

## The Cherokee Nation

Originally known as the “Keetoowah,” by the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Cherokee Nation inhabited tens of thousands of acres stretching across Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. When George Washington (1732–1799) became the first



president of the United States in 1789, he implemented a policy of “assimilation” towards the Indian nations. Indians were to be taught English language and customs in hopes they would one day be integrated as citizens of the United States. Missionaries to the Indians were viewed as agents of assimilation, and when the U.S. Congress passed the *Indian Civilization Act* in 1819 missionaries across many denominations received government funding for their ministries. This acquisition of funds would have disastrous consequences since government funding inevitably leads to government control.



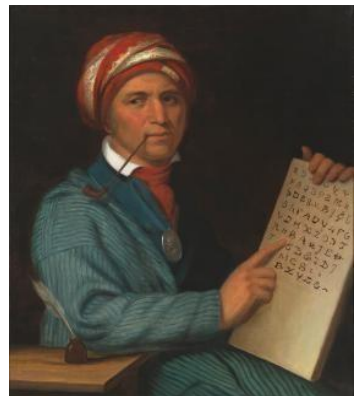
Four protestant denominations had a presence among the Cherokee Nation from 1789–1839: Moravians, Baptists, Congregationalists, & Methodists. The Congregationalists established several schools for the Cherokee youth, the most successful of which was *The Brainerd School*. Named for David Brainerd (1718–1747), the school was established in Chattanooga, Tennessee in 1817. Hundreds of Cherokee young people were exposed to the gospel until the school closed in 1823.

But as extraordinary as these labours were,

very

few missionaries were interested in “becoming as a Cherokee to win the Cherokees” by acquiring the Cherokee language (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19–23). Thankfully there were exceptions to the rule such as Samuel Worcester (1798–1859), Daniel Butrick (1789–1851), **Evan Jones** (1788–1872), and his son, John B. Jones (1824–1876). Evan Jones was a Calvinistic Baptist who studied the Cherokee language for almost a decade until he could preach the gospel with clarity in their own tongue.

Jones also recognized the value of indigenous Cherokees preaching to their own people and dedicated much of his ministry to training faithful men to serve as gifted brothers



and pastors. Many indigenous Cherokee speaking churches were planted through Jones' ministry.

An illiterate Cherokee named **Sequoyah** (c.1770–1843) recognized the power of the written word and he laboured for 12 years organizing the phonetic sounds of the Cherokee language into written symbols and published his Cherokee Syllabary in 1821. The Syllabary was easy to learn, and many Cherokees quickly became literate. A printing press was established at the Cherokee capital in New Echota, Georgia, and on February 21, 1828, the first edition of a weekly newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, was published. The paper was bilingual, written in both Cherokee and English. Portions of the Bible, hymns, and catechisms were printed in the Cherokee language for the first time through this means. The first full Cherokee New Testament would be published in 1860.



Under the presidency of Andrew Jackson (1767–1845) the federal government's attitude towards the Indian nations transformed from a policy of assimilation to one of Indian Removal. In 1828 gold was discovered in Dahlonega, Georgia, leading greedy speculators to covet Cherokee land. In defiance of a supreme court ruling, the Georgia state government divided Cherokee lands into



numerous 160 acre lots and gave their property away to white Georgians at state lotteries. This led to the forced migration of the Cherokee people from Georgia into Oklahoma in what became known as the *Trail of Tears*. It is estimated that 1/4 of the Cherokee population perished because of the trauma and exposure caused by this event. Evan Jones and the Cherokee preacher, Jesse Bushyhead (1804–1844), chose to endure the Trail of Tears with their congregations, leading more than 500 Cherokee Baptists to their new home in Oklahoma.

Today there are 3 Cherokee tribes that are officially recognized by the U.S. government: the Eastern Band in Cherokee, NC; and the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band, both headquartered in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Between these 3 tribes there are more than 316,000 enrolled Cherokee citizens. While there are many professing Christians among them most are nominal at best, and Cherokee churches are generally in decline. In North Carolina less than 2% of Cherokees attend church, and among these not all are church members. Pentecostalism has profoundly influenced many Cherokee churches, and there is a movement among many Cherokee young people to return to the animism of their



ancient forefathers to preserve their culture. There are at least 2 Reformed churches that have a presence in or near Cherokee populations. Scott Hill serves as the pastor of Grace Community Church (PCA) in Cherokee, NC. And David Bane is the pastor of Christ Reformed Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Pray for the spread of biblical and confessional Christianity among the Cherokee people.

This national prayer focus was extracted from the *Harvest Field Prayer Guide*, and is posted by permission of the publisher. *The Harvest Field Prayer Guide* is a monthly publication of Berean Baptist Church in Powder Springs, GA, USA ([berean1689church.org](http://berean1689church.org)). Pastor Jerry Slate, Jr. wrote the article on the Cherokee Nation using the following sources:

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Video: *The Cherokee Nation: The Story of New Echota* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ym0Ar9LQwEc>

Wikipedia

***Photo credits:***

Flag Wikipedia.org

Evan Jones: [okhistory.org](http://okhistory.org)

Sequoyah: Wikipedia.org

Couple: Oakridger.com

Girl: [phhs.ebci-nsn.gov](http://phhs.ebci-nsn.gov)

Woman: [georgiaindiancouncil.com](http://georgiaindiancouncil.com)