

FREEDOM THROUGH CHRIST

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32.

A world fellowship of Baptists was an idea born in 1790 -- two years before the forming of the Baptist Missionary Society, and three years before William Carey, the father of the modern missionary movement, sailed to India. It was born in the mind of John Rippon, a London pastor, editor, and song-book publisher.

It was in 1790 that Dr. Rippon dedicated his Baptist Annual Register "to all the baptized ministers and people" of the world, and proposed "an international interchange of kind offices among them ... in serious expectation that before many years elapse ... a deputation from all these climes will meet, probably in London, to consult the ecclesiastical good of the whole, which is now first of all submitted to their superior wisdom."

The Rippon dream of a worldwide assemblage of Baptist leaders was revived in print by Editor J. N. Prestridge of the Baptist Argus, later known as Baptist World, in a page of news about Baptists in distant lands, and his subsequent publication of an article by Dr. A. T. Robertson urging the realization of Rippon's dream of a London meeting, and by Editor R. H. Pitt of the Religious Herald of Richmond, Virginia. British Baptist leaders John Clifford and J. H. Shakespeare responded with an invitation.

Nearly 3,000 Baptists from 23 countries came together in London in July 1905. They met for nine days in unprecedented fellowship and closed their meeting after organizing the Baptist World Alliance for these stated purposes: "Whereas in the providence of God the time has come when it seems fitting more fully to manifest the essential oneness in the Lord Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour of the churches of the Baptist order and faith throughout the world, and to promote the spirit of fellowship, service and cooperation among them, while recognizing the independence of each particular church and not assuming the functions of any existing organization, it is agreed to form a Baptist World Alliance, extending over every part of the world."

The second congress met in Philadelphia in 1911 when one of the notable events was the presence of a large Russian delegation for whom the messengers spontaneously raised \$66,000 in cash and pledges to establish a Baptist seminary in Russia.

The third congress was to have met in Berlin in 1916, but World War I intervened and the Baptists did not meet again until 1923 in Stockholm, Sweden.

The fourth congress met in Toronto, Canada, in 1928 with nearly 5,000 messengers present.

Again Berlin was selected as the meeting place of the Alliance, but conditions in Germany in 1933 caused a year's delay in the meeting of the congress. When it met there in 1934 tensions were great. While the Baptists were in session Adolph Hitler declared himself fuhrer. Hitler asked a delegation from the Alliance to meet with the Reichsbishop to receive an official welcome. Secretary J. H. Rushbrooke, who spoke German fluently, headed the delegation and made a notable response with a forthright statement of the Baptist position on separation of church and state, the priesthood of the believer, the equality of believers, and the autonomy of the local church.

The sixth congress met in Atlanta in 1939, when 12,445 were registered.

World War II forced the cancellation of the planned meeting in Burma in 1944, so the seventh Congress met in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1947.

The eighth congress met in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1950.

The Alliance returned to London for its Jubilee Congress and ninth meeting in 1955.

The tenth congress met in Rio de Janeiro in 1960, with some 13,000 registered and an estimated 180,000 persons crowded in the Maracana Stadium on the closing Sunday afternoon when Dr. Billy Graham preached an evangelistic sermon.

The eleventh congress met in Miami Beach with over 17,300 registrations.

Since the Baptists first met in a world fellowship in 1905, their numbers have grown from 6,185,289 to 25,848,787 and their witness has spread to 121 countries or territorial divisions.

THE NUMBER OF BAPTISTS TODAY

Africa	390,483
Asia	902,624
(Estimate for China of 123,000 included)	
Central America	208,334
Middle East	756
South America	248,779
Southwest Pacific	101,264
Europe	1,134,385
North America	22,862,162
Grand Total	25,848,787

The nature and functions of the Baptist World Alliance are seven in number as listed in the Constitution:

1. Have as one of its primary purposes the safeguarding and maintenance of full religious liberty everywhere, not only for our own constituent churches, but also for all other religious faiths.
2. Serve as an agency for propagating Baptist principles and tenets of faith, objectives and distinctive principles throughout the world.
3. Serve as an agency to make surveys throughout the world with a view to furnishing facts to the various Baptist groups and counseling with them in establishing work in new fields when such service is requested.
4. Serve as a world-wide agency in making such use of the radio and press as may be practicable in preaching the Gospel, propagating Baptist principles and promoting common tasks of Baptists throughout the world.
5. Arrange and conduct preaching missions throughout the world.
6. Cooperate with Baptist groups in instituting and administering relief funds as occasion may require.

7. Gather news by means of correspondents in the various Baptist groups disseminate it by use of bulletins, Baptist and other papers, and radio; and, when feasible, by a Baptist world publication.

The twelfth congress is scheduled for Hong Kong in 1970 if it is determined that the facilities there are adequate. Otherwise, the congress will be held in Tokyo.

Highlights of the program were the keynote address by Dr. H. H. Hobbs, the president's address by Dr. John F. Soren, two sermons by Dr. Billy Graham, panoramas of Baptist work in North America, Africa, Europe, Asia, South America, and Australia and New Zealand, panel discussions on timely questions and problems, the congress sermon by Dr. John Ithel Jones of Wales, the oratorio, "What is Man?" conducted by Dr. Thor Johnson, and the coronation address by Dr. C. Oscar Johnson, past president.

Of the more than one million Baptists in Europe, the largest group, or 550,000 of them are in Russia, and 300,382 are in Great Britain. It is reported that there are 5,400 Baptist churches in the U.S.S.R. All church services are held in buildings that belong to the government. Visitors report finding crowds of 2,000 people in attendance at the church in Moscow, which has only 1,200 seats. No service they attended lasted less than two hours, many of them as long as three hours -- and even then the people left reluctantly. They have six services per week. Similar reports come from the churches at Leningrad and Kiev, the other Russian cities frequently visited by tourists.

Young people are legally prohibited from joining the church before their eighteenth birthday. There are no Sunday Schools in the churches, because the Soviet constitution reserves the right of education for the government.

No Baptist missionaries have ever been sent to Russia. How then did Baptists get their start there?

The first Russian Baptist of record was Nikita Veronin, a merchant in Tiflis, who somehow secured a copy of the Bible. His study of the Scriptures brought him to convictions unlike those of the Russian church, and for a while he believed he was the only person in the world with such doctrine. In 1867 Veronin met a Lithuanian immigrant, Martin Kalweit, with whom he discussed his odd beliefs. "Oh, you are not alone," Kalweit told him. "You are a Baptist. There are thousands of people like you." Veronin was overjoyed and started witnessing to his friends. After receiving baptism at the hands of Kalweit on August 20, 1867, he set up a small church in Tiflis and called it "Baptist."

Study papers were presented in the group meetings on doctrine, religious liberty, human rights, the Bible, and evangelism. Many exchanged and shared experiences which they had had in different parts of the world. Together they examined global conditions and needs, and considered ways of meeting them. All were agreed that the only remedy for the problems which confront the peoples of the world today is found in the gospel of Christ. Inasmuch as Baptists have always been champions of liberty, strong emphasis was placed upon complete freedom from sin and its social ills, and from tyranny by church or state -- for all men through the preaching of Christ.

One of the noblest impulses of the human heart is its passionate love of freedom. A desire to possess and enjoy freedom is innate in man. Freedom is priceless, and is eagerly sought by everyone who is not free. All want to be free. In these days we hear so much about "free thought," "free speech," "free trade," and a "free press." But what is freedom? Voicing

the prevalent sentiment, one defines freedom as the right of every man to do as he pleases. But suppose that he pleases to do wrong and injure others? Suppose that he pleases to burn your house, and you please that he shall not do it, how can both be free? If the law restrains him from injuring others as he desires, is he free? Liberty to do as one pleases, whether good or bad, is not freedom but license. True freedom comes only with an absence of all desire to do wrong and a willingness to do right.

Political coercion may imprison the body and intellectual error may degrade the mind, but the most abject and fatal bondage is that of the soul under the dominion of Satan and sin. Sin is an awful tyranny when it has become the habit of life. Man is unable to procure freedom from this servitude.

Through the centuries men have gained political freedom by force. Because our forefathers were willing to endure all types of hardship, to suffer, and to die, this is known as "the land of the free and the home of the brave." But man cannot liberate himself morally and spiritually by mere force. Christ said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

What is truth? Christ has told us, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Truth does not help us to free ourselves, but it makes us free. Christ not only tells us and shows us how we may be free, but He makes us free. Christ frees us from the guilt and penalty of sin, and we shall never be brought into condemnation.

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood avails for me."

True freedom comes to us through Christ. Christ possesses perfect freedom -- freedom from ignorance, freedom from error, freedom from sin. Christ alone is able to break the power of sin. He alone has that which is adequate for our needs. His aim is to make men free. He provides deliverance from past guilt, exoneration from the punishment of sin, liberty from the fear of death, admission into the family of God, the supply for our needs, the privilege of prayer, and the security of His promises.

"Once I was bound by sin's galling fetters,
Chained like a slave I struggled in vain,
But I received a glorious freedom
When Jesus broke my fetters in twain.

Glorious freedom, wonderful freedom,
No more in chains of sin I repine!
Jesus, the glorious Emancipator,
Now and forever He shall be mine."

Thank God, real freedom is possible. In His infinite mercy God has opened a way by which it may be received. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."