

Baptists of Brazil and Texas:

A long partnership

BY BILL PITTS | *Baylor University*

Brazil's Baptist population approaches 2 million, making it one of the largest groups of Baptists in the world. Texas Baptists deserve much credit for the founding of Brazilian Baptists. Four young Texans established a permanent Baptist presence in the country in 1882.

William Buck Bagby met Anne Luther in 1878. Anne shared with Buck her desire to become a missionary. Buck, too, was persuaded. They married in 1880 and sailed for Rio de Janeiro, arriving in 1881.

Z.C. Taylor, a college student at Waco University, was convinced of the need for people abroad to hear the gospel as he knew it. Taylor met Kate Crawford, whose uncle, T.P. Crawford, a missionary to China, had sparked her interest in missions. Z.C. and Kate married, sailed for Rio and arrived a year after the Bagbys.

Shortly after the Taylors arrived, the four youthful missionaries met in March of 1882 to discuss key issues regarding their work: Among whom should we work? Where should we work? Should we work together or separately? They recognized the need for someone to minister among Americans, but they agreed they had come to Brazil to share their beliefs with the Brazilians, most of whom were Roman Catholic. These Baptists preached the necessity of a personal conversion.

Also critical was the location of their work. Z.C. Taylor wrote, "I almost tremble at the thought of choosing a mission—it is of so much importance." They wanted to serve a large population, and they chose to work together in Bahia (Salvador), the second-largest city in Brazil. On their reflection, this meeting provided the formal organization of the Brazilian Baptist mission. Taylor reported, "It gave me such happiness to know that the mission to the Brazilians had already commenced."

The missionaries could not have succeeded without the work of Alfonso Teixeria de Albuquerque. He was the first Brazilian member of the church; he taught them Portuguese, and he served as the first pastor of the first Baptist church in Brazil. The five of them moved to Bahia and organized a Baptist church in October of 1882—the first congregation that properly could be called a Brazilian Baptist church, with services conducted in Portuguese. Texans with vision and commitment gave life to Baptists in Brazil.