

PREFACE

It has been my personal concern for some time, a concern shared by many Baptist pastors and leaders, that Baptist people generally seem to be lacking in knowledge of their history and heritage. So, this study course is issued to help relieve this situation by giving Baptists at least an introduction to what it means to be a Baptist.

This course has been prepared with adults, college students, and young people in mind. It can be used for one's private study, but it can also be adapted easily to various types of study groups: women's auxiliaries, men's brotherhoods, new church member classes, college fellowships, young people's meetings, and even the "patio" meetings, informal gatherings in homes, which have become quite popular.

Since this study course has been written primarily for use of the churches of the American Baptist Association, two lessons have been developed explaining the "Articles of Agreement" and the "Mission Policy" of the ABA. No other publication offers such an explanation to our people. These chapters should make the study course more valuable as an introductory course for new church members.

If a group leader guides in these studies, he should encourage the members of the group to read the materials for each lesson outside the meeting and to make notes of any questions or ideas (or even objections and criticisms) which reading arouses. These can become discussion starters in the meeting. Test questions are provided at the end of each lesson. Of course, they may be used or ignored as one chooses.

As much as time allows, look up the Scripture references given in the lessons. This will not only familiarize the students with their Bibles (which is extremely important especially with new converts) but will also demonstrate that Baptist doctrines and principles have Biblical support.

May the Lord use these lessons to enlarge our understanding of the people called Baptists and our appreciation for the rich heritage which is ours.

—James A. Kirkland

Baptist Roots

Bible Reading: Matthew 3:1-6.

From colonial times the Baptists have played a vital role in the religious history of our nation. Early in colonial life they preached the gospel, planted missions, labored to establish free churches, and struggled for the separation of church and state and liberty of conscience. No denomination of Christians has exerted a more powerful spiritual influence upon American life than the Baptists.

Where did these people called Baptists come from? Do their roots lie in recent religious history, or are they an ancient people? Baptist historians are answering these questions in various ways: some historians trace Baptist beginnings to the Separatists who withdrew from the Church of England in the 17th century; others identify Baptists with the radical movements of the Reformation and place their origin there.

But we must look further back than that for the roots of Baptist churches. Before the 1600's, before the Reformation, churches holding the doctrines and principles of Baptists carried on a vigorous ministry for Christ. Our search for their roots does not end until we reach Christ and the apostles.

The Preparation.

John the Baptist prepared the way for the out-calling of the first New Testament church by the Lord Jesus Christ. He was chosen of God to be a herald, a forerunner, for Jesus. The prophet Malachi had predicted such an emissary would come (Malachi 3:1), and the New Testament definitely says John's ministry fulfilled Malachi's prophecy (Mark 1:2-4).

John prepared the people whom Jesus would call out into His first church.

How did John prepare the way? He won people to personal faith in Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) (Acts 19:4). Then, he baptized those who gave evidence that they had truly repented and believed on Christ (Matthew 3:8; Acts 19:4).

Jesus Christ was central in John's preaching. John never failed to point his hearers to "one coming after" him who was mightier than he (John 1:15-30). The Apostle John (who wrote the Gospel of John) says John the Baptist witnessed of Jesus as the preeminent One (verses 15, 30), the Giver of grace (verse 16), the only begotten Son and the Revealer of God (verses 18, 34), the Lord (verse 23), the Lamb of God (verse 29), and the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit (verse 33).

John led his hearers to personal faith in Jesus, but that was only the first step in becoming a disciple. He led them to immersion as a testimony to their faith (Matthew 3:5, 6). He was careful about whom he baptized: everyone who came to John did not receive his baptism. He sifted the genuine repenting believers from the mere professors by demanding that they show him fruits to prove they had repented (Matthew 3:7, 8)—a simple but effective method. As far as it was humanly possible to guarantee it, the material John prepared for the first church was a body of genuine believers immersed on their profession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

The Out-calling.

Jesus called out His first church himself; that distinction He gave no one else. He later called it "my church" (Matthew 16:18) because He is its Organizer, Savior, Possessor and Head.

Christ selected His first disciples very carefully. We do not know what particular qualities He looked for in these men, but we may be sure, whatever their weaknesses, they were men of high character. (Judas was the exception.) They were to be the nucleus of His first church. The gospels give us the record of three out-callings: Andrew and Philip (John 1:29-51); Peter and Andrew, James and John (Matthew

4:18-22), and Matthew (Mark 2:14). Which of these disciples was called first? It is hard to say; the dates sometimes given in the margin or center column of our study Bibles are only scholarly guesses.

This company of disciples grew until it was composed of at least 120 by the time Jesus ascended to heaven following His resurrection (Acts 1:15). The Apostle Paul says Christ appeared to more than 500 brethren at once after His resurrection (I Corinthians 15:6). So, His first church might have been made up of more than the 120 mentioned in Acts 1:15.

This company of believers was a church before Jesus ascended back to heaven. Some Bible teachers place the beginning of the church at Pentecost after Christ's resurrection. But Dr. Stanley E. Anderson in the preface to his book, *The First Church*, lists 27 items the disciples had during the days of Jesus' presence with them before Pentecost which were certainly sufficient to make them a church, They had the gospel (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:1); they were converted (Matthew 3:5-8); they were baptized after their conversion (Matthew 3:6; Acts 1:22); they had Christ as Head (Matthew 23:8); they were instructed in church truths (Matthew 18:15-20); they were called to obey Christ (Matthew 4:18-20); they were ordained (Matthew 10:1-5); they were commissioned (Matthew 28:18-20); they were organized enough for their needs (John 13:29); they had a missionary program (Matthew 4:23; 10:1-42); they were promised a permanent church (Matthew 16:18); they had church discipline (Matthew 18:15-17); they had divine authority (Matthew 18:18; 28:18-20) they had essentials of church life (Matthew 4:19; 18:20); they had true church democracy (Matthew 23:8-12); they had qualified pastors (John 15:16; 21:15-17); they had the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-28); they had the Holy Spirit (John 20:22); they had divine power to do Christ's work (Luke 9:1); they sang "in the midst of the church" (Matthew 26:30; Hebrews 2:12); they had prayer meetings (Acts 1:14); they had business meetings (Acts 1:15-26); they had a membership roll (Matthew 10:2-4; Acts 1:13-15); they were united and

"added unto" (Acts 2:1, 41); Christ was their corner stone (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20).

The Ministry

Acts 1:1 is an important verse which we read over (like so many other verses) without really grasping what it says: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." Note carefully these words, "Began to do and teach." In the book of Acts and in the Epistles of the New Testament we have the record of Christ's work *continued* through the churches, a work which He had begun during the personal ministry of our Lord. The apostles and churches only carried forward after Christ's ministry on earth what He had begun during His ministry.

What did Jesus begin to do and teach? More than we can list here; but we can note three things. Jesus began a system of faith (doctrine) during His personal ministry. Every day was a day of training and instruction for His disciples; however, three distinct periods of teaching stand out in the Gospels and Acts: in the first days of His ministry (Matthew 5-7), just before His crucifixion (Matthew 24, 25; John 12-17), and for forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3).

Even with all this teaching, though, He did not give all His truth to His disciples; He left many things to be taught them later by the Holy Spirit when they were spiritually more mature (John 16:12, 13). The Epistles may be regarded as the teachings Jesus gave to the churches through the Holy Spirit after His ascension.

Jesus also began giving His church power for its work. He personally and directly empowered them while He was with them (Luke 9:1; John 15:5). He told them, however, that He must go away. Would they be without power? He assured them that He would not leave them alone and without power, for He would pray the Father, and the Father would send them the Holy Spirit to endue them with heaven's power for their work (John 14:16, 17; 16:7, 13). This promise was fulfilled on the first Pentecost after His resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:1-5). The Holy Spirit

came on that day to be the abiding Helper of the churches of Christ until He comes again.

Jesus began an evangelistic-missionary work. He first began it alone (Mark 1:14). Then He called out disciples and enlarged His ministry through them (Matthew 10:1-15; Luke 10:1-20; John 4:1, 2). How many were converted through their work? We cannot say exactly; the Gospels give no statistics. Dr. Anderson suggests that if we added those converted through the preaching of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3, 6) to those won by the seventy (Luke 10:1-24), plus those won by Christ and the Twelve (John 4:1, 2), the total might be more than ten thousand or several tens of thousands.

In the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:38) Jesus showed His church that the field of Christian work is the whole world. That was His vision and His will. Later, before He went back to heaven, He gave them a commission to evangelize the whole world, (Matthew 28:18-20). He has not reduced the boundaries of our field; it is still the world.

His first church caught that vision of a world in need, and when persecution scattered them, the disciples preached the gospel wherever they traveled (Acts 8:1-4). In the succeeding 1900 years the first church has multiplied itself hundreds and thousands of times. And today modern Baptists gladly acknowledge themselves the successors of the first church which Jesus built, and they accept the challenge of His vision and commission.

Now Test Yourself

1. What two opinions do we sometimes find regarding the origin of the Baptists?
2. How far back must we go in history to find their roots?
3. Who prepared the way for Christ to call out the first church?
4. What Old Testament prophecy predicted this ministry?
5. How were the people prepared for the Lord?

6. What did Jesus mean by the expression “my church”?

7. Who were the disciples first called by the Lord?

8. How many items can you name which the disciples possessed demonstrating that they were a church before Pentecost?

9. What three things did Jesus begin during His personal ministry?

10. What were the three distinct teaching periods in Christ's earthly ministry?

11. What promise of Christ was fulfilled on Pentecost after His ascension?

12. In the parable of the wheat and tares what does the field represent?

Baptists and the Bible

Bible Reading: II Timothy 3:16, 17.

Take the Bible away from the Baptists and you remove the very foundation of their theology and principles. They have always been a people of the one Book. That statement standing alone could be misleading, of course, suggesting as it does that Baptists have placed little value in other religious writings, which certainly is not true. Had you gone into the humblest English Baptist home in the early 17th century, you would have found near the stone hearth John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* which the English Baptists cherished next to their Bibles.

Through the years the Baptists have produced scholarly and devout writers who have enriched the Baptist denomination, and the world, with their pens. The heritage in literature is rich. Baptists have believed deeply in the power of the written word. So, when we say Baptists are the people of the one Book, we obviously mean that we have counted all other religious writings secondary to the Word of God. Our appreciation for the Scriptures and our faith in them is due to our belief in their inspiration.

The Inspiration of the Scriptures

The Bible claims to be the inspired Word of God (II Timothy 3:16, 17). The Greek word translated "inspired" in this verse literally means "God-breathed," and emphasizes primarily the *source* of the Bible, not the method by which it came to us. The Apostle Peter also assures us that the Bible is the record of what holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:16-21).

What is inspiration? Our understanding of this doctrine must not be hazy; too much depends upon a correct knowledge of what inspiration is.

Inspiration is not human genius. As brilliant as men may be at times, human intellect alone could not have produced a book with such accuracy, unity, and spiritual power as the Bible. And we may add, there are truths and concepts in the Bible which the human mind would never have dreamed of unaided by the Holy Spirit.

Inspiration is not illumination. Every believer in Christ has the illumination of the Holy Spirit which is the Spiritual ability to understand Bible truth (I Corinthians 2:9-16).

Inspiration is not revelation, although the two are so related and interdependent they seem to be one. Revelation is God's activity of communicating divine knowledge to the human mind. Inspiration is God's activity of controlling and guiding those who made that knowledge known to others as they recorded it.

The distinction in these three terms has been summarized in this way: revelation is God's giving the truth; inspiration is God's guiding those who recorded the truth so that they were preserved from error; illumination is God's imparting understanding of what has been revealed and recorded. All of these are the work of the Holy Spirit. (Read Galatians 1:11, 12; II Timothy 3:16, 17; Psalm 119:18; John 16:13.)

Inspiration can be claimed only for the original documents of the Bible. None of the originals exist today; we only have copies of the originals, and translations made from the copies. God did not inspire the copyists; they were not preserved from error. However, their errors are amazingly few in proportion to the thousands of words in the Bible, and no copyist's error affects a single doctrine of the Bible or lessens the Scriptures' veracity and trustworthiness. We have an accurate and totally trustworthy Bible.

Historically, Baptists have believed in the inspiration of the Scriptures. We have accepted the Bible as the very Word of God without error and have humbly submitted to its authority. Nevertheless, we are forced to admit, and sadly, that modernism has infiltrated several Baptist groups in this

century, and not all Baptists believe now in the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scripture. For this reason we must read even Baptist writings now with caution lest we be corrupted by modernistic theories regarding the nature of the Bible. It is safe to say, though, that the majority of Baptists are still firm believers that every word of the Scriptures is inspired of God and that the whole Bible is the Word of God.

Various Versions

The first copies of the Bible circulated among the churches were on papyrus, a kind of "paper" made from the papyrus plant which grew chiefly along the Nile in Egypt. For the first two centuries very few copies of the whole New Testament existed; for the most part the churches had only portions, perhaps only the gospels or the epistles. But as Christianity spread, interest in the Christian Book grew, and devout men vigorously spread the Word of God in handwritten copies. Charles Gulston says:

With Christianity barely three hundred years old, therefore, the Word of God was being widely diffused. The modern world can claim no originality in its art of multiplying books rapidly. In the Graeco-Roman Empire, a manuscript could be put into a thousand different homes within a month if copyists did a little overtime. The ancient scriptorium was as efficiently run as the modern printing house. And by the fourth century papyrus (paper), the Greek name for which was "*biblos*," was giving place to vellum, and the roll form of manuscript to the codex. The Divine hand can already be noticed moving behind the momentous events of the time, controlling already the preservation of the sacred Scriptures. By the year A.D. 150 the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were ready for their transcription to the more durable quality of calfskin. (*Our English Bible: No Greater Heritage*).

During the Dark Ages, the Roman Catholic Church tried to keep the Bible out of the hands of the common people, forbidding anyone but priests and officials of the church to possess it—on pain of death. The Roman hierarchy feared the Bible in the vernacular in the hands of the common people, and with good reason. William Butler, a Franciscan friar, expressed the official sentiment of the Roman church when he wrote:

name of the Church, and the decrees of the various Roman Catholic ecumenical councils. To the Roman Church the tradition has equal authority with the Bible.

Similarly, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon) places the Book of Mormon in equal authority to the Bible; and the Christian Science religion makes Mary Baker Eddy's *Key to the Scriptures* equal to the Bible. We can never allow any other book to stand alongside the Word as the standard of doctrine and practice.

Neither can we allow anyone to be an "official" interpreter of the Bible for us. The indwelling Holy Spirit in every believer assures that we will have light upon God's Word. This does not guarantee we will interpret infallibly; but it does guarantee our privilege to interpret for ourselves. Only by preserving this right of interpretation are we assured that the Bible will continue to be the sole authority of our faith and life. To place an official interpreter between us and the Bible is to make the interpreter the authority for our doctrine and practice. This, we have never been willing to allow. We must remain free to interpret the Scriptures for ourselves so that the Holy Spirit may speak the truth of God's Word to our hearts.

Now Test Yourself

1. What does the Greek word translated "inspired" mean?

2. What does this term primarily have reference to?

3. How does inspiration differ from human genius? From divine revelation? From illumination?

4. Can inspiration be claimed for copies of the original manuscripts?

5. What effect do the copyists' errors have upon the truthfulness and accuracy of the Bible?

6. How do the majority of Baptists believe about the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible?

7. Upon what kind of material were the first copies of the Bible made?

8. What form of “book” replaced the scroll? And what kind of material replaced papyrus?

9. What was a scriptorium?

10. What effort did the Roman Catholic Church make during the Dark Ages regarding the Bible?

11. Why did the Roman Church make this effort?

12. What restriction does the Roman Church place on the Catholic Bible reader today?

13. Two great Englishmen led the way in giving the English Bible to us; who were they?

14. What great doctrine is the corollary of the inspiration of the Scriptures?

15. Why can Baptists allow no one to become an “official” interpreter of the Bible for them?