

Tucker, Joel W. ^[1]

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by Larry E. Tise, 1996

1820–post–1868

Joel W. Tucker, [Methodist](#) ^[2] clergyman and controversialist, a native of Virginia, was one of those individuals who appear from virtually unknown origins, reveal a flash of brilliance, and then disappear in obscurity. In 1845 he was received on trial as a minister in the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In his first year in the active ministry, he was assigned to the Guilford Circuit. Between 1845 and 1850 he served churches in [Greensboro](#) ^[3], Beaufort, Plymouth, and Whiteville. Afterwards he succeeded to the largest churches in North Carolina Methodism at Washington, New Bern, [Wilmington](#) ^[4], Wilson, [Raleigh](#) ^[5], and [Fayetteville](#) ^[6]. He was examined before a committee of clergymen at the December 1860 meeting of the church's North Carolina Conference and approved to be made an elder.

In 1868 Tucker was serving as the presiding elder of the New Bern District when his ministerial career came to an abrupt end. The official record for the year merely notes, "Joel W. Tucker . . . was expelled for immorality." His whereabouts thereafter are unknown. But by the time of his dismissal, he had become one of the more prominent Methodist clergymen in North Carolina. In 1866, for example, when he was assigned to the Methodist church in Wilson, he was named to the Board of Missions and was also chosen to preach the funeral sermon of an elderly, highly respected clergyman.

His flash of brilliance came during the course of the [Civil War](#) ^[7], when he was located at the Methodist church in Fayetteville. In quick succession he gave three sermons that were published and distributed throughout the South as comforting, if stern, theological interpretations of the place of the Confederacy in divine history. In one of the sermons, *God's Providence in War* ^[8], delivered to his congregation in Fayetteville on Friday, 16 May 1862, a general Confederate fast day, Tucker saw the ongoing war as "a conflict of truth with error—of the Bible with Northern infidelity—of pure christianity with Northern fanaticism—of liberty with despotism—of right with might." In the next, *God Sovereign and Man Free* (1862), he prayed "for the success of our cause; for the triumph of our armies," arguing that God could "answer our petitions, because he has sovereign control of the bodies and souls of men." These two sermons expressed succinctly and clearly the epitome of Southern wartime religious ideology, making Tucker momentarily one of the most popular and lauded prophets of the wartime South. The third published sermon, *Guilt and Punishment of Extortion*, preached on 7 Sept. 1862, was directed at extortioners who caused serious price inflation and contributed to the scarcity of certain goods. Tucker suggested means of controlling them. All of these were printed in Fayetteville at the office of the *Presbyterian*, a journal of that denomination.

At the time of the 1850 census, when he was living in Plymouth, N.C., his wife was twenty-year-old Penelope, a native of North Carolina. No children were recorded.

References:

Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Minutes of the Annual Conferences* (1845–68).

Joel W. Tucker, *God Sovereign and Men Free: A Discourse* (1862), *God's Providence in War: A Sermon Delivered . . . in Fayetteville, N.C., on Friday, May 16, 1862* (1862) ^[8], and *Guilt and Punishment of Extortion: A Sermon* (1862).

Additional Resources:

West Market Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South (Greensboro, N.C.). *West Market Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South: a history of its growth and influence for one hundred years from its foundation in 1830, until October 12th, 1930*. Greensboro, N. C. [Published by Circle No. 6, Woman's Missionary Society]. 1934. <https://archive.org/details/westmarketstreet01west> ^[9] (accessed March 26, 2014).

Loftin, Emily. *History of Ann Street Methodist Church, Beaufort, North Carolina : organized 1778*. [Beaufort, N.C. : Ann Street Methodist Church]. 1966. <https://archive.org/details/historyofannstre00loft> ^[10] (accessed March 26, 2014).

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Authors:

[Tise, Larry E.](#) ^[15]

Origin - location:

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Carteret County ^[18]
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Craven County ^[20]
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Cumberland County ^[22]
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Wilson County ^[24]
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