

Daybreak in Alaska

Sheldon Jackson
and the Gospel's Entrance
into the Wild West and Alaska

R. A. Sheats

Psalm 78 Ministries

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Biblical quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Scriptures. Divine pronouns have been capitalized.

Photo Credit:

Page 40, Eric Gaba, *Alaska area compared to contiguous United States*

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To the Reader

Long ago, in the days of Eli and Samuel, the nation of Israel had fallen upon difficult times. Apostasy was rampant—even among the priests—God’s Law was rejected, and the Lord no longer granted victory to the armies of His people. Israel warred against the Philistines and lost. In their victory the Philistines captured the ark of the Lord, which they carried home as a trophy of war.

As plagues visited them and their cities, however, the Philistines realized that God was judging them, and they called upon their wise men for counsel. The Philistine priests and diviners offered advice on how the plagues were to be stopped and the ark of God removed from their land. Then, after giving this counsel, they asked a question of the rulers of the Philistines, saying in effect: “Why did you harden your hearts like the Egyptians and Pharaoh? Didn’t you learn anything from them? Haven’t you heard what God did to them?” (See 1 Sam. 6:6.)

Though they were unbelieving pagans, the Philistine priests knew that history was written for their instruction. Why has God given us history? He gives it in order that we might learn of Him, and in order that we might see how He works among the children of men. The Philistines understood this; so ought we.

Daybreak in Alaska is a history book—a book chronicling God’s dealings with man. The history of Sheldon Jackson and the arrival of the Gospel in Alaska is a stunning picture of the mighty power of God displayed in the humblest of lives and the most unlikely of places.

Though only five feet four inches tall, Sheldon Jackson was a giant of a man. Small in stature, yet he was a man who took seriously the petition in the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come.” In every way Jackson was a kingdom man. Whether he was preaching in a small frontier church in the middle of nowhere, combating Indians in the wild west, or battling snowstorms in Alaska, his goal was ever the same: the glorification of his Savior Jesus Christ and the extension of His

Kingdom.

It is the author's hope that this stirring tale of the wild west and the brave new land of Alaska will grant the reader an opportunity to marvel at the Lord of Hosts, and to say with all saints, "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes!" (Psalm 118:23.) May it inspire the children of the next generation to rise up, enter into Christ's vineyard, and carry on the mighty work of extending the Kingdom of our glorious Lord and Savior.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Daybreak in Alaska employs the letters, journals, and writings of many missionaries, Alaskan Indians, and various other eyewitnesses to the events of this marvelous tale. Most first-hand accounts have been taken from Richard Laird Harris' *Sheldon Jackson, Pathfinder and Prospector* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908) and Sheldon Jackson's own work entitled *Alaska, and Missions on the North Pacific Coast* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1880). Because more than a century now separates us from the time of these writings, certain vocabulary and grammatical structures then in use are now quite outdated. Therefore when original documents are quoted, archaic or difficult wording has been updated to render the text more understandable to today's readers. Spelling has also been conformed to modern usage.



Birthplace of Sheldon Jackson

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CHAPTER ONE

God Calls a Boy

On May 18th, 1834, in a small village called Minaville in the countryside of New York, a child was born. The child's parents, Samuel and Delia Jackson, rejoiced at the birth of their firstborn, and gave him the name Sheldon.

Young Jackson began his life with unusual excitement. When only an infant his life was nearly lost when the family home caught fire. The child was quickly carried outside, however, and escaped harm.

Sheldon was still a young child when the Jackson family was blessed with the addition of a daughter. She was given the name Louise.

Sheldon's father Samuel was an elder in the local Presbyterian church. A staunch, godly man, Samuel and his wife Delia prayed earnestly for their little brood, and when Sheldon was just four years old he was dedicated by his parents to the work of the ministry of the Gospel.

Growing up in Minaville, some of Jackson's earliest memories were of the family's regular attendance at divine services. Though the Jackson home was located ten miles from the village church, this did not prevent the family from attending worship, no matter what the weather or temperature might be. Whether by wagon or by sleigh, Samuel Jackson brought his family to church. Sheldon recalled that upon these long rides his mother often worked with him and his sister Louise on their memorization of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Even after he was grown Jackson never forgot those Lord's Day mornings, and later recorded a typical Sunday morning's trip to church in winter:

In the short days of winter on Sabbath morning the chores were done, preparations made, and breakfast over before daylight. The team was hitched up and buffalo robes, blankets, and straw (with the necessary axe and shovel) were placed in the

sleigh. And as the family locked the doors and went out from the house they carried with them the lunch-basket and a three-inch oak plank or soapstone that had been heated in the oven or the stove, to keep their feet warm.

On these ten mile trips, going and returning from church, it was not an uncommon occurrence for the sleigh to upset or the horses to get down in the snow. In such case a buffalo robe would be spread on the snow, upon which mother and daughter would be placed. Then, while I was stationed at the horses' heads, father would loosen the traces and right the sled or help up the team. Frequently on these occasions a panel would be broken out of the road fence with the axe, and a path shoveled through the snowdrifts into the neighboring field where the sled could make progress parallel with the road until a place was reached where the drifts were passable.



Sheldon Jackson's childhood home

As parents, Samuel and Delia Jackson recognized their obligation before God, and raised their children in the fear of the Lord. And, in the merciful working of Providence, God laid His hand upon Sheldon at an early age and brought him to the feet of Christ.

As a young man Sheldon eagerly entered training for the ministry with the intention of becoming a missionary, much to the joy of his parents. Jackson afterward wrote of this time:

Immediately upon experiencing the love of Christ in my heart, my mind was made up to be (Lord willing) both a minister and a missionary.

Jackson was ordained a minister of the Gospel in 1857 at only twenty-three years of age. He immediately applied to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church to become a missionary. By the beginning of 1858 he had been accepted, though his request to be sent to a foreign country was denied. He was instead assigned to work as a schoolteacher among the Choctaw Indians in Spencer, Oklahoma.

Before entering upon his missionary labors Jackson was married to Miss Mary Voorhees. After their honeymoon the couple excitedly prepared for the long journey to their new home.

Traveling from New York to Oklahoma in the 1850's was indeed a long, arduous journey. Mary, Sheldon's new wife, recorded a short portion of their extended trip and her first taste of the 'wild west.'



Mary Voorhees Jackson

At Little Rock we took the stagecoach for Washington, Arkansas. We were two days and nights reaching that place, and had most wretched food offered us by the way, for which we paid fifty cents each. I very often did not eat at all.

At Washington the hotel was most shocking. If the floor in the room we occupied had not been so dirty, we would have preferred it to the bed. All the furniture the parlor contained was a carpet and looking-glass and two or three chairs. And when mealtime came they took the chairs out of the room, and we were required to stand or sit on the floor (which I did, to the astonishment of the natives).

We had some difficulty in procuring a carriage to bring us to Spencer. We finally made arrangements with a man, and started about 4 P.M. The next day we rode ten miles, getting lost on the way. That night we put up at the house of one of the better class of people, and had good accommodations and a comfortable night's rest.

The next morning we started and found that one of the horses was lame. We supposed that it would get better after a little while, but it grew worse and we were obliged to travel slowly. When we had traveled about twenty miles the tire came off one of the wheels. As there was no blacksmith's shop near, it was fastened on as well as was possible under the circumstances, and we endeavored to reach a small town ten miles distant where we could have it reset. But night overtook us before we reached it, and the roads were so bad that it was almost impossible to travel after dark.

That night we put up at a place where we preferred to sleep on the floor. The next morning the lame horse was unable to travel, and half the day was lost in procuring another horse and in repairing the damage to the carriage. This being Saturday, the delay was particularly unfortunate as we wished to reach Mr. Byington's mission to spend the Sabbath.

Due to the lame horse and the wheel trouble, Sheldon and Mary did not reach the Byington's Saturday night. They therefore found a home to stay in for the Lord's Day, and resumed their journey on Monday. Mary continues:

Night overtook us Saturday eighteen miles from this station, and we stayed until Monday with a man by the name of Peguis. About 2 P.M. on Monday we reached Mr. Byington's and had dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Byington are pleasant old people.

Both have been sick this summer.

Monday evening we arrived at a place called Depot. Here it was worse than ever. We had to share our room with the driver and some others, and the bed was alive with bugs. We thought the wagon preferable, and slept in that the next night.

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