

## America's First Baptist Chaplain

Scripture reading Nehemiah 4

The first Baptist pastor ever to become a chaplain in the American military was the Reverend David Jones, who in 1776 was appointed to serve Colonel St. Clair's regiment. He also served under General Horatio Gates and General Anthony Wayne. He was highly trusted by General George Washington and preached to the troops at Valley Forge.

The life of David Jones was filled with learning and adventure. He was reared in a hearty Welsh Baptist family, was saved early in life, and trained for three years in the Hopewell Academy (America's first Baptist academic facility) in New Jersey. He studied medicine but doubtless was influenced by the life and ministry of David Brainerd among the Indians, for while [he was] pasturing the Freehold Baptist Church in Monmouth County, New Jersey, Jones actually became the first Baptist missionary to the Indians in Ohio on two extended tours that consumed over a year.

Upon returning to the pastorate in Freehold, the firmness of Jones's expression concerning a desire for American freedom rendered him unpopular. Thus in April 1775, he accepted the call to become pastor of the Great Valley Baptist Church in Chester County, Pennsylvania. The Continental Congress called for a day of fasting and prayer (July 20, 1775), and Jones preached to an army regiment on the subject "Defensive War in a Just Cause Sinless." The die was cast, and in 1776 he left his flock to serve the first of three tours of duty with the American forces. There were few major events in the war that Jones missed, for he was at Ticonderoge, Morristown, and Brandywine. He narrowly escaped being killed at the Paoli Massacre, and he spent the winter with the troops at Valley Forge. So valuable was he considered by the English that General Howe offered a reward for his capture. When victory came at Yorktown in 1781, he was present for the surrender of Lord Cornwallis.

Chaplain Jones was called upon to use his medical skills as well and he removed bullets and even performed amputations, although he lacked the benefit of anesthetic. It might amaze some to realize that Chaplain Jones carried a pistol or a musket and was not unwilling to use it in battle.

After American independence had been secured, Jones returned to the pastoral ministry, but when General Wayne requested that he serve as chaplain to the troops during the Indian War in the Northwest Territory, he responded and served from 1794-96 and was present at the signing of the treaty at Greenville. Again, the Reverend Mr. Jones returned to his pastoral duties.

Incredible as it may sound, David Jones at age seventy-six was appointed chaplain once again in the War of 1812, and he served America faithfully. One of his public addresses was delivered at the dedication of the monument commemorating the Paoli Massacre, where he had been so close to death. Jones died on February 5, 1820 at the age of 84. He had served as an author, pastor, missionary, medical doctor and chaplain. "In danger he knew no fear, in fervent patriotism he had no superiors and few equals, in the

Revolutionary struggle he was a tower of strength... He was a Christian without reproach." [1] We do well to pray for Bible believing chaplains to serve in our military forces today.

Prayer:

"Almighty Father, we ask you this day to please be with our troops in harms way around the world, to please be with the chaplains you have placed with them to lead them to you and strengthen them in their walk with you. Give these men of God the direction, strength, wisdom and compassion to do your work for your honor and glory, we ask these things in the name of Jesus."

Taken from This Day in Baptist History by E. Wayne Thompson and David L. Cummins