

Daniel, Robert Thomas ^[1]

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by John R. Woodard, 1986

10 June 1773–14 Sept. 1840

Robert Thomas Daniel, Baptist minister and agent for benevolent agencies, was born in Middlesex County, Va., the fifth son of Samuel and Eliza Thomas Daniel. At the close of the Revolutionary War, the family migrated to [Orange County](#) ^[2], N.C., and settled near Hillsborough. Young Daniel probably attended a local school for a short time. He was brought up in the two businesses conducted by his father, a blacksmith and cabinetmaker.

In July 1802 Daniel professed his faith and in August was baptized by Elder Isaac Hicks at Holly Springs Baptist Church, [Wake County](#) ^[3], of which he became a member. By 1803 he felt the call to begin speaking at church meetings; he was formally licensed to preach in April. Three months later he was ordained at Holly Springs by Elders Isaac Hicks, his pastor, and Nathan Gully. From that day until his death he devoted himself exclusively to the ministry, thereby expending his fortune and his health.

Throughout his career, Daniel spent most of his time traveling as an agent for various Baptist causes but he did have several brief pastorates. As one of the first missionaries of the North Carolina Baptist Benevolent Society, he organized the Raleigh First Baptist Church (presently located on Salisbury Street near the state capitol), on 8 Mar. 1812, serving as pastor in 1812–13 and again in 1822–26. During the latter period, he began sunrise services and took steps to increase the Negro membership. In 1823, one Joseph, a slave of Sherwood Haywood, was appointed to officiate for members of his race at the Lord's Supper; in the same year permission was granted for any colored minister of like faith "possessing proper credentials" to preach in the church whenever it was not being used. Success as a pastor did not affect Daniel's desire to travel, and he again resumed his missionary efforts.

On 14 Aug. 1814, Daniel helped organize Yates (now Mount Pisgah) Baptist Church in [Chatham County](#) ^[4] and was its pastor until 1818 and again in 1822. He also assisted in the organization of Mount Carmel Baptist Church (1816) and Sandy Fields Baptist Church (1823), both in Orange County. From 1819 until 1820 he was pastor of Grassy Creek Baptist Church, [Granville County](#) ^[5]. During his travels as agent, he preached at many churches—at May's Chapel, Chatham County; at Carthage; and at Sawmill Baptist Church in South Carolina, among others.

According to abstracts of the minutes of the Sandy Creek Baptist Association, Daniel served as a delegate to the Raleigh Baptist Association (1808, 1825), to the Pee Dee Baptist Association and the General Meeting of Correspondence, North Carolina (1815), and to the Charleston Baptist Association (1817, 1821); as a correspondent with the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions (1815, 1817); and as moderator for the Sandy Creek Baptist Association (1816, 1817, and 1822). He wrote a circular letter for the Sandy Creek Association in 1816 and another in 1822 on "The Encouragement of Itinerant Preachers." In 1823 he was present at the Sandy Creek Association as an agent for domestic missions and took up a collection of \$18.73 and a gold ring.

In 1826 Daniel went to Virginia where he served the Black Creek and High Hills Baptist churches in the Virginia-Portsmouth Baptist Association; at Black Creek he took the position of a pastor who would not baptize slaveholders. In November 1827 he began to preach just across the state line in [Gates County](#) ^[6], and by February 1828 he began baptizing converts. That May he organized a church of thirty-one members at Sandy Cross. For four years (1827–30) he attended the Chowan Baptist Association as a delegate from the Virginia-Portsmouth Baptist Association.

At the first meeting of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, held in 1830, Daniel was appointed an agent of the convention. He soon was preaching and traveling from [Northampton County](#) ^[7] to [Camden County](#) ^[8] in northeastern North Carolina. Daniel then removed to Tennessee and, after spending some time in itinerant work in the central part of the state, settled in Lexington. From there he moved to Paris, Tenn. In July 1837 he wrote to the *Biblical Recorder* that his health was restored and that he was able to travel and preach each day. In the fall he was elected as a delegate from Paris Baptist Church to the Western Baptist Convention of Tennessee and the Western Baptist Education Society. As a member of the committee to locate a literary institution, he persuaded the delegates to select Paris for the site; he also served on the committees assigned to secure a charter from the legislature and to appoint trustees for the institution. In August 1837 he informed the *Biblical Recorder* about the committee's determination to establish an educational institution and requested the support of other states.

In 1839 Daniel moved to Mississippi. There he issued a circular calling for a meeting to organize a Southern Home Mission Society. At the meeting, held in Columbus, he was elected as the general agent to travel in the society's behalf. He finally settled in Salem, Miss., which he regarded as home for the remainder of his life.

Daniel was a wanderer and had no continuing home base. He was easily discouraged and just as easily induced to change his place by the prospect of greater usefulness elsewhere. The revival spirit appealed to him and he was disposed to fix his residence where religious excitement prevailed. Consequently, he played a prominent role in the organization and maintenance of many religious and benevolent associations. Much of his time was occupied in these duties, and during the greater part of his life he was either a missionary or an agent of one of them. He served the North Carolina Baptist Benevolent Society, the North Carolina Baptist Society for Foreign and Domestic Missions, the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Baptist State Conventions of Tennessee and North Carolina, the Southwestern Baptist Home Mission Society, and educational societies in Tennessee and Mississippi. When overtaken with his final illness, he was on a projected tour of Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi for two of these societies.

Just before his death Daniel wrote: "During the thirty-seven years that have passed since I commenced the work of the ministry, I have travelled for the purpose of preaching the gospel about sixty thousand miles, preached upwards of five thousand sermons, and baptized more than fifteen hundred people." His doctrine was of a high Calvinistic cast, but his feelings with regard to the spread of the gospel were apostolic. He felt a peculiar anxiety that could not be confined to the narrow compass of a town, a county, or a state.

Daniel was a vigorous, graceful, and often brilliant writer. Some of his letters were printed in the *Biblical Recorder* (Raleigh) and the *Baptist Banner and Western Pioneer* (Louisville, Ky.). His circular letters, agency reports, and other writings appear in the minutes of the various associations and agencies he represented. In 1812 he published *Daniel's Selection*, a 280-page songbook (printed in Raleigh by [Thomas Henderson](#)^[9]) containing 176 hymns and 52 "Spiritual Songs." Thirty-eight of the hymns were composed by Daniel himself.

In later years Daniel suffered from dyspepsia and chronic diarrhea, which caused him to lose weight and exhausted his physical powers. In July 1840 when his health began to worsen, he went to the top of the Cumberland Mountains to take the waters, but this did not help him. He became bedridden at Solomon Hartsfield's home, "awaiting the place of final deposit"; nevertheless, he rallied enough to travel to his son's home in Paris, Tenn., where he died and was buried.

At twenty-three Daniel married Penelope Cain Flowers of Chatham County, N.C., a quiet, unassuming co-worker. They had eight children, five boys and three girls, three of whom died in infancy. Mrs. Daniel was crippled and confined to her bed for several years before her death on 1 Jan. 1840, in Salem, Miss.

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Additional Resources:

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[23]

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