



### OUR BAPTIST FOREFATHER

By Lee Haines

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George W. McDonald was born on Grand Manan, an island which is part of New Brunswick in Canada, July 15, 1835. Little is known of his early years, prior to his conversion at the age of 27. Like other residents of Grand Manan, he earned his living for some years as a fisherman. He was married, and to him and his wife were born two sons and a daughter.

The real starting point for McDonald came in August 1862, when he exercised saving faith in Jesus Christ. On August 9, 1862, he was baptized and received into the membership of the Free Christian Baptist church, a small freewill denomination organized in Canada some 30 years earlier.

McDonald was licensed to preach by the Free Christian Baptist Conference in 1865, and ordained in 1867. He began his pastoral ministry in 1865, with his third pastorate coming at Woodstock in western New Brunswick, 1873-84.

Early in 1882, a young evangelist by the name of Aaron Hartt, who had been in the United States, came to Woodstock to assist McDonald in special services. Hartt preached entire sanctification as a second work of grace, and as the privilege and need of every believer. McDonald searched the Scriptures and studied *Butler's Theology*, the denomination's official doctrinal standard. As a result, he and many of his people were entirely sanctified.

McDonald's crisis came on March 19 and is best described in his own words as he tells of the rest he experienced.

Such rest, only to be experienced, never fully told. Rest from all the inward warfare caused by remaining evil in my heart, and withal a sense of cleanness, purity, and such a deep satisfied assurance of having reached the place where the soul could well with God, and that God had perfected His love in me. There was no doubt about it; the Comforter had come. How easy now to pray, to praise, what a constancy of faith; how deep the peace; how bright the hope.

The revival which had began at Woodstock soon spread to other Free Christian Baptist pastors and congregations. At the October 1882 Conference, several testimonies to entire sanctification were heard and the subject was discussed. Aaron Hartt was received and licensed as a preacher.

During the following years the revival continued to spread. But opposition now began to develop, some calling the doctrine "Methodist" and "unscriptural." Erroneous reports of what was being preached circulated widely. By 1884, the Conference discontinued the license of Hartt and another young holiness preacher. In 1886 the Conference adopted a statement condemning the doctrine of entire sanctification, saying that such an experience was not for this life but was reserved for heaven. No one holding the doctrine was to be licensed or ordained, and it was recommended that no local church elect such to office. The 1887 Conference continued this rigid stand, but changed the basis for it, saying that entire sanctification was experienced at regeneration!

Finally, on October 16, 1888, the Conference of the Free Christian Baptist Church voted to disfellowship five of its ministers who persisted in preaching holiness. The first one named was George W. McDonald, whose pastoral assignment had been at Sussex and Penobscis since 1884. The others were William Kinghorn, Bambord Colpitts, G. Bennet Trafton, and George T. Hartley.

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Four days after the five ministers were dropped, a meeting was held in Woodstock and a letter was drafted calling lovers of holiness to a convention at the Main Street Church in Woodstock.

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**George W. McDonald followed the Scriptures and the leadership of the Holy Spirit into a life of perfect love. It cost him much in former relationships but led to a larger ministry than he had ever dreamed.**

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The Convention was held November 1-3, 1888. On the last day, the Reformed Baptist Alliance of Canada was formed and officers were elected. The officers were headed by a president, whose primary duty was to preside over the annual business meeting. On the same day, the local Reformed Baptist Church of Woodstock was organized, with 41 members followed by 15 more the next day. The first pastor of this “mother” congregation was G.W. McDonald.

The growth of the new denomination was rapid. In the first seven months following the organization of the denomination and of the local church at Woodstock, 21 other churches were organized. There were now 18 churches in New Brunswick and four more in Nova Scotia, with a total membership of 540 and a Sunday school enrollment of 688. This expansion took place in spite of the fact that the churches were compelled to worship in halls, schoolhouses, store lofts, and fish houses, and the pastors had to get by with very little in the way of support.

G.W. McDonald served as pastor at Woodstock for two years, and then moved to St. John for three years. While on the latter pastorate, he held the office of vice-president of the Alliance, 1890-91, and that of president, 1891-92.

Of greater importance than these more routine offices were his position as field evangelist beginning in 1893, and his service for two periods as editor of the denominational paper, *The King's Kingway*, 1893-97 and 1900-02. It is not fully known what transpired during his service as field evangelist, although the movement

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did spill over into the state of Maine at about this time. During his first period of service as editor, the paper was changed from a monthly to a semimonthly, and McDonald also served on the committee to develop a campground at Brown's Flats, New Brunswick, where the Beulah Camp was occupied for conference and camp the first time in 1894. During his second period of service as editor, the foreign mission field in South Africa was opened in 1901, and a second campground, Riverside Camp, was established at Robinson, Maine, in 1902.

George W. McDonald passed away on December 31, 1902, a little over one year after the death of his wife. He died in his sleep while spending the holidays with his three children. He had by this time returned to the pastorate, serving at Hartland, New Brunswick, and also serving as editor. His name was stamped indelibly in the minds of succeeding generations as the founder of his church. That church continued growing, and in 1966 it merged with The Wesleyan Methodist Church of America. Following the 1968 merger it became the Atlantic District of The Wesleyan Church.