

# The Prophetic Meaning of America's First Missionary

What does it mean to be a pioneer?

Webster's Dictionary defines a pioneer as: "1. a person who is among those who first enter or settle a region, thus opening it for occupation and development by others; 2. one who is first or among the earliest in any field of inquiry, enterprise, or progress."

Truly, the life of George Liele embodies that of a pioneer.

He is the first of many African American missionaries who will go to a nation not their own to those who know nothing of the Son of God. They will go because, like George, they too "hold to live nigh the scriptures as much as [they] can." The reality of George Liele being the first missionary sent out of America speaks volumes about the prophetic future of missions from the shores of America. This history of African Americans pioneering in missions from America prophesies the destiny of Black missions. Currently, the reality does not represent this history or destiny! This can only mean that the greatest mobilization effort for global missions is ahead of us, and it will be full of African American praying, preaching and singing.

Liele was born around 1750 into slavery. As a child, he was separated and sold off from his parents when he was very young. Liele had no memories of his mother and father outside of what he heard from other slaves. Liele went from plantation to plantation up and down the east coast of America until he landed on a plantation owned by a man named Henry Sharp. At this point, George Liele was called George Sharp. Later, when he was freed, he chose the last name Liele, which was his father's first name.

Liele's life would take a dramatic turn on Henry Sharp's plantation when he heard the gospel for the first time. He realized he was not walking in the way of Christ and surrendered His life to Jesus at the age of 23. Liele's conversion would impact not only him but slaves and slave owners alike. On the plantation, he began to preach to fellow slaves, and his preaching caught the attention of Henry Sharp's pastor, Matthew Moore. Matthew Moore baptized and ordained Liele on May 20, 1775, making him the first African American Baptist pastor in America. Shortly after, Sharp granted Liele his freedom so that he would be able to preach unhindered and pursue the ministry. Liele not only preached to slaves but also at the quarterly meetings with Matthew Moore's white congregation. Liele preached, baptized slaves and raised up leaders to preach on the various plantations he would visit. In a time where slavery was the law of the land and the Revolutionary War was at its conception, Liele made the gospel message his priority. He may have been born into slavery, but it didn't stop him from serving God and bringing the gospel to those in need. Liele would go on to found First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia. His preaching and ministry were so dynamic that the meetings would be packed with both Black and white people. This went on for a few years. During this time, Liele's heart began to turn toward slave populations beyond the shores of America.

When the Revolutionary War began, Henry Sharp was killed in battle, and his children tried to reenslave Liele. Liele was able to provide his manumission papers, but he saw the future did not look bright for him in America. Liele and his family decided to leave with Colonel Kirkland to Kingston, Jamaica. Liele's life as a pioneer was only just beginning.

Continue reading about the first missionary from America here, and listen to this episode of *MAPS Global Podcast* on Charisma Podcast Network to hear more about the history, reality and destiny of African American missionaries. {eo}

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