



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Norman Jameson, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
MEMPHIS Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Haste, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

January 21, 1981

81-11

Southern Baptists Join Rejoicing For Hostages

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptists, like millions of others, paused to thank God for the release and safe return of 52 Americans held hostage for 444 days in Iran.

"All of us rejoice in the fact of the release of the hostages from Iran and pray that these ex-hostages and their families will be blessed with God's grace and by his presence," said Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

Bennett encouraged Southern Baptist churches to join in a national movement to hold services of prayer and thanksgiving for the release of the captives.

"I think it would be appropriate for Southern Baptist churches to conduct special services for thanksgiving to God for his presence in this matter," Bennett said, suggesting such services be conducted either Wednesday, Jan. 28, or Sunday, Feb. 1.

The suggestion calls for "joining with other religious groups" from across the nation who have called for a national time of thanksgiving on Thursday, Jan. 29. Bennett, however, said he feels it would be more appropriate for Baptists to hold the services at regular prayer meeting or Sunday service times.

In the immediate aftermath of the release of the hostages Jan. 20, Southern Baptists in many places across the nation joined in prayer, rang church bells and tied yellow ribbons to trees and other places.

In Dallas, James H. Landes, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, participated in a community thanksgiving service Jan. 21, delivering a statement at Thanksgiving Square, a special downtown site dedicated to prayer and meditation.

Many state conventions were conducting evangelism conferences, and a number of those took time out from a heavy schedule of preaching to announce the release and to hold special times of prayer.

In Nashville, members of the SBC Inter-Agency Council, composed of the executives of the 20 SBC agencies and institutions, spent a time in special prayer and thanksgiving and to ask God's continued blessings on the hostages and their families.

Jimmy R. Allen, a denominational executive who spent 13 days in Iran at Christmas 1979, said: "I am very grateful that the patience and persistence paid off. There were times during the past 14 months when we feared the spark of war would be set off, escalating into World War Three."

-more-

Allen, a former president of the 13.6 million-member SBC and currently president of the denomination's Radio and Television Commission, said he met with the captors of the hostages and with three ayatollahs, including Khomeini, during the unofficial fact-finding trip.

"After talking with them, I was convinced that if we could avoid precipitating a war, we would see them (the hostages) out."

He commented that during the past 14 months, he has been concerned about "war breaking out, the safety of the hostages, the anger in our national life, the anger in the life of Iran."

He added: "I am very grateful for the restraint and strength with which President (Jimmy) Carter led us."

John Walsh, a Southern Baptist missionary and student worker at Princeton University, returned to the United States from Iran the night of Jan. 20, arriving in New York about the same time the hostages arrived in Algiers.

Walsh, on his third trip to Iran, went to Tehran at the request of Iranian officials, arriving there Dec. 26, too late to conduct Christmas services for the hostages.

Walsh told Baptist Press he probably knew less about the actual release and condition of the captives than did Americans who watched television newscasts, even though he had been in Tehran during the last hectic days.

And, in probably the most ironic occurrence of the hostages' release, at least for Southern Baptists, is the fact that one of their own, outgoing President Carter, was not able to welcome the prisoners to freedom as the head of the government.

Carter worked around the clock in the days preceding the transfer of the presidency to Ronald Reagan, in order to free the hostages. However, on the day following Inauguration Day, Carter, now a private citizen, left Plains, Ga., to go to Wiesbaden, West Germany, to welcome the hostages to freedom.

He went as a representative of incoming President Reagan.

-30-

Tennessee Journalist
Dies Following Wreck

Baptist Press
1/21/81

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Bobbie Durham, 34, an editorial assistant for the Baptist and Reflector, died Jan. 20, five days after she was injured in a traffic accident.

Mrs. Durham, who had worked for the newspaper, journal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, since 1971, was critically injured when her small car was struck by a fire truck Jan. 15. At the time of the accident, she was enroute to the Nashville airport to provide news and photo coverage of the departure of six Tennessee Baptist laymen who were going to Upper Volta to aid in relief projects of the convention and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

According to Nashville police, Mrs. Durham pulled to the side of a main thoroughfare to allow a fire truck on an emergency run to pass. Not realizing another truck was approaching, she pulled back into traffic and was sideswiped by the second truck.

-more-

She suffered massive head injuries and was unconscious and sustained by life support systems from the time of the accident until her death.

Mrs. Durham was born in Denver, Colo., and was a journalism graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso. Before joining the Baptist and Reflector, she was editorial assistant of the Baptist Program, a publication of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee. Previously, she was employed by the Baptist Sunday School Board and a reporter for a Denver newspaper.

Survivors include her husband, David; a son, David, age 11; her mother, Mrs. Doris Bagley of Denver, and a brother, Bill Bagley of Las Vegas, Nev.

-30-

A News Analysis

Reagan Era Begins
As Carter Steps Down

By Stan Haste

Baptist Press
1/21/81

WASHINGTON (BP)--Amid pageantry and splendor, Ronald Wilson Reagan took the oath of office as the nation's 40th president Jan. 20, promising the nation a "new beginning."

As he did, Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter began the inevitable slide into history that faces all former presidents.

During the brief but impressive ceremony which traditionally signals the transfer of the enormous powers of the presidency, both men treated one another with the proper dignity expected.

Carter, the third Baptist in history to hold the nation's highest office, applauded warmly and stepped to the podium to congratulate President Reagan at the conclusion of his 15-minute inaugural address.

For his part, the new president thanked his predecessor for carrying on the American tradition of an orderly transition of power. "By your gracious cooperation in the transition process," Reagan said, "you have shown a watching world that we are a united people pledged to maintaining a political system which guarantees individual liberty to a greater degree than any other."

He had earlier surprised some but pleased many with his request that Carter represent him and the American people by flying to Wiesbaden, West Germany, to welcome to freedom the 52 former hostages held in Iran since Nov. 4, 1979. Carter did so Jan. 21.

Yet, despite the deference and propriety on display, the inauguration of Ronald Reagan made clear that the United States is entering a new political era.

No sooner had he thanked Carter, than Reagan launched into his principal theme--an anti-government, pro-free enterprise discourse some veteran observers said amounted to the new president's standard campaign speech for the past 20 years.

"These United States are confronted with an economic affliction of great proportions," he declared. "We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our national history. It distorts our economic decisions, penalizes thrift and crushes the struggling young and the fixed-income elderly alike. It threatens to shatter the lives of millions of our people."

The solution, he offered, is not government. "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."

-more-

He pledged that his immediate priorities, all domestic and economic moves, will be to curb public spending and the size of the federal bureaucracy and return more power to the states.

Then, in what he described as a paraphrase of a famous Winston Churchill saying, Reagan declared, "I did not take the oath I have just taken with the intention of presiding over the dissolution of the world's strongest economy."

The heavy emphasis on economic self-determination and the evils of big government contrasted sharply with Carter's almost sermonic inaugural address four years ago.

Then, Georgia's only native son to be elected president took an Old Testament text from the prophet Micah as his theme: "He has showed you, o man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

While Carter seemed to hold up a vision of an America yet to fulfill her idealistic dreams of justice and equality, Reagan appeared to be beckoning the nation back to a former day of self-sufficiency.

The nation's mood has obviously changed in those four short years, an era that has often seemed like a long decade.

Perhaps no other president suffered more setbacks than did Carter. Rising oil prices, runaway inflation, delicate international difficulties climaxed by the 14-month-long hostage crisis in Iran—these and a host of other stubborn problems plagued this gentle Georgian, who by most accounts may well have been the most genuinely pious and spiritually sensitive man ever to occupy the White House.

Without question, however, his vision of an America whose economic future would be characterized by less rather than more, frugality instead of indulgence, did not square with what the voters wanted.

President Reagan struck that note most clearly during his inaugural address when he declared, "It is time for us to realize that we are too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams. We are not, as some would have us believe, doomed to an inevitable decline. I do not believe in a fate that will fall on us no matter what we do. I do believe in a fate that will fall on us if we do nothing."

Besides economic expansion and governmental retrenchment, Reagan touched briefly on the issues of poverty and peace.

"We shall reflect the compassion that is so much a part of your makeup," he told the millions watching and hearing him. "How can we love our country and not love our countrymen?"

On the need for world peace, a major theme of Carter's inaugural, Reagan promised the world's "enemies of freedom...will be reminded that peace is the highest aspiration of the American people."

Nevertheless, he proceeded immediately to a stern warning that while "we will negotiate for it, sacrifice for it; we will not surrender for it—now or ever."

Toward the end, noting that prayer meetings were being held all across the nation to coincide with his inauguration, he proposed that every subsequent presidential inauguration day be a day of prayer.

Regardless of the transparent—even stark—contrast between the last two such days of national celebration, and in spite of the apparently wide differences between the two principals in personal style, both the incoming Presbyterian president and his departing Baptist predecessor will doubtless attest to every president's need for the sincere prayers of his fellow citizens.

-30-

Remove Commandments
Advises Kentucky's AG

By Norman Jameson

Baptist Press
1/21/81

FRANKFORT, Ky. (BP)--Copies of the Ten Commandments posted in Kentucky public school classrooms should come down, according to an advisory opinion from the state attorney general.

Copies of the decalogue had been posted with private funds in every classroom in 106 of Kentucky's 120 counties. But on Nov. 17, 1980, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that a Kentucky law requiring the posting was unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court, however, issued no opinion as to what should be done with the copies of the Ten Commandments already posted with the \$250,000 raised for the purpose by such groups as Kentucky Heritage Foundation. When the court refused the request of the Kentucky attorney general to clarify, Attorney General Steven Beshear issued his advisory.

The five-page opinion is not binding and does not have the force of law. Each of Kentucky's 181 school districts must now decide on their own to remove the plaques or leave them up. Beshear's advisory warned of the risk of litigation from private parties if the plaques were not removed.

Tom Riner, executive director of the Kentucky Heritage Foundation, said none of the 21,000 copies of the Ten Commandments already in Kentucky classrooms was posted under the statute stricken by the Supreme Court. Instead, they were posted under a similar authority through local school boards using private donations.

Riner and his wife Claudia, the state representative who introduced legislation to require posting of the Ten Commandments in classrooms, feel the issue is a battle between state liberals, who control metropolitan Louisville and Lexington and state level office, and conservatives, who control most county and local governments in the predominantly rural state.

Correspondingly, they feel school boards in Louisville and Lexington, where there is a "distinct likelihood" of challenge to take the plaques down, will remove them. And in the rural areas, where the prevailing opinion is similar to that of a principal who told Riner "it's going to take more than Steve Beshear and the national guard to take these out of my classrooms," the plaques will probably stay up.

The Kentucky Heritage Foundation is continuing with its efforts to place copies of the Commandments in the 9,000 classrooms where they have yet to be posted.

Franklin Owen, executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention responded to questions about the ruling simply that "I'm not surprised. I had expected to hear this opinion when the issue was spoken to."

Riner, who is pastor of two small Southern Baptist churches in Louisville, and some other pastors in the state have been somewhat miffed at the perceived lack of support by state convention officials since Kentucky Baptists had voted to look favorably on the legislation in 1979. Owen had counseled caution until the law had passed court tests.

-30-

NOTE TO EDITORS: A Bobbie Durham Memorial Scholarship Fund has been established through the Tennessee Baptist Foundation, P.O. Box 347, Brentwood, TN 37027, and will be to aid students interested in religious journalism.