which did not allow an unsupervised

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3 For examples of scholars that emphasize the dualistic nature of religion, see John B. Boles, ed., *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South* (Lexington, Ky., 1988) and Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, N.J., 1987).

4 Daniel, *Southern Protestantism*, 123-125.

gathering of blacks. This second method was less common than the first approach, but numerous congregations did practice it.<sup>5</sup>

Independent black congregations, a third approach, did exist. In an independent black congregation, African Americans held their own services and conducted their own business. In some cases, they enjoyed their own house of worship and employed their own ministers. These churches were not completely independent, however, because a small group of whites monitored their affairs. At any time, these overseers could step in and take control of the church.

While an impressive number of black Baptists resided in Virginia, only a handful of independent black churches existed before the war. These few congregations could generally be found in Virginia's larger cities. Richmond, Norfolk, Alexandria, and Fredricksburg boasted of African-American churches, but very few other localities could do the same.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

Before the Civil War began, white Baptists in Virginia took a polite interest in the black membership of their churches. Most whites believed that God had placed in their hands the eternal destiny of the enslaved population. For this reason, they felt a certain duty to spread the gospel among the African Americans in their midst.<sup>7</sup>

Self-interest, however, played a greater role in the whites' mission to the slaves. Many Baptists believed that training the slave population in the way of the gospel would turn African Americans into better servants. This argument arose from all sections of the state. At the annual meeting of the Albemarle Association, the committee on instructing the black population recommended that all slaves receive a gospel education. The committeemen believed that the area's black population was becoming more intelligent. Thus, only proper biblical guidance promised to direct their knowledge along the proper path of servitude.<sup>8</sup>

This same recommendation arose from the far southwestern corner of the state. The Lebanon Association asked its members to create "more useful ... servants" by inculcating them in the gospel. Although less than 10% of the Lebanon's

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<sup>7</sup> See *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1860*, 21, and *Minutes of the Roanoke Assoc., 1860*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1860*, 22.

membership were African-American, the delegates believed that the churches needed to emphasize the proper instruction of their local black congregants in order to prevent any problems.<sup>9</sup>

As America's sectional crisis worsened, Virginia Baptists turned their attention away from the slaves and toward the institution of slavery itself. According to *The Religious Herald*, blame for sectional problems rested squarely on the shoulders of "Northern fanaticism," especially that of "rampant Abolitionists." In the minds of these Baptists, abolitionists wished to subjugate the South and destroy the Southern way of life, including slavery.<sup>10</sup>

During the early months of 1861, the state's white Baptists challenged the purpose and morality of the abolitionist movement. *The Religious Herald* published a series of articles by Thornton Stringfellow that explained the Baptist position on the issue. Stringfellow, a Culpeper minister, was considered an expert on the issue. He had previously published a book on the topic, *Slavery: Its Origins, Nature, and History*. In his series of articles, Stringfellow argued: "The relation of slavery sought to be

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9 *Minutes of the Lebanon Assoc.*, 1860, 11.

10 *The Religious Herald*, Feb. 2, 1860.



overthrown by our northern brethren is not only not condemned as sin, nor prohibited in the Bible, but fully sanctioned as a lawful relation among men by Christ and his Apostles." In a subsequent article, Stringfellow declared: "God's law of subordinating individuals and races, is wise, humane, and good, and that the infidel theory of 'freedom and equality' is only evil and that continually."<sup>11</sup>

Once war erupted in 1861, most Baptists chose not to address the issue of slavery. Despite its importance to the division of the Union, many Baptists preferred to deal with other issues. In addition, the slaves themselves became peripheral concerns for the churches. For example, the delegates to the Albemarle Association meeting in July neglected to prepare a statement on the instruction of the black population. In years past, Albemarle Baptists had considered this report to be a key element of their meeting. With civil war now raging in the state, however, the evangelistic mission to the slaves seemed unimportant.<sup>12</sup>

Foremost on the Baptist mind was proselytizing the army. Just as this new evangelistic concern replaced the state missions program, it overshadowed slave missions in the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Jan. 31, 1861 and Feb. 28, 1861.

<sup>12</sup> *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1861.*

hearts and minds of Virginia's white Baptists. As a third of the churches' white membership marched to war, those who remained on the homefront dedicated themselves to raising support for missionary efforts among the Confederate armies.

Although the slaves' religious well-being became a secondary concern of white Baptists, it remained a vital element of the slaves' lives. Large numbers of blacks turned to religion to provide some sort of stability in the tumultuous times. Churches throughout the state witnessed impressive growth among their slave constituency. In the Albemarle district, well over 400 blacks joined the Baptist ranks that year. At Charlottesville Baptist Church alone, nearly 200 slaves were added to the rolls. To the south, the large number of African-American conversions at Mount Moriah Church led Samuel R. Irvine to comment that "much interest is manifested upon the subject of religion" among the slave population.<sup>13</sup>

The next year, 1862, brought similar developments. White Baptists continued to devote evangelistic attention to the armies. As Peter C. Hoge, a pastor in Augusta County, stated, army missions represented "the great work of the age." To support that work, homefront congregations gave

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13 Ibid., 2, 21. See also *Minutes of the Concord Assoc., 1861*, 11; *Minutes of the Portsmouth Assoc., 1861*, 3.

liberally of their time and treasure.<sup>14</sup>

As previously noted, the emphasis on army missions began to take a severe toll on the homefront. With so little attention paid to civilian souls, church attendance and spirit plunged. George Vaughn, clerk of St. Stephen's Baptist Church in Nelson County, noted that "great coldness and indifference to religion" marked his church and denomination.<sup>15</sup>

While this "alarming increase of stagnation" took hold of a majority of white congregants in Virginia, the black population experienced a different phenomenon. Many churches again witnessed massive numbers of black conversions. For example, at Dover Church in Goochland, pastor Abram B. Smith baptized thirteen blacks at a single meeting. This was more than twice the number of whites baptized throughout the entire year. At Antioch Baptist in Augusta County, Robert Kent, clerk of the church, recorded an amazing revival. In 1862, the black portion of the congregation increased by 300%.<sup>16</sup>

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14 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1862*, 16.

15 *Ibid.*, 23.

16 *Ibid.*, 19; *The Religious Herald*, Sept. 4, 1862; *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1862*, 21. See also Fleet, *A Virginia Plantation Family*, 188; *Minutes of the Valley Assoc., 1862*, 3; *The Religious Herald*, Sept. 11, 1862.

In addition to the great numerical increases made by slaves in 1862, blacks in certain areas of the state also began to take control of their earthly destinies. With Federal forces so near, many enslaved Baptists in the northern and northeastern portion of Virginia fled from their homes and churches to the Union lines. For example, late that summer, Battle Run Baptist in Northern Virginia called a special business meeting with the sole purpose of counting the number of runaway slave members. Pastor Barrett Grimsley and his congregants discovered that ten blacks had disappeared.<sup>17</sup>

This became a particularly common occurrence in the churches of the Rappahannock Association. At the associational meeting in September, 1862, Richard Potts and Howard W. Montague from Shiloh Baptist Church asked delegates to address the issue of runaways. More precisely, the two men wished to know what the member churches should do to African-American members who fled to the Federal Army. The Association recommended that such individuals be excluded from church membership. The written recommendation explained that fleeing to enemy lines violated the scriptural sanction

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17 Minute Book of Battle Run Baptist Church, Sept. 13, 1862 and Dec. 13, 1862, VSL. See also Fleet, *A Virginia Plantation Family*, 138.

of slavery, the rights of masters, and the duties of slaves.<sup>18</sup>

Potts, Montague, and the other white members of Shiloh Baptist quickly implemented this recommendation. They asked all black members to attend the next business meeting and present their names for the membership rolls. When this occurred, Potts found that a dozen slaves "have eloped from the fellowship of this church." The next month, the church clerk reported that those members that "absconded from their respective homes ... are hereby declared excluded from the fellowship" of Shiloh Baptist Church.<sup>19</sup>

Despite their increased numbers and their extra-ecclesiastical agency, enslaved black Baptists continued to possess little power within the congregations themselves. In addition, most white Baptists continued to gloss over the relationship between the churches and slavery. However, in 1863, this began to change. By the end of that year, whites began to address their relationship with enslaved blacks more seriously. At the same time, blacks exerted more influence over the affairs of their churches than they had previously.

The underlying cause of the slaves' increased influence was the changing fortunes of the Confederacy. During 1861,

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<sup>18</sup> *Minutes of the Rappahannock Assoc., 1862, 5.*

<sup>19</sup> Minute Book of Shiloh Baptist Church, Sept. 13, 1862, VBHS.

Baptists believed that the Confederate war effort was proceeding well. With victories at Manassas, Big Bethel, and other locales, it seemed that Union forces could not handle the Southern armies. These early successes gave Virginia Baptists a false sense of security and led them to believe that God willed a swift Confederate victory.

In 1862, Baptist churches abandoned this naive optimism. After mixed results on the battlefield, the state's congregations realized that a long road of war lay ahead of them. Yet with Robert E. Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson leading the Confederate forces, eventual victory seemed attainable.

By the summer of 1863, this attitude changed dramatically. After devastating defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Baptists began to feel that God had withdrawn His favor from the South. Thus they reasoned that the nation must have sinned against His will.

Among the many national sins that the Baptists acknowledged, one of the most intriguing was failure to share the gospel with slaves. No one questioned the morality of the institution itself. Yet many Baptists believed that the churches had failed in their God-given duty to baptize the slaves "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Unless the churches repented of this

neglect, God's favor would not return to the Confederacy.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Middle District Association, white Christians in the region fell well short of ministering properly to the slaves' spiritual needs. The Association specifically targeted slaveowners and pastors. More owners needed to bring their slaves to church, while ministers needed to make special accommodations for their black congregants. More precisely, the delegates recommended that pastors plan special, separate services for blacks.<sup>21</sup>

In July, 1863, William A. Whitescarver, pastor of Fork Baptist Church in Fluvanna, also called attention to major shortcomings in the evangelistic efforts aimed toward the slaves. "Ordinary pulpit instruction" in a biracial setting, Whitescarver argued, "is not sufficient" to meet the spiritual needs of slaves. To rectify the situation, he also proposed that more churches hold independent meetings for their black members.<sup>22</sup>

When the delegates to the Albemarle Association's annual meeting read this proposal in August, they recommended the plan to area churches. In the words of one delegate, he and

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20 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1863*, 16-17.

21 *Minutes of the Middle District, 1863*, 6.

22 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1863*, 17.

his fellow believers needed to "bestow much more attention than we have ever done, upon the ... religious instruction of our colored population."<sup>23</sup>

This sentiment arose from other portions of the Commonwealth. In the counties of Franklin and Bedford, Pastor Absalom C. Dempsey pleaded with the region's churches to hold special services for their enslaved congregants. Dempsey argued that the black constituency needed this special attention, and the white Baptists' unconcern brought "God's chastening hand" upon the land.<sup>24</sup>

Along the Rappahannock River, Pastor Robert Williamson of Farnham Baptist Church tempered his fellow believers' arguments. In his opinion, slaveowners in his region had cause for concern. Since some area slaves fled to the Union lines, masters needed to monitor slave religion closely. Despite this warning, Williamson still believed that faithful blacks deserved spiritual nurture from owners and ministers.<sup>25</sup>

John W. McCown, a pastor in Campbell County, argued that slaves deserved more than just spiritual attention. In his opinion, enslaved African Americans deserved the right to

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23 Ibid., 14.

24 *Minutes of the Strawberry Assoc., 1863*, 7-8.

25 *Minutes of the Rappahannock Assoc., 1863*, 22-24.



read the scriptures for themselves. Thus, he recommended that Virginia's state laws be changed "as to make it lawful to teach slaves to read." The Appomattox Association approved of this radical idea, but it had no impact on Virginia law. However, the ideas of McCown, Dempsey, Whitescarver, and others reflected a new awareness of slaves' religious lives.<sup>26</sup>

Some slaves took advantage of this new attention to gain previously unimagined autonomy. At Charlottesville Baptist, the large number of black congregants moved to become a separate church body. In August, 1863, Pastor William F. Broaddus and the church board decided to grant this request. Broaddus and the board believed that this decision would increase the amount of attention given to enslaved members. Thus, in Charlottesville, appeared a new congregation, African Baptist Church.<sup>27</sup>

Rather than take advantage of this new power, some black Baptists continued to escape their situation. At Wallers Baptist Church in Spotsylvania, a large portion of the slave membership "absconded from their owners and [went] to the public enemy." The church board followed the now customary practice and resolved that such "colored members ... be

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<sup>26</sup> *Minutes of the Appomattox Assoc., 1863, 16.*

<sup>27</sup> *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1863, 2, 21.*

excluded from the fellowship of this church."<sup>28</sup>

As 1864 dawned, African-American Baptists exerted their influence in the church setting even further. For example, African Baptist Church, Charlottesville acquired its own pastor, John Randolph. Then the church applied for admission into the Albemarle Association. That summer, the Association voted to admit the 842-congregant church into membership. This made African Baptist, Charlottesville the first black church admitted into that Association.<sup>29</sup>

In Bedford County in 1864, a similar development occurred. At Mt. Hermon Church, the enslaved membership petitioned to become a separate ecclesiastical body. The church board voted to allow this, and they agreed that the new body could hire its own minister. The white leadership of Mt. Hermon, however, made it clear that this new black entity remained answerable to its parent church.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, as the Confederacy suffered great losses in 1864, the white membership of many congregations in Virginia withered even further. David P. Powers of Scottsville

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28 Minute Book of Wallers Baptist Church, Sept. 6, 1863, VBHS.

29 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1864, 2, 22.*

30 Minute Book of Mt. Hermon Baptist Church, Oct. 1864, VBHS.

Baptist Church related that the church in eastern Albemarle County "became almost disorganized" during the autumn and winter. According to an associational report, "nearly all the departments of Christian effort which depend upon the activity of our churches at home, and upon the internal ... conduct of these churches, seem to be in a languishing condition."<sup>31</sup>

Only the slave portion of Virginia's churches existed "in a healthy condition." As Confederate fortunes faded, the Promised Land of Freedom seemed close at hand. Abraham Lincoln and his Union forces appeared ready to liberate slaves from their bonds. Enslaved Baptists, therefore, became even more active. Worship service became more spiritual and hundreds more blacks joined the churches.<sup>32</sup>

In the middle of the summer, over thirty blacks joined Mt. Tirzah Baptist at a mass baptismal service in Charlotte County. Across the county, dozens of slaves accepted the Lord at Mossingford Church. In this manner, slaves praised the Almighty who seemed poised to deliver them from

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31 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1864*, 23, 18.

32 *Ibid.*, 22.

servitude.<sup>33</sup>

White Baptists celebrated these additions. The Appomattox Association's committee on instructing blacks gladly reported that piety among the slaves was growing. "Many are professing religion, joining the church, and giving indications of sincerity and firmness," the committee stated. "Let us elevate them" in the future, they commanded, and avoid complacency in this vital mission.<sup>34</sup>

In Richmond, a new missionary, Alexander H. Sands, decided to further the work among the "dependent race." After his ordination by Jeremiah Jeter and John L. Burrows, Sands agreed to serve the black Baptist population of the city. He soon assumed the ministry of African Baptist Church, Manchester. According to Sands, he hoped to be the first in a line of new, well-qualified pastors to serve Virginia's slave population.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the new-found attention and agency within the churches, some enslaved Baptists affirmed their religious

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33 Minute Book of Mt. Tirzah Baptist Church, June 19, 1864, VSL; Minute Book of Mossingford Baptist Church, June 19, 1864 and Aug. 1864, VSL. See also *Minutes of the Accomac Assoc., 1864*, 8; *The Religious Herald*, July 9, 1864.

34 *Minutes of the Appomattox Assoc., 1864*, 11.

35 *The Religious Herald*, Jan. 28, 1864.

hopes by grasping freedom immediately. For example, the entire African-American membership of Mt. Crawford Baptist in Rockingham County absconded to nearby Federal forces. At Fairmount Baptist Church, nearly 60 black members crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains in order to link with the Union Army and acquire their freedom.<sup>36</sup>

Mossingford Baptist also underwent this experience. Within weeks of a mass black revival, several of the church's black members fled during "the late plundering, burning, and murdering raid of the Yankees." Yet these escapees did not link with the Federal army. After several days, "they could go no farther" and returned to their homes. When they did, Pastor William T. Gilliam and the church board refused to forgive their transgressions and excluded them from membership.<sup>37</sup>

Such occurrences led Alfred Bagby, pastor of Mattaponi Baptist, to fear that some slaves used religious conversion "as a cloak to hide their treachery." Once a slave professed faith in Christ, Bagby believed that his or her master became more trustful of the slave. This provided the black convert

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<sup>36</sup> *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1864, 4, 3.*

<sup>37</sup> *Minute Book of Mossingford Church, Aug. 1864.*

with an easier path to freedom.<sup>38</sup>

Though Bagby worried about this development, he did not want slaveowners to withhold the gospel from their slaves. Rather, he asked only that owners and churches be more wary of possible treachery. His requests assuredly created mixed feelings among his neighbors about evangelizing enslaved blacks.<sup>39</sup>

The Albemarle's advisory committee on instructing the slaves saw a different reason for the large number of runaways. According to committeemen James Hiden, John T. Randolph, and Frank M. Wills, a majority of Baptists "apparently feel but little concern" for the souls of African Americans. Thus, very few slaves possessed a truly religious spirit. Without this spirit, slaves did not appreciate the gospel command to accept one's station in life, whether bond or free.<sup>40</sup>

In the committee's opinion, this was a "lamentable fact" that required remedy for the sake of both races. So the committee made several recommendations. First, it reiterated Pastor Whitescarver's recommendation that churches in the

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38 *Minutes of the Rappahannock Assoc., 1864*, 10.

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1864*, 13.

area hold separate, supervised services for the slaves within the church setting. The group then suggested a new approach. They advised slave owners to lead weekly services within their homes. In this setting, master and slave would grow closer, and the slave would receive additional religious instruction.<sup>41</sup>

Within months of these recommendations, the master-slave relationship was no more. When the Confederate armies surrendered to Federal forces in 1865, the Southern dream of independence died. At that moment, the institution of slavery passed away as well. No longer were African-American Baptists enslaved; they were now a free people.

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41 Ibid. See also *Minutes of the Concord Assoc., 1864*, 5.

*Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God;  
arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the Lord God.  
I Chronicles 22:19a (KJV)*

## ***Epilogue***

As peace settled over Virginia in 1865, the Commonwealth's Baptists faced an unenviable task. After years of deprivation and decline, homefront religion needed to be physically and spiritually rebuilt. "Our churches are enfeebled," William F. Broaddus declared, and warfare "demoralize[d] the great mass of the people."

For too long, Baptists had focused their attention on military concerns to the neglect of civilian faith. With the arrival of peace, Broaddus believed that the time had come for Baptists to begin a spiritual renewal on the homefront.<sup>1</sup>

Baptists around the state recognized the tremendous challenges they faced. As the General Association reported, houses of worship needed to be rebuilt and Sunday school programs needed to be re-established. Missionaries and colporteurs needed to be hired and sent into the countryside. As one committee surveyed the state's religious condition, it reported: "Our hearts grow sad." Religious destitution was

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<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1865, 26, 17.*



"widespread and alarming."<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Anderson eloquently summarized the situation. In a report to the Lebanon Association, Anderson proclaimed: "And where is that eye, so dull of light, which cannot see at a glance the unfortunate moral and religious condition of our country. Where once stood lofty temples dedicated to the worship of Almighty God ... not a vestige or relic is to be found to mark the spot."<sup>3</sup>

In Anderson's opinion, the state missions program represented the best way to combat the "desolating influences of the war through which we have just passed." Thus, he begged the believers across the state to dedicate themselves anew to state missions. "Is [Virginia] not missionary ground," Anderson asked. "Should we not with our united efforts, move onward, and onward, until Virginia becomes herself again, in all that is good, in all that is praiseworthy, and in all that is noble."<sup>4</sup>

That summer, the General Association heeded Anderson's

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2 Ibid., 26; *Minutes of the 74th Anniversary of the Albemarle Baptist Association, Aug. 15-17, 1865* (Charlottesville, 1865), 13, VBHS.

3 *Minutes of the 20th Annual Meeting of the Lebanon District Baptist Association, Sept. 14, 1865* (Wytheville, 1866), 10, VBHS.

4 Ibid., 11.

plea and hired ten new missionaries. Several district associations, both east and west of the Blue Ridge, employed small numbers of missionaries as well. With the "horrid roar of cannon" silenced, Baptists slowly began to reenter the fields of state evangelization.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, some churches reacquired pastors in order to spark local rebuilding efforts. In Loudoun County, George W. Harris returned to Kettoctin Baptist after spending over a year in Federal prison. Wallers Baptist in Rappahannock County hired a new pastor after doing without for several years. Shepherds were finally returning to the flocks. The delegates to the Dover Association hoped that such developments would lead to "seasons of copious refreshment."<sup>6</sup>

In a few areas, this hoped-for refreshment came. For the first time in four years, Nathan R. Heaton, clerk of Kettoctin Baptist, reported "large and attentive" congregations attending church. In September, Wallers

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<sup>5</sup> *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1865, 31; Minutes of the 56th Session of the Accomac Baptist Association, Aug. 18-19, 1865 (Baltimore, 1865), 4, VBHS.* For examples of associations that hired missionaries, see *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1865, 6; Minutes of the Appomattox Baptist Association, Aug. 8-9, 1865 (Petersburg, 1865), 6; Minutes of the Lebanon Assoc., 1865, 11-12.*

<sup>6</sup> *Minute Book of Kettoctin Baptist Church, Apr. 1865 and July 1865; Minute Book of Wallers Baptist Church, July 1865; Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, Sept. 1865 (Richmond, 1866), 29, VBHS.*

Baptist held a successful protracted meeting, as did Neriah Baptist in Rockbridge County. On the eastern shore, Lower Northampton Baptist Church baptized thirteen converts in one service.<sup>7</sup>

In the months directly following Appomattox, however, most Baptist churches in Virginia struggled to recuperate from their wartime degeneration. Congregations experienced "coldness and indifference ... to a lamentable extent." For example, the congregations that formed the Accomac Association bemoaned "their unfruitful condition." In Clarke County, the paucity of members led Berryville Baptist to fire Pastor Joseph Sharp. A similar development occurred at Zion Hill Baptist in Botetourt County. As the members of the General Association surveyed these "embarrassing difficulties," they asked the Lord to bring a season of healing upon the land.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to institutional concerns, Virginia Baptists faced another tremendous problem in the postwar period.

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7 Minute Book of Kettoctin Church, July 1865 and Oct. 1865; Minute Book of Wallers Church, Sept. 1865; Minute Book of Neriah Church, Sept. 10, 1865; *Minutes of the Accomac Assoc., 1865*, 10.

8 *Minutes of the Appomattox Assoc., 1865*, 8; *Minutes of the Accomac Assoc., 1865*, 7; Minute Book of Berryville Church, July 15, 1865; Minute Book of Zion Hill Baptist Church, May 1865, VSL; *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1865*, 20.

Their Confederate nation had been thoroughly defeated in its bid for independence. Now they needed to come to grips with this defeat and explain it in light of their faith in God's omnipotence.

The Commonwealth's Baptists humbly accepted the South's defeat. After such a grueling war, no one voiced hostility toward their conquerors. On the contrary, Baptists around the state promised to "prove themselves loyal citizens of the United States."<sup>9</sup>

While they humbly accepted defeat, Baptists refused to attribute their loss totally to the strength of Northern arms or to the weakness of their own forces. The might of the Northern military played a part in the Confederacy's defeat, but the hand of God also played a role. As the Rappahannock Association explained, the end result of the war was "part of the workings of Providence."<sup>10</sup>

Some Baptists scrutinized God's plan and concluded that their defeat served a grand purpose. According to the Dover Association, God used "the arbitrament of the sword" to

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9 *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1865*, 21. For similar statements, see *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1865*, 17; *Minutes of the Appomattox Assoc., 1865*, 5; Minute Book of Copper Creek Baptist Church, 76, VSL; *Minutes of the Dover Assoc., 1865*, 26.

10 *Minutes of the Rappahannock Baptist Association, May 29-31, 1865* (Richmond, 1866), 13, VBHS.

settle the issue of slavery. The great debate over human bondage divided the nation four years earlier; now the dispute was settled. The Dover's delegates asked that all Southerners accept the Lord's decision and adjust to a new society.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the altered relations between the races, Virginia's white Baptists wished to continue the religious association between the two groups. John L. Burrows of Richmond realized that the races would continue to live in close proximity to one another. In order to avoid "jealousies and dissensions," Burrows argued that the two groups needed to prolong their shared religious lives.<sup>12</sup>

William F. Broaddus also hoped to prolong the interracial religious experience. The pastor of Charlottesville Baptist asked the churches of the Albemarle Association to continue the great project of evangelizing the black population. In spite of the African Americans' new legal status, the white race still had a duty to share the gospel with them.<sup>13</sup>

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11 *Minutes of the Dover Assoc., 1865, 26.* See also *Minutes of the Appomattox Assoc., 1865, 5* and *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1865, 21.*

12 *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1865, 11-12.*

13 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1865, 18.*

One other factor contributed to the white Baptists' plans to continue their religious relationship with freedmen. In 1865, a new northern rival entered the religious fields of Virginia: the American Baptist Home Missionary Society. Among other projects, this group attempted to evangelize black Americans and form independent black religious organizations.

Baptists across the Commonwealth doubted the need for this group. In Robert Ryland's opinion, Virginia's black population enjoyed "a high degree of harmony and religious life," thanks in large part to the efforts of white Baptists. Moreover, he and the General Association worried that the Home Missionary Society had a more sinister motive at heart. They will "preach politics rather than religion," one delegate feared, " and ... excite the colored people to consider their former masters and real friends as their enemies."<sup>14</sup>

This fear led Baptists to declare publicly their opposition to the northern society. They also took action. In order to thwart the society's efforts and to limit its appeal, many congregations decided to allow black congregants more power over their own religious affairs. William Broaddus hoped that the freedmen would exercise this

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14 *Minutes of the General Assoc., 1865*, 17.

increased agency within white congregations, but separate churches remained a possibility.<sup>15</sup>

Some former slaves took advantage of their new found agency. At Ebenezer Baptist, black members of the congregation threatened to leave altogether unless the church agreed to allow them to hold independent, unsupervised meetings. In June, 1865, the church agreed to the freedmen's demands. Black congregants soon began to hold independent meetings in an arbor near the church when weather permitted. In inclement conditions, they met in the church building.<sup>16</sup>

In Stafford County, African-American members of White Oak Baptist Church left the church altogether. They soon formed two new congregations. The black Baptists of Mill Creek Church in Botetourt County took a different path. Directly after the war, they chose to remain a part of the church. Within months, however, white members restricted black congregants' ability to hold separate services. After this development, the whole black membership withdrew to form its own congregation.<sup>17</sup>

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15 Ibid.; *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1865*, 18. See also *Minutes of the Dover Assoc., 1865*, 25.

16 Minute Book of Ebenezer Baptist Church, June 1, 1865, VBHS.

17 Minute Book of White Oak Baptist Church, 80-85, VSL; Minute Book of Mill Creek Baptist Church, Dec. 2, 1865, VSL.

Meanwhile, at numerous churches around the state, the races continued to worship together. For example, the races worshipped in harmony at Preddie's Creek in Amherst County, Mattaponi Baptist in King and Queen County, and Hebron Church in Albemarle County. Yet in all cases, race relations clearly remained a thorny issue for Baptists throughout the initial months of peace.<sup>18</sup>

While the Baptists attempted to revive and rebuild their churches, comprehend the Confederacy's defeat, and solve the riddle of postwar race relations, they took solace in the knowledge that the soldiers were coming home. According to William Broaddus, returning veterans possessed "hearts all burning with a desire to be useful in the kingdom of our Divine Lord." Since so many troops either converted to Christianity or rededicated their lives to the gospel during the conflict, many Baptists hoped that the veterans would provide a spiritual spark on the homefront.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, even the influx of devout veterans could not immediately mend the churches' wounds. The Civil War had ravaged the land. Only faithful perseverance could bring healing. In time, however, recovery would come, and the

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18 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1865*, 3-5; *Minute Book of Mattaponi Church*, Dec. 9, 1865.

19 *Minutes of the Albemarle Assoc., 1865*, 17.



Baptist churches would reap a bountiful harvest from the spiritual fields of Virginia. Then the state's Baptists could claim that the Lord's prophecy had come true for their land:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.... And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Joel 2:28-29, 32a, NIV.

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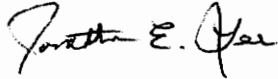
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan E. Lee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'L'.

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