

A WELSH BAPTIST CHURCH SUCCESSION FROM THE YEAR 63 TO THE 19th CENTURY

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A Course for the Welsh Succession

It was about A. D. 57, that Paul arrived at Rome, where he remained a prisoner two whole years, PREACHING THE KINGDOM OF GOD. In this space of time the progress of the gospel was prodigious. In his letter to Philippi he tells that, "his bonds of Christ were manifest in ALL THE PALACE, AND IN ALL OTHER PLACES." If St. Paul visited Britian, it must have been after his liberation. Assertions have been, from on this point, "and when tradition's voice has been, strong unvarying and continued," which has been the case on this subject, and there is no opposing evidence, we are inclined to conclude he visited our shore in his labor of love. It has been supposed his stay was very short, and that on his reaching the continent, or Rome, he sent Evangelists to prosecute the work. Fox says, Simon was crucified among the barbarians, but this is legendary. Gildas seems to fix the introductions of the gospel into Britian about the period of the great revolt and defeat under Queen Boadicea, which took place in A. D. 61. He observes, "Christ the true son, afforded his rays-that is, the knowledge of his precepts- to this island, benumbed with

extreme cold, having been at a great distance from the son: I do not mean the sun in the firmament, but the eternal son of heaven, about the end, as we know, of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. But many Evangelists came out of France about the year 63, and were the first successful planters of the gospel in this nation. The above considerations may serve to show us how easily the gospel might find its way into this remote province by emigrants, by soldiers, or evangelists. Early Christian writers equally assert that Britian was united in the beginning of the Christian era with the gospel. Clement of Rome, and Jerome, both speak of Paul having visited Britian. Tertullian positively asserts that those parts of Britian into which the Rome arms had never penetrated, were become subject to Christ. Eusebius endeavors to prove that the apostles had preached the gospel to the Romans, Persians, Indians, and to those which are called the British Isles. Theodoret maintains the same. Jeffery of Monmouth, (ch. 4), tells us that in this country Christianity flourished even from the apostolic days, and that a form of worship was delivered the Greek fathers make such frequent and great mention of the British Isles, their reception of the gospel, and to them by the apostles. Darteus (in cent. 1. for 37) says, the divine sense they had of the power thereof, that the churches were exactly constituted according to CHRIST'S PATTERN. G.H. Orchard, Published this history in Notting, England, June 30, 1856

Now Quoting from the History of THE WELSH BAPTIST by J. Davis published in Pittsburg, Pa., 1835. pages 178-179.

While the red horse of war prancing in wanton fury on the banks of Britain, trampling on the full ripe blossoms of its youth, and in the glory of its strength--while the sleepless sword was extending its ravages, and while miseries were multiplying, without any prospect of a suitable remedy, behold, the feet of them that bring good tidings of great joy, that publish peace and salvation, that say unto Zion thy God reigneth, advance toward the British isle. Yea, behold the heralds of the Redeemer, carrying in their hands the torch of everlasting truth, and in their hearts the zeal of the Lord of hosts, enter Wales, and commence their labors of love in Llanilltyd Vawr in the vale of Glamorgan.

The names of the missionaries were Illtyd, Kyndaf, and Arwystly. While in Rome as prisoners of war, they were brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God, and became teachers of the Christian religion.

These missionaries of the cross became instrumental in turning many Britons from their ignorance to the knowledge of Christ; and Druids, not a few, became obedient to the faith.

The supposition that Paul preached the gospel in Britain is not altogether without foundation. About six years ago, a polished stone, of about eight feet in length, was found embosomed eight

feet deep in the earth, near Llandilo Vawr, in Carmarthenshire, with this inscription upon it in the Welsh language: "Near this place has the apostle Paul been preaching the gospel--A. D. 64."

Now quoting from the History of the Welsh Baptists, J. Davis, Pages 19-20.

The vale of Olchon, also, is situated between mountains almost inaccessible. How many hundred years it had been inhabited by Baptists before William Erbury ever visited the place, we cannot tell. We have no account of him, or any other person, baptizing any before the time we know that there was a Baptist church there; that is, in 1683. It is a fact that cannot be controverted, that there were Baptists here at the commencement of the Reformation; and no man upon earth can tell when the church was formed, and who began to baptize in this little Piedmont. Whence came these Baptists? It is universally believed that it is the oldest church, but how old none can tell. We know that, at the Reformation, in the reign of Charles the First, they had a minister named Howell Vaughan, quite a different sort of a Baptist from Erbury, Wroth, Vavasor Powell, and others, who were the great reformers, but had not reformed so far as they ought to have done, in the opinion of the Olchon Baptists. And that was not to be wondered at; for they had dissented from the church of England, and probably brought some of her corruptions with them,

but the mountain Baptists were not dissenters from that establishment. We know that the reformers were for mixed communion, but the Olchon Baptists received no such practices. In short, these were plain, strict, apostolical Baptists. They would have order and no confusion--the word of God their only rule. The reformers, or the reformed Baptists who had been brought up in the established church, were for laying on of hands on the baptized, but these Baptists whom they found on the mountains of Wales were no advocates of it. As the Baptists of Piedmont were much disappointed in the reformation of Luther; so these on the mountains of the Principality were, in some degree, disappointed in the reformation of their Baptist brethren in Wales; not compromise matters with Austin. Indeed, they were so for the Olchon Baptists were like those Baptists that would much like them, in many things too numerous to be mentioned, that they must have been a separate people, maintaining the order of the New Testament in every age and generation, from the year 63 to the present time.

Now quoting from the History of the Welsh Baptists, J. Davis, Pages 83.

About this time a Baptist meeting-house was built at Hay, a market-town about eight miles from Olchon, where the church generally met until the persecution, when they had to draw towards

the Black Mountains, and worship God under the canopy of heaven, as we have observed already. Several branches of this church have been formed into distinct churches, which has reduced her to narrow bounds, but still she abides as a mother among many daughters. Many were the trials through which she passed; many were the afflictions wherewith she was afflicted; and many and severe were the persecutions which she endured.

Now quoting from the History of the Welsh Baptists, J. Davis, Pages 107-108. Rhyd-wilim Church Came From Olchon In 1667.

William Jones, an ejected minister, a prisoner for preaching the gospel of Christ, being convinced in the prison of Carmarthen, that believers' baptism is the only baptism of the New Testament, as soon as he was liberated from the said prison, went immediately to Olchon, nearly one hundred miles, to be baptized. Returning to the neighborhood of Rhyd-wilim, (whence he was taken to prison in 1667,) in the warmest and most severe period of the bloody persecution under that monster, (commonly called King Charles the second,) he actually did baptize sixty-nine persons in six weeks; which was the beginning of the Baptist church at that place. In a short time, eleven were added to them by baptism. On the 12th day of the 5th month, they were regularly formed into a church, by William Prichard, of Llanwenarth, and Thomas Watkins, of Olchon. On the 13th day of the same month, William Jones and

Griffith Howell were chosen elders, and Morgan Ryttrerch, or Prittroe, and Llewellyn John, deacons.

Now quoting from the History of the Welsh Baptists, J. Davis, Pages 72-73. Welsh Tract came from Rhydwillim Church in the county Pembroke, South Wales.

Thomas Griffiths was born in 1645, in the parish of Llanfernach, county of Pembroke. He was baptized and became a member of the church at Rhydwillim, in 1677. He resided at that time in the parish of Melinau. He began to preach about the year 1683, and had to suffer his part of the dreadful persecution under Charles the second, for the space of eleven years. At first, the subject of his preaching were the perfections of the Deity, the beauty of creation, and man's depravity and moral obligation: subjects which, however excellent in themselves, and however well managed, are, nevertheless, not calculated to awaken the careless sinner from a state of carnal stupidity, any more than the thunders of Sinai and the damnation of hell. But when he directed the attention of his hearers to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world--to the incarnation, life, sufferings, and death of Christ--his triumphant victory over the powers of hell, and his glorious resurrection from the grave--he often found himself so impressed, his heart so much warmed and animated, attended with correspondent effects on his hearers, that the Spirit of God seemed

to have descended with such astonishing energy, as to overpower all opposition, like a mighty torrent sweeping before it whatever comes in its way with irresistible force. In the year 1701, he and fifteen of the members of the church went to America in the same vessel. They formed themselves into a church at Milford, in the county of Pembroke, South Wales, and Thomas Griffiths became their pastor in the month of June, 1701. They embarked on board the ship James and Mary, and on the 8th day of September following, they landed at Philadelphia. The brethren there treated them courteously, and advised them to settle about Penepeck. Thither they went, and there continued about a year and a half. During that time twenty-one persons joined them, but finding it inconvenient to abide there, they purchased land in the county of Newcastle, and gave it the name of Welsh-tract, where they built a meeting-house, and Thomas Griffiths labored among them as their pastor, till he died on the 25th of July, 1725, aged 80 years. He was buried at Penepeck.

Reynold Howell, in a letter to Miles Harris, dated 1752, states, "that the Baptist church at Welsh-tract, under the pastoral care of Thomas Griffiths, was the first regularly formed church in the state of Pennsylvania." In a letter from Samuel Jones to Caleb Evans, dated 1713, we are informed, "that T. Griffiths was of almost infinite service to the cause of Christ in that region, notwithstanding that he was not a man of popular talents." Of the

fifteen that went over with him, two of them at least came up out of the fiery furnace of persecution: Griffith Nicholas and Jennet Davis.

**Baptist Encyclopedia, William Cathcart, 1883, page 1230
“Welsh Tract Church, Del”:**

Their principles soon spread in Delaware and into Pennsylvania and Maryland, and to Pedee River, S. C.

“The community at Welsh Tract, in early times held a respectable stand among the American Baptists; it was one of the five churches which formed the Philadelphia Association; its ministers were among the most active in all Baptist operations, and the whole community was not behind any of the members, of that quintuple alliance.” (Benedict’s Baptist History, p. 626.)

A History of the Baptists in the Middle States. By Henry C. Vedder published in Philadelphia in 1898, from pages 93-99-100.

Henry C. Vedder says, "The turning of the tide may be noted in the formation of the Welsh Tract Church, and the increase of its influence in the Philadelphia Association. The Baptists who came from Wales really determined the character of the Baptist denomination in America, and finally overcame the strong Arminian influence of New England. From 1742 the influence of the Philadelphia Association was paramount. Its missionary zeal was great; men closely connected with this body, and fully

believing its Confession, became preachers of the gospel in New England, New York, and the Carolinas. By the close of the century, the Calvinistic party was in the ascendency everywhere; it had completed its triumphs by the capture of the stronghold of Arminianism, the First Baptist Church of Providence, thanks to the Rhode Island College and President Manning.

By the year 1800, forty-eight Associations had been organized among the Baptist churches of the United States, most of which were in a flourishing condition, active in evangelization, and powerfully promoting the unity, piety, and mutual acquaintance of the churches, systematizing their efforts and provoking one another to good works. They had proceeded, as we have seen, from a single center, the Philadelphia Association being the mother of them all.

Welsh-Neck Church was organized from Welsh Tract Church in the year 1737. This church was first called Pedee, from the circumstance of its being situated on the great Pedee River, 60 miles north of Georgetown; but when other branches were settled on the same river it became necessary to give this a more special name, and accordingly the compound name of WELSH-NECK was selected, which, descriptive of the people who founded the church, and of its local and peninsulated situation. This church originated in the following manner: In the year 1737, 30 members of the Welsh-Tract Church, which was then in the province of

Pennsylvania, but now in the State of Delaware, arrived here, viz: James James, Esq., and wife and three sons, Philip, who was their minister, Abel, Daniel, and their wives. Daniel Devonald and wife, Thomas Evans and wife, one of the same name and his wife, John Jones and wife, three of the Harrys, Thomas, David and John and his wife, Samuel Wilds and wife, Samuel Evans and wife, Griffith Jones and wife, David and Thomas Jones and their wives. These thirty members, with their children and households, settled at a place called Catfish, on Pedee River, but they soon removed about fifty miles higher up the same river, where they made a permanent settlement, and where they all, except James James, esq., who died at Catfish, were embodied into a church, January, 1738.

James James, Esq., was the most distinguished of this company of emigrants, for he was the head of the party, and his son Philip became the pastor of the church. Of him, I can learn no more than he died at Catfish. His son Philip, the first pastor of the Welsh Neck Church, was born near Pennepeck, Pennsylvania, in 1701; he was ordained over the church in 1743, by Messrs. Chanler and Simmons, and died in 1753.

This company were all either native Welchmen or were the descendants of emigrants from that country, who had resided a while in Pennsylvania and Delaware before they emigrated to this southern location.

This was a substantial company of Baptist professors, and laid a foundation for a permanent and highly respectable community, which branched out in different directions. Which during the next century became the center from which thirty-eight Baptist Churches sprang, in the immediate vicinity. Those Baptist baptized on profession of faith and repentance and they were Calvinistic in doctrine.

This information was gathered from Baptist histories as follows:

WELSH BAPTIST HISTORY by J. Davis 1835, p. 125.

**HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST by David Benedict 1848 edition,
p. 704-705**

**HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST by Thomas Armitage 1886, p.
712-713**

**BAPTIST ENCYCLOPEDIA by William Cathcart 1883, p.
1231**

**HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS by David Benedict 1820
edition, p. 361**

John Hightower, Alexander Devin and Joseph Logan were ministers of the Pedee River section of South Carolina. They also helped organize churches in South Carolina before they migrated to Southern Kentucky. According to the History of the South Carolina Baptist by Leath Townsend, pages 237-239-240.

I will now quote from the J. H. Spencer's History of Kentucky Baptists vol. 1, from pages 322 to 325.

"The Kentucky Legislature had passed an act in 1795, by which a preemption right to two hundred acres of land was secured to each settler in the Green River country. This induced a large influx of immigrants from the southeast to settle in that region. Most of the early settlers along the southern border of the State were from the Carolinas. A settlement by people from these States was made on the waters of Drake's Creek, in what are now Allen and Warren counties, as early as 1795. Among these were a number of Baptists, and two or three Baptist preachers. Here the first church in that part of Kentucky lying south of Green River, was formed.

Union church was located near the West Fork of Drake's Creek, in Warren county. The preachers known to have settled early in that region were John Hightower, Alexander Devin and

Joseph Logan. Some or all of these were probably the instruments in gathering this church. It was constituted sometime during the year 1796.

John Hightower was the first pastor of Union church. He was an able and successful preacher, and a man of tireless zeal in the cause of his Master. He and Alexander Devin and Joseph Logan were instrumental in raising up most of the early churches in that region.

Mr. Hightower was a native of South Carolina, and spent the early years of his ministry in preaching among the Baptists of that State. In the year 1795, he and a number of others formed a settlement on the Middle Fork of Drake's Creek in which is now Allen County. Here he spent the remainder of his days. As stated above, he and his fellow laborers gathered Union church in 1796. In 1798, he gathered Sulphur Spring church in Allen County, of which he became pastor. During the Great Revival, which began two years after this, his great zeal so carried him away that his feet were severely frost bitten. From this circumstance he was unable to walk for about a year. But as soon as he was able to sit in a chair, he made appointments for preaching at his house, and continued preaching with much fervor, sitting in his chair, till he was able to walk again. He was badly crippled in his feet the remainder of his life, but continued to preach with zeal and faithfulness, till the Lord took him to himself, about the year 1823.

Alexander Devin was a co-laborer of Mr. Hightower in building up the first churches in Allen and Warren counties. He was also a strong doctrinal preacher, a man of fine talents, and exerted a strong influence on society.

Mr. Devin was raised in South Carolina, where he spent some years in preaching the gospel. He came to Kentucky, and was one of the first settlers on the present territory of Allen county.

Joseph Logan was a native of Virginia. In young manhood, he moved to North Carolina, and married Annie Bias. Here also he obtained hope in Christ, and was baptized. Not long after he united with the Church, he moved to South Carolina, where he was put into the ministry, and was, for some years, pastor of a church on Pedee River. The exact time of his coming to Kentucky is not known, but he aided in gathering Bethlehem, the second church formed in Allen County. This large old church, located two miles north of Scottsville, the county seat of Allen, was constituted by John Hightower, Alexander Devin and Joseph Logan, January 31, 1801, and Mr. Logan was immediately chosen its pastor.

I will give the charter members of Bethlehem Church from Spencer's History Vol. II, page 532. Names of the following: James Atwood and his wife, Margaret, William Strait and his wife, Dorcas, William Thomas and his wife, Mary, Thomas Spillman and Polly Richey. It was probably gathered by Joseph Logan and John Hightower. It was, at first, called the Church on the head of

Difficult, under which style it united with Green River Association, the same year it was constituted. At that time it numbered forty-eight members. The following year, it dismissed eight members, probably to go into the constitution of either Trammels Fork, or Lower Difficult, both of which churches were constituted that year. In 1802, it was represented in Green River Association by Elder Joseph Logan (probably its pastor), William Strait, and William Thomas, and reported a membership of eighty-eight, thirty-two of whom had been received by experience and baptism, and twenty-one by letter, during the year. The church continued to prosper, under the preaching of Joseph Logan, John Hightower, Alex. Devin, Alex. Davidson and Samuel Greathouse, till 1811.

Mt. Pleasant and Puncheon Camp, both constituted in 1804., are the oldest churches now belonging to the body. Mt. Pleasant in Barren County. From this church Thomas Scrivner gathered Fountain Run church in 1829 and also Indian Creek in 1835. Spring Creek church was organized in 1849 from Puncheon Camp in Allen County and also Red Hill church was organized in 1925. **For further information see J. H. Spencer's History Of The Kentucky Baptists, Vol. I and II, published in 1885.**