

## History, Rev WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS

### The Censure of REV. WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS

Posted 01 May 2014 by robteal1

On 14 Oct 1811, **REV. DAVIS** was charged with heresy by the Presbytery of Concord, NC citing "eight objectionable" doctrines contained in **REV. DAVIS** writings and his sermons. His antislavery beliefs were also controversial. **REV. DAVIS** resigned from the Presbytery and published "A Solemn Appeal to the Impartial Public," in his own defense. In October 1813, **REV. DAVIS** and the congregations of five Presbyterian churches in NC and S.C. founded the Independent Presbyterian Church.

**REV. WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS**, Author

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Grandson, **SAMUEL Calvin FEEMSTER** states in his unpublished biography of **REV. WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS**, that his grandfather left fourteen published and unpublished books. These volumes were religious texts, the most well-know of which is The Gospel Plan, published in 1806 while **REV. DAVIS** served at Bullock's Creek Church in York, S.C..

## History, Rev WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS

### The REV. WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS

(December 16, 1760 - September 28, 1831)

**WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS** was born on Dec. 16, 1760. **DAVIS** apparently studied at the Mt. Zion College in Winnsboro, S.C.. He was received as a candidate for the ministry by the Presbytery of South Carolina on October 12, 1786. The Presbytery licensed him to preach on Dec. 13, 1787. On Oct. 16, 1788, **REV. WILLIAM C. DAVIS** received a call to be pastor of the Nazareth and Milford Presbyterian churches. He was ordained and installed on April 14, 1789. **REV. DAVIS** was dismissed from the churches on Sept. 28, 1792.

Apparently a controversial figure, **REV. WILLIAM C. DAVIS** also was prominent as an educator in colonial South Carolina. He was one of the first vocal opponents of slavery. A letter was written by **JOHN WILSON** of Crowders Creek, Lincoln County, NC, to his brother, the **REV. SAMUEL WILSON**, who was a minister at Big Spring, Pennsylvania, near Carlisle, dated March 7, 1797, regarding **MR. DAVIS'** concern regarding slavery. **REV. WILLIAM C. DAVIS** was dismissed from the Presbytery of South Carolina to join the Presbytery of Concord on Oct. 13, 1797, and served the Presbyterian church at Olney, NC, (Lincoln County).

In 1803, the Synod of North Carolina appointed him as a missionary to the Catawba Indians and to run a school for the Catawbas. In 1805, **REV. DAVIS** was stated supply minister to the church at Bullock's Creek. On Sept. 30, 1806, he was received back by the Presbytery of South Carolina to serve as the regular minister to Bullock's Creek.

Due to the controversy over slavery and his book on "*The Gospel Plan*" in 1809, **REV. DAVIS** was charged with holding erroneous beliefs. After years of discussions, the Presbytery of Orange (NC) suspended him as a minister on April 3, 1811. He was barred from the Presbyterian ministry on Oct. 4, 1811. In October 1813, **REV. DAVIS** and the congregations of five Presbyterian churches in North Carolina and South Carolina founded the Independent Presbyterian Church. At some point in the 1810s, **REV. DAVIS** moved "west."

**REV. WILLIAM C. DAVIS** died on Sept. 28, 1831, in York County, South Carolina.

<http://www.phcmontreat.org/bios/Bios-D.htm>

## History, Rev WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS

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Heresy, Slavery, and Prophecy:

The World of **WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS**

**DAVIS**, a maverick preacher in the early nineteenth-century South, started his own Independent Presbyterian denomination and spread two doctrines that would grow in influence after his death: opposition to slavery and the imminent fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

by **WILLIAM B. BYNUM**

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THE GREAT REVIVAL IN THE FIRST DECADE of the 1800's spawned theological controversies leading to three Presbyterian schisms in the rural South. Each gave birth to a new denomination: the Christian Church led by **BARTON W. STONE** (later united with the Disciples of Christ), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Independent Presbyterian Church. The latter group, led by the Reverend **WILLIAM CUMMINS DAVIS**, was the smallest and least known.<sup>1</sup> Yet **DAVIS** and his sect are worth examining. His doctrines convulsed Presbyterianism in the Carolinas for several years, resulting in the dissolution of a presbytery, lengthy debate in the 1810 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and the creation of a denomination that endured for half a century. His opposition to slavery had a hitherto unrecognized influence on Presbyterian abolitionism. His prediction of imminent Armageddon and the millennial reign of the saints fueled the speculation about prophecy that was a powerful motif in nineteenth-century American Christianity. Even those unsympathetic with his "errors" acknowledged his "vigorous intellect" and "considerable influence among the people."<sup>2</sup> In his influential work *The Democratization of American Christianity*, Nathan Hatch portrays the rise in the early republic of populist religious leaders who "refused to defer to learned theologians and inherited orthodoxies," "empowered ordinary people," and encouraged individuals to "think and act for themselves."<sup>3</sup> **DAVIS** exemplified this spirit in one small corner of American Presbyterianism. **DAVIS** and the early years of the Independent Presbyterian Church have never been the subjects of modern scholarly research, and even basic facts of his life tend to be misrepresented.<sup>4</sup> This study is intended to fill a gap in American Presbyterian historiography by examining his life, his theology, the denomination he created, his views on slavery, and his interpretation of apocalyptic scripture.

### I. "A Powerful and Popular Preacher"

**DAVIS's** parents, **DAVID DAVIS** (or **DAVIES**) and **ELIZABETH JAMES**, were frontier settlers of Welsh descent in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. **ELIZABETH's** father was a Seventh Day Baptist preacher. During the French and Indian War the family moved to Frederick County, Maryland, where **WILLIAM** was born on 16 September 1760.<sup>5</sup> About 1768 they moved to Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, and attended the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, where **WILLIAM** became a

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communicant at the age of eighteen or nineteen.<sup>6</sup> After his father's death in 1776, he attended the school kept by his brother-in-law Francis **CUMMINS**, who was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry in 1782. During the Revolutionary War **DAVIS** served in the militia but saw no combat.<sup>7</sup>

After the war, **DAVIS** attended Mount Zion College in Winnsboro, South Carolina. The head of this new "log college," Princeton graduate **THOMAS H. MCCAULE**, thought so highly of **DAVIS** that he made him an instructor before his graduation in 1787. **DAVIS** became a candidate for the ministry under the Presbytery of South Carolina in 1786, was licensed to preach in 1787, and was ordained in 1789 as pastor of the Nazareth Church in Spartanburg County and the Milford Church in Greenville County. In this pastorate, lasting until 1792, he proved to be "a powerful and popular preacher." Unafraid of controversy, he plunged into one of the most contentious Presbyterian issues of the day defying tradition and offending many members of the Nazareth congregation, he replaced the Scottish Psalter with **ISAAC WATTS**'s Psalm paraphrases and hymns.<sup>8</sup> As a visiting minister, his use of **WATTS**'s Psalms of **DAVID** imitated is said to have split the Providence Church in Mecklenburg County.<sup>9</sup>

From his first pastorate **DAVIS** moved to another congregation divided by controversy as well as by geography. Bethel was in York County, South Carolina, with part of the congregation in Lincoln (now Gaston) County, North Carolina. **DAVIS**'s brother-in-law Francis **CUMMINS** had been pastor of Bethel from 1783 to 1789. "Animosity and party spirit" from the latter part of **CUMMINS**'s tenure (**CUMMINS** had been a Federalist delegate to the South Carolina ratification convention for the United States Constitution, much to the displeasure of some of his flock), together with the inconvenient distance of the North Carolina members, led to a division in the early 1790s. **DAVIS**, who had occasionally served as supply minister to the undivided congregation, served the new "North Bethel" congregation beginning in 1793. Renamed Olney, the new church joined Concord Presbytery, North Carolina, in 1798. The new name derived from the English parish of the evangelical pastor and hymn writer **JOHN NEWTON**, and may reflect **DAVIS**'s preference for the new style of church music over the old metrical Psalms.<sup>10</sup>

During **DAVIS**'s tenure at Olney, the Great Revival reached the Carolinas. Like most Presbyterian ministers in the area, he was supportive of the movement although wary of excesses. In May 1802 he preached at Fair Forest Presbyterian Church in Union District, South Carolina, in one of the state's first camp meetings. **WILLIAM WILLIAMSON**, pastor of Fair Forest, recounted that nothing extraordinary happened until **DAVIS** preached, when some in the crowd were "struck to the earth under the sense of their guilt and danger.... the distress of the convinced was awful, their cries piercing; and the joys of those delivered ecstatic." Nevertheless, "no undue attack was made on the passions... No scenes of confusion were to be seen... Regularity and good order were observed." Some in the Fair Forest congregation were devoted to **DAVIS** for years afterward, believing "there could be no good done at a camp meeting till he came." Two months later **DAVIS** joined other ministers and a crowd estimated at four to five thousand for a massive camp meeting held near Nazareth, his former church. A participant described **DAVIS**'s sermon there as "one of the most popular orthodox gospel sermons that I ever heard."<sup>11</sup>

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Though he supported the revival, **DAVIS** feared it would "eventually be stopped by the too great zeal and wild sallies of its own votaries." The greatest danger to the revival, he wrote, was not from enemies, but from the avowed friend of the revival who, in the "frantic sallies of an unguided imagination... introduces things which have no authority from God's word & passes them for the work of the spirit." **DAVIS**'s concern for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate effects of the revival may explain why Concord Presbytery in 1803 chose him, along with the Reverend **JOHN Makemie WILSON**, to reply to questions from a disapproving church session about the "exercises" associated with the revival.<sup>12</sup> In 1804, the presbytery sent **DAVIS** to investigate and discipline another congregation for irregular behavior stemming from belief in "immediate revelations from God, and consequently doing things under the pretext of divine direction, very disorderly."<sup>13</sup>

During the revival era **DAVIS** was asked to deal with another difficult group. In 1803 the Synod of the Carolinas appointed him as a part-time missionary and school superintendent to the Catawba Indians in York and Lancaster counties, South Carolina, some twenty miles from the Olney church. Like other missionary efforts with this tribe before the late 1800s, this mission failed. **DAVIS** reported in 1804 that **ROBERT** Crawford had agreed to teach the school and lead the students in worship, "but before the close of the year, they evidently appeared to flag, neglected the school, and seemed to give themselves to idleness, reveling and intoxication: whereupon, I judged it proper to give up the school." Because of the inconvenient distance from his home, **DAVIS** visited the Catawbas only once.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this failure, **DAVIS**'s peers respected and trusted him. They elected him moderator of the Presbytery of South Carolina three times between 1790 and 1794, moderator of Concord Presbytery in 1799, moderator of the Synod of the Carolinas in 1802, and commissioner to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1797, 1804, and 1810. The General Assembly elected him to three terms (1805-08) as his synod's representative on the Standing Committee of Missions.<sup>15</sup> He seemed destined for a long, successful career in mainstream Presbyterianism.

### II. "Some Schisms Are Not Only lawful but Glorious"

But a different future was instore for **DAVIS**. In 1806 he accepted a call to the Bullock Creek Presbyterian Church in York District, South Carolina, thus becoming a member of the First Presbytery of South Carolina (South Carolina Presbytery had been divided in 1799). **DAVIS**'s preaching soon began to draw criticism from the neighboring Second Presbytery of South Carolina, on the grounds that he was teaching "doctrines contrary to the Confession of Faith" within the Second Presbytery's bounds. (He was preaching regularly at what would become Salem Church near Gaffney, across the Broad River from Bullock Creek and thus within the Second Presbytery.)<sup>16</sup> **DAVIS** had become a participant in the nationwide theological ferment of the day. Some New England Congregationalists, notably **SAMUEL HOPKINS**, had subtly altered traditional Calvinism to create a "New Divinity" which "attempted to reconcile personal responsibility and Calvinistic determinism," influencing some of their Presbyterian colleagues to the south. Other, more liberal Congregationalists-

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who likewise influenced some of their Presbyterian cousins conceded a larger role to the freedom of the human will in the plan of salvation, discarding traditional Calvinist concepts of predestination and the "decrees" of God.<sup>17</sup> Traditional Presbyterians, wedded to the Westminster Confession of Faith, thought that elements of **DAVIS**'s teaching resembled both of these suspect schools of thought.

The first controversy about **DAVIS**'s theology came in 1807. The moderator and stated clerk of the Second Presbytery complained to the Synod of the Carolinas that **DAVIS** "for a considerable time" had taught two objectionable doctrines. One was that believers obtained justification before God solely through "the passive obedience of Christ" (his atoning death) and not also through Christ's "active obedience" (sinless life). The Westminster Confession stated that "Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt" of the elect. The standard Presbyterian interpretation of this statement was that Christ's "obedience" meant active obedience. and his "death" meant passive obedience. **DAVIS** never denied Christ's sinlessness, but came to believe that it was unbiblical to say that God's law demanded of Christ both perfect obedience and the death penalty due to disobedience.<sup>18</sup> The Second Presbytery's second complaint was that **DAVIS** taught "that faith precedes regeneration, and is not a holy exercise." Though this statement at first glance might imply a liberal belief that the unregenerate were able to take the first step toward salvation without special aid from the Holy Spirit, **DAVIS** agreed with traditional Calvinism that the sinner could not move toward salvation "until the Spirit of God comes with power and accompanies the truth to the conscience." However, **DAVIS** also criticized those who were "such staunch predestinarians that they think it useless to try [to believe] till God gives them faith." **DAVIS** believed that to say that holiness or regeneration preceded faith would overthrow the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, which he saw as the heart of the gospel: "every one is made welcome to come just as he is, without any thing to recommend him to Jesus." The synod responded to the complaint by recommending that the First Presbytery take action as "duty and discipline may appear to direct."<sup>19</sup>

After a "friendly conversation" with **DAVIS**, the First Presbytery was uncertain whether or not his doctrinal peculiarities justified a trial, and put the matter back in the synod's hands. The synod, at its 1808 meeting, directed the First Presbytery to question **DAVIS** about the offending doctrines "and such other doctrines as may be thought by them advisable." **DAVIS** protested that this was "a vague and unconstitutional mode of trial," saying he "never would submit to be tried, unless there was a regular charge" brought against him. The synod then took a different tack, directing both the First and Second presbyteries to meet immediately so that proper charges could be brought.<sup>20</sup> These included the two doctrines complained about in 1807, plus two new doctrines. **DAVIS** was charged with teaching that even God must obey "the moral law." He wrote that the holiness of God and our reverence for him depended on his laws being just: God had a "duty" to "do that which was right." If the only standard of right and wrong were God's arbitrary will, God would be a "tyrant"; "we might fear him, it is true, but we never could love him." The second new doctrine charged against **DAVIS** was that "Adam was never bound to keep the moral law." **DAVIS** argued, based on Genesis, that God's covenant with Adam required simply that he abstain from the forbidden fruit; keeping the

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entire moral law was not a condition of the covenant as the Westminster Confession posited. This, for **DAVIS**, made Adam's disobedience more inexcusable and his punishment more comprehensible than if the covenant involved the entire moral law.<sup>21</sup>

The First Presbytery met in November 1808 at **DAVIS**'s Bullock Creek church and found him guilty of propagating the doctrines as charged. However, they judged his errors to be "of such a nature as do not strike at the vitals of religion." The presbytery reprimanded **DAVIS** for his "imprudence in espousing and propagating those opinions without consulting his brethren and the higher judicatories of the church," and there the matter rested—for the moment.<sup>22</sup>

The **DAVIS** case came up again at the 1809 meeting of the Synod of the Carolinas. The committee to review the minutes of the First Presbytery included the Reverend **JAMES MCELHENNY**, whom **DAVIS** termed "the most influential member of the 2<sup>d</sup> Presbytery of S.C." Not surprisingly, the committee took exception to the First Presbytery's handling of **DAVIS**. In the long debate that followed, as the minutes record, "it was strongly intimated, by some of the laity on the floor, that but too many of the members of Synod were favorable to [**DAVIS**'s] doctrines, and lightly esteem the Confession of Faith, and Catechisms. The debate brought forth "many strokes of wit, and some very ill-natured invectives" (as **DAVIS** put it) before the synod ruled that the First Presbytery must "either issue the case, in a manner more agreeable to the Spirit of the order of Synod at our last [meeting], or refer it to this Synod." The First Presbytery hastily convened and responded that it could not constitutionally allow its judgment to be overruled, since no formal appeal had been brought to the synod.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the synod took steps to try **DAVIS** immediately, but before the trial could begin, **DAVIS** declared that because of the synod's "unconstitutional" action, he would appeal to the General Assembly. After further deliberation, the synod agreed to refer the case to the national governing body.<sup>24</sup>

At the same meeting in 1809 the synod took up another complaint against **DAVIS**. He had recently published a long theological work entitled *The Gospel Plan*, which included the controversial doctrines for which he had already been tried, plus some new ones. The synod decided to refer this to the General Assembly along with the rest of the **DAVIS** case.<sup>25</sup> Meeting in Philadelphia in May 1810, the General Assembly ruled that the Synod of the Carolinas had acted improperly "in deciding that they had a right to try **MR. DAVIS** when there was no reference nor appeal in his case before them." **DAVIS** had won his appeal, but the synod's request regarding *The Gospel Plan* would not turn out so well for him. Late on the afternoon of 28 May the Assembly appointed a committee to examine **DAVIS**'s book and report any doctrines "contrary to the standards of the Presbyterian Church." The committee consisted of three ministers: **ROBERT G. WILSON** of Ohio (who had grown up in the Olney church and studied theology under **DAVIS**), **WILLIAM Calhoun** of Virginia, and **John Anderson** of Pennsylvania. **DAVIS** later complained that his statements were taken out of context because only one of the three (undoubtedly **WILSON**) had previously read the book, "and that in a hasty manner," and because the committee was given only a few hours to review his 62 8-page volume before reporting the next morning.

The committee cited eight "objectionable" doctrines:

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1. "That the active obedience of Christ constitutes no part of that righteousness by which a sinner is justified."
2. "That obedience to the moral law was not required as the condition of the covenant of works."
3. That God had a "duty" of moral behavior toward his creation; otherwise "there could be no justice in God."
4. "God could not make Adam, or any other creature, either holy or unholy." (DAVIS wrote that "there can be no holiness or unholiness in any being whatever, except he has it by his own choice"; this statement might be interpreted as undermining traditional notions of original sin, although DAVIS also affirmed that "the guilt of Adam's first sin is equally imputed to all.")
5. "Faith precedes regeneration."
6. "That faith, in the first act of it, is not a holy act."
7. "That Christians may sin willfully and habitually." (DAVIS wrote, "There is no christian under the sun but willfully commits sin every day he lives")
8. "If God has to plant all the principal parts of salvation in a sinner's heart, to enable him to believe, . . . it must be impossible for God to condemn a man for unbelief, for no just law condemns or criminales any person for not doing what he cannot do."

The first, second, third, fifth, and sixth doctrines had come up in DAVIS's previous trials, and the eighth doctrine might be considered an explanation of the fifth and sixth. After hearing what DAVIS described as "detached scraps of the book" read to support each doctrine, the Assembly voted that the first, second, fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth doctrines were "contrary to the Confession of Faith"; that DAVIS expressed the third doctrine in an "unhappy" way, "calculated to mislead the reader"; and that the seventh doctrine had implications "contrary to the

letter and spirit of the Confession of Faith." (In a later pamphlet in his defense, DAVIS looked for support on this point to the Westminster Confession's statement that the Christian "by reason of his remaining corruption...doth not perfectly, nor only will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.") The Assembly concluded that these doctrines were "of very dangerous tendency" and that presbyteries should deal with anyone propagating them.<sup>26</sup>

To the modern mind the issues in the DAVIS case may seem to be nothing but theological hair-splitting, but one must consider the state of Presbyterianism in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In 1804 BARTON W. STONE and a group of "New Light" Kentucky ministers and churches had left the Presbyterian Church in the USA, renouncing creeds, confessions, and all denominational labels other than "Christian." In 1805 the Synod of Kentucky had suspended most of the preachers of its Cumberland Presbytery, partly because that



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presbytery had required "only a partial adoption of the Confession of Faith ... so far only as they ... think it corresponds with the Scripture." In 1810, just a few months before the General Assembly meeting, some of the Cumberland dissidents had formed an independent presbytery: they would become the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and adopt a revised confession of faith.<sup>27</sup> The Presbyterian Church was understandably in a defensive mood, on guard against further assaults on the Westminster Confession, and **DAVIS** made it clear that, like the Cumberland dissenters, be reserved the right to differ from the confession where it contradicted his own reason and interpretation of the Bible. "I am not disposed to knock out my brains as a compliment to my ancestors, dearly as I love them," he wrote. "When I believe this doctrine I must have an argument which has some force in it; and bad as I am I will give that much honour to the bible as to learn from it...." One of **DAVIS**'s adversaries in the Second Presbytery, **ANDREW BROWN**, feared that lack of action against **DAVIS** meant that the confession was becoming "only the Ostensible, & not the real standard of our church," and "that nothing short of exploding the antiquated system contained in the confession will satisfy a majority of the preachers in our church." **BROWN** warned his friends that he would leave the denomination if it did not "exercise...a wholesome discipline" against **DAVIS**.<sup>28</sup> It was **DAVIS**'s misfortune to promulgate controversial doctrines in such a hostile climate.

Comparisons between the **DAVIS** case and another case a decade earlier are revealing. In 1796 the Reverend **HEZEKIAH BALCH** of Greeneville, Tennessee, a disciple of **SAMUEL HOPKINS**, was brought before Abingdon Presbytery for preaching and publishing Hopkinsian doctrines involving, among other things, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the nature of original sin, and the unregenerate sinner's ability to obtain faith—issues echoed in the **DAVIS** case. When the presbytery acquitted **BALCH**, the Synod of the Carolinas looked into the case and appealed it to the 1798 General Assembly. The General Assembly went over the controversial publication point by point, and required **BALCH** to "renounce the errors therein pointed out; [and] that he engage to teach nothing hereafter of a similar nature..." **BALCH** acknowledged that he had been wrong in publishing the document, and renounced the "doctrines pointed out as errors," though he insisted that he had been misconstrued. This satisfied the General Assembly, which declared **BALCH** to be "in good standing with the church."<sup>29</sup> The difference between the two cases resulted not only from the schisms that took place between 1798 and 1810, but from the defendants' differing reactions to the General Assembly's judgment. **BALCH** was willing to recant what the Assembly saw as errors; **DAVIS** was far from willing, as we shall see.

At its next meeting after the 1810 General Assembly, the First Presbytery moved, though slowly, to comply with the Assembly's decision on The Gospel Plan. They began by referring a question to the synod: had the Assembly "required or authorized any presbytery" to ensure that **DAVIS** not "preach or publish the doctrines ... stated by the General Assembly to be erroneous?" The Synod of the Carolinas, meeting in October 1810, put the decision back in the presbytery's hands, but took steps to ensure that the presbytery would issue the "right" decision. The synod's Committee on Overtures first proposed to require that the First Presbytery try **DAVIS** within a month, but then, when it appeared that this motion would not pass, substituted a motion to dissolve the

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First Presbytery altogether. The presbytery, which had consistently voted against punishing **DAVIS**, acquiesced, unanimously requesting dissolution. **DAVIS** and four other ministers were assigned to Concord Presbytery, where he expected no "good will or tenderness." Another minister commented that **DAVIS**'s new presbytery "expected to have him hung up in a few days."<sup>30</sup> During the synod's first recess after this action, the moderator of Concord Presbytery, **JAMES** Adams, asked **DAVIS** if he was ready for trial at the November presbytery meeting. **DAVIS** refused on the grounds that he had not seen a copy of the charges against him. Adams then notified the other members of his presbytery (but not **DAVIS** and evidently not the other First Presbytery ministers newly assigned to Concord) that they would meet in eleven days— as soon as they could constitutionally do so—to bring charges. **DAVIS** got wind of the upcoming meeting and took quick action of his own. "I now, for the first time in my life, determined to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church," he wrote.<sup>31</sup>

**DAVIS** thought it important to leave the Presbyterian Church before formal charges were brought. Believing that "the resolution of the Assembly was only their judgment relative to certain doctrines contained in The Gospel Plan, and could not be considered a charge against me," he considered himself "vested with full clerical authority, and not the scrape of a pen against me." Accordingly he called a meeting of the Bullock Creek congregation for 15 October, and notified members of Salem church, his other pastorate, to attend. He presented his case, asking them whether he should "submit to a most assured suspension, on a preposterous trial, or to withdraw from the government of the Presbyterian church. . . . If you advise me to withdraw...WLLL YOU ALSO WITHDRAW, AND STAND BY ME UNANIMOUSLY?" The vote of the members and supporters of the two churches was fifty-two in favor of withdrawal, three against, and six not voting. The Bullock Creek church sent a declaration of independence to Concord Presbytery, with the pledge that if the presbytery could "prove. . .from the word of God, that the doctrines preached by **MR. DAVIS** and set forth and contained in the book entitled The Cospel Plan, to be erroneous, we will cheerfully put ourselves again under their care, and under the government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America." Minority factions of the Bullock Creek and Salem congregations remained loyal to Concord Presbytery. The result was that two Bullock Creek churches and two Salem churches would exist for decades.<sup>32</sup>

For his part, **DAVIS** sent Concord Presbytery a declaration he had prepared on 9 October – which shows he had no doubts his congregations would support him on 15 October. He announced his withdrawal from the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and his consequent immunity from "the rules, edicts, discipline, or commands of said church, from henceforth sine die. Amen." In this paper **DAVIS** stated that he had adopted, preached, and published the controversial doctrines because "It is impossible, on the common orthodox plan [i.e., the Westminster Confession]...to vindicate our holy religion, or to vindicate it on the principles of common equity and justice." He termed his treatment by presbytery and synod "underfunded... cruel and barbarous," and charged that "if my enemies had only the civil sword in their hands, nothing but my blood could satisfy them." Like the Kentucky New Lights and the Cumberlandds, he complained that he had not been judged by the Bible but only by the Westminster Confession, an admittedly fallible document. Though the General Assembly had condemned his doctrines as "contrary to the Confession of Faith

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of our Church, and the word of God," **DAVIS** contended that "there was not a single text of scripture brought forward" against him; the Assembly had assumed that "the Confession of Faith agrees with the Word of God" and anything "contrary to the one" was "of course. . .contrary to the other." He warned that "when the Bible is kept out of sight, and creeds, and confessions, and votes of Synods and councils are put in its place," "popery" is on the way. Nevertheless, he professed his love of Presbyterian doctrine and discipline (his complaint was that the rules of discipline had not been followed in his case), and offered to "return with joy ... whenever you will open a door in which I can enter with a good conscience." For the present, he did not fear being called a schismatic: "some schisms are not only lawful but glorious... Witness the divisions in the time of the Reformation." He cast himself in the role of a martyr, declaring that "like Huss and Jerome [of Prague] I will die happy in having made a bold stand for truth."<sup>33</sup>

The sequel to this declaration was not surprising. Concord Presbytery proceeded to cite **DAVIS** for trial anyway, charging him with publishing the doctrines condemned by the General Assembly. The presbytery also sent a letter to his congregations, urging them and their pastor to return to the fold and to "consider the baleful effects of schism in the church" such as the weakened state of Presbyterianism in the West after the New Light and Cumberland defections. **DAVIS** replied with another letter to the presbytery, comparing himself to Luther and his prosecutors to the pope. Asserting that "no church under heaven can govern a man any longer than he continues a member," since "he has a right to draw off when he pleases, without asking your liberty," he further likened the presbytery to the British government, which claimed the right to remove British-born sailors from American ships even if they had renounced British citizenship.<sup>34</sup> The presbytery, unmoved by **DAVIS**'s arguments, suspended him from the ministry for "contumacy" (willful disregard of church authority) on 12 December 1810, and finally deposed him from the Presbyterian ministry on 4 October 1811.<sup>35</sup>

### III. "A little Republic"

Undaunted by the actions of "orthodox" Presbyterianism, **DAVIS** and his followers continued on their course. In 1812 he and the Bullock Creek church published *A Solemn Appeal to the Impartial Public*, a lengthy defense of his struggle in the church courts and his eventual secession from the PCUSA. By 1813, three more congregations had left the mainstream Presbyterians for the Independent Presbyterian fold: Edmonds church in Chester District, South Carolina (present Chester County), a faction of the Shiloh church in York District, South Carolina (present Cherokee County), and a majority of the Olney church. "' Delegates from the five churches met at Bullock Creek in October 1813 to draft a constitution and rules of discipline for their new denomination. The manuscript was intended for publication but was lost because of the printer's sudden death. "'

As reconstructed from memory and published in 1817, the Independent Presbyterian constitution provided for a congregational form of government. The name "Presbyterian" was preserved by declaring all adult white male members to be elders (presbyters). A congregation that desired to have a smaller body of ruling elders as in conventional Presbyterianism might do so,

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but there was a right of appeal from this church session to the "presbytery" (congregational meeting). The decision of the presbytery could not be appealed to any other body. Each congregation was "a little republic, independent in her government and discipline, and acknowledges no superior on earth." Although this form of government obviously resonated with **DAVIS**'s recent experience in the Presbyterian system, congregational polity may have appealed to some of the lay delegates as well. The Bullock Creek church had been incorporated in 1784 under the name "The Presbyterian or Congregational Church on Bullock's Creek," despite the almost total absence of other Congregational churches in upstate South Carolina.<sup>38</sup> The Independent Presbyterian constitution adopted in 1823 made the congregational features even more prominent. It allowed the use of a session but recommended "that it is more consistent with the apostolic form, in which the primitive churches were governed, for the presbytery to conduct the business of the church without a session." Under both the 1813 and 1823 constitutions, ministers were licensed and ordained by the "presbytery" of the local church. Much like the contemporary Cumberland Presbyterians, the Independent Presbyterians urged ministers "to obtain a liberal education" but did not require it; the only academic requirement was that they "be good English scholars, and able to read, write and pronounce the English language with a good degree of propriety."<sup>39</sup>

The doctrines considered essential by the Independent Presbyterians were few, an even greater deviation from traditional Presbyterianism than was the Independent form of government. Unlike the Cumberland Presbyterians, who kept the Westminster Confession in an amended form, **DAVIS** and his followers did not prescribe a detailed confession of faith. While professing "adherence to the doctrines which are usually called Calvinistic [sic], excepting in some non essential points, " the 1817 constitution specified only two essential doctrines: justification by Christ—who is equal with God and whose "righteousness is imputed by faith, and is the only meritorious ground of a believer's salvation" – and the necessity for believers to live "a sober, righteous and godly life." "No error [would] be deemed heresy" unless it contradicted one of these tenets. Again, this reflects **DAVIS**'s experience in being charged with heresy over doctrines be deemed nonessential.<sup>40</sup> The 1823 constitution expanded the essential doctrines to include belief in the Trinity and in the Bible as "the word of God." Another group of teachings was added to the 1823 constitution as "of great importance" but not "essential to salvation" and not "to be made terms of communion." A minister who denied these tenets could not be charged with heresy, but his congregation "ought to" oppose him and, if he persisted, dismiss him. These doctrines, which showed that **DAVIS** retained much of orthodox Calvinism, included original sin; "particular election to salvation, according to God's sovereign will, and unchangeable purpose from eternity"; "the decrees of God, by which all things are foreordained"; "the final perseverance of the saints"; "the right of infants to church membership, and consequently to baptism"; no "state of probation" after death; and the eternity of reward and punishment after death.<sup>41</sup>

In 1815, less than two years after the new denomination's doctrines were first set forth, **DAVIS** moved to Tennessee along with his son **ROBERT McCleary DAVIS** (recently licensed to preach) and some members of his congregations. There

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they founded a church in Rutherford County called Ebenezer.<sup>42</sup> Reasons for the move are not entirely clear. **ROBERT G. WILSON** reported rumors that **DAVIS** wanted to join the Cumberland Presbyterians – numerous in Tennessee but almost unknown in the Carolinas – but "will not (probably) be received by the Cumberland Pby. and that the place in Indiana to which he had thought of going was occupied by a Presbyterian Preacher." **DAVIS's** grandson **S. C. FEEMSTER** later wrote that he believed **DAVIS** intended "to go to a free state" as did his son **DAVID**, who moved on from Tennessee to Illinois. This may relate to **DAVIS's** Opinions on slavery.<sup>43</sup>

In 1821 **DAVIS** returned to South Carolina with his son **ROBERT** (now ordained), and licentiate Silas J. **FEEMSTER** (ordained in 1822 and married to **W. C. DAVIS's** daughter Abigail in 1825). Part of the Ebenezer congregation returned to the Carolinas with him, and the Tennessee church soon dissolved. During **DAVIS's** absence the Shiloh Independent church likewise had dissolved, but somehow the other four Independent congregations had kept going without an ordained minister. Soon after the Davises returned, **ROBERT** became pastor of a new Independent Presbyterian church at Yorkville (now York), South Carolina, the first organized church of any denomination in that county seat.<sup>44</sup>

The three ministers and delegates from the five congregations met in Yorkville in 1823 to formulate a new constitution, since the 1813 constitution had been lost and the 1817 constitution had been adopted only by the Tennessee congregation. Some details of this constitution have been given earlier. The most important change was to create a General Convention composed of every minister plus two delegates from each church. The convention was to meet annually to promote communication and unity between the churches, to manage missions and relations with other denominations, and to act on proposed amendments to the constitution (requiring approval by two-thirds of the churches for ratification), but was not to act as a court of appeals or even an advisory body in the judicial affairs of its congregations. Again, this is not surprising, given **DAVIS's** past experience with church courts.<sup>45</sup> (An amendment adopted in 1829 allowed the General Convention to give non-binding advice on questions brought to it by the churches.)<sup>46</sup>

In the same year that this constitution was adopted, the first volume of **DAVIS's** Lectures on the New Testament, intended to be one of two volumes on the Gospels, was published by his son **ROBERT**. **DAVIS** had completed the eight-volume manuscript of Lectures several years earlier, but this was the only portion of the work published in his lifetime.<sup>47</sup> His volumes on the epistles to the Romans and the Hebrews would be published by the Independent Presbyterian Church over twenty-five years after his death.<sup>48</sup>

The first annual General Convention of the Independent Presbyterian Church took place in 1824. It reported that the five churches had over two hundred communicant members. Soon after the convention, **ROBERT M. DAVIS** died. Helping to fill the gap, George W. **DAVIS** (**WILLIAM's** nephew) and **ROBERT Y. Russel** would be ordained in 1826. By 1831, another minister, **THOMAS Mitchell**, was ordained, five more churches organized, and the membership more than doubled.<sup>49</sup>

**WILLIAM C. DAVIS** had resumed his old pastorates of Bullock Creek and Salem on his return from Tennessee. He gave up Salem for the Yorkville church shortly

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after his son **ROBERT**'s death, and gave up Bullock Creek for the newly organized Beth Shiloh church near Yorkville in 1829. Enfeebled at the age of 68, he no longer wanted to serve two churches fifteen miles apart. He remained active to the end of his life, preaching his last sermon at Bullock Creek, where the Independent Presbyterian denomination had been born. As in many previous services, he spoke "with such energy and zeal that the whole assembly appeared deeply impressed and many cheeks were bathed in tears." Ten days later, on 28 September 1831, he died after a short illness. As his grandson **S. C. FEEMSTER** wrote, "he expired without a groan or a struggle," with a "calm smile of the perfect peace within."<sup>50</sup> His is the oldest grave in the Rose Hill Cemetery, formerly the Yorkville Independent Presbyterian Cemetery.<sup>51</sup>

**DAVIS** left as his tangible legacy personal property that sold after his death for \$148; the authorship of two substantial books and several smaller ones; a large amount of unpublished work including lengthy manuscripts entitled "Elements of Theology," "Infant Salvation," and "Believer's Advocate" (**S. C. FEEMSTER** estimated that **DAVIS**'s works, if all were published, would fill "14 octavo volumes of between 500 and 600 pages each"); and a tiny denomination with fewer than five hundred communicants.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, his influence was wider than one might expect. **E. H. Gillett**, a Presbyterian historian of the later nineteenth century, wrote of meeting "an old New England Clergyman ... who regarded the volume of Gospel Plan, with an admiration worthy of the writings of [Jonathan] Edwards." Nineteenth-century Old School Presbyterians and twentieth-century historians have seen **DAVIS** as an early advocate of the New School theology which split the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1837.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps more important legacies were his teachings on slavery and his interpretation of biblical prophecy.

### IV. "Vender of the Doctrine of Freedom to Africans"

**WILLIAM C. DAVIS** was never shy about speaking his mind, even on such a touchy subject as slavery. At a meeting of the South Carolina Presbytery in 1794 he preached an ordination sermon that "denounced all his fellow-Christians who owned slaves." Although in the years immediately following the Revolution slavery was not as volatile a topic as it would later become, **DAVIS**'s sermon so discomfited "some leading men of the presbytery" that they solicited another member, **THOMAS REESE** – recipient of the AB. and O.O. degrees from the College of New Jersey at Princeton – to write a reply to **DAVIS** showing that Christianity and slaveholding were compatible. There is no known copy of this sermon or of Reese's reply, but from the scripture text on which **DAVIS** spoke, combined with his later writings on the subject, one may reconstruct the thrust of his argument. His text was 1 John 4:1: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."<sup>54</sup> **DAVIS**'s Gospel Plan, completed in 1806, gives some clue to the content of his 1794 sermon when it speaks of slave owning ministers in terms echoing Old Testament denunciation of false prophets who sided with oppressors, or Jesus' castigation of the Pharisees: Although they are very willing to acknowledge the sin [of slaveholding], yet they are not ashamed of it; the reason is, it is a sin practiced by men of high rank; the affluent and the honourable and even the generality of the clergy are abettors of this crime, black as it is; and it is a profitable sin, and attended by elegance and fashionable politeness ... Quit telling your

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congregation, that if they willfully and habitually live in any known sin they have no religion. For if this doctrine is true, you will most assuredly go to hell. You are the very person who does willfully, avowedly, habitually and confessedly live in the daily practice of the worst sin that ever our country was guilty of; and you never preach that gospel but you spit upon your own coat."

Whatever the exact content of **DAVIS's** antislavery sermon in 1794, it was a rare public denunciation of slavery in South Carolina, the most proslavery of states. **JOHN WILSON**, a member of **DAVIS's** Olney congregation, termed him "the first Vender of the Doctrine of Freedom to Africans, in this country." (By "this country" **WILSON** meant "this region," probably referring to the area along the border of the Carolinas.) **WILSON**, writing to his minister brother in Pennsylvania, continued, "He [**DAVIS**] has some followers – tho' few. **MR. GILLILAND** I believe is the only one besides himself that ventured to preach from the pulpit, that it was Sinful to Deprive mankind of the Rights that GOD & nature Bestowed on them."

"**MR. GILLILAND**" was **JAMES GILLILAND** (1769-1845), who grew up in the part of the Bethel congregation that became the Olney church, and studied for the ministry under **DAVIS**. In 1796 a petition against **GILLILAND's** ordination was presented to South Carolina Presbytery on the grounds that he preached against slavery. He agreed "to desist from preaching on the subject of slavery ... without previously consulting the Presbytery," and his ordination proceeded. **GILLILAND's** conscience would not let him rest, however, and three months later he advised the presbytery that he believed silence about slavery was "contrary to the counsel of God." The presbytery referred the matter to the Synod of the Carolinas, which concurred with the presbytery's earlier ruling, advising **GILLILAND** that "to preach publicly against slavery in present circumstances, and to lay it down as the duty of every one to liberate those who are under their care ... would lead to disorder, and open the way to great confusion."<sup>57</sup> He acquiesced in this decision for a few years, but in 1804 or 1805 he left the land of slavery and moved to Ohio, where he could speak freely. There he became one of the leaders of Chillicothe Presbytery, the most antislavery judicatory in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A."<sup>58</sup>

**GILLILAND** was not **DAVIS's** only student who left the South on account of slavery. The Reverend **ROBERT G. WILSON** (1768-1851), son of the **JOHN WILSON** mentioned above, studied theology under **FRANCIS CUMMINS** and **DAVIS**. **WILSON** left South Carolina for Ohio in 1805, eventually becoming president of Ohio University. Like **GILLILAND**, **WILSON** considered slavery "an enormous crime" and "felt it [his] duty as a public character to bear testimony against it." As early as 1799 he predicted that slavery would "probably divide the churches in these states." Again like **GILLILAND**, **WILSON** would become a member of Chillicothe Presbytery.<sup>59</sup>

A third antislavery minister who moved from South Carolina Presbytery to Ohio was **WILLIAM WILLIAMSON** (1762-1839), probably another student of **DAVIS**.<sup>60</sup> As noted earlier, **WILLIAMSON** was associated with **DAVIS** in the 1802 revival at Fair Forest church, and he continued his interest in **DAVIS's** activities after moving to Ohio. **WILLIAMSON** was a slave owner, but came to abhor the institution, perhaps goaded by the antislavery sermon **DAVIS** preached at his

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ordination in 1794.<sup>61</sup> When **WILLIAMSON** announced in 1805 that he believed it his duty to move to a free state and emancipate his servants, **DAVIS** attempted to persuade him to stay for the good of his congregation, writing that "I am as much an enemy to Slavery as any one can be, yet I [have] a little scruple whether it is your duty to leave your people on that account." **DAVIS** suggested that he assuage his conscience "by hiring your slaves, setting them on a part of your land, or doing as well by them as you can."<sup>62</sup>

Although **DAVIS** did not go so far as to move to a free state, it is significant that the only Presbyterian ministers in South Carolina or southern North Carolina known to have publicly expressed antislavery views all studied under **DAVIS**. Through the leadership of **GILLILAND**, **WILSON**, and **WILLIAMSON** in Chillicothe Presbytery, which became the storm center of the slavery controversy in the Presbyterian Church, **DAVIS** had an indirect influence on the growth of abolitionism in the denomination.<sup>63</sup>

**DAVIS** propagated his own antislavery views almost as an aside in his theological writings. In *The Gospel Plan*, **DAVIS** included several pages on slavery as part of his argument that "Christians may sin willfully and habitually" without falling from grace. He began with the words, "I do not mean by this hint, to introduce an argument on the subject of slavery, " but went on boldly to assert that "there is no necessity to say one word proving the immorality of holding slaves. It is a point long ago given up by all." **DAVIS** was less than candid here; he needed only to recall **THOMAS REESE**'s reply to his own antislavery sermon in 1794 – a reply which had, according to **DAVIS**'s opponents, "greatly mortified" him – to be reminded that many people would not admit slavery was immoral. In 1806, the year **DAVIS** finished *The Gospel Plan*, Georgia congressman **PETER EARLY** said, "a large majority of people in the Southern States do not consider slavery as even an evil."<sup>64</sup> This seems to have been true of church members as well as the general population. **RACHEL N. KLEIN**, in her study of upstate South Carolina from 1760 to 1808, finds that, with rare exceptions, pulpit and pew alike saw slavery as "an extension of God-given inequalities" found in other aspects of human life. In South Carolina even Quakers, a denomination which led the early antislavery movement elsewhere, tended either to become slaveholders or to leave the South.<sup>65</sup>

In opposition to the pro-slavery majority in the South, **DAVIS** employed several arguments. In common with many writers in the early national period and later, he saw slavery as inconsistent with the freedom Americans had fought for in the Revolution and with the truths of human equality expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Anyone "who would vindicate the practice of slavery," wrote **DAVIS**, should "feel it a dishonor to him, as a man of sense and as a citizen of America which has fought and bled for freedom." "It illy suits the pride and glory of an American, to boast of the rights of man, and the divine blessings of the freedom of his country" when he "buys, and sells a human being whose freedom is guaranteed by the Almighty God who made him." Quoting **JEFFERSON** on slavery, **DAVIS** wrote, "'I tremble for my country when I know that God is just.'"<sup>66</sup>

Like later abolitionists, **DAVIS** called on not only the "self-evident truths" of natural religion, but the spirit of the Bible. Human servitude was "contrary to the mild dictates of the gospel which directs us to do as we



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would be done by, according to the general spirit of the law and the prophets." He proclaimed woe to the slaveholding clergyman who "holds an IRON ROD in one hand, and the BIBLE in the other; the one directing him to DO TO OTHERS AS HE WOULD THAT OTHERS SHOULD DO TO HIM, and the other CONTRADICTING THIS GOLDEN RULE OF OUR LORD and enforcing the ORDERS OF A RIGOROUS DESPOT."<sup>67</sup>

Finally, **DAVIS** argued that slavery was undesirable on practical political grounds, both because of the threat of insurrection and because of slavery's moral effect on the master: "I think that man is a poor politician, who does not see the miserable prospects our country has before her, in consequence of the thousands of miserable objects, on whom we bind the iron fetters of eternal slavery. Our children bred up in the constant habits of absolute tyranny and pride, will constitute wretched materials for a republican government." The "perpetual oppression" to which slaves were subjected might well "call down the vengeance of heaven upon us."<sup>68</sup>

**DAVIS**'s arguments were by no means unique, but were common to writers of his era. What specific individuals or writings could have influenced him? His early teacher **FRANCIS CUMMINS** may be ruled out, for **ROBERT WILSON** commented sarcastically in 1799 that **CUMMINS** "inculcates by precept & example the godly practice of enslaving the human species." **DAVIS**'s instructors at Mount Zion College, **THOMAS H. MCCAULE** and **SAMUEL W. YONGUE**, both seem to have been slaveholders, and none of their students besides **DAVIS** is known to have opposed slavery.<sup>69</sup> **DAVIS**'s reading included at least one work that "denounced slavery and slaveholders in strong and unequivocal terms," **THOMAS SCOTT**'s widely used Bible History commentary (first published 1788-92)?<sup>70</sup> **DAVIS**'s library included another volume designated in his estate inventory as "Sharps Essays," probably the Essay on Slavery (1773) by the English antislavery leader **GRANVILLE SHARP**, who, like **DAVIS**, warned of divine retribution against slaveholders and believed that Americans' struggle for liberty should inspire them to free their slaves. The library of **DAVIS**'s son **ROBERT** included another work—published before **ROBERT**'s birth and thus possibly passed on to him by his father—by a leading English antislavery author, **THOMAS CLARKSON**.<sup>71</sup> Finally, **DAVIS** was influenced by his own reading of the scriptures. According to his grandson, **DAVIS** "by marriage [sometime before 1793] came in possession of one slave. He examined the Bible on the subject and told that slave that she was free but she, thinking that she could find no better home, stayed with him till her death."<sup>72</sup>

In recounting **DAVIS**'s opposition to slavery, his grandson **SAMUEL FEEMSTER** suggested that it could have been a factor in his expulsion from the Presbyterian ministry. "As southern men were his persecutors," wrote **FEEMSTER**, "I have thought it possible that they wanted to stop the antislavery influence of the book [The Gospel Plan] and its author." Some other authors have tried to make that possibility into a probability.<sup>73</sup> However, the evidence suggests otherwise. **ANDREW BROWN**, a strong opponent of **DAVIS**, was also an opponent of slavery, though he appears not to have spoken against it from the pulpit. **BROWN** believed **DAVIS** inserted the antislavery passage in The Gospel Plan "for the Double purpose of making his [theological] system go down better with those who detest slavery & to blacken with them, the reputation of the southern Clergy."<sup>74</sup> **ROBERT WILSON** and **WILLIAM WILLIAMSON**, who put their

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antislavery beliefs into practice by moving to Ohio, both condemned **DAVIS's** departures from Presbyterian theological standards.<sup>75</sup>

After **DAVIS** formed the Independent Presbyterian Church, the issue of slavery surfaced from time to time in the new denomination. The Independents did not necessarily treat African Americans in a manner consistent with **DAVIS's** professed views on human equality. The 1817 constitution, while stating that black members should "be respected as brethren in the church," denied them any voice in church government: "In consequence of their peculiar circumstances and relations, which necessarily attend their state [of slavery], they are liable to prepossessions disqualifying them to bear rule." (The constitution did not address the status of free blacks in the church.) The 1823 constitution used words that the staunchest supporter of slavery might approve:

As our black people occupy a humble station among us, according to the scale of divine providence, it appears most prudent and most conducive to the welfare and respectability of the church, at least in present circumstances, that they ... be not permitted to have any share in governing the church as presbyters, nor admitted as competent witnesses for or against any, except those of their own color. They are therefore to remember the apostle's directions in I Cor. vii. 20-24, "Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called. Art thou called, being a servant? care not for it. And let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God."<sup>76</sup>

**DAVIS** again approached the issue of slavery in 1831, shortly before his death. He asked the General Convention's advice on the question, "Have infant slaves a right to the ordinance of baptism through the representation of their master or mistress?" The Presbyterian Church in the USA had ruled in 1816 that masters should present slave children for baptism, a decision which strengthened the pro-slavery argument that the master-slave relationship was analogous to the parent-child relationship. The Independent convention decided otherwise, unanimously (according to **S. C. FEEMSTER**) adopting the following resolution authored by **DAVIS**:

Resolved that the relation existing between a slave holder and his slave is founded on unjust and immoral principles of tyranny and oppression, and that the principle of involuntary slavery is morally wrong, consequently to admit an infant slave to baptism through the representation of its master or mistress would be a tacit acknowledgment that slavery is morally right and would cause the sacred ordinance of God to countenance a moral evil and would make Christ the minister of sin.<sup>77</sup>

Even though this strong statement was non-binding advice, the convention had enough second thoughts to "postpone the discussion of the slave question to the next General Convention." The 1832 convention postponed discussion again indefinitely, despite a plea from its moderator, **SILAS FEEMSTER**, **DAVIS's** son-in-law: "This is the last matter that our venerated founder ever brought before the General Convention, and is this house ready to treat with contempt

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this last question of his, and in less than one year after he has been consigned to the grave!<sup>78</sup> In 1836 **FEEMSTER** moved to Lowndes County, Mississippi, where he became pastor of the Salem Independent Presbyterian Church?<sup>79</sup> The Independents in the Carolinas became increasingly favorable toward slavery, and in 1836–37 they adopted a new constitution which brought the denomination closer to mainstream Presbyterianism in both creed and polity. **FEEMSTER** eventually cut all ties with the church in the Carolinas, considering himself the only heir to **DAVIS**'s antislavery and congregationalist beliefs. The Carolinian Independents united with the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States in 1863, with evidently not a word said about their founder's writings on slavery. The Independents in Mississippi went in the opposite direction, becoming more outspoken against slavery. They were staunch Unionists during the Civil War and united with the Congregational Church during Reconstruction. **DAVIS**'s spiritual progeny could hardly have taken more divergent paths.<sup>80</sup>

V. "The glorious dawn of forty seven, Will introduce new earth and heaven."

During the world upheaval in the era of the French Revolution and Napoleon, many American and British churchmen, including respected leaders, attempted to link the prophecies of the books of Daniel and Revelation with events in the present and near future, particularly the coming of the thousand-year reign of the saints on earth described in Revelation 20:1-6. "America was drunk on the millennium," in the words of historian **ERNEST SANDEEN**.<sup>81</sup> Among those peering into the apocalyptic crystal ball was **DAVIS**, with his writings *The Millennium, or, A Short Sketch on the Rise and Fall of Antichrist* (Salisbury, NC, 1811) and *A Treatise on the Millennium* (Yorkville, S.C., 1827). Seventh-day Adventist historian **LE ROY FROOM** credits **DAVIS** with being the first American author to predict that an important apocalyptic event would occur in the 1840s. (The first English-language work to reach this conclusion was an article in the *London Christian Observer*, probably unknown to **DAVIS**, printed three months before **DAVIS** published *The Millennium*.) Thus **DAVIS** helped usher in what **FROOM** terms "the beginning of an epoch" in prophetic interpretation.<sup>82</sup> The nineteenth century's most famous interpreter of apocalyptic scripture, Adventist founder **WILLIAM MILLER**, would proclaim a similar date, but reached his conclusions several years after **DAVIS**'s 1811 pamphlet and did not publicize them until the year of **DAVIS**'s death. Both **DAVIS** and **MILLER** counted the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 as 2300 years, beginning with the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the 450s B.C. **DAVIS** set 1847 as the end of the 2300 years, but acknowledged that if, as "generally thought," Jesus was born in 4 B.C. instead of A.D. 1, the correct date would be 1843. **MILLER** began with the date "about 1843," but changed to 1844 after events did not take place as expected in 1843.<sup>83</sup>

Like **MILLER**, **DAVIS** believed that earthshaking events in the 1840s would usher in the millennium; unlike **MILLER**, he believed the Second Coming of Christ would follow, not precede, the millennium. Still, **DAVIS**'s account of the near future resembled the pessimistic visions usually associated with pre-millennialism rather than the confidence in human progress usually associated with post-millennialism. His predictions for 1847 included a literal battle of Armageddon (fought near Rome) and the downfall of a literal Antichrist (the pope, whom Protestants had called Antichrist ever since Luther). **DAVIS**

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interpreted the dragon, beast, and false prophet of Revelation 16:13 as Napoleon (also identified as "Apollyon" of Revelation 9:11 – for **DAVIS**, "Napoleon" meant "né Apollyon"), the pope, and the Turkish emperor (heir of the "false prophet" of Islam) respectively. **DAVIS** predicted that the Ottoman Turkish empire would come under Napoleon's control (as part of it had during Napoleon's campaigns in Egypt and Palestine), but the Turks would then revolt and invade Italy, leading to the final battle during which "Babylon" (Rome) would be destroyed by earthquake (Revelation 16:18-19). While expressing hope that the United States and possibly Britain could avoid involvement in this war, **DAVIS** inserted in a footnote another comment on slavery, admitting his fear that America's treatment of Africans would "call down the vengeance of heaven upon us."<sup>84</sup> The resurrection at the beginning of the millennium (Revelation 20:4-5) would not be a literal resurrection of the dead, but a revival of the true church in Europe after its apparent extermination through persecution under "Napoleon or his successor."<sup>85</sup>

Following Armageddon, according to **DAVIS**'s interpretation of the numbers in Daniel, it would take thirty more years "for extirpating the relicks of Antichrist after his holiness is gone to perdition," and "45 more for the calling in [i.e., conversion] of the Jews, and for the spread of the gospel all over the world." Waxing poetic, **DAVIS** summarized his view of the future:

In forty seven we may hope  
To find the world without a Pope;  
When thirty more expel the evil,  
We'll find the world without a Devil;  
Add three years more and forty two,  
We'll find the world without a Jew;  
The Pope, and Devil, known no more,  
Until the thousand years are o'er;  
And Jew and Gentile now the same,  
Rejoice to wear the Christian name:  
The glorious dawn of forty seven,  
Will introduce new earth and heaven.<sup>86</sup>

Much like **HAL LINDSEY**'s Late Great Planet Earth in the 1970s, **DAVIS**'s Millennium in 1811 struck a responsive chord among those inclined to see frightening world news as fulfillment of prophecy.<sup>87</sup> **DAVIS** initially had printed a thousand copies, which he made sure were distributed widely. (One surviving copy is inscribed by **DAVIS** to **GEORGE POTTS**, pastor of the Fourth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.)<sup>88</sup> One skeptical Presbyterian, after reading The Millennium, thought "the thing carries internal marks of being written for the express purpose of supporting the credit of the Gosple [sic] Plan among his followers." Indeed, **DAVIS**'s pamphlet warned that in the coming era of persecution, "orthodox sticklers for old forms and creeds, will need some of the simple easy doctrines of faith, and the simple promises of Christ, according to the gospel plan to help them to ascend the scaffold."<sup>89</sup> Unlike **DAVIS**'s other works, The Millennium was popular enough to be reprinted, and reprint editions were issued from several locations: Nashville, Tennessee (1812); Cambridge, South Carolina (1813); Frankfort, Kentucky (1815); Lexington, Kentucky (1817); and even Workington, England (1818). There was also an abbreviated reprint published in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, with "T H. R.

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**ROBERTSON**" named as author (1826). (It is anyone's guess whether the pseudonym was intended to help sell the book to Presbyterians who disliked **DAVIS**, or intended only to cover up a publisher's piracy.) Through these reprints **DAVIS** influenced interpretations of prophecy published by Reformed Presbyterian minister **ARCHIBALD MASON** in Scotland in 1820, Presbyterian minister **JOSHUA L. WILSON** (a future Old School General Assembly moderator) in Ohio in 1828, and Disciples of Christ layman **SAMUEL M. MCCORKLE** in Tennessee in 1830.<sup>90</sup>

After the demise of Napoleon, **DAVIS** brought out a totally new Treatise on the Millennium in 1827. He reaffirmed his belief in a post-millennial return of Christ, his view that the millennium would "commence about the year 1847 or 1848," and his expectation of a great persecution before its arrival. In fact, he seemed more pessimistic than in 1811 about the chances of America being spared tribulation; he cited the rise of Roman Catholicism, "Deism and infidelity" in the United States, and reiterated "what **MR. JEFFERSON** said in his Notes on Virginia. 'I tremble for my country, when I know that God is just,' and will hear the cries of the oppressed, and avenge their cause." After this veiled reference to slavery, **DAVIS** warned his readers of coming persecution:

If you are old, you may die in peace; but if you are young, perhaps you may fly to heaven in a fiery chariot. A cross, a gibbet, the wheel, or a burning-stake, is as good a place to start from to go to heaven as a feather bed, with half a dozen of friends weeping around you, and two or three physicians drugging you to death.<sup>91</sup>

Unlike its predecessor, the 1827 work did not go into the details of the war leading to Armageddon, beyond stating that a "great revolution will take place" in which "the church of Rome will be brought to ruin."<sup>92</sup> Instead, **DAVIS**'s main preoccupation now was with the length of the millennium. He agreed with the earlier commentator **DANIEL WHITBY** that the "thousand years," using the day-year symbolism commonly applied to other numbers in the book of Revelation, actually meant 360,000 or 365,000 years. To interpret the millennium as a literal thousand years would mean that, since Satan would have ruled earth for almost six thousand years from Adam's fall to the millennium, "the reign of Satan will be six times as long as the reign of Christ" on earth. Such an interpretation, in **DAVIS**'s view, "sends Satan to hell with his head un-bruised, loaded with spoils and crowned with glory, and leading in triumph the great majority of the race of Adam to be shut up with him in his infernal kingdom of darkness," leaving Christ's "mediatorial glory tarnished and lost forever," for the glory of Christ is manifest in the salvation of sinners.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to this gloomy picture, according to **DAVIS**, a "millennium" lasting hundreds of thousands of years, without war, disease, or "fatal intemperance," would allow unimaginable millions to be born, who "all will be of the elect number." Thus he countered Universalists and others who argued that it would be unfair for God to allow the majority of humankind to be damned. Though **DAVIS** maintained his orthodox belief that some would suffer eternal damnation, "there will be more than a thousand of the human family saved, for everyone who will be lost, and even this calculation may prove to be very far under the mark." Only for the present were Christ's followers a "little flock"

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outnumbered by Satan's votaries; in the future the Church would be "universally triumphant over the whole world."<sup>94</sup>

### VI. "Wisdom Shews a Narrow Path"

**DAVIS** had the courage of stubborn conviction whether he was introducing new hymns to a congregation that considered them sacrilegious, breaking with the denomination in which he had spent his life, or challenging the institution of slavery. He followed his own understanding of the Bible no matter how much it put him at odds with established schools of thought. For instance, Journal of Presbyterian History although many of his controversial doctrines were akin to the New Divinity of **SAMUEL HOPKINS**, **DAVIS** emphatically rejected the best known distinction of Hopkinsianism, its insistence on "disinterested benevolence" – even to the point of being willing to be damned for the glory of God – as the hallmark of true Christianity. **DAVIS** responded, "I sincerely wish the notion of disinterested religion was buried in eternal oblivion." To teach that "to desire to go to heaven or not to go to hell spoils all our religion," he wrote, was "most unnatural and unreasonable ... the bible teaches no such doctrine,"<sup>95</sup> In an age when both liberal and conservative Presbyterians agreed that the idea of "infants in hell" was a slander against Calvinism, **DAVIS** wrote that, just as dying infant children of believers were saved through their parents' covenant with God, dying infant children of unbelievers were damned.<sup>96</sup> Even though **DAVIS**'s Independent Presbyterian churches were congregational in polity, there was already an association of Congregational churches in coastal South Carolina, and his theology would not have been as controversial among Congregationalists as among Presbyterians, he is not known to have made any effort to join them.<sup>97</sup> As one acquaintance commented upon the publication of the Gospel Plan, "**WILLIAM** does not like to sail in a common bark." Or, as **DAVIS** himself put it, "Every man is by nature an Emperor, and every Clergyman is by nature a Pope."<sup>98</sup> A mid-nineteenth-century critic of the Independent Presbyterians may have been close to the mark when he described **DAVIS** as "a man of vigorous and disciplined mind" combined with "no small amount of vanity and dogmatism, stubbornness and ambition to be singular and great."<sup>99</sup> **DAVIS**'s supporters saw his stubbornness not as vanity but as faithfulness to the truth. An admirer from east Tennessee lauded him as a "sequestered Sage ... whom the world knows not and regards not because the whole powers of his gigantic mind are devoted to the world's good," a man dedicated to "clearing out the rubbish which ignorance, illiberality, bigotry, and superstition have been long heaping in the straight and narrow but plain way that leads the human mind to never ending joy."<sup>100</sup> It is fitting that at the last worship service he led, **DAVIS** chose **ISAAC WATTS**'s hymn,

Broad is the road that leads to death,  
And thousands walk together there;  
But wisdom shews a narrow path,  
With here and there a traveller.<sup>101</sup>

**DAVIS** saw himself as a lonely traveler on the way of truth, heedless of the mistaken multitude. His wanderings in theology and prophetic interpretation may have been dead ends, but on the issue of slavery he truly led along wisdom's path while the South as a whole took the road that led to death.

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### NOTES

I wish to thank **WILLIAM B. WHITE, JR.**, and **S. DAVID CARRIKER** for generously sharing their own research on **DAVIS** and the Independent Presbyterians, and to thank **GEORGE APPERSON** for his helpful critique of an earlier version of this article.

<sup>1</sup> Davis's middle name is usually given as Cummins, although it is spelled "Cummings" in the manuscript history of the Independent Presbyterian Church by his grandson Samuel Calvin Feemster (hereafter cited as S. C. Feemster Manuscript), typed copy in Silas Jamieson Feemster Collection, Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreal, N.C. (repository hereafter cited as PHSM). Davis is believed to have adopted his middle name as a tribute to his brother-in-law Francis Cummins (letter of descendant William B. White, Jr., to author, 11 Jan. 2000).

<sup>2</sup> George Howe, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina*, 2 vols. (Columbia: W. J. Duffie, 1870-83), 2:97.

<sup>3</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 9-11.

<sup>4</sup> A brief earlier article is E. H. Gillett, "The Rev. William C. Davis and the Independent Presbyterian Church of South Carolina," *Historical Magazine*, 3d ser., 3 (Jan. 1874): 26-28; another account of the Independent Presbyterians (based on information from S. C. Feemster) is found in George Punchar, *History of Congregationalism from about A.D. 250 to the Present Time*, vol. 5 (Boston: Congregational Publishing Society, 1881), 105-17. Harold M. Parker, Jr., "The Independent Presbyterian Church and Reunion in the South, 1813-1863," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 50 (Summer 1972): 89-110, deals primarily with the later years of the Independent Presbyterians in the Carolinas after Davis's death. A brief summary of the entire history of the Independent Presbyterian Church and its congregations is found in Richard H. Taylor, *Southern Congregational Churches* (Benton Harbor, Mich.: the author, 1994), 25, 200-202.

<sup>5</sup> S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 1; indicates William was born in Maryland. Samuel W. Williams, a grand nephew of Davis, believed he was born in Pennsylvania, and apparently thought the family moved directly from Pennsylvania to North Carolina. [S. W. Williams] to James H. Saye, undated, unsigned letter fragment [ca. 1883], photocopy courtesy of Robert Stevens. Darlington, S.C.



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<sup>6</sup> S. C. Feemster Manuscript. 1; notes by descendant Nell Davis (undated) in William C. Davis folder, Biography File, PHSM; William B. Sprague, ed., *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 9 vols. (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857-69) 3:419; see also mentions of Davis family in S. W. Williams, "Reminiscences of Arkansas. Rev. Aaron Williams," *Christian Observer* (Louisville) 3 Oct. 1883, 2.

<sup>7</sup> S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Howe, *Presbyterian Church in S.C.*, 1:504-6, 667, 625-26. For examples of the widespread disputes over psalmody, see William B. Bynum, "The Genuine Presbyterian Whine': Presbyterian Worship in the Eighteenth Century," *American Presbyterians: Journal of Presbyterian History* 74 (Fall 1996): 163-65.

<sup>9</sup> William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina, Historical and Biographical* (New York: Robert Carter, 1846), 249.

<sup>10</sup> Howe, *Presbyterian Church in S.C.*, 1:604-5; S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 1; T. G. Tate, *History of Olney Presbyterian Church, 1793-1947* (n.p., n.d.), 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 1-2; William Williamson to Drs. Hollinshead and Keith, 6 May 1802, in *New York Missionary Magazine* 3 [1802]: 276-77; Daniel Gray to Williamson, 2 August 1809. William Williamson Papers in John D. Shane Collection, Record Group 196, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia (repository hereafter cited as PHSP) Ebenezer H. Cummins to "My Friend," 7 July 1802, in Poole, *Sketches of North Carolina*, 404-9; John B. O. Landrum, *History of Spartanburg County* (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Publishing, 1900), 95. For more on the beginnings of the revival in South Carolina, see John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 78-80.

<sup>12</sup> Davis to Robert Patterson, 3 Apr. 1803, Robert Patterson Papers, Shane Collection, PHSP; Minutes, Concord Presbytery, 1:121-22. Davis and Wilson's reply to the questions was oral and "for want of time could not be written" in the minutes. All presbytery and synod minutes cited in this essay are manuscripts at PHSM. Concord minutes exist in two copies: originals and uniformly bound transcripts. I have used the original.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes, Concord Presbytery, 1:138-40.

<sup>14</sup> Minutes, Synod of the Carolinas, 2:101, 127u28. For the failure of other missions to the Catawbas. see Douglas Summers Brown, *The Catawba Indians: The People of the River Columbia: University of S.C.. Press, 1966*), 340-43, and James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: University of N.C. Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1989), 242-43.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes, Presbytery of South Carolina, 1785-99 (in volume with Minutes, First Presbytery of South Carolina), 39, 68, 73, 96; Minutes, Presbytery of Concord, 1:52, 132; Minutes, Synod of Carolinas, 2:74; Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America ... A.D.

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1789 to 1820 AD. 1820 Inclusive (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication. [1847]), 345, 362, 393, 434.

<sup>16</sup> Howe, Presbyterian Church in S.C., 1:625–26, 2:97; Minutes, Synod of Carolinas, 2:190; J. L. Strain, Historical Sketch of Salem Church (Gaffney, S.C.: Ledger Print, n.d.), not paginated.

<sup>17</sup> See William Breitenbach, "The Consistent Calvinism of the New Divinity Movement," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 41 (Apr. 1984):241-64, quote on 255. For more on Hopkins, see Joseph A. Conforti, Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981), especially chapters 4, 7, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Minutes, Synod of the Carolinas, 2:190–91; Confession of Faith, chap. 11, sec. 2, in Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Jane Aitken, 1806), 59; William C. Davis, The Gospel Plan, or a Systematical Treatise on the Leading Doctrines of Salvation (Philadelphia: Hopkins and Earle, 1809), 419-21. The Gospel Plan, though not published until 1809, was completed in 1806 as a collection of "truths which I [Davis] have so often delivered ... from the pulpit" (author's preface in Gospel Plan, v-vi).

<sup>19</sup> Minutes, Synod of the Carolinas, 2:191-92; Davis, Gospel Plan, 366-67. 393, 352-65, 345.

<sup>20</sup> Minutes. First Presbytery of S.C., 103–4; Minutes, Synod of Carolinas, 2:228, 237-458; William C. Davis, A Solemn Appeal to the Impartial Public (1812; reprint, Columbia: South-Carolinian. 1839), 25 (PHSM copy bound with Constitution and Form of Government of the Independent Presbyterian Church).

<sup>21</sup> Minutes, First Presbytery of S.C., 105; Davis, Gospel Plan, 163–65, 177–83; see Confession of Faith 19.1 in Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Minutes, First Presbytery of S.C., 107-14.

<sup>23</sup> Minutes, Synod of Carolinas. 2:272, 321-27; Davis, Solemn Appeal, 38-39.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes, Synod of Carolinas, 2:331-33; Davis, Solemn Appeal, 47-53.

<sup>25</sup> Minutes, Synod of Carolinas, 2:320, 333.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes of the General Assembly 1789-1820, 448, 452-53; Davis, Solemn Appeal, 56-57, 62-63; Davis, Gospel Plan, 194, 205, 527; Confession of Faith 9.6 in Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, 53.

<sup>27</sup> See Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 1:148-53. 156-64; Ben M. Barrus, Milton L. Baughn, and Thomas H. Campbell, A People Called Cumberland Presbyterians (Memphis: frontier Press, 1972), 60, 106.

<sup>28</sup> Davis, Gospel Plan, 275; Andrew Brown to William Williamson, 21 May and 15 Aug. 1810, Williamson Papers.

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<sup>29</sup> Minutes, Synod of Carolinas, 1:187-95, 250; Minutes of the General Assembly 1789-1820, 155-58; see also Balch's "Creed" as published in the Knoxville Gazette, 1 Aug. 1796 (typed copy in Biography File, PHSM). The synod suspended Balch from the ministry in 1799 for continuing to promulgate the Hopkinsian definition of holiness (as "disinterested benevolence"), which had been one of the "errors" the General Assembly had required him to renounce, but he was back in good standing within a couple of years (Minutes, Synod of Carolinas, 1:332, 337; 2:34).

<sup>30</sup> Davis, Solemn Appeal, 77-79; Minutes, Synod of Carolinas, 2:362-66; Minutes, First Presbytery, 139; Daniel Gray to William Williamson, 26 Nov. 1810, Williamson Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Davis, Solemn Appeal, 79-81, 250: see Minutes. Concord Presbytery, 1:242-46.

<sup>32</sup> Davis, Solemn Appeal, 84-85, 98, 108-11; Minutes, Concord Presbytery, 1:246: Roster of Cemetery and Historical Sketch of Bullock Creek Church (N .p.: Bullock Creek Cemetery Association, 1976) 6; Strain, Historical Sketch of Salem Church, not paginated.

<sup>33</sup> Davis, Gospel Plan, 66-68, 82-83, 86-88, 96, 98, 103-4; Minutes of the General Assembly 1789-1820, 453.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, Concord Presbytery, 1:243-44; Davis, Solemn Appeal, 178-79 (quoting letter from Concord Presbytery), 186-87, 190-91.

<sup>35</sup> Minutes, Concord Presbytery, 1:250, 257-60, 266.

<sup>36</sup> Constitution and Form of Government of the independent Presbyterian Church (Yorkville, S.C.: Printed for the Society by P. Carey, 1824), iii (copy in Robert Y. Russel Papers, PHSM); Park H. Moore, Jr., History of the Shiloh Presbyterian Church (Grover, NC, 1955), 2; Tate, History of Olney Presbyterian Church, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Constitution of the IPC (1824), iii-iv.

<sup>38</sup> An Abstract from the Rules and Form of Government of the Independent Presbyterian Church (Nashville: Nowell & M'lean, 1817), 13-16, 11 (copy in Russel Papers); for Bulluck Creek's Congregational connection, see Howe, Presbyterian Church in S.C., 1:515; and Taylor, Southern Congregational Churches, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Constitution of the IPC (1824), 34, 16-20; Abstract from the Rules & Form of Government, 7-11. For a rumor at an Independent plan to ordain ministers, formulated even before the 1813 constitution, see Andrew Brown to William Williamson, 25 Apr. 1812, Williamson Papers.

<sup>40</sup> Abstract from the Rules and Form of Government, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Constitution of the IPC (1824), 48-49. Parker, "The Independent Presbyterian Church," 92, mistakenly dates these doctrines to 1837 and calls them "a

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departure from Davis' theology." Parker evidently did not see the 1823 constitution in researching his article.

<sup>42</sup> Silas J. Feemster Memoir (1867), typed copy in Feemster Collection, PHSM, 1, 6-7; S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 3; Constitution and Form of Government of the Independent Presbyterian Church (Columbia : South-Carolinian. 1839), 5.

<sup>43</sup> Robert G. Wilson to William Williamson, 18 Dec. 1815, Williamson Papers: S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 3; information on David Davis in Davis Family folder, Genealogy File, PHSM.

<sup>44</sup> Constitution of the IPC (1839), 5-6; S. J. Feemster Memoir, 7-11; S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 3; William B. White, Jr., ed.. First Presbyterian Church, York, South Carolina: One Hundred and fiftieth Anniversary (N.p., 1992). 2-3.

<sup>45</sup> Constitution of the IPC (1824), v, 50-53.

<sup>46</sup> Amendments to the Constitution of the Independent Presbyterian Church" (1829), bound with Constitution of the IPC (1824) and W. C. Davis, A Treatise on the Millennium (Yorkville, S.C.: Advocate, 1827), University of Virginia microfilm, PHSM.

<sup>47</sup> William C. Davis. Lectures on the New Testament. 1 (Yorkville, S.C.: Robert M. Davis, 1823), title page, x, xvi; see also S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 3.

<sup>48</sup> W. C. Davis, Lectures on Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Charleston: General Convention of the Independent Presbyterian Church, 1858): W. C. Davis, Lectures on Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews (Charleston: General Convention of the Independent Presbyterian Church, 1859).

<sup>49</sup> Constitution of the WC (1839), 8-11. Mitchell's name is spelled "Mitchel" in this source, but "Mitchell" in almost every other source. For C. W. Davis's relationship to W. C. Davis, see S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 5.

<sup>50</sup> S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> William C. Davis H5 file, PHSP; White, First Presbyterian Church, York, S.C., 3.

<sup>52</sup> Bill of Sale, William C. Davis Estate, Case 1, File 12. York County Probate Court, York. S.C.; S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 3. The Independent Presbyterian statistics closest to Davis's death (1833) give a total of 940 members, 573 of whom had joined during the revivals of the previous year (Minutes and Pastoral letter of the Tenth Session of the General Convention of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Yorkville. S.C., 1833|, 3).

<sup>53</sup> Gillett, "William C. Davis." 27; Samuel J. Baird, ed., A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856). 647, 663 (protests to the General Assembly in 1817 and 1834 which use Davis as an example of Hopkinsian or New School theology); James O. Farmer, Jr., The

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Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 179-80.

<sup>54</sup> J. R. Witherspoon, "Memoir of the late Rev'd Thomas Reese," Southern Presbyterian Review 6 (1852): 116-18. Witherspoon gives the year but not the date or text of Davis's sermon, but minutes of the presbytery show that his only sermon before that body in 1794 was an ordination sermon on 1 John 4:1, preached on 25 September. Minutes. S.C. Presbytery, 1785-99: 74.

<sup>55</sup> Davis, Gospel Plan, vi, 531-33.

<sup>56</sup> John Wilson to Samuel Wilson, 7 Mar. 1797, Leonidas C. Glenn Collection, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, 4:122, shows Wilson's connection with the North Carolina portion of the Bethel congregation, which became Olney. For an analysis of the strength of pro-slavery views in South Carolina in the early national period, see Rachel N. Klein, Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Back country, 1760-1808 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1990), 271-76.

<sup>57</sup> Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, 4:137; Howe, Presbyterian Church in S.C., 1:607; Minutes, S.C. Presbytery, 1785-99:90,94; Minutes, Synod of the Carolinas, 1:198-99.

<sup>58</sup> Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, 4:138; Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 1:336. Thompson mistakenly calls Gilliland "a native South Carolinian," while Sprague, using information from Gilliland's family, states that he was born just across the North Carolina border.

<sup>59</sup> Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, 4:122-26; Robert Wilson to Samuel Wilson, 27 Mar. 1799, Glenn Collection. Robert Wilson appears to have added the middle name Gilliland after his move to Ohio: of his several letters in the Glenn Collection, the first one signed "Robt. G. Wilson" instead of "Robt. Wilson" is dated 1806.

<sup>60</sup> Extant records do not name the minister under whom Williamson studied theology, but it was most likely Davis, who was the Presbyterian minister closest to Williamson's hometown of Spartanburg when Williamson became a candidate for the ministry.

<sup>61</sup> Minutes, S.C. Presbytery 1785-99: 74; see note 54 above.

<sup>62</sup> Howe, Presbyterian Church in S.C., 1:621-22; Davis to Williamson. 4 Feb. 1805, Williamson Papers. For Williamson's continuing interest in Davis, see, for example, "Some Remarks on William C. Davis's Delence by William Williamson," n. d. (ca. 1810), Williamson Papers.

<sup>63</sup> For the importance of Chillicothe Presbytery in the antislavery movement see Dwight L. Dumond, Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 91-92; and Larry G. Willey, "John Rankin,

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Antislavery Prophet, and the Free Presbyterian Church," *American Presbyterians: Journal of Presbyterian History* 72 (1994): 159-63.

<sup>64</sup> Davis, *Gospel Plan*, 530; Witherspoon, "Memoir of Thomas Reese," 118; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 136. For pro-slavery thought in both South and North during the Revolutionary and early national periods, see Larry E. Tise, *Pro-slavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 22-45.

<sup>65</sup> Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*, 269-76, 301-2.

<sup>66</sup> Davis, *Gospel Plan*, 530; W. C. Davis, *The Millennium; or, A Short Sketch of the Rise and Fall of Antichrist* (Salisbury, NC: Coupee, 1811), 46-47n. For arguments used by antislavery writers during the early national era, see Mary Stoughton Locke, *Anti-Slavery in America from the introduction of African Slaves to the Prohibition of the Slave Trade (1619-1808)* (1901; reprint, Gloucester, Mass; Peter Smith, 1965), 166-88. Jefferson's exact words were, "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever...." Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 163.

<sup>67</sup> Davis, *Gospel Plan*, 531; Davis, *Lectures on the New Testament*, 1:359.

<sup>68</sup> Davis, *Millennium*, 46n.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Wilson to Samuel Wilson, 27 Mar. 1799, Glenn Collection. to the 1790 census of Fairfield County. where Mt. Zion was located, McCaule and Samuel "Young" (no "Yongue" appears in the published census of South Carolina that year) are listed as having slaves in their households. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790: South Carolina* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1908), 21, For what little other information is available on McCaule, see Richard A. Harrison, *Princetonians 1769-1775* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 407-9. For Yongue, see Howe, *Presbyterian Church in S.C.*, index. For a list of thirteen ministers of S.C. Presbytery educated at Mt. Zion, see Howe, *Presbyterian Church in S.C.*, 1:667-69.

<sup>70</sup> Davis's library included "Scott's Family Bible," an unofficial title sometimes used on the cover of Scott's commentary. William C. Davis Estate Papers, Case 1, File 12, York County Probate Court, York, S.C. A later critic of Davis's theology pointed out that much of his apparent erudition was lifted from Scott's commentary. "Reuchlin." *An Expository Critique, Being a Vindication of an Article Entitled "Old Errors Revived and Rejuvenated in South Carolina* (Yorkville, S.C.: Enquirer Office, 1860), 5, copy in Russel Papers, PHSM. For Scott as an antislavery author, see John W. Christie and Dwight L. Dumond, *George Bourne and "The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable"* (Wilmington, Del., and Philadelphia: Historical Society of Delaware and Presbyterian Historical Society, 1969), 8, 71.

<sup>71</sup> For Sharp's arguments. see D. B. Davis, *Problem of Slavery*. 396-98. A search of Charles Evans. Ralph R. Shaw, and Richard H. Shoemaker's *American*

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Bibliography (New York: P. Smith, 1941-59, and Scarecrow Press, 1958-65) and its successor, *A Checklist of American Imprints* (New York and Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1964-) reveals that Granville Sharp's *Essay on Slavery* is the only work known to have been published in America before Davis's death with an author named Sharp, Sharpe, or Sharps and a title containing the word "Essay" or "Essays." The volume called "Clarkson on Slavery" in the sale bill of Robert M. Davis's estate, 1825 (Case 16, File 660, York County Probate Court) is most likely Clarkson's "famous" *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1786), but it may be his "highly influential" *Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (1788). See D. B. Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, 358, 352-53n.

<sup>72</sup> S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 5. Davis's marriage to Isabella McCleary is dated by the birth of their son Robert in 1793 (William B. White, Jr., letter to author. 10 Feb. 1996).

<sup>73</sup> S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 6; see Andrew L. Pickens, *Antislavery and Other Memoirs of Old Richmond Kirkworth* (n.p., 1960), 42-43, copy in William C. Davis H5 file, PHSP. Pickens's treatment of Davis is long on rhetoric and short on facts.

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Brown to William Williamson, 21 May 1810 and 3 April 1805, Williamson Papers. Brown wrote in the 1805 letter just cited: "I tremble for our country when I think of the iniquity of slavery. I blush for republic[an]ism when I think of the late abominable importation act [South Carolina's act reopening the foreign slave trade]. And firmly believe that all concerned in that act either in making it, or in purchasing the unhappy victims are tyrants & would if in their power enslave all their fellow creatures."

<sup>75</sup> For Wilson's opinion of Davis's theological innovations, see Robert G. Wilson to William J. Wilson, 27 Feb. 1812, Glenn Collection. Although Williamson thought at first that The Gospel Plan would do more good than harm (see Andrew Brown to Williamson, 21 May and 15 Aug. 1810, Williamson Papers), he came to believe that Davis was wrong in departing from the Presbyterian standards, and inconsistent, even hypocritical, in his defense. "Some Remarks on William C. Davis's Defense," n.d., Williamson Papers.

<sup>76</sup> Abstract from the Rules and Form of Government, 14; Constitution of the IPC (1824), 31.

<sup>77</sup> S. J. Feemster Memoir, 18; Minutes of the General Assembly 1789-1820, 617.

<sup>78</sup> S. J. Feemster Memoir, 18-19.

<sup>79</sup> S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 8; for the date of the move to Mississippi see Roy F. Feemster. *Brief Biographies of the Feemster, Cope, Leflors, Redus Families* (Concord, NH: Feemster Publications, 1983), 40.

<sup>80</sup> S. C. Feemster Manuscript, 8-10; Constitution of the IPC (1839), 14-17, 36, 82-84, 87-97. By 1843 Salem Church, Mississippi, was no longer listed in the statistics of the General Convention (Pastoral Letter of the General

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Convention of the Independent Presbyterian Church with Extracts from the Minutes [Columbia, S.C., 1844], 14). For a study of the later years of the Independents in the Carolinas, see Parker, "Independent Presbyterian Church."

<sup>81</sup> Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (1970; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978). 5-9, 42. See chapters 1 and 2 of this work for an overview of early nineteenth-century Anglo-American beliefs about the millennium.

<sup>82</sup> Le Roy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, 4 vols. (Washington: Review and Herald, 1946-54), 4:210-11.

<sup>83</sup> Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, 4:463, 482-86, 796-98; Davis, *Millennium*, 10-13.

<sup>84</sup> Davis, *Millennium*, 40-44, 46-48.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-51.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>87</sup> For the popularity of Lindsey's 1970 book, see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), *passim*.

<sup>88</sup> Andrew Brown to William Williamson, 25 Apr. 1812, *Williamson Papers*: inscription on cover of copy of Davis, *Millennium*, PHSP.

<sup>89</sup> Brown to Williamson, 25 Apr. 1812; Davis, *Millennium*, 52.

<sup>90</sup> Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, 3:402; and 4:214-15, 223, 232-33, 237-38. For the 1812 Nashville printing, which Froom missed, see Ralph R. Shaw and Richard H. Shoemaker, *American Bibliography: A Preliminary Checklist for "NZ"* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1962), 83.

<sup>91</sup> W. C. Davis, *A Treatise on the Millennium* (Yorkville: Advocate Office, 1827), 23, 85, 125-27.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, 88. 91-93, 48-49.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, 94, 98-99. The Connecticut New Divinity minister Joseph Bellamy made a similar statement in a sermon on the millennium published in 1758. While he believed the millennium would be a literal thousand years, population growth would be such that "above 17,000 would be saved, to one lost." Quoted in *Conforti*, Samuel Hopkins, 164.

<sup>95</sup> Davis, *Gospel Plan*, 337, 347.

<sup>96</sup> Davis, *Lectures on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 292-95, 323-24. For contemporary Presbyterian views, see Hezekiah Balch's 1797 accusation against



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"sortie of our Calvinistic divines" in Synod of the Carolinas Minutes, 1: 211-12, and the response in Minutes of the General Assembly 1789-1820, 156. Some earlier Calvinists agreed with Davis on this point; see c. B. Warfield, *The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation* (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1891), 40-41 .

<sup>97</sup> For the Congregational Association of South Carolina, see Howe, *Presbyterian Church in S.C.*, 2:45-52, 323-24.

<sup>98</sup> Robert M. Cunningham to William Williamson, 28 July 1808, Williamson Papers; Davis. *Solemn Appeal*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> "Reuchlin," *An Expository Critique*, 4.

<sup>100</sup> "Mr. Rankin" (perhaps a relative of Presbyterian abolitionist John Rankin?), quoted in *S. C. Feemster Manuscript*, 4-5.

<sup>101</sup> *S. C. Feemster Manuscript*, 3; Isaac Watts. *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Wilmington, Del.: Peter Brynberg. 1796), 206-7 (Book 2, Hymn 158).

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