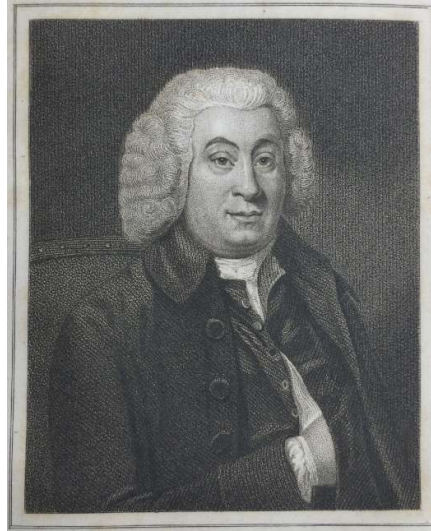


A TRAVELLER TO ZION:  
Robert Hall of Arnsby (1728–1791)

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*Initially drawn to this subject because Hall was a significant force in the life of John Ryland Jr., whom I studied for my PhD., I also came to appreciate the insight afforded by an unknown minister.*

KEYWORDS: Robert Hall Sr.; northern Baptists; Arnsby, Leicestershire; Northamptonshire Association; Real Calvinism; *Help to Zion's Travellers*; rural ministry

## INTRODUCTION

There is a sculpture at McMaster titled “The Unknown Baptist Minister” dedicated to the pioneer Baptist ministers of Ontario. Alluding to Paul’s words in 2 Cor 6:9a (“unknown, yet well known”) the inscription reads, “unknown, yet well known; poor, yet making many rich; Having nothing, yet possessing all things.” Far beyond Ontario this phrase describes the forgotten numbers of elders who have overseen and cared for God’s flock through the ages of Baptist history. It is also a most fitting epitaph for our subject this morning. Robert Hall Sr. or Robert Hall of Arnsby is unknown, yet well known. Like most of us in ministry, we need not ascend to the heights of fame to be useful. In his time Hall ministered in an obscure country pastorate, yet was known to God and his

many friends. Since his death he has remained unknown to most Christians and Baptists, except for the few who may be familiar with him from studying Baptist history. He has been the subject of some literary attention throughout history, beginning after his death, and more recently by Michael Haykin and Nathan Finn. This lecture marks my foray into his study in the hopes of compiling a more comprehensive study of his life. Specifically we can see his influence as a preacher, writer, mentor and regional Baptist statesman.<sup>1</sup> As such, this lecture will not necessarily reveal any ground breaking research, but it will seek to faithfully recount his life story for us so that we might learn of an important figure who contributed to our story. Along the way I will pause to offer personal, pastoral and theological insights in the vein of biographical sermons.

### *[Preliminary Historiography<sup>2</sup>*

Robert Hall Sr. is not a neglected figure, though it may be said he is a rather unknown or obscure figure. Those who have a familiarity with eighteenth Baptist history may have heard his name but beyond this small circle it is unlikely that his name is more widely known. He is largely eclipsed by his more famous associational contemporaries. While he has never been the subject of a full critical biography, there are a number of important works that comprise his historiography. These may be categorized as those that follow his death by those who knew him, works of the nineteenth century and those of the twenty and twenty-first centuries. (Primary source material can be found at a few select archives, including the Leicestershire Record Office where the Arnsby Baptist records are kept. Very few letters remain, though more than Warren notes<sup>3</sup> (e.g. Bristol Baptist College Archives).

John Ryland Jr. preached Hall's funeral sermon, "Salvation Finished" (1791).<sup>4</sup> In 1793 a 16 page biography of Hall appeared for the Baptist public in John Rippon's *Baptist*

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan A. Finn, ed., *Help to Zion's Travellers: Revised and Updated for Modern Readers*. (Dallas, TX: Borderstone Press, 2011). xlv.

<sup>2</sup> There is also a missing diary of Hall from 1775–1791 (Robert Hall Warren, *The Hall Family*. [Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1910, 12).

<sup>3</sup> Warren, *The Hall Family*, 23–24.

<sup>4</sup> John Ryland, *Salvation Finished: a Funeral Sermon on Robert Hall senior; with a Appendix on the Church at Arnsby and its pastor*, 1791. (BBCA 13536).

*Annual Register* (1793), titled “The Rev. Mr. Robert Hall.”<sup>5</sup> J.W. Morris included an 11 page “Memoir” in his *Complete Works of the Rev. Robert Hall* (1828).<sup>6</sup> Concluding this initial corpus was the space allotted to Hall in Joseph Ivimey’s *A History of English Baptists* (1830).<sup>7</sup> Information also appears about him in the prefaces to the second (Ryland) and third (Hall Jr.) editions of his *Help To Zion’s Travelers*. With the birth of the *Baptist Magazine*, and the *American Baptist Magazine*, Hall likewise appeared in some early articles. Clearly the Particular Baptist community was remembering one of its more significant members. In the nineteenth century William Bassett published a history of Arnsby Baptist (1856, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 1859), half of which is devoted to Hall.<sup>8</sup>

These works remained the sum of the historiography until the twentieth century. A Hall descendant wrote a family biography in 1910 containing helpful information.<sup>9</sup> Graham Hughes published an article in the *Baptist Quarterly* in 1940–41.<sup>10</sup> Starr’s *Baptist Bibliography*, vol 10 (1952) contains four pages of entries.<sup>11</sup> In 1961 a short biography was published. Michael Haykin published an article (1992),<sup>12</sup> which became a chapter in a book (1998).<sup>13</sup> Most recently Nathan Finn published a contemporary critical edition of *Help to Zion’s Travellers* (2011) with an introductory chapter.<sup>14</sup> Sources related to Arnsby Baptist or the Northamptonshire Association also make note of Hall.<sup>15</sup> Hall can also be found in various biographical dictionaries (e.g. Brackney, *The A to Z of Baptists*, etc). Finally, he appears in all English and most general Baptist surveys, from R. Brown to Bebbington, as well as in works that pertain his friends (i.e. Fuller, Ryland Sr. and Jr., Carey, Pearce, Sutcliff, etc) and to his son, Robert Hall Jr.<sup>16</sup> There is a real sense that even on earth he is “*Unknown, yet well*

<sup>5</sup> John Rippon, The Rev. Mr. Robert Hall,” *Baptist Annual Register* (London 1793), 1:226–241.

<sup>6</sup> J. W. Morris, *The Complete Works of the Rev. Robert Hall*. (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1828). (Henceforth, *Works*).

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*. (London: Isaac Taylor Hinton/Holdsworth & Ball, 1830), IV, 603–604.

<sup>8</sup> William Bassett, *History of the Baptist Church assembling at Arnsby, in the County of Leicester; with a Memoir of the Rev. Robert Hall, Sen., and Biographical Notices of his Successors*. (Leicester: Winks and Son, 1856).

<sup>9</sup> Warren, *The Hall Family*, 5–33.

<sup>10</sup> Graham W. Hughes, “Robert Hall of Arnesby: 1728–1791,” *BQ* 10 (1940–41).

<sup>11</sup> Starr, vol. 10, 8–11.

<sup>12</sup> M. Haykin, “The Elder Robert Hall and His Help to Zion’s Travelers: 1,” *The Banner of Truth*, 343 (April 1992).

<sup>13</sup> M. Haykin, “Robert Hall, Sr. (1728–1791),” in *The British Particular Baptists*, vol. I. (Springfield, Mo: 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Finn.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Elwyn S.H. Thornton, *The Northamptonshire Baptist Association*. (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1964); Reginald H. Spooner, “Northamptonshire Ministers’ Meeting, 1770–1816,” *Baptist History and Heritage*, 11 (1976).

<sup>16</sup> *Robert Hall (1764–1831)*. (London: Independent Press, 1961).

*known.*” (2 Corinthians 6:9a). This work will seek to unite the historiography of Hall in one convenient location while incorporating material from new research.]

To tell our story we must travel 3400 miles from Toronto to Northumberland, and go back in time nearly 300 years.

## **EARLY LIFE, CONVERSION AND CALL TO MINISTRY**

### *Early Life*

Robert Hall was born on April 15, 1728 (O.S., “old style”) in the hamlet of Black Heddon in the parish of Starminton, northwest of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the County of Northumberland. (Today it stands as a mere group of farmhouses). His father, Christopher Hall, was a farmer; and it was said he lived in the same farmhouse as his own grandfather. Despite the fact that Britain was undergoing an industrial revolution, Hall spent his life entirely in rural England (which was undergoing its own agricultural revolution). His father was a “worthy, honest man,” an Anglican and his mother Presbyterian. They appeared very religious, something that was uncommon in what was known as the “godless eighteenth-century” when only 1/5 people attended church regularly. However, revival was in the air through the likes of Whitefield, Harris, Wesley and Edwards. The early eighteenth century, however, still bore the marks of the religious upheaval of the previous century as we shall see. His parents hoped he would become “possessed of true religion.”<sup>17</sup>

### *Conversion*

Hall’s father died when he was 11 or 12 and so he went to stay with his uncle in Kirkley, which was three miles east of Black Heddon. Here he attended a Presbyterian church which through a youth and the minister Hall learned of the torments of hell, yet he could see no way of escaping “from everlasting ruin, nor was any satisfactory method of salvation pointed out to him by the minister.”<sup>18</sup> During this dark season Hall suffered two accidents where he broke

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<sup>17</sup> Bassett, 16–17.

<sup>18</sup> Bassett, 18–20.

many bones, yet he admitted that this did not approach the “anguish of his mind” of the damnation that he feared. Hall believed his sins unpardonable before a holy God, even that it was a sin to desire salvation. Rather than providing relief a passage such as Ex 34 brought further despair and frustrating inconsistencies between justice and mercy that he threw away his Bible for seven years (18 or 19). It was only then that he resolved to pick up the Bible and he read Gal 4:4, “God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law...” This verse showed him the possibility of salvation. Further searching of the Scriptures led him to see how God could forgive sin but also not clear the guilty. His conversion began with a possibility and ended in certainty around May, 1748. Hall was 20 years old.<sup>19</sup> Over a year to a year and a half he followed the Puritan conversion narrative,<sup>20</sup> which Ryland Jr. described as of being convicted of sin, convinced of Christ and comforted by the Spirit.<sup>21</sup> Between his conversion and his baptism Hall married Jane Catchaside on July 18, 1751.<sup>22</sup> Altogether Hall had 14 children, though all but six, two sons and four daughters, died in infancy.<sup>23</sup>

Hall now left the Presbyterian church near Kirkley and journeyed five miles to “another place where the Gospel was more clearly and fully preached.” The minister was Mr. Dryden who also ran a small Academy. Hall became friends with two of his students, James Rutherford and William Peden. About this time two events created religious suspense. The first was that some “Anabaptists” had licensed the Juniper Dye House some twelve miles away as a preaching point. Hall’s brother, who had moved to the County of Durham when his mother had remarried had likewise joined the Baptists at Hamsterley (some 38 miles south) and had married the sister of the preacher, David Fernie, from

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<sup>19</sup> Bassett, 18–20.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*. (Oxford: Oxford, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Chris Crocker, “A Man of Considerable Usefulness: John Ryland Jr.” PhD Thesis, University of Bristol, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Warren, *The Hall Family*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Warren, *The Hall Family*, 24–25, 33.

Juniper Dye House. Hall and his friends were very concerned by this abhorrence and agreed to go and dispute this preacher under the pretense of Hall visiting his relations. On the Saturday night, three vs. one, they spent two hours disputing baptism only to be “entangled and ashamed.” After a short respite the debate was renewed and they were silenced again, though they remained to be convinced. The three met frequently to prepare for a future attack, however, shortly after this Dryden gave up his academy, the boys dispersed, and Hall was left alone. He acquired books on the Baptists and in seeking to form counter arguments, along with the continuing to search Scripture, he became convinced of believer’s baptism without further dispute. The next time he saw Fernie he was baptized in the [river Rowley Burn], on January 5, 1752, in front of Juniper Dye House and was received into the Baptist church [which afterwards] met at Hexham.<sup>24</sup> Like the Judson’s studying the subject in advance of meeting William Carey in Serampore and submitting to baptism, it is a danger reading the Bible, it might make you a Baptist!

### *Call to Ministry*

The same day that the church in Hexham received him into membership they also urged him to preach privately to them, discerning ministerial talents. They did this so quickly because they had just heard of his conversion and baptismal experience but also because he had been known to them from during his time with the evangelical Presbyterians.<sup>25</sup> He then commenced a five to six month trial by them in preaching until he was, aged 24, called to Arnsby in June 1752.<sup>26</sup> Though he did not have the educational advantage of his young friends his son described his natural intellectual abilities in the following way, “He appeared to the greatest advantage upon subjects where the faculties of most

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<sup>24</sup> Bassett, 21–22.

<sup>25</sup> Bassett, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Bassett, 23.

men fail them; for the natural element of his mind was greatness.”<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Hall’s “deep exercise of mind” during his conversion experience meant he was well suited to speak a word in season and endure trials.<sup>28</sup>

A member of Arnsby from nearby Lutterworth fought in the army near Carlisle and here became acquainted with Christopher Hall. He passed along a glowing report to the church’s trustee as the church was without a pastor. The Trustee was described as “obnoxious,” perhaps similar to certain people we have met.<sup>29</sup> The congregation was inclined toward a Mr. Walker of Olney but the Trustee favoured Christopher. Being at liberty, Christopher visited the congregation *en route* back from London. The people consented hoping that if a man came whom he liked the Trustee would give up possession of the minister’s house, which he had been inhabiting. In 1752 Christopher spent two Sabbaths with them. Though the Trustee did not like him the people did and he agreed to come again in the spring. Christopher, however, established a church in Whitehaven that winter and sent his younger brother, Robert, in the spring (and did not inform him of the discouraging circumstances!).<sup>30</sup> Robert Hall had two opportunities of usefulness, the other in Yorkshire, but his brother encouraged him to visit Arnsby first.<sup>31</sup> This he did and he found his “heart cleave to the people” and he preached with more liberty than he had before. Though a poor congregation Hall, having a low view of himself, thought himself unfit to preach to any other. The people pressed him and his mind was fixed on God’s promise to Moses, “My presence shall go with thee.” Hall

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<sup>27</sup> Olinthus Gregory, “A Brief Memoir of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.,” in *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.*, vol. III. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Bassett, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Bassett, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher later pastored at Crown Alley, Moorfields, London in 1780. The congregation grew into four different locations. He is buried at Bunhill Fields, London. (Warren, *The Hall Family*, 13–14).

<sup>31</sup> Bassett, 13.

consented; it was June 1753.<sup>32</sup> Peter Naylor observed, “The good that came from [Hall’s] country church in Leicestershire is incalculable.”<sup>33</sup>

**‘A SMALL COUNTRY PASTORATE’<sup>34</sup> (1750s)**

Though Hall served as “an able minister of the New Testament; a good man, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost”<sup>35</sup> through this small country pastorate over the 37 years of his ministry, the first six years were difficult.<sup>36</sup> (He thereby outlasted four vicars at St. Peter’s, Arnsby). As Fuller had expressed it, for a host of reasons, Baptists during this time were “a perfect dunghill of a society.” In fact from 1689 to 1750 the number of Baptist churches had halved to 150 congregations.<sup>37</sup> The reasons for this decline were manifold, but two that come to light in Hall’s story were the prevalence of High Calvinism and an insularism. The latter appears true of Arnsby at the time of Hall’s arrival. The congregation was small, about 26 aging members who were geographically dispersed and poor.<sup>38</sup> The congregation had been formed c. 1694, splitting from the church in Kilby (1667, later Foxton), under Benjamiin Winkles. Winkles was sent by his master to propose to a wealthy widow for him, but she in turn respected Winkles character and the master encouraged him to marry her. This is how Mr. Winkles was able to secure a small chapel attached to a small manse and also 15 acres of land for the support of the pastor.<sup>39</sup> Hall had been assured that the Trustee would pay the rent of the manse for Hall’s support but when Hall, his wife and first-born child arrived,<sup>40</sup> the Trustee informed him he would not pay the money.<sup>41</sup> (What a pain to the soul it is to work with such carnal individuals, c.f. Ps 13). This amounted to £10/annum (an agricultural worker

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<sup>32</sup> Bassett, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Naylor, *Picking up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptists from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century*. (London: Grace, 1992), 212.

<sup>34</sup> *Robert Hall (1764–1831)*. (London: Independent Press Ltd 1961, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Memorial plaque at Arnsby Baptist.

<sup>36</sup> Bassett, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Crocker, 385.

<sup>38</sup> Bassett, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Bassett, 5, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Basset, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Bassett, 14–15.



made 15p/day and clergy £40+). Hall, and the church, were thus forced to meet in a private house (tradition says this was a thatched house down the lane). This resulted in many mockers coming to Arnsby to gather around the windows while Hall preached. Later Hall would speak of these six years, “Oh, it was a trying time, yet God was with us of a truth and over ruled even those trials for good; for several of those who came to disturb and persecute us began to listen, and grace reached and changed their hearts.”<sup>42</sup>

Even once the meeting house and manse and field were appropriated Hall’s life and ministry were not easy. His family knew numerous infant losses, a human pain enhanced by low infant mortality. Instead of renting the land Hall farmed the 15 acres alongside his ministry; thus he was bi-vocational. (Though I’m sure farming was a respite to his soul, of advantage to his mind, and helped him relate to his people). During the early years the church could only afford to give him £15/annum (about a third what some other Baptist minister made at the time).<sup>43</sup> Yet it appeared a godly and happy home. His wife was a great encourager, spiritually mature and cheerful. With so many children it would have been a busy home. Robert Hall Jr. spoke of his father’s piety “I shall ever esteem it one of the greatest favors an indulgent Providence has conferred upon me, to have possessed such a father, whom in all the essential features of character it will be my humble ambition to imitate though conscious it must ever be—*Haid passibus aequis* [at a slower pace].”<sup>44</sup> There is a copy of his license to preach from 1757, a reminder that Baptists were second class citizens in an Anglican land. This confirms much of his belief, he only objecting to articles 34, 35 and 36 on church polity in the Thirty-Nine Articles.<sup>45</sup> Hall remained a five point Calvinist his entire life.<sup>46</sup> Throughout his life, his mean estate largely continued but there are many stories of how the Lord provided.

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<sup>42</sup> Bassett, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Bassett, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Preface to 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

<sup>45</sup> Warren, *The Hall Family*, 7–8.

<sup>46</sup> Warren, *The Hall Family*, 5.

For example, in 1775 the notable evangelical Anglican John Newton of Olney, Buckinghamshire, sent him a gift of £10. To this Hall declared, “This is the Lord’s doing and Marvellous in my eyes. O to be found worthy of favours.”<sup>47</sup>

After these initial trials, and from an original membership of 26, the membership during Hall’s times usually hovered around 80.<sup>48</sup>

### **THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ASSOCIATION (1760s)**

Having become established in Arnsby Hall began to associate more widely, through which he became a regional Baptist statesman. He was among the six founding ministers of the famous Northamptonshire Baptist Association, that would produce so many movements, works and personalities central to the Baptist story. Citing from a later circular letter this moment is recorded:

On the 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1764, six ministers, pastors of the Churches at Sutton in the Elms, Arnsby, Foxton, Walgrave and Kettering; and whose names were Woodman, Hall, Evans, Deacon, Walker and Brown, met at Kettering, and formed the plan of Association. Its first meeting was held at Kettering in the Whitsum week of 1765 [May 14–15].<sup>49</sup>

Eight or 12 churches answered the invitation, “that an annual association of the particular Baptist Ministers and Churches in the adjacent counties should be formed on the principles of Christianity.”<sup>50</sup> The first Circular Letter, which was signed by Hall, spoke of the refreshing of the gathering, the trials and encouragements of the churches, the “[doctrinal] temptations of the present age,” and exhorted the readers to attend prayer meetings for “revival” (even appointing days “of humiliation and prayer on account of the church and state”), as well as the importance of catechizing children.<sup>51</sup> The doctrines, to which Hall subscribed, headed the first and subsequent letters (modified) and was the basis of their association. They were:

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<sup>47</sup> Warren, *The Hall Family*, 17. On his impoverishment see Ivimey 603–604; and Bassett, 26–27, for similar stories.

<sup>48</sup> Bassett, 45.

<sup>49</sup> Northamptonshire Circular Letter, 1838 (c.f. 1812).

<sup>50</sup> Northamptonshire Circular Letter, 1812.

<sup>51</sup> Elwyn, 12–13.

Maintaining the great doctrines of three equal persons in the Godhead, eternal and personal election, the original guilt and universal depravity of mankind, the particular redemption, free justification by the imputed Righteousness of Christ, efficacious grace in regeneration, and the final perseverance of the saints to glory, professing Independency respecting Church government.<sup>52</sup>

He was its moderator six times, often preached before it and wrote seven of its circular letters, including the fourth in 1768 titled *Conditional Salvation*. In this work Hall opposed a works salvation that he defined as, “dispositions or acts required of the creature, as conditions *entitling* to salvation.”<sup>53</sup> Speaking at the induction of Andrew Fuller in Kettering, Morris said, his “preaching, conversation and advice, excited no ordinary degree of interest.”<sup>54</sup> The Circular Letter from 1791 reported Hall’s death in these words. After praying for the church in Arnsby it continued:

And *pray for us*, that the ministers who remain a while longer with you, may have a double portion of the HOLY SPIRIT poured down upon them, and be enabled more than ever to be *valiant for the truth upon earth*, till he who hath taken away our dear father from the midst of us, shall say to us also, *Come up hither*.<sup>55</sup>

Through the Association Hall would have an influence beyond Arnsby, particularly among a rising generation of ministers.

### **THEOLOGICAL & FAMILY TRIALS (1770s)**

The mid to late 1770s were a time of family trials and theological wrestling. The memoirs expend many pages describing what was for the Hall family and congregation a serious trial concerning Jane Hall. She had long walked in assurance and love but near her death underwent “sore afflictions of body and mind;” though she died in clarity and joy of thought. Hall recounted

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<sup>52</sup> This later read: Maintaining the important Doctrines of three equal Persons in the Godhead; eternal and personal Election; original Sin; particular Redemption; free justification by the imputed Righteousness of Christ; efficacious Grace in Regeneration; the final Perseverance of true Saints; the Resurrection of the Dead; the future Judgement; the eternal happiness of the Righteous, and endless Misery of the Impenitent; with the congregational Order of the Churches inviolably.

<sup>53</sup> *Works*, 293.

<sup>54</sup> J.W. Morris, *Biographical Recollections of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.* (London: Whightman, 1833), 29.

<sup>55</sup> Northamptonshire Circular Letter, 1791, 2.

this episode in a lengthy letter to a friend. From losing 8 children in infancy, combined with a fever 13 years prior that affected her “regular use of reason” for several weeks, Jane’s constitution was much diminished. Beginning in March 1773 she complained of spiritual darkness. A local burglary set her mind to believing God was angry with her and she doubted her salvation. She took no delight in family life or domestic duties and many bodily and mental disorders abounded. Prayer and medical help were sought but she continued into deep (and even blasphemous) darkness. She became suicidal and members had to watch her during services. As such she was often kept in a rear bedroom with bars on the windows and a constant watch set over her. She was wasting away to a skeleton, yet the congregation and Hall sought to care for her in the midst of this great trial. Suddenly, in the very last days of her life, her assurance, joy and love returned, hence why her gravestone stresses, “Whose Joy in Jesus towards the close of Life, was *unspeakable and full of Glory.*” Two of her adult children returned home and she died with Hall at her side. She died on December 21, 1776 and was buried in the Arnsby Baptist Burial Ground.<sup>56</sup> When thinking of Hall or Arnsby during these three and a half years, all they still did and the constitution he was enabled to continue in, it is surely a testament to God’s persevering grace. Any of us who have suffered with a loved one in body or mind or both may well testify to a similar experience. May we prayerfully hope in the Lord under such trials. (Hall remarried a widow from Northampton, Elizabeth Swan, on June 21<sup>st</sup> 1780. They had no children. She died March 3, 1817 and is buried at Harvey Lane Chapel, Leicester<sup>57</sup>).

The 1770s were a time of great theological trials as well in which Hall showed himself a true pastor-theologian who worked out theological questions for the benefits of his people. (And oh that we would be and do the same in our erroneous age!). Two may be mentioned here that concerned Hall. The first was

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<sup>56</sup> Bassett, 29–43.

<sup>57</sup> Warren, *The Hall Family*, 24.

the Trinity, which the prevailing ‘omni-competent’ rationalism of the Enlightenment often assailed, including recent attacks by the Unitarian minister Joseph Priestly. Having much on his mind at home, Hall was still pastorally concerned<sup>58</sup> about the negative spiritual implications such rationalism would have on his congregation and local churches. As such, in 1776 he wrote an Association letter on the Trinity, not only defending it but calling the people to see the practical spiritual importance of the Spirit. “Look to him [the Spirit] to create in you a clear heart, and renew a right spirit within you,” was his closing admonition.<sup>59</sup>

A greater issue was known as the Modern Question, “whether it be the duty of all men to whom the gospel is published, to repent and believe in Christ.”<sup>60</sup> A negative answer to this question had paralyzed Baptist life. Its recovery ultimately came through Edwardsean theology. John Ryland Jr. was a primary conduit in this, though many ministers were simultaneously seeking “to get a more decided conviction of the Truth of the affirmative side of the Modern Question, and a clearer view of the nature of Faith in Christ.”<sup>61</sup> Ryland was reading Edwards from 1768–1776. In 1776 John Newton lent Ryland two sermons by Smalley on moral and natural ability. Ryland transcribed them and lent them to Hall Sr. and was thus directly responsible for his change of thinking. Ryland recollected:

I well remember lending them to Mr. Hall of Arnsby, to whom I remarked, that I was ready to suspect, the distinction well considered, would lead us to see that the affirmative side of the Modern Question was fully consistent with the strictest Calvinism. He replied, “I do not think that.” But I believe the next time I met him was at a Ministers’ Meeting at Kettering, when I found he was fully satisfied of the truth of my observation.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Finn, xxiii–xxiv.

<sup>59</sup> *Works*, 346. See Haykin, “Robert Hall,” 205–206.

<sup>60</sup> John Ryland, *The work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope illustrated in the life of Andrew Fuller*. (London: Button & Son, 1816 [2nd ed, 1818], BBCA, 13532), 6.

<sup>61</sup> John Ryland, *Autograph Reminiscences* (1807). (BBCA 14883), 55.

<sup>62</sup> Ryland, *Andrew Fuller*, 9–10

Though Hall called no man a theological master,<sup>63</sup> he had come to appreciate Edwards and joined a group of younger ministers (Fuller, Sutcliff, Ryland) in espousing the affirmative side of the Modern Question. Ryland Sr., a close friend and contemporary of Hall's, made this disinterested comment about his friends new interest:

Speaking of the *Modern Question*, he [Ryland] said, Hall [Sr.], his son [Ryland Jr.], and Fuller were busied on it. The devil threw out an empty barrel for them to roll about, whilst they ought to have been drinking the wine of the kingdom. That old dog, lying in the dark, has drawn off many good men to whip syllabub,<sup>64</sup> and to sift quiddities,<sup>65</sup> under pretence of zeal for the truth.<sup>66</sup>

Hall, though Edwards, Ryland and company, had come off of a higher Calvinism to embrace what they saw as “real Calvinism,” sometimes called ‘evangelical Calvinism.’ This was evidenced in the sermon Hall preached before the Association in May 26, 1779 from Isa 57:14, “take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people,” where he addressed many issues, including the Modern Question.<sup>67</sup> Finn describes the sermon as “the most tangible contribution Hall made to the evangelical renewal movement in the Northamptonshire Association.”<sup>68</sup> (May we never doubt the effect of our preaching and the relationships we hold and seek to develop with others.).

Hall's personage also meant he was able to effectively mentor a new generation that would directly carry out the Baptist revival even when his death in 1791 cut short his own involvement. Ryland described Hall Sr., along with John Newton, as “the counsellors of my youth.”<sup>69</sup> Ryland recollected hearing

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<sup>63</sup> Finn, xxv.

<sup>64</sup> A syllabub is a sweet frothy drink popular in England during this time. It is also possibly a word play with syllabus, the subjects in a course of study.

<sup>65</sup> A quiddity is the essence of a thing.

<sup>66</sup> William Newman, *Rylandiana: reminiscences relating to the Rev. John Ryland, A.M. of Northampton, father of the late Rev. Dr. Ryland of Bristol*. (London: George Wightman, 1835), 73.

<sup>67</sup> See *Works*.

<sup>68</sup> Finn xxiv.

<sup>69</sup> John Ryland, *The indwelling and righteousness of Christ no security against corporeal death, but the source of spiritual and eternal life ...* (London 1815), 37.

Hall preach in his youth (first c. 1767) hearing him “with much pleasure.”<sup>70</sup> Years later Hall in turn comforted Ryland on the loss of his first wife.<sup>71</sup> It has already been seen how Hall preached at Fuller’s ordination. He also had an influence in preaching, piety and learning upon his more famous son, Robert Hall Jr. Graham Hughes notes, “To have so profoundly influenced the mind of one of the most brilliant figures in the history of the Christian pulpit...was no mean achievement for one whose ministry was spent in a small country pastorate.”<sup>72</sup> At least three ministers were also called out from Arnsby during Hall’s time: George Morton who became pastor of the church at Kettering (1772); Mr. Butler who became pastor of the church at Gretton, Northamptonshire (1774); and Nathan Sharman who became pastor of the Baptist Church at Chenies, Bucks (1789).<sup>73</sup>

After Jane’s death Hall had prayed the following, “O that this year Jany. I. 1777 may be a year of mercy to my Person, my Family, the neighbourhood (whose souls I long for) the church and the State. Lord keep me pure, make me fervent in thy work, faithful to they cause and active in it...”<sup>74</sup> From what follows it would seem that the Lord answered that prayer.

### **FINAL YEARS OF USEFULNESS (1780s)**

Without a doubt, Hall’s greatest contribution was the publication of his 1779 sermon as *Help to Zion’s Travelers* in 1781. Publication was encouraged by members of the Association. Its original printing had 468 subscribers.<sup>75</sup> Hall’s intent was clear, to remove “various stumbling blocks [for the believer] relating to doctrinal, experimental and practical religion.”<sup>76</sup> It flowed from Hall’s own experience, “Knowing by mournful experience the various obstacles and intricacies which annoy and perplex the heavenly traveler in times of

<sup>70</sup> *Reminiscences*, 27 and 41.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Hall Sr. to John Ryland (soon after my...Betsy’s death), 1787. (BBCA, 19430).

<sup>72</sup> Hughes, 444–447.

<sup>73</sup> Bassett, 47.

<sup>74</sup> Warren, extract from diary, *The Hall Family*, 19–20.

<sup>75</sup> Olin C. Robinson, “The Particular Baptists in England, 1760–1820.” (PhD: Oxford, 1963), 58.

<sup>76</sup> Robert, Hall, Sr., *Help to Zion’s Travelers* [London: Buckland and Keith, 1837], 1

distress and obscurity...”<sup>77</sup> In the preface to the second edition (1807) Ryland prayed, “May God bless the reprinting of this excellent work, to lead many more fully into the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.”<sup>78</sup> The work was broken into three sections. The first deals with the love and election of God, the second with the Modern Questions and the third with the practical duties of believers; or in Ryland’s words, a vindication “of the genuine doctrines of grace, from the objections of Socinians, Sabellians, Arminians, and Antinomians...”<sup>79</sup> Joseph Ivimey reckoned its publication was “the commencement of a new era in the history of our denomination.”<sup>80</sup> This is significant as this preceded both Sutcliff’s *Prayer Call* (1784) and the printing of Fuller’s *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785). Hall’s work would influence the trajectory of not only the Baptist revival but this revival’s influence upon the Evangelical Revival more broadly. His son concurred, “To this treatise, and to another on a similar subject by my excellent and judicious friend Mr. Fuller, the dissenters in general, and the Baptists in particular, are under great obligation for emancipating them from the fetters of prejudice, and giving free scope to the publication of the gospel.”<sup>81</sup>

The work’s influence on Fuller is unknown, though he cited it in *A Gospel Worthy*,<sup>82</sup> and was among those who encouraged Hall to publish it.<sup>83</sup> Its impact was more deeply felt by William Carey, the founder of the BMS and father of modern missions. He used to walk 20 miles to hear Hall preach.<sup>84</sup> When Carey became pastor in Leicester Hall acted as his “honourary tutor.” Carey described his friendship with Hall and others, “It was one of my chief

<sup>77</sup> Robert, Hall, Sr., *Help to Zion’s Travelers* [London: Buckland and Keith, 1837], 1

<sup>78</sup> Ryland, “Preface,” 12.

<sup>79</sup> Ryland, “Preface,” 10.

<sup>80</sup> Ivimey, *History of Baptists*, vol. iv, 41.

<sup>81</sup> “Preface” to *Help to Zion’s Travellers* in *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.*, eds. Olinthus Gregory and Joseph Belcher. (New York: 1854), II, 452.

<sup>82</sup> Finn xxxvii.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Haykin, *One heart and one soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, his friends, and his times*. (Darlington Co. Durham: Evangelical Press, 1994), 147.

<sup>84</sup> Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the 18th Century*. (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 116.



privileges to be favoured with this kind of advance, and kinder criticism of men of the greatest eminence, and their friendship was jewel I could not too highly prize.”<sup>85</sup> He was lent Hall’s work by Rev. Thomas Skinner of Towcester and helped him confirm many of his views.<sup>86</sup> Carey remarked, “I do not remember ever to have read any book with such raptures...It was so sweet to me that I drank it greedily to the bottom of the cup...doctrines are the choice of my heart to this day.”<sup>87</sup> “Here,” Ryland said, “that excellent man, who is now laboring in India, with such indefatigable zeal for the salvation of the heathen, first found his own system of divinity.”<sup>88</sup> The work was so important to Carey that he took it with him to India (this copy is held at the Bristol Baptist College Archives). According to Peter Morden, Hall’s work, “was probably the most important extra-biblical work that Carey read.”<sup>89</sup> He did not live to see the foundation of the BMS but through, but not only would he have approved, his life had helped to found it already.

The 1780s brought about continued and consistent usefulness as Hall shared life and ministry with his second wife. In December 1783 he was nearly smothered in snow, remarking, “he had not been in so great danger for many years.” In 1788 a finger joint fused and would not work and he suffered an attack whereby the right side of his head became swollen. Such health impediments meant he missed the Association that year, though he wrote its Circular. The last Association he was able to attend was in Olney in 1790 where he preached. This was followed on by preaching at Nathan Sherman’s ordination as well as Samuel Pearce’s ordination in Leicester.<sup>90</sup>

## *Death*

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<sup>85</sup> Samuel Pearce Carey, *William Carey*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), 33, 62.

<sup>86</sup> Elwyn, 30.

<sup>87</sup> Eustace Carey, *Memoir of William Carey*. (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 16–17.

<sup>88</sup> Ryland, Preface.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life*. (UK: Paternoster, 2003), 130.

<sup>90</sup> Bassett, 49–59.

Over 1790–91, Hall’s health deteriorated. He often had fits of cramps and spasms. Sometimes he ministered only to return to bed. In the afternoon of, March 13, 1791, having preached on John 4:10 in the morning, he complained of feeling ill and having chest pain. That evening he died in the manse after many had gathered for the evening lecture and prayer meeting.<sup>91</sup> (Apparently heart related). John Ryland preached the funeral sermon and spoke at the internment. He remarked, “the concourse of people was so great that I was obliged to preach in the yard, as not half could have got into the meeting.”<sup>92</sup> Both Ryland Jr. and Hall Jr.’s prefaces to *Help* reveal the legacy of Hall Sr. The space allotted to Hall in Bassett’s history of Arnsby Baptist is indicative as to the legacy of Hall in that congregation. (In Arnsby he is also remember by the high street bearing his name, “Robert Hall Road,” ironically the same street as that of the Anglican church!). John Ryland lamented at the funeral on behalf of the Baptist community, “We shall see his face no more! O my Father! My Father how great a share of prudence, and wisdom, and piety, and zeal, which once blessed our association, is removed from us by thy deceased.”<sup>93</sup> More so his legacy was felt in the theology and lives and movements he influenced as a preacher, writer, mentor and regional Baptist statesman. Hall was one who travelled to Zion and whose journey there is “WORTHY OF IMITATION.”<sup>94</sup>

#### TIMELINE

- 1728 Born April 15, 1728 Black Heddon, Starminton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northumberland
- 1748 Converted May 1748
- 1751 Married to Jane Catchaside, July 18, 1751
- 1752 Baptized January 5, 1752, Juniper Dye House
- 1753 Called to Arnsby, June 1753
- 1757 Licence to Preach
- 1759 Acquires Manse, Meeting House and Field, June
- 1764 Founds Northamptonshire Baptist Association, October 17, 1764

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<sup>91</sup> Bassett, 51–52.

<sup>92</sup> “Extracts from the Diary of the Late Rev. Dr. Ryland,” in *The Baptist Magazine* (1861), 283.

<sup>93</sup> Ryland, *Salvation Finished*, 38.

<sup>94</sup> Gravestone.

- 1768 *On Conditional Salvation* (Northamptonshire Circular Letter)  
1772 *Particular Redemption* (Northamptonshire Circular Letter)  
1773 Beginning of Mrs. Hall's illness, 1773  
1775 Receives £10 from John Newton  
1776 Reads Smalley's two sermons  
1776 *The Doctrine of the Trinity Stated*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. (2<sup>nd</sup> 1776) (Northamptonshire Circular Letter)  
1776 Death of First Wife, December 21  
1777 *Causes of Salvation and Damnation Considered* (Northamptonshire Circular Letter)  
1779 Preaches before the Association on Isa 57:14, May 26  
1780 Marries Second Wife, Elizabeth Swan, June 21  
1780 *Nature and Necessity of Repentance* (Northamptonshire Circular Letter)  
1780 *The Nature of Faith* (Northamptonshire Circular Letter)  
1781 *Help to Zion's Travellers* (First Edition)  
1784 Association Prayer Call  
1788 Health declines  
1788 *Divinity of Christ and Efficacy of his Atonement* (Northamptonshire Circular Letter)  
1789 *On Communion with God* (Northamptonshire Circular Letter)  
1791 Died March 13  
Buried at Arnsby Baptist