Samuel Davies

Apostle to Virginia

Dewey Roberts

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To Jane, my Chara

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SOLA FIDE PUBLICATIONS
Destin, Florida
Appreciations

Samuel Davies is one of the lesser known men God used in that period of American history known as the Great Awakening. But being lesser known today does not mean his ministry was not strong and effective in his time. Davies as been referred to as the founder of Southern Presbyterianism, and as the “Apostle” of Virginia. He planted congregations throughout central Virginia and south into North Carolina. Dewey Roberts provides us with a new and fresh history of Samuel Davies that will engage us in reviewing his life and ministry as well as this period of eighteenth-century America. After reading this book I believe you will agree with what Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said of Samuel Davies: “You Americans do not know one of your greatest preachers.” But we will know and appreciate him after reading this book.

Dr. Dominic A. Aquila,
President, New Geneva Theological Seminary, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Dewey Roberts introduces his readers to the great Samuel Davies, providing a robust historical and biographical account where there was so little before. Davies’ all-round ministry is made known as a renowned preacher, an earnest minister to African slaves and Overhill Cherokees, and as the president of early Princeton. Roberts describes the phases of Davies’ life in which an apprehension of God’s grace moved such a gifted man from potential to reality.

Dewey Roberts is a fine biographer, describing Samuel Davies’ Christian experience with such pastoral precision that we are able to appreciate the best of the Great Awakening’s influence on him and learn from worst of trials he faced. Roberts sounds his conclusion with admiration and wisdom: “We know in part and we saw in part something of what those uncommon gifts were, but, for reasons known only to God, he was called to his heavenly home before all his gifts were manifested to the world. Yet, here is where Davies was perhaps best—he was arguably the best combination of evangelist, preacher, and theologian in the whole
Appreciations

history of the church. With his passing, the American church lost her greatest preacher ever and one of the most astounding all-around ministers to ever grace an American pulpit.

Dr. Robert Davis Smart,
Senior Pastor of Christ Church (PCA), Bloomington-Normal, Illinois

I read Reverend Dewey Roberts’ _Samuel Davies_ with an eagerness to learn more about one of the most important but underappreciated figures in American Presbyterian history. The Samuel Davies story is nothing short of amazing grace. That a man is able, in the short span of thirty-seven years, and with the relatively limited communication resources of the mid-eighteenth century, to produce so varied a record of service is a testimony to the prodigious subject of this new book, as well as to the gracious intent of the God whom Davies preached.

As Reverend Roberts demonstrates with remarkably fresh and readable prose and well-documented footnotes (that form their own enticing footpath begging to be followed) Davies was not merely an evangelist (in a day when Whitefield roamed the Colonial coast), or an academic, or a college president (following Jonathan Edwards); he was a pastor, a writer, a patriot, a hymn-writer, and an administrator. He was quintessentially American and in a real way forged those peculiar traits that mark out the strong, optimistic spirit that the world thinks of today as the indomitable youthful spirit of our people. Yet, Davies was an unabashed Calvinist. He was not rigid as some imagine Calvinists—indeed, he chastised those whose theology made them brittle and inhuman—but, was unashamed to confess that _the Westminster Confession of Faith_ was essential for ordination in the Presbyterian Church of his day.

Dewey Roberts should be commended for this generous work in bringing this great American Presbyterian clergyman back to the vanguard of spiritual giants (where Davies belongs). For this Samuel Davies who stirred the spirit of a young Patrick Henry, may well be the one who stirs the spirit of some young person, now, to serve God in a new day. Perhaps—shall we not pray—the Lord who brought revival then might even grace us with even the minutest dewdrop of spiritual renewal in our land. Oh, what a joy that would be for this country that Davies helped to found! For as I read this new book on Samuel Davies, I could
not help but pray the words of his hymn for our generation (On Thee, O Lord our God, we call):

“Lord, we repent, we weep, we mourn,
To our forsaken God we turn;
Oh, spare our guilty country, spare
The church thine hand hath planted here!”

Without reservation and with the greatest enthusiasm possible I commend *Samuel Davies* by Rev. Dewey Roberts to the Church with my prayer for personal and corporate revival.

**Dr. Michael A. Milton, PhD, MPA**
James Ragsdle Chair of Missions and Evangelism, Erskine Theological Seminary
President, D. James Kennedy Institute
Fourth Chancellor, Reformed Theological Seminary
Chaplain (Colonel), US Army Reserve

I have been waiting for years to read a thorough, well-documented and enlightening biography on Samuel Davies, the greatest preacher our nation has seen. Thanks to Dewey Roberts we now have this important work on Davies. Read this book for your edification and motivation for ministry.

**Al Baker**
Evangelist with Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship (PEF)
Director of Samuel Davies Conference on Evangelism
**Dewey Roberts** was born in Cleveland, Mississippi, and raised in the southeastern states of the USA. He studied Bible and English at Belhaven College and earned his Master of Divinity from Reformed Theological Seminary (both institutions in Jackson, Mississippi). He is the founding pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Destin, Florida, where he has served since 1995. He was an Army Reserve chaplain for twenty-four years and served three tours on active duty. He retired in the rank of Colonel in 2011 and spent the last eight years of his chaplain career as a writer / instructor at the US Army Chaplain School and Center in Fort Jackson, SC. In addition to his pastoral duties, he also serves as Executive Director of Church Planting International (CPI) which promotes reformed indigenous missions in Russia, Uganda, Myanmar, India, and Portugal. CPI was founded by Rev. Donald Dunkerley in 1993.

*Samuel Davies: Apostle to Virginia* is the first full-scale biography ever produced on Samuel Davies, America’s greatest ever preacher. It is a meticulously researched work which presents the story of Davies’ life from cradle to grave. With the publication of this biography, the great Samuel Davies will no longer be an obscure figure from the past. It deserves a place on the bookshelves of those who have read the biographies of Whitefield, Spurgeon, McCheyne, Edwards, Lloyd-Jones, and other great Christian ministers.


Dewey and his wife, Jane, have two children and four grandchildren.
Acknowledgements

The research for this book began in earnest in October of 1978 with a visit to the Presbyterian Historical Center at Montreat, North Carolina. I was thankful to find several primary source materials on Samuel Davies, but was dismayed that there was so much of his life shrouded in mystery. It was, nonetheless, my conviction from the beginning of this project that Davies deserved to have his story told from cradle to grave. Thus, I undertook years of tireless research and have tried to leave no stone unturned in my effort to uncover the details of his life. Thirty-nine years is a long time to work on a book, but those years were not all spent on this one project.

A twenty-four year career as an Army Reserve/Army chaplain often left me little time to devote to the writing of this book. I always tried to redeem the time and studied at major libraries in every city where Providence placed me in hopes of finding some hidden treasure about Davies. Yet, the most important developments for completing this book came because of the Internet. Google books now has millions of books which can be studied online. The Evans Collection of Early American Imprints (including numerous materials concerning the Colonial era) has made many of those documents available online. Formerly, they were accessible only by using a microdot reader and could be found only in major libraries. Then, JSTOR has numerous magazine and periodical articles available online which once could be found only in certain libraries. In the past three years, I have been able to do a great deal of in-depth research on Samuel Davies from the confines of my office at the church I pastor. It has also been easier to access the materials and much faster to do so.

There are several libraries where I have studied that I especially want to acknowledge: the Firestone Library at Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey; the Princeton Theological Seminary Library in Princeton, New Jersey; the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Historical Society of Pennsylvania—Library Company of Philadelphia in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.; the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, Virginia; and, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. The staff at each of these libraries was most helpful to me in locating materials that aided my research on Davies. Additionally, there are other libraries that have answered enquiries and
sent me photopies of documents about Davies. I particularly want to thank the staff at the Library of Union Presbyterian Seminary.

My editor, Jim Holmes of Taylors, South Carolina, has always been available to answer my questions or help me to think through an issue. His suggestions for the organization of the chapters has been invaluable as has his work on editing the whole manuscript, formatting it for print, and designing the dust jacket of the book.

In writing 126,000 words, there are numerous typographical, punctuation, and grammatical errors that find their way into the text. I am very thankful for the assistance given to me by several people who proofread the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions: Jane Roberts, Kathy Orr, Bob Good, Chuck Stoyer, Rich Rogers, Gail Rogers, Linda Wohleber, Sally Maddox, and Ed Maney. This book is much better as a result of their help. If any errors remain, they are wholly my fault.

**Dewey Roberts,**
Pastor, Cornerstone Presbyterian Church
Destin, Florida
Foreword

The Puritan Conference took place annually at Westminster Chapel and for nineteen years the much anticipated closing address was given by the chairman, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. I was privileged to hear many of them, and in 1964, in his address entitled “John Calvin and George Whitefield,” Dr. Lloyd-Jones spoke of George Whitefield’s preaching saying:

Take the way his ministry is described for us by the author of the great hymn which begins with the words:

Great God of wonders, all Thy ways
Are matchless, godlike, and divine.

Samuel Davies himself was an astonishing preacher and a great intellect also. He had been involved in a great revival in the eighteenth century. He had been made principal of a college and one year Samuel Davies and Gilbert Tennent were sent over to this country to collect money for that college. They arrived after a terrible voyage during which they thought they were going to be shipwrecked many times over. They at last arrived in London on a Saturday morning, and the first question they asked was this—“Is Mr. Whitefield in town?”

To their delight they were told he was and that he was due to preach the next morning; I think it was in Moorfields. So they made certain that they would be there in very good time to listen to him. Samuel Davies writes the account of the service and this is what he says. He says, “It became clear to me quite soon in the service that Mr. Whitefield must have had an exceptionally busy week; obviously he had not had time to prepare his sermon properly.” He adds, “From the standpoint of construction and ordering of thought it was very deficient and defective; it was a poor sermon. But,” said Samuel Davies, “the unction that attended it was such that I would gladly risk the rigours of shipwreck in the Atlantic many times over in order to be there just to come under its gracious influence.” That is preaching, my friends. Poor sermon, but tremendous preaching! What do we know about this?¹

Here we have one of the most discerning and helpful preachers of the twentieth century, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, writing about the impact that

one of the greatest preachers of the eighteenth century, George Whitefield, had upon another preacher who himself had displayed those rarest of homiletic qualities so evident in the New Testament apostles, an awakening ministry allied to much discernment, a keen intellect and powers of poetic expression, Samuel Davies. Doesn’t this whet your appetite to know more about him? Until now we have been dependent for our knowledge of this American preacher with his Welsh forebears upon the reprint volumes of his sermons, and also the brief sketch of his life in the standard work on revival written by Iain Murray entitled “Revival and Revivalism” (Banner of Truth). Now our friend Dewey Roberts has come to our deliverance and has provided for us this rich biography of Davies’ life.

Of course it is a “fascinating read” and a page turner. It will thus be widely enjoyed and appreciated, but its ultimate value does not lie in the engaging nature of its style, nor in any romanticized view of the eighteenth century. Indeed, when Davies and Tennent walked about London and even met the diminutive Wesley brothers, they were disturbed by the carnality and degradation they saw everywhere in the metropolis, and that was at a time some decades after the Great Awakening had begun. The book is not nostalgic; it is not looking back to a utopia that never existed. It is valuable because Samuel Davies is approached with four crucial questions in mind:

How did Samuel Davies become the mighty preacher he was?
What did he preach and do?
Were his sermons biblical and how did they become an awakening ministry?
What can we learn from his life and witness today?

We are living in remarkable days when we are being given the fruits of the studies of many men from all over the world of the greatest preachers of the past, and these books are of great potential importance for the church. The long-ignored writings of Reformers, Puritans, and the leading preachers of the Evangelical Awakening are being reprinted, and these books have reached the ends of the earth with the strange discovery of their unexpected relevance for today and in every place of the stand they took and what they said. They expose much weakness of contemporary preaching, and they assist us in our controversy with new movements that have emerged in conservative evangelical circles. Read-
ing the life of Samuel Davies is a practical enterprise, not something theoretical or archaeological. Remembering him is to honor one who stood fast for the central important truths of the Christian religion. His life and opinions can encourage our own generation to believe in God and His glorious grace.

Geoffrey Thomas,
Pastor Emeritus of Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth, Wales
Samuel Davies has suffered in obscurity, unknown to many Christians today, because there was no full-scale biography written about him during the eighteenth century. That oversight by his peers and those who knew him best has resulted in many facts about his life being lost to posterity. It has also proven to be the greatest challenge to me in trying to do his memory justice with the writing of this new biography. Where direct information about his life was not available, I have had to supplement it with facts from secondary sources.

A diary which he started keeping in his youth has apparently been lost for all time. That diary was mentioned by Samuel Finley at the funeral service of Davies in 1761 and was last known to be viewed by Dr. Jonathan Witherspoon who was one of the successors of Davies as president of Princeton College. If it were available it would provide valuable insights into the circumstances of his conversion, his education, his church membership, his assurance of salvation, and numerous other details. It is very likely that this diary was burned in the fire that nearly destroyed Nassau Hall in 1802.

There are several people who have written partial or brief biographies of Davies—Ashbel Green, John Holt Rice, William Henry Foote, Albert Barnes, Enoch Pond, William B. Sprague, B. B. Edwards, George H. Bost, George W. Pilcher, and Iain H. Murray. Each of those biographies, biographical notices, or unpublished manuscripts covers the same general facts while leaving much of his life untouched. There are some interesting anecdotes communicated by the older biographers—Green, Rice, Foote, Barnes, Edwards, and Sprague—but very little information on the first twenty-three years of his life.

It would have been a much easier task for me to write a biography of Samuel Davies using primary source materials only. Such a biography would have added little new information about this great man. Instead, I chose the more difficult task of writing a full-scale biography. One of his earlier biographers, B. B. Edwards, suggested the need of such a work 180 years ago:

The individual who shall undertake this work will deserve well of the church and of his country. He should make a personal investigation of the places where Davies resided—Newcastle in Delaware, Princeton in New Jersey, and the scenes of the labors of Davies in Virginia—examining the records of the college of New Jersey, and of the ecclesiastical bodies with which the president was connected. Something might possibly be found
in Nottingham, Pa., and among the papers of Dr. Gibbons of London. It is not honorable to the country, that while the memorials of her greatest general are carefully prepared and elegantly published, many memorials of one of her most distinguished pulpit orators, should be left to decay and utter loss. ¹

The Scripture teaches us that every fact must be confirmed by two or three witnesses. Secondary source materials have sometimes provided irrefutable documentary evidence of some fact pertinent to Davies’ life. Thus, I decided long ago to write a new and fresh biography of Davies instead of a romanticized retelling of the same facts already known about him. I especially wanted to show that Davies was a child of the Great Awakening and one of the greatest evangelists in that exciting period of church history. Therefore, this book is being sent forth to the Christian public with the hope that it will inspire a new generation of believers to pray and labor for a fresh awakening of God’s Spirit in our day.

Dewey Roberts

The Son of Prayer

“The greatest preacher you have ever produced in this country was Samuel Davies, the author of the hymn, ‘Great God of wonders, all thy ways/Are matchless, godlike, and divine’, and the man who followed Jonathan Edwards as president of Princeton.”¹

~Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones~

¹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, Knowing the Times (Edinburgh, Scotland and Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 263.
Patrick Henry awoke early in the morning on March 20, 1775, which was a day of great importance for Virginia and the American colonies. A light snow was falling as he mounted his horse for the twenty-mile ride to Richmond. Henry was the delegate for Hanover County to the second meeting of the Virginia Convention that would debate the issue of waging war with Great Britain. Many of the delegates were Tories who opposed any rebellion against the Crown. Recently bereaved of his wife, Sallie, after twenty years of marriage, the impending crisis at this convention weighed heavily on Henry’s heart.

When Henry arrived in Richmond, the sky was clearing and the delegates were gathering outside St. John’s Parish Church. There was a flurry of excitement with horses, gigs, and carriages everywhere, according to witnesses. St. John’s, which sat conspicuously on Church Hill, was the only building in the city that could seat the one-hundred-and-thirty delegates and friends from sixty-one counties. Suddenly, a howling March wind swept through the church grounds, upsetting the horses and sending the delegates scurrying for seats. The foul weather further depressed an already downcast assembly, particularly Henry, who quickly repaired to the third pew.

Peyton Randolph, speaker of the Virginia House of Burgesses, was elected President of the Convention, which made the cause of rebellion appear hopeless. Little was accomplished the first day. The following day, Henry made a resolution to arm the colony which passed the convention with ease. His second motion, to declare war with Great Britain, was hotly debated and vigorously opposed by delegates Edmund Pendleton, Robert Carter Nicholas, Richard Bland, Benjamin Harrison, and George Wythe. Much of their opposition focused on Henry himself with some delegates ready to oppose any measure which he championed.

On the epoch fourth day of this convention, March 23, Henry passed “through the westerly gate in the brick wall surrounding the churchyard and . . . into the little wooden building.” The weather was balmy and the church windows were opened to let in the refreshing breeze. Randolph called the convention to order at 10 a.m. and the ironic prayer for the King

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2 Norine Dickson Campbell, *Patrick Henry: Patriot and Statesman* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1969), 123. Most of the information for the first six paragraphs is taken from this work.


4 Ibid.
was read by Reverend Miles Selden, rector of the St. John’s Church. A motion from the Jamaican Assembly⁵ was read to the convention by Pendleton, the delegate from Caroline County. That resolution wished for “a speedy return to those halcyon days” of British rule as “a free and happy people.”⁶ This sentiment aroused the patriotic spirit of Henry who quickly presented amendments which were vigorously opposed by several influential members of the Convention.

Rising from his seat, Henry spoke in favor of his amendments without attacking the patriotism of the opponents to his motion. In the audience were John Mason, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington. The time for action was now, in Henry’s opinion. Before he finished, Henry gained immortality for his speech with the final sentence:

I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

As the delegates reflected on his words, liberty and freedom wafted through the assembly like the balmy breeze that blew in the open windows. Colonel Edward Carrington, a delegate from Virginia to the Continental Congress in 1786-1788, was so overcome with emotion as he listened by an open window that he exclaimed, “Let me be buried on this spot!”⁷

Henry dramatically held up an ivory letter-opener as he exclaimed, “Give me liberty . . . ,” and feigned stabbing his heart as he uttered the word “death.”⁸ This speech stunned the convention into silence for a few minutes before Richard Henry Lee rose to second Henry’s motion. Jefferson, who called Henry the “greatest orator ever,” spoke in favor of the motion with great eloquence. Henry’s speech carried the day. His amendment was passed, and the colony of Virginia prepared for war with Great Britain.

Where did Henry, the former tavern keeper and planter whom some considered to be illiterate, acquire such oratorical powers? As a youth, he drove his mother and sisters by carriage over Hanover County’s back

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⁵ Jamaica was a British colony.  
⁶ Meade, Patrick Henry, Practical Revolutionary, 23.  
⁷ Campbell, Patrick Henry: Patriot and Statesman, 131.  
⁸ Meade, Patrick Henry, Practical Revolutionary, 35.
roads from their home at Studley to hear the great Samuel Davies preach.\(^9\)

On the ride home, he was required to recite as much of the sermon as he could remember, which was undoubtedly the source of his education in oratory. Henry repeated the sermons word for word and mimicked the gestures of the man he esteemed as “the greatest orator he ever heard.”\(^10\)

Two decades before his speech to the Virginia Convention at Richmond, Henry had heard several of Davies’ war sermons, particularly “Religion and Patriotism the Constituents of Good Soldiers,” which was preached at Hanover Courthouse on August 17, 1755 to the company raised by Captain Samuel Overton for the French and Indian War. There are no phrases in Davies’ sermons that exactly match Henry’s immortal words, but the ideas of fighting for liberty and preparing for death are interspersed throughout them. Many of the ideas in Henry’s speech were inimical to Davies’ thoughts and style of oratory.

Who was Samuel Davies, whose preaching prowess was the model for one of the most important speeches in American history? Known by few today, Davies was, in the opinion of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, former pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, “the greatest preacher you ever produced in this country.”\(^11\) The man who inspired some of the most important words in the history of the United States and who championed religious toleration in Virginia well deserves our study.

Without Davies’ example, Patrick Henry might never have become the orator and statesman he was. Without Henry’s moving speech before Virginia’s convention in March of 1775, that colony might not have voted in favor of the Revolutionary War. Without Virginia’s support in the cause of freedom, her favorite son, George Washington, might not have led the Continental Army through all the difficult days and losing battles to eventual victory over the British in the Revolutionary War. Perhaps independence would have come at a later date through different circumstances, but the place of Davies in the prelude to the Revolution is but one of the reasons he is worthy of this book.

There are several other reasons Davies is worthy of our attention. First, he was a champion of religious toleration and freedom. He was the first

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\(^10\) Ibid., p. 19.

\(^11\) Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times*, 263.
Presbyterian minister east of the Shenandoah and Appalachian Mountains to be lawfully licensed in Virginia, and he was intimately involved in efforts to secure the freedoms guaranteed by the Act of Toleration in 1689 for other Dissenters. Second, he was active in promoting the flames of revival throughout Virginia for over a decade. Third, he was one of the first American ministers to actively labor among the African slaves, and received many of them into membership in his Hanover congregation. Fourth, he started a mission to the Overhill Cherokees along the western borders of North Carolina and South Carolina. Fifth, his sermons were among the most popular in print for nearly a century after his death. Finally, he was the fourth President of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton College or Princeton University), succeeding the venerable Jonathan Edwards upon his unexpected death. All these reasons commend his life to us as worthy of our interest and study.

**Morgan David’s Family Flees Religious Persecution**

The hand of God can be seen in preparing Samuel Davies to be a champion of liberty and religious toleration through providential events on both sides of his family. Both his paternal and maternal ancestors were subject to religious persecution in Wales. His paternal grandparents, Morgan and Catherine David and their three sons—Shionn, Evan, and David—fled the persecution of Quakers (the Society of Friends) in Wales and emigrated to America in the spring of 1684. Almost all of the Welsh who emigrated to Pennsylvania in the 1680s were Quakers by religious conviction.

The persecution came as a result of the Act of Uniformity of 1662 which denied the rights of religious freedom for all Nonconformists except those who would worship according to the Church of England’s *Book of Common Prayer*. Quakers, though, were more persecuted than almost any other religious group. Their very presence could cause Anglicans and Dissenters alike to become distempered. They held several distinctive doctrines which were repugnant to most Protestants: they took the Scriptural and Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers to an extreme; they

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12Morgan David was born in 1622–23 and was several years older than his wife, Catherine.
13The Davies family name, typical of the period, is alternately spelled David, Dafid, Dafis, Dafydd, or Davis.
rejected creeds; they held to the doctrine of the “inner light” that believers could be guided by the Holy Spirit apart from the Word of God which would cause their hearts to tremble or quake (hence their nickname); they also rejected the sacraments, war, and taking oaths in law courts. The Quakers were among the first to flee to America to be a part of William Penn’s “Holy Experiment” which was envisioned as a safe haven for all those who were persecuted for their faith. In 1682, twenty-three ships brought two thousand Quakers or Quaker sympathizers to Pennsylvania, with ninety more ships coming over the next three years.

Leaving their Welsh homeland in 1684, Morgan David and his family boarded the Vine at Merionethshire and ventured their future on a new start in the colonies. The master of the Vine was fifty-four-year-old William Preeson of Liverpool, and virtually all his passengers were Quakers. Such passenger ships as the Vine were almost always overcrowded. Food was constantly in short supply which caused some to arrive at their destination malnourished while others died from the ravages of sickness and disease during the voyage. Nearly thirty passengers on the Welcome, which carried William Penn and the first wave of Quaker emigrants to America in 1682, died from smallpox. Similarly, an account by Edward Foulke of his voyage on the Robert and Elizabeth in 1698 records that a fatal illness of dysentery broke out on their ship resulting in forty-five deaths, including three ship’s crewmen and numerous children. As Foulke commented:

The distemper was so mortal that two or three corpses were cast overboard every day while it lasted. But through the favour and mercy of divine providence I, with my wife and nine children, escaped that sore mortality, and arrived safe at Philadelphia.²⁴

Then, there were dangers from oceanic storms that drenched passengers in sea water, that frequently caused the dreadful ordeal of seasickness, and that terrified the stoutest of hearts. Shipwrecks, though infrequent, were another danger for passenger ships and the Atlantic Ocean has numerous Colonial era vessels buried on her floor.

David Davies was a boy of four at the time of this transatlantic voyage and apparently survived the ordeal without any difficulties. After nearly

three months at sea, the Vine entered the mouth of the Delaware Bay in the middle of July and harbored at Philadelphia on July 17, 1684. Morgan David\textsuperscript{15} there received a grant of one hundred acres in Merion Township,\textsuperscript{16} a part of William Penn’s Welsh Tract,\textsuperscript{17} which was northwest of Philadelphia across the Schuylkill River. Merion, Radnor, and Haverford Townships were settled exclusively by Welsh Quakers who envisioned establishing their self-government in that part of the colony. Thomas Glenn describes the land where the Welsh settled as follows:

These lands, comprising what are now the Townships of Merion, Haverford, and Radnor, possessed, indeed, many natural advantages. There were amongst other desirable features, an abundance of excellent streams, plenty of good timber, and fine building stones, and the fair rolling country, reminding colonists of their native Wales, had much to commend itself to their eyes.\textsuperscript{18}

The David family soon began attending the Merion Meeting (Quaker), the oldest Friends’ church in Pennsylvania, a simple but elegant structure of stone in the shape of a cross which was erected in 1695. There were several other families with the surname of David or Davies in the Merion Meeting and some of them may have been relatives of Morgan David inasmuch as the Friends were a close-knit religious group that frowned on marriage outside of their fellowship. When Morgan David died in December of 1694, he was buried in the Merion Meeting cemetery.\textsuperscript{19} His will was probated by Catherine on July 18, 1695, and it divided his property equally between his two older sons, Shionn and Evan, while leaving legacies to his other children (David, Catherine, and Elizabeth).

Samuel’s father most likely never had the opportunity to attend school. An old desk from the school founded at the Merion Meeting has a crudely cut date of 1711, but there are no records of a school before that date. Quaker educational ideas were dynamic at the time of the first Welsh set-

\textsuperscript{15} Morgan and Catherine David became parents of two daughters in America: Catherine and Elizabeth.

\textsuperscript{16} Merion Township was in Philadelphia County, northwest of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

\textsuperscript{17} The Welsh Tract was a vast acreage on the west side of the Schuylkill River and the city of Philadelphia.


\textsuperscript{19} http://www.lowermerionhistory.org/burial/merion/d.html accessed on March 18, 2016.
tlement in Pennsylvania and for several years afterwards. The idea that most prevailed was that education should be practical in the apprenticeship of boys and girls. It is likely that David and his brothers were taught to work a trade, to labor as a carpenter, or to farm, but were not given the rudiments of a classical education or even taught to read.20

Almost nothing is known of the daily life of the David family until David Davies’ marriage to Sarah Dickinson, of Plymouth Township, Pennsylvania, on March 31, 1716. The wedding was held at the Plymouth Meetinghouse, a native limestone structure built in 1708, with some fifty people in attendance. Their marriage was short-lived, though, due to the untimely death of the bride a few weeks later from complications unknown. In June of 1716, Shionn and David sold their interest in the family farm to their brother, Evan, and moved to a new Welsh Tract21 in New Castle County, about forty miles south of Philadelphia. Other family members who migrated south to New Castle County with the two brothers included Shionn’s wife, Ann Thomas Davies, and their sisters, Catherine and Elizabeth Davies. They settled in that part of the Welsh Tract known as the Pencader Hundred where the two brothers jointly purchased four hundred acres on May 21, 1717 from David Evans and William Davis of Radnor Township. Ann Davies’ relatives already lived in this new Welsh Tract and that was probably the impetus for this move.

**Persecution of Baptists and Protestants in Wales**

Samuel’s maternal ancestors fled to America when a new wave of persecution broke out in the late seventeenth century. For over a century, Dissenters in Great Britain had been uneasy concerning their religious freedoms. The brutal killing of as many as 70,000 Huguenots (French Reformed Protestants) in the bloody St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre on August 24, 1572, carried out with the approval of Catherine de Medici and the French court, had made them very apprehensive. In his *History of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky*, Robert Davidson was certainly correct when he wrote:

> In England, ever since the memorable St. Bartholomew’s day, all eyes had

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21 The Welsh Tract in New Castle County, Pennsylvania—later Delaware—consisted of 30,000 acres of land granted by William Penn.
been anxiously directed to the Transatlantic settlements, notwithstanding they were as yet a wilderness; and while some fled to Holland, a great number, together with many of the ejected ministers, betook themselves to New England, Pennsylvania, and other American plantations.22

As a result of the previously mentioned Act of Uniformity under King Charles II, ministers and churches in England were required to conform to the Book of Common Prayer by St. Bartholomew’s Day, 1662. That day, a Sunday in 1662, became infamously known as “Black Bartholomew’s Day” because it resulted in at least 2,000 Nonconformist ministers being immediately ejected from their pulpits. The event came to be known as the Great Ejection. It was not an isolated, temporary event and the main issue was more than just conformity to a form of worship. As Iain Murray wrote in an introductory article to Sermons of the Great Ejection, it was a watershed moment when a “wider issue, namely, what is true Christianity”23 was being decided wrongly. Murray then quotes from an evangelical Anglican author, J. B. Marsden, who assessed the damage done by the Great Ejection as follows:

If it be presumptuous to fix upon particular occurrences as proofs of God’s displeasure, yet none will deny that a long, unbroken course of disasters indicates but too surely, whether to a nation or a church, that His favour is withdrawn. Within five years of the ejection of the two thousand Nonconformists, London was twice laid waste, first by pestilence and then by fire. . . But other calamities ensued, more lasting and far more terrible. Religion in the Church of England was almost extinguished and in many of her parishes the lamp of God went out.24

John Charles Ryle, the nineteenth-century evangelical Anglican, described the Great Ejection as:

An injury to the cause of true religion in England which will probably never be repaired. . . a more impolitic deed never disfigured the annals of a Protestant church.25

Some of the ministers who lost their positions within the Church of

24 Ibid., 8–9.
25 Ibid., 9.
England included Thomas Watson, Thomas Manton, John Flavel, Richard Baxter, Edmund Calamy, and Thomas Brooks. In 1662, August 24th fell on a Sunday, so the last sermon for these ministers was August 17, a day filled with gloominess and heaviness of heart. Other ministers who were already Nonconformists, such as John Bunyan, were also punished for their refusal to conform. Bunyan spent twelve years in the Bedford jail where he wrote *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and other works.

While some ministers eagerly sought religious freedom in the American colonies, others were exiled to the New World only after being marched as criminals through the streets of London in manacles, two-by-two. In 1685, one hundred such “criminals” were banished to America on a ship sailing from Newcastle. Since they could not pay their own passage, their fares were paid by a wealthy gentleman for whom they would be indentured servants until their debt was repaid. Not everyone on this ship made it to the New World. The ravages of the sea took its toll and over sixty of the passengers died before they reached New Jersey, including the man who had paid their fares. In America, they were declared free men by a jury gathered by the Governor, and most of them settled in New England. For those who survived the dangers of the sea, their new life in America was worth the risk. Having been imprisoned for their religious convictions in Great Britain, they were willing to be exiles for the Word of God.

**The Founding of the Pencader Meeting (Baptist)**

It was during such a time of persecution that a small colony of believers from the Rhydwilyn Baptist Church in Wales determined to flee to America. They were constituted as a church at Milford Haven, Wales, under the spiritual leadership of Rev. Thomas Griffith. Boarding the *James and Mary* in June of 1701, they embarked for the New World where they arrived in Philadelphia on September 8th. Elisha and Mary Thomas, along with their small daughter, Martha, were among the fourteen other members of this new church on board that ship.

On their arrival in the New World, this colony of emigrants first settled in Philadelphia County where they were warmly welcomed by the Pennepack Baptist Church, located northeast of Philadelphia. This new congregation from Wales insisted on the practice of the laying on of hands as confirmation to the newly baptized which led to a sharp disagreement
with the Pennepack Baptists who considered the practice a matter of indifference.\textsuperscript{26} The Welsh emigrants, though, believed that the laying on of hands was such an essential New Testament ordinance that they soon decided they could no longer fellowship with the Pennepack Church in the Lord’s Supper\textsuperscript{27} or worship with them. The *History of the Welsh Tract Baptist Church* records their reasons for this separation:

After landing, we were received in a loving manner (on account of the gospel) by the congregation meeting in Philadelphia and Pennepek who held the same faith with us (excepting the ordinance of Laying-on-of-hands on every particular member) with whom we wished much to hold communion at the Lord’s table; but we could not be in fellowship with them in the Lord’s supper; because they bore not testimony for God touching the forementioned ordinance. There were some among them who believed in the ordinance: but it was neither preached up, nor practiced in that church: for which cause we kept separate from them for some years. We had several meetings on this account, but could not come to any agreement; yet were in union with them (except only in the Lord’s-supper, and some particulars relative to a church).\textsuperscript{28}

In *The Doctrine of “Laying on of Hands,” Examined and Vindicated*, David Jones (1736-1820), a Baptist minister and son of the Pencader Meeting, wrote the following:

We believe that the laying on of hands, with prayer, upon baptized believers, as such, is an ordinance of Christ, and ought to be submitted unto by all such persons, that are admitted to partake of the Lord’s Supper; and that the end of this ordinance is not for the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, but for a farther reception of the Holy Spirit of promise; or for the addition of the graces of the Spirit and the influences thereof, to confirm, strengthen, and comfort them in Christ Jesus; it being ratified and established by extraordinary gifts of the Spirit in the primitive times.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{26} Horatio Gates Jones, *Historical Sketch of the Lower Dublin (or Pennepek) Baptist Church* (Morrismania, New York, 1869), 11.
\textsuperscript{28} [http://www.newrivernotes.com/other_states_delaware_religion_welshtractbaptistchurch.htm](http://www.newrivernotes.com/other_states_delaware_religion_welshtractbaptistchurch.htm), accessed on March 18, 2016.
In tying the further reception of the Holy Spirit to the actions of men within an alleged scriptural ordinance, this doctrine of the laying on of hands by the Pencader Meeting was entangled in an element of superstition. Though Jones disclaims that the laying on of hands confers the extraordinary gifts, he contends that an additional gift of the Spirit subsequent to the new birth is bestowed through such. Interestingly, his position comes perilously close to teaching that the imposition of hands bestows a second blessing experience.

Having fled the intolerance of their religious freedom in Wales, the Pencader Meeting was now intolerant of a sister church over what is judged by many Christians to be a matter of indifference. This difference no doubt contributed to the decision of this congregation to migrate to New Castle County in 1703. Before doing so, there were twenty-two additions to their membership from Philadelphia and Bucks counties, some of whom had recently emigrated from Wales while others were converts from other denominations. In New Castle County, the church acquired some property on a promontory known as Iron Hill and took the name of the Pencader Meeting (Baptist), later changing that name to the Welsh Tract Baptist Church. In 1710, there was a large influx of members to the church from Pembrokeshire and Caermarthonshire, Wales. Despite this division over a non-essential matter, the Pencader Meeting was the first Baptist congregation south of present-day Pennsylvania and became the mother church of a number of other Baptist congregations as far south as the Pee Dee River in South Carolina.

**Marriage of David Davies and Martha Thomas**

Martha Thomas was the oldest of the six siblings of Elisha and Mary Thomas. She was born during the last decade of the seventeenth century and would have been a toddler or an adolescent when her parents made their transatlantic voyage to America. Along with her sister, Mary, and two brothers, William and John, she joined the Pencader Meeting in 1712 by believer’s baptism. She was probably about fifteen years old at the time. Martha’s paternal grandparents, Thomas and Mary Thomas, had emigrated to America in 1695 and settled in Cecil County, Maryland, before joining the Welsh Baptist colony in 1702 by transfer of their membership.

David Davies’ first encounter with his new bride was probably on some occasion when Martha’s family visited Shionn and Ann Thomas Davies at their home near Merion township. Since David was fifteen to twenty years older than Martha, he would have taken little notice of her at first.
In the intervening years, Martha would have blossomed into a young lady with all the attendant female charms. A whirlwind courtship between them was followed by the exchanging of wedding vows before February 4, 1717, when David and Martha signed the confession of the reorganized Baptist congregation with an “X” as husband and wife.

The following year, Martha Davies gave birth to a daughter who died in infancy. Moved by the loss of her first child, Martha prayed fervently over the next five years for a son whom she could dedicate to the Redeemer’s service. Her faith was exercised in “waiting for the divine answer to her petition,” and her patience was rewarded. On November 3, 1723, Martha gave birth to her son, Samuel, at Summit Ridge in New Castle County on Lums Pond, about twelve miles southeast of Newark, Delaware. In later years, Samuel commented on the circumstances of his birth:

I am a son of prayer, like my name-sake Samuel the prophet; and my mother called me Samuel because, she said, I have asked him of the Lord. . . This early dedication to God has always been a strong inducement to me to devote myself to Him by my own personal act; and the most important blessings of my life I have looked upon as the immediate answers to the prayers of a pious mother. But, alas! what a degenerate plant am I. How unworthy of such a parent, and such a birth.

David Davies was a modest farmer of average intelligence who never received any formal education. He was evidently industrious and a man of great character whom Foote described as having “a blameless, religious life.” He built a substantial two-story brick home with five bays, one room deep, which is still standing. The living area and kitchen were
downstairs with the bedrooms upstairs. Both floors were heated by fireplaces.

While Martha Davies was uneducated in the English language at the time of Samuel’s birth, she was probably not illiterate. Welsh was her native tongue and the services at the Pencader Meeting were in that language. She was probably unable to read and write in English, but she possessed numerous talents. She was also a woman of unblemished character and great piety. Samuel once wrote “that he was blessed with a mother whom he might account, without filial vanity or partiality, one of the most eminent saints he ever knew upon the earth.” She provided Samuel with his early education, and he inherited most of his extraordinary talents from her.

**Pencader Meeting Censures Martha Davies**

Few facts about the Davies’ family are known until a distasteful and regrettable incident in 1732. Martha Davies adopted some differences with the Baptists, apparently over the doctrine of baptism. Thus, she sought information from the local Presbyterian minister, Thomas Evans, concerning this issue for which she was disciplined for her rebellion and excommunicated from the Pencader Meeting on March 4, 1732. The record of “The Case of Martha David” gives the following details:

The rebellion of Martha David against the Church appeared.

(1) In opposing the truth which she once professed to the church according to the commandment of Christ and the practice of the Apostles under the ministry of the New Testament.

(2) In refusing instruction, and despising advice tho’ offered many a time by the brethren in particular, and by the church, in general.

(3) In breaking covenant with the church by carrying unconnected pieces of what was talked in the church to the Presbyterians to have their opinion upon them, tho’ the church charged her beforehand not to do so.

(4) In being so false and unfaithful in carrying her tales so that she has cur-

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896. A road sign marks it as the birthplace of Samuel Davies. The original structure has been expanded and the present building is very dilapidated.

37 The inside of the house is off limits to visitors, so my observation was from outside.


40 This congregation changed its name to the Welsh Tract Baptist Church at a later date.
etailed the truth and increased her falsehoods; and thereby hath wronged the church by her change of opinion, and putting a false gloss on what was said to her—and putting it in the power of the enemies to blaspheme—also to renew the variance between us and the Presbyterians, for which causes she was put out of the church Mar. 4, 1732.41

In light of the above censure, the reason for Martha Davies’ visits to Thomas Evans, the Presbyterian minister, almost certainly included discussion of the doctrine of baptism since she was accused of “opposing the truth she once professed” and having a “change of opinion.” The issue was neither simple gossip nor a fundamental difference with the truth of the gospel. Rather, it was a discussion with the Presbyterian minister about “truth” she had once professed over an issue where the Baptists and Presbyterians differed. Her meeting with Evans probably began innocently enough since she was primarily concerned about her son’s education, a precocious child with a great thirst for learning. Martha was also cognizant of the vows she made in praying for a son and earnestly desired to prepare him for the ministry. Yet, she was not literate in English and was incapable of teaching her son without first being educated herself. The only school in the Welsh Tract at this time was the academy under the tutelage of Thomas Evans, pastor of the Welsh Tract Presbyterian Church. Academies were intended for those who had already gained the rudiments of an education from an English grammar school. Martha probably wanted Evans to tutor her so she could instruct her son. The ensuing conversations may have led to discussion of the differences between Presbyterians and Baptists concerning covenant theology and infant baptism. Both congregations held to Calvinistic doctrine at this time and baptism was one of the very few areas where they differed with one another. It is disappointing, but not surprising, that the Pencader Meeting, which had previously denied fellowship to a sister congregation over a non-essential matter of order, should discipline a member with the censure of excommunication for doctrinal discussions with a Presbyterian minister. They should have considered the words of Rupertus Meldenius, the German Lutheran theologian, who wrote dur-

ing the Thirty Years War (1618-1648):

In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.\textsuperscript{42}

Those words have been called by the great church historian, Philip Schaff, “the watchword of Christian peacemakers.”\textsuperscript{43} In the incident of Martha Davies, the Pencader Meeting, then pastored by Enoch Morgan, was guilty of neither permitting liberty in non-essentials nor being charitable in all things. Instead, the congregation imposed the highest censure on Martha Davies despite her numerous relatives in the congregation. Moreover, Martha’s father, Elisha Thomas, had served as the second pastor of this congregation from 1725 until his death on November 7, 1730. Fifteen months afterwards, Elisha’s oldest daughter was put out of the congregation. On June 9, 1733, another relative, Esther Thomas, who had joined the church in 1702, was also removed from the membership for having her grandchildren baptized at the Presbyterian church. After Martha’s ouster, the Davies family soon began attending the Welsh Tract Presbyterian Church in Glasgow.\textsuperscript{44} Samuel was only eight at the time of this upheaval in his family. He never mentioned this incident in later life, but it undoubtedly had a great impact on teaching him to be a peacemaker and to have a charitable spirit toward the religious views of others.

\textbf{Samuel’s Childhood}

Samuel’s childhood, otherwise, was typical of most farm boys on the Welsh Tract. He was a normal child with a docile temperament who enjoyed the games played by other children. The boys in the Welsh Tract would often wrestle, jump, run, or throw the discus. It is easy to imagine Samuel joining in contests of skill along with the other children. He and his father surely took trips to the nearby coast where they would go crabbing or fishing. In the fall and winter, they probably hunted squirrel, rabbit, deer, and other wildlife. On other occasions, they would travel to Wilmington, about seventeen miles away, to buy and sell at the markets.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Glasgow was about six miles from the Davies’ home, situated between the Pencader Meeting and Summit Ridge.
that flourished along that river city. There were numerous chores—planting crops and tending livestock—on the family farm to keep him busy, but Samuel quickly wearied of such tasks. His real love was education and learning.

Young boys reared in farming communities were at a great disadvantage in acquiring an education. The towns and villages of the northern colonies provided greater opportunities for education than the agrarian colonies to the south. In farming areas, the rudiments of an education, particularly reading, were almost always taught by one of the parents. Frequently, the children learned little more than to write their names and spell out the catechism. Some families used a standard text, like Edmund Coote’s *The English Schoole-Maister*, while the poorer class simply taught the alphabet and a few syllables that combined a consonant with a vowel. Samuel’s mother, who had abundant reasons to consider him as an answer to her prayers and a blessing of God, began to teach him to read herself since there was no English school in the area. He soon made so much progress that it surprised everyone who heard him read.

It was an unwritten rule that each person who learned to read was to teach another one to do the same. Samuel’s own adherence to this rule resulted in an interesting anecdote concerning his youth. David Davies used various workers in the farming of his land. One of his helpers was a young man named John Campbell. The elder Davies would send his son and Campbell to the fields to work, but was quickly disappointed in their efforts. On investigation of their progress, he found the boys sitting in the fields, with open books, involved in lessons. Samuel, though ten years younger than his friend, was the teacher! David Davies scolded the boys, returned home and complained to his wife that their son would never make a farmer. Martha replied that if he would not make a farmer perhaps he would make a scholar, and she determined from that day to send him away to a grammar school.

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47 John Campbell (1713–1753) later studied at the Log College and became a Presbyterian minister before dying of palsy at the age of 40.
48 J. L. Vallandigham, Mrs. J. Wilkins Cooch, W. T. Skinner, and George A. Blake, *History of the Pencader Presbyterian Church* (Glasgow, Delaware: The Woman’s Missionary Society, 1899), 42.
Conclusion

There is always the danger that both individual Christians and churches will fail to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials, will refuse to allow Christian liberty to other believers in non-essential matters, or will neglect to practice charity towards others in all things. The Pencader Meeting fled the persecutions of their native Wales, but often treated others in America with the same intolerance with which they had been treated. They separated from the Penepack Baptist Church over a difference concerning the ordinance of the laying on of hands. They excommunicated the daughter of one of their former pastors over a difference concerning baptism. Yet, it must be stated that this problem is not confined to this Welsh Baptist congregation only. Their real issue was deeper than any differences over baptism. The harsh disciplinary procedure of the Pencader Meeting has been exercised by numerous congregations of all denominations both before and after this event.

Christian charity requires us not to make everything we consider to be a scriptural principle as a term of communion among Christians. The body of Christ is wider than our convictions. The reformed faith is a greater bond of unity than the different practices concerning baptism among Presbyterians and Baptists. None of us has yet attained to the mature man and the unity of the faith. We only see through a glass dimly and we only know in part while we dwell in houses of clay. True Christian toleration is not learned by circumstances or trials alone, but by the Holy Spirit.