History & Theology – Church History

**Class 9 – The Early English and American Baptists (1609-1988)**

## Main Point:

* Emerging in the context of Puritanism, Baptists began practicing believer’s baptism as an implication of regenerate church membership and became a major force for the spread of the gospel in America and around the world.

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## Class Goals:

* Establish the origins of Baptists as “baptistic congregationalists” in seventeenth century England by illustrating the process through which the earliest English baptist churches emerged.
* Explain the origins of Baptists in America from the colonial period to the Triennial Convention.
* Show the mixed history of Baptists in America on the issue of slavery while illustrating how race-based slavery and Christianity are fundamentally incompatible.
* Discuss the origins of black Baptist churches in America and why white and black churches remain historically segregated.
* Highlight the conservative resurgence within the Southern Baptist Convention during the last half of the twentieth century.

# Introduction

Every parent in this room has had the experience. It’s the moment every parent dreads. If you haven’t had it yet, you can expect to have it soon. One day, one of your sweet little children will come up to you, and seemingly out of the blue ask you, “Daddy, where do Baptists come from?”

This class today is to help prepare you for that day.

Over the past eleven weeks we’ve traced the history of the church from the Apostles, through the Medieval church and the Reformation, up through the Puritan movement in England. Along the way, we’ve been especially careful to track with the theological streams and conversations that have informed our own church’s beliefs and practices. Today, we come to the stream that is perhaps closest to home as we look at the Baptists.

We’ll do so in five parts, looking first at Baptist beginnings in England in the seventeenth century, second, how Baptists came to America, third, how Baptists responded to the instution of slavery, fourth, how separate African American institutions developed, and finally, some concluding comments on the Southern Baptist Convention.

# 1. Baptists in England

We should start by noting that to refer to “Baptists” in the early seventeenth century is only possible by way of anachronism.[[1]](#footnote-0) To their enemies, they were “Anabaptists,” a term they protested.[[2]](#footnote-1) They simply considered themselves to be Reformed Protestants in the separatist Puritan tradition: religious dissenters, outside of the Church of England, who, other than their practice of believers baptism, stood in lockstep with Protestant orthodoxy. In this sense, the early English Baptists were simply Puritans who took Puritanism to its logical conclusion.[[3]](#footnote-2)

This class traces the origins of the Baptists out of the English Separatist Tradition. In this, we’re in the company of men like Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, John Owen, and countless others who found themselves unable to subscribe to the Articles of Faith of the Church of England, choosing rather to organize separate, sometimes illegal churches outside of the interference of King and Bishops. In this sense, it’s best to refer to the early English Baptists as “Baptistic Congregationalists,” that is, congregationalists who adopted the practice of believers baptism.[[4]](#footnote-3)

To explain how baptists emerged, some brief historical context is required.[[5]](#footnote-4) In seventeenth-century England, religion was almost singularly subject to the whims of whichever monarch was in charge. For King James I (r. 1603-1625), whose ecclesiological persuasions were aggravated by his upbringing in Presbyterian Scotland where—to quote James, even the King was subject to the judgments of “every Tom, Dick, and Harry”— Puritanism posed a threat to royal supremacy. His ecclesiological convictions could be summed up with the simple aphorism, “No bishop, no king.”[[6]](#footnote-5) Unsurprisingly then, and much to the disappointment of the Puritan clergy, the King’s official decree at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 was that Episcopalianism would continue to be the form of church government in the Church of England.

The ministers who refused to subscribe to James I’s doctrines of royal supremacy, Thirty-Nine Articles, Episcopal church government, and the Book of Common Prayer were fired. Around three hundred refused initially, but many backtracked under pressure. Only about ninety ministers held out and were deprived of their positions.[[7]](#footnote-6) They became known as “Separatists” over their conviction of the need to separate from the Church of England. Out of these ministers, and the followers they attracted, grew a movement of Separatist congregations. In contrast to earlier groups, “a considerable proportion of each congregation were clergy.”[[8]](#footnote-7) These were not gatherings of ignorant farmers, but congregations of educated members of the gentry class where “many members could be expected to preach and teach.”[[9]](#footnote-8)

The central principle to which these Separatists held was that church members were bound together, not by geography or nationality, but by entering into a covenant with one another. For them, it was the covenant that made a church a church. Several implications flowed from this: First, there is no external authority over the local congregation. Second, every member is equally responsible for the work of the church and upholding the covenant. Third, each member of the church needed to show evidence of true conversion.

These were the convictions that were growing among the Puritans in early seventeenth-century England, and these were the convictions that led to the first baptistic churches in England. We’ll look at two examples. First, John Smythe, and second, Henry Jessey.

## John Smythe

John Smythe (1565-1612) was a Cambridge educated minister in the Church of England. He came under Puritan influences while at Cambridge where he was ordained in 1594. After leaving the Church of England, he helped form a church in the town of Gainsborough in Lincolnshire, sometime around 1606-1607.[[10]](#footnote-9) In the words of their original church covenant:

“As the Lords free people joined themselves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a Church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walke in all his ways made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them”[[11]](#footnote-10)

All forty-three members of the “Smythe Congregation,” signed the church confession and statement of faith.[[12]](#footnote-11) They had a plurality of elders, many of whom regularly taught the Word.[[13]](#footnote-12) They only permitted two offices in the church: elder and deacon. Elders governed and taught the Word. Deacons met practical needs in the church, and women could serve as deacons.[[14]](#footnote-13)

So far, however, they were not yet Baptists.

Eventually, they fled England due to persecution and settled in Amsterdam in 1608. Around 1609, while in Holland, Smyth became convinced that believer’s baptism was biblical and that infant baptism was not, so baptized first himself, and then the rest of the congregation. Now, they were not yet practicing believers’ baptism by *immersion*, but by pouring. The development of baptism by full-body immersion did not come until later.

Tragically, not long after arriving in Amsterdam, John Smythe tried to lead the English congregation in uniting with a Mennonite church, eventually leading to his excommunication by the congregation, and most of the members returning to England.[[15]](#footnote-14)

Still, Smythe serves as an example of how believer’s baptism logically developed as a logical outgrowth of understanding the local church as a community of saints covenanted together to live faithfully to God’s Word.

## Henry Jessey and the J-L-J Church

Another example of this same process comes from the life of Henry Jessey.[[16]](#footnote-15) Born in 1601, Jessey commenced his studies at St. John’s College, Cambridge at the age of 17. This was a time when Cambridge was producing hundreds of godly, Reformed ministers. St. John’s College in particular was known a “hot-bed” of Puritanism,[[17]](#footnote-16) being the college that produced Richard Sibbes, Peter Bulkeley, John Arrowsmith and many others. In fact, Richard Sibbes was appointed Senior Fellow at St. John’s in 1619,[[18]](#footnote-17) just as Jessey arrived at the school, making it quite possible that Sibbes’ preaching played a part in Jessey’s conversion in 1622 at the age of 21. Under the tutelage of Sibbes and others, Jessey set his sights on becoming a minister.[[19]](#footnote-18)

Being ordained in the Church of England in 1627, Jessey worked as a chaplain in Suffolk and later in Aughton in 1633. But like many Puritans of his day, the re-Romanizing of the Church of England under Archbishop Laud proved too much for him. Around this time, Jessey embraced “non-conformity” and was removed from his position for “not using the ceremonies then imposed” and for “the removing of the Crucifix there.”[[20]](#footnote-19) As Jessey wrote candidly on June 12, 1633 to his friend John Winthrop Jr. (son of Governor Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony), through the “renewing [of] old customs, setting tables altar-wise, genuflections [in the name of Jesus], solemn processions, observing Wednesday and Friday prayers, and other such things… Popery much increaseth!”[[21]](#footnote-20)

Moving to London with his benefactor, Sir Matthew Bointon, in 1635, Jessey planned on continuing on to New England with Bointon and supporting the work there. However, only a month or two after arriving in London “he was earnestly importuned to remove and join himself with that Congregation where Mr. Henry Jacob and Mr. John Lathrop had been Pastors.”[[22]](#footnote-21) This congregation, the famous Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey (“J-L-J”) Church as it would later become known, had been founded by Henry Jacob in 1616 and was on the cutting edge of the Separatist Puritan movement. They now wanted Henry Jessey to become their new pastor. As Bointon’s move to New England tarried and the J-L-J Church remained insistent, Jessey was ultimately convinced to accept their call and become their pastor “about Midsummer 1637.”[[23]](#footnote-22) He would labor in that congregation for over 25 years until his death in 1663.

Like Richard Sibbes, Jessey never married. Rather, “He chose a single life,” so that “not being encumbered with wife or family he might be the more entirely devoted to his sacred work.”[[24]](#footnote-23) Jessey’s devotion to that “sacred work” was such that he *despised* “idle talk and fruitless visits,” so much so that he “took all possible methods to avoid them.”[[25]](#footnote-24) He even placed a sign above his study door that said in Latin:

*Whatever FRIEND comes hither,*

*Dispatch in Brief: or go:*

*Or help me busied too.*

A brilliant linguist and scholar, his command of not only Greek and Hebrew, but Chaldean and Syriac was so unparalleled that when the House of Commons in 1652 commissioned a revision of the King James 1611 Bible, they picked Henry Jessey to be one of its nine translators alongside men like John Owen and John Row. For years, Jessey had been critical of the “Episcopalian” biases of the translators of the King James Bible. He once remarked that “had they been as well conscientious in point of fidelity, and godliness, as they were furnished with abilities, they would not have molded it [the KJV] to their own Episcopal notion rendering *episkopen*, (the office of oversight) by the term Bishoprick (Acts 1:20, etc), as they do in 14 places more.”[[26]](#footnote-25)

### Becoming Baptist

The one event for which Jessey is most remembered today, however, is his change of mind over the issue of baptism in the 1640s. Now, unlike John Smythe, Jessey’s first conviction to change was the *mode* of baptism.[[27]](#footnote-26) Being a linguist, Jessey became convinced around the year 1642 that immersion or the *dipping* of the whole body into water best made sense of the Greek, as well as the symbolism of baptism as a *burial* into Christ’s death and a *resurrection* from the grave. For the next 2-3 years he continued to baptize children but did so by immersion. Around the year 1644, however, the question of the proper *subject* of baptism became disputed at the J-L-J Church and after protracted discussions with the elders, Jessey became convinced of believer’s baptism.[[28]](#footnote-27) As Jessey would later write,

“Baptisme is an Ordinance of the Lord annexed to the Word of the Covenant; wherein persons repenting, and believing in Jesus Christ, yielding up themselves to him, in his Name, are solemnly dipt in water, and arise; signifying, representing, and sealing up to them, their Union with Christ; and their Communion with him in his Death, and Burial, and Resurrection.”[[29]](#footnote-28)

After consulting several friends, including Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, and Jeremiah Burroughs, and finding they could give no satisfactory arguments to the contrary, Jessey was baptized by Hansard Knollys on June 29, 1645.[[30]](#footnote-29)

### A Patient Reformer

Despite his changed convictions about believers baptism, Jessey did not split the church over the question. As his biographer notes, “He always had some in his congregation of the Padobaptist Perswasion [sic], & blamed those that made their particular Opinion about baptism the Boundary of Church Communion.”[[31]](#footnote-30) Jessey simply recognized that since believer’s baptism had not been a prerequisite for church membership at the onset, it was imprudent to require existing members to violate their consciences by submitting to what they would consider “re-baptism.” As a result, he patiently preached the truth and waited for the minds of his members to change, just as it had taken years for his own views on the matter to change.[[32]](#footnote-31)

* **Discussion Question:** What should a pastor do whose convictions about baptism have changed do with those who were not baptized as believers when they became members of the church?

# 2. Baptists in America

Due to persecution in England, many Puritans were fleeing to the Netherlands, and to America where they could freely gather and worship God according to their convictions. Just as in England, many of these Puritans became convinced of believers' baptism. One such Puritan was Roger Williams.

## Roger Williams and Religious Liberty

Like Smythe and Jessey, Roger Williams (1603-1683) was a graduate of Cambridge and had been ordained in the Church of England. He arrived in Massachusetts in 1631 and quickly began to make trouble: insisting that settlers had no right to steal Indian land and that the Magistrate ought not persecute religious dissenters.[[33]](#footnote-32) In 1636 he founded the town of Providence, Rhode Island, and in 1638, established the first baptistic church in America in that city.

What Williams is most remembered for today is his writings on religious toleration. His most treatise, “The Bloody Tenant of Persecution for cause of Conscience,” published in London in 1644, made the case that the Old Testament laws requiring Israel to punish idolaters did not authorize the State to persecute religious dissenters, because, “The state of the land of Israel, the kings and people thereof” are merely “figurative and ceremonial, and no pattern nor precedent for any kingdom or civil state in the world to follow.”[[34]](#footnote-33) His argument for religious toleration was thus grounded in his doctrine of the relationship between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant.[[35]](#footnote-34)

William's views were considered so controversial that on August 9, 1644, the House of Commons ordered his book to be publicly burnt![[36]](#footnote-35)

In addition to believers’ baptism, this issue of religious toleration quickly drove a wedge between Baptists and Congregationalists in New England. It’s not that Puritans like John Cotton believed they could coerce someone into having saving faith. But they believed that the magistrate was required by God to suppress heresy. As John Cotton—the leading Congregationalist theologian in New England—wrote in a response to Roger Williams in 1647:

“None is to be constrained to beleeve or professe the true Religion till he be convinced in judgement of the truth of it: but yet he may be restrained from blaspheming the truth, and from seducing any unto pernicious errours.”[[37]](#footnote-36)

Either, if his “his Errors be Fundamentall, or seditiously, and turbulently promoted,” or “leading to the disturbance of Civill peace,” then Cotton writes, the offender “may justly be punished according to the qualitie and measure of the disturbance caused by him.”[[38]](#footnote-37)

What exactly would a “just punishment” look like for disturbing the peace?

On September 5, 1651, Obadiah Holmes received 31 lashes with a three-corded whip in Boston. What was his crime? He had been fined 30 pounds for meeting for worship with Baptists and had refused to pay the penalty.[[39]](#footnote-38)

So this discussion of religious liberty was far from theoretical for the early Baptists in America.

Now John Cotton had claimed in a letter to Roger Williams that “Whatever they may say about toleration of religion where they are under hatches, when they come to sit at the stern, they judge and practice quite contrary.”[[40]](#footnote-39) What did the Baptists do when they were in charge? When the Rhode Island received its royal charter, through the efforts of Roger Williams, they became the first colony to adopt religious toleration into their charter. As The Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations of July 15, 1663 states,

“That our royal will and pleasure is, that no person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be anyway molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question,*for any differences in opinion in matters of religion*, and does not actually disturb the civil peace of our said colony; but that all and every person and persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences,*in matters of religious concernments*, throughout the tract of land hereafter mentioned.”[[41]](#footnote-40)

## Associations

Throughout the colonial period, Baptist churches sprung up across the colonies. William Screven started a church in Kittery Maine that relocated to Charleston, South Carolina in 1696.[[42]](#footnote-41) Elias Keach, son of the famous Benjamin Keach of London, came to America in 1686, preaching and establishing churches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, including a church in Philadelphia in 1698.[[43]](#footnote-42) These city churches in Charleston and Philadelphia soon established associations to help regularize practices, resolve congregational disputes, test ministerial candidates, and support missionary efforts.[[44]](#footnote-43) Although Baptist churches were congregational—they were also *connectionalist*: meaning that they believed in partnering together and adopted shared practices for membership and discipline. These associations adopted Confessions of Faith, such as the Philadelphia Confession of 1742, and gathered annually to hear updates on the state of the churches in their region.

## Missions (Triennial Convention)

By the early 1800s, the Baptists had largely secured religious liberty for themselves, and could turn to the task of expansion and organization.[[45]](#footnote-44) Adoniram Judson’s adoption of Baptist convictions—as we discussed in a previous class—brought Baptist associations together that would have otherwise maintained independence. Up “until that time, mission work had been supported by each local association largely within its own territory.”[[46]](#footnote-45)

### The Triennial Convention

In May 1814, delegates from Baptist churches from across the United States met in Philadelphia to consider how churches could partner in missions on a national level. To provide regional representation, Richard Furman of Charleston was elected President and Thomas Baldwin of Boston as secretary.[[47]](#footnote-46) Taking the title the “Triennial Convention” because they agreed to gather every three years, the Baptists began to shift from regional concerns to national concerns. In 1817, the Convention decided to take steps to establish a national Baptist theological college.[[48]](#footnote-47) In 1824, a publishing company called the “Baptist General Tract Society was formed.”[[49]](#footnote-48) In 1832, the American Baptist Home Mission Society was formed, a precursor to the “North American Mission Board” (or NAMB) to focus on domestic missions and church planting.[[50]](#footnote-49) This was a time of institution-building and growth.

But there were tensions growing between an Associational Model and a Societal Model. In an Associational Model, regional concerns dominated (i.e. Philadelphia, Charleston, Baltimore), whereas in a Society Model, various geographically diffuse groups were united by *cause*: Missions, Publishing, Education, etc. But as political tensions over slavery grew, “The regional consciousness would… eventually undo the national alliances Baptists had formed.”[[51]](#footnote-50) And it would all center on the issue of slavery.

**Transition:** Now I stated earlier that by the early 1800s, the Baptists had largely secured religious liberty for themselves, but that statement is overlooking something. One group of Baptists in America that did not benefit from the First Amendment’s protections of religious liberty, were enslaved Africans, many of whom were, or soon became Christians, which brings us to our third section: Baptists and slavery.

# 3. Baptists and Slavery: Color and Contradiction

There is no question that the existence of race-based slavery is an indelible stain on American history. The fact is that in the 1840s, every major American Protestant denomination split along North-South lines over the issue of slavery, and Baptists were no exception.

It went down like this. In 1844, Georgia Baptists sent a test case to the Baptist Home Mission Society: a slaveholder named James Reeves who was presenting himself for appointment as a missionary to the Cherokee Indians. When his appointment was voted down 7 to 5, the Alabama Baptist convention asked the Foreign Mission Board whether a slaveholder could be appointed. They received the reply, “If any one should offer himself as a missionary, having slaves, and should insist on retaining them as property, we could not appoint him.”[[52]](#footnote-51) In May 1845, delegates from nine state conventions gathered in Augusta, GA to form the Southern Baptist Convention.

This issue of slavery had been fomenting for a long time. “As Baptists spread throughout the American South… so did slavery.”[[53]](#footnote-52) “Some white Baptists in the Revolutionary era had condemned Christian slave owning.”[[54]](#footnote-53) For instance, John Leland, in 1790, offered a resolution that the Virginia Baptist General committee adopted:

“Resolved, That slavery is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature, and inconsistent with a republican government; and therefore we recommend it to our Brethren to make use of every legal measure, to extirpate from the land, and pray Almighty God, that our Honourable Legislature may have it in their power, to proclaim the general Jubilee, consistent with the principles of good policy.”[[55]](#footnote-54)

However, “over time most white Baptists in the South made peace with the institution, whether they owned slaves or not.”[[56]](#footnote-55) “Most Baptists… [simply] accepted it as a necessary if not inevitable part of American life.”[[57]](#footnote-56) The fact of the acquiescence of many of our theological forbears, who agree with us in nearly every respect but this issue of slavery, continues to have repercussions and consequences that we are bearing to this very day. We should be honest about that and lament that fact. As Matthew Hall writes,

“Getting the story right is often painful. It exposes why some people have suffered for so long, and it also shows how others have experienced privileges of which they may not even be aware. But something in this is profoundly Christian.  One reason I need to know this story, learn this story, and tell this story is for myself. I need to be reminded of the depravity of the human heart.”[[58]](#footnote-57)

But history is complicated. Baptists generally agreed that the Bible condemned man-stealing (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 24:7; 1 Tim. 1:10). Thus, they recognized, at some level, that the system of slave-trade was fundamentally flawed. What they disagreed over was what, if anything, should be done now that it existed. What they did agree upon, however, was that, at the very least, masters had an obligation to provide religious instruction for their slaves. After all, 1 Timothy 5:8 says that whoever fails to provide for members of his household is worse than an unbeliever. What could be more basic than providing spiritually for those under your care?

As terrible as it sounds, such views were actually considered highly controversial in the American South. After the Vesey slave conspiracy in Charleston in 1822 and Nat Turner's revolt in Virginia in 1831, the religious instruction of slaves came to be seen as a conduit of emancipation.[[59]](#footnote-58) Education, it was thought, would only encourage insubordination. As one Virginia law from 1831 stated,

“If a white person assemble with negroes for the purpose of instructing them to read or write, or if he associate with them in an unlawful assembly, he shall be confined in jail not exceeding six months and fined not exceeding one hundred dollars.”[[60]](#footnote-59)

These systematically racist laws had a “chilling effect” on any attempts to provide religious instruction for slaves. One powerful illustration of this, comes from the life of our second pastor here at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Joseph Parker.

## Joseph W. Parker

Born in Vermont in 1805, Parker travelled south in 1829, to Charlotte County, Virginia, to teach school, at the age of twenty-four. At the encouragement of his host, a plantation owner named Nicholas Edmunds, he began to provide religious instruction to the slaves.

But one morning, over breakfast, Edmunds looked up at Parker and told him plainly, “I think you should not religiously instruct the negroes anymore!”[[61]](#footnote-60) Parker was surprised, and asked why, pointing at the example of one slave who had recently been converted,

“Don’t you think John is a Christian?” he questioned. “Is he a worse slave than before?”

“I believe John is a true Christian. If my hope of heaven were half as bright as my confidence that John is fit for it, I should be a much happier man than I am,” Mr. Edmunds replied.

“Is John not as good and faithful a servant as he was before his conversion?” Parker pressed.

“Entirely faithful and I could trust him with anything. But he feels himself a man accountable to God,” Edmunds explained. “When Isaac was buried the other day, I saw him standing on the pile of earth they had thrown out and heard him exhorting his fellow servants to prepare to meet their God in the judgment. You see, John feels he is a man accountable to God, and, what God requires of a man, and a master may require of his slave may be very different things and opposite. So you must stop instructing my slaves.”

Parker, undeterred, continued, “Do you believe that Jesus Christ has given us a system of religion which has bidden us to preach to every creature which is dangerous for all to be instructed in?”

“We can’t philosophize on that subject, but suppose you go down to the negro quarter tonight and read that part of the sermon on the mount which says, ‘Therefore, whatsoever ye would have men do to you, do ye even so to them,’ and you explain it and talk to them of all the excellence of this precept, and so on. Have I a single negro on the plantation so dull that he will not stop and say, ‘If you please, Mar, does Mars Nick [Edmunds name was Nickolas], treat us as he would have us treat him?’ You must answer them. Now if you say ‘Yes,’ they know you lie and you can do them no good. But if you say, ‘No’, you damage my character among them. I tell you sir, we can do nothing toward giving Christian light and instruction. We are bound to keep them as dark as possible. You must desist from teaching them at all.”

At this, Parker’s heart stirred, “My dear sir, can you stand the full blaze of the light of salvation through Jesus Christ and rejoice for yourself and your family, while you shut it entirely from those absolutely dependent on you? For while you remember that the soul of the master and slave are regarded of equal value by him who died to save them, and before whom both are soon to appear in the day of judgment!”

At this Edmunds burst into tears. “Mr. Parker, for God’s sake, don’t name the day of judgment in connection with slavery! But you must desist from teaching my slaves.”[[62]](#footnote-61)

So how would Baptists respond?

Richard Furman, a leading Baptist pastor in Charleston, South Carolina refused to let social pressure stimy his calls for the religious instruction of slaves, writing in 1833:

“For though they are slaves, they are also men; and are with ourselves accountable creatures; having immortal souls, and being destined to future eternal award. Their religious interests claim a regard from their masters of a most serious nature; and it is indispensable. Nor can the community at large, in a right estimate of their duty and happiness, be indifferent on this subject.”[[63]](#footnote-62)

In this, Furman was pushing hard against the grain of his social context. Slave-owners were quick to defend their “property rights.” But Furman was asserting that their property had rights too. As one historian has written, “Defending and teaching Christianity to slaves at such a time put Baptists decidedly on the wrong side of white public opinion.”[[64]](#footnote-63) Another such Baptist who was not afraid to stand up against public opinion, was Josiah Spry Law.

## Josiah Spry Law

Josiah Spry Law was born in 1808 in Liberty Country, Georgia, and remembered for being “deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of the negroes,” and for his efforts to establish independent, African American congregations in his native county.[[65]](#footnote-64) In this, he was following the example of his father, Samuel Spry Law (1774-1837), who spent the last four years of his life “devoted himself entirely to preaching to the poor congregations in Liberty County,” and especially “to the coloured people.”[[66]](#footnote-65)

In 1830, Josiah returned south from studies at Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, and was ordained minister of the Sunbury Baptist Church in Liberty County, GA, alongside Rev. Charles B. Jones, who would go on to write an influential book in 1842 entitled, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes In the United States*.[[67]](#footnote-66)

From the commencement of his ministry, Law was “deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of [the slaves].”[[68]](#footnote-67) As his biographer writes, “It was his custom… not only to preach to them, but also to teach them orally, old and young, upon every occasion, either before or after the sermon.”[[69]](#footnote-68) What was his motive? “He felt that the soul of a black man was as precious to the Saviour as that of his master.”[[70]](#footnote-69) He was frequently offered other lucrative ministry positions—including a professorship in the theological department of Mercer University—but all these he declined, preferring the more immediate duties of the ministering to the slaves.[[71]](#footnote-70)

On May 18, 1846, at the Georgia State Baptist Convention, Law delivered an address on “the obligations of masters to give their servants the gospel, and the best means of doing it.”[[72]](#footnote-71) In it, he excoriated his fellow Georgia Baptists for willful neglect of the spiritual well-being of slaves: “They cannot read the word of God,” he lamented, “and we are the cause of this inability.” “Do not justice, humanity and religion all require of us to read it for them, and have it read and expounded to them?” “If this criminal neglect continue,” Law charged, “as sure as there is a judgment, so sure will their blood be required at our hands.”[[73]](#footnote-72)

Law’s work was marked by extraordinary fruit. By 1844, the African American members of Baptist churches in the Sunbury Baptist Association outnumbered white members, with 4,444 “colored members” and 495 “white members.”[[74]](#footnote-73) In 1857, they could report “thirteen African churches and five thousand nine hundred and fifty-seven colored members.”[[75]](#footnote-74)

Tragically, Law died suddenly “while yet in the vigour of manhood” in 1853 at age 45.[[76]](#footnote-75) His last words were those of the hymn by Isaac Watts, “There is a land of pure delight.” After his death, the African American members of the North Newport Baptist Church erected an honor to his memory.[[77]](#footnote-76) As his biographer concludes, “In all our broad domain, the memory of no servant of Jesus is more sacredly enshrined in the hearts of his people, than is his by the grateful children of Africa, who received the Gospel from his lips, and to whose spiritual good his life was consecrated.”[[78]](#footnote-77)

* **Discussion Question:** As Christians, howdoes the gospel enable us to look back humbly, honestly, and hopefully on our past?

**Transition:** So what was the experience of these Black baptist churches? What challenges did they face and how did they overcome them? That’s what we’ll consider.

# 4. Black and Baptist

Next week we’ll learn more about the “Great Awakenings” in the early 1800s. Many African Americans who attended those meetings were converted and became powerful preachers: George Liele, Andrew Bryan, John Jasper, Peter Randolph, and Joe Willis.[[79]](#footnote-78) As a result, by the end of the second period of revivals in 1822, there were thirty-seven Afro-Baptist churches in the United States, most of them in the South.[[80]](#footnote-79) In other places, whites and blacks worshipped together, were baptized together[[81]](#footnote-80), and, in some cases, even voted together on matters of membership and discipline.[[82]](#footnote-81) As one white pastor in New Orleans wrote,

“It is desirable that white and colored worship together: one reason among many is, that no distinction of religion arise between them. Religion appears in its loveliest form where rich and poor, bond and free, meet together, and to a common Father through a common Saviour, drinking into one Spirit, offer up songs and prayers, and hear what all have equal interest in.”[[83]](#footnote-82)

## Integrated but unequal

As we’ve seen, however, everything changed, following the Vesey Revolt in Charleston in 1822 and the Nat Turner Rebellion in 1831, both of which were “blamed on the black church.”[[84]](#footnote-83) In fact, Charleston lawyers stated that Vesey had plotted during church meetings “held usually at night in some retired building, avowedly for religious instruction and worship, no white person attended.”[[85]](#footnote-84) As a result, “Almost every Afro-Baptist church had the choice of either becoming a part of a white church that would supervise its activities or dissolving itself.”[[86]](#footnote-85) In this way, most black churches in the south were denied autonomy and placed under the supervision of a local white Baptist “mother church.”

For example, the First African Baptist Church of Richmond, VA was placed under the control of the pastor and deacons of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, even though that church’s white pastor acknowledged the practice violated baptist principles of church autonomy.[[87]](#footnote-86) In like manner, when the First African Baptist Church of Paris, Kentucky was formed in the 1850s out of an existing white church, the black members were made to sign an agreement allowing final authority in discipline and election of ministers to reside with the white church. According to the agreement, they were forced to state,

“We, as a church, will elect our own officers; call and maintain our own pastor; administer the ordinances to the church; receive, discipline, dismiss or exclude members *only with the advice and approval of the church from which we are separated*.”[[88]](#footnote-87)

As the pastor of the black church in question Elisha W. Green later observed,

“If you will read carefully the rules you will find that the colored church was a slave to the white Baptist Church. So long as we complied with their ideas and judgment in matters of worship, we could remain a separate and distinct church, but when we failed in their judgment to comply, the act must be rescinded and then all the members of the African church were back in the white church.”[[89]](#footnote-88)

Meanwhile, in the North, up through the end of slavery, black churches enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy. Here in Washington DC, for example, Nineteenth Street Baptist Church was formed in 1839, with the encouragement and support of the members of the First Baptist Church, of which they had previously been members, who gave them their old building.[[90]](#footnote-89) As an independent church, they were given the “right hand of fellowship” from the other Baptist churches in Washington, and shortly after, applied, and were accepted as members of the Philadelphia Baptist Association.[[91]](#footnote-90)

After the Civil War, black churches were free to form independent institutions such as seminaries, schools, publishing companies, and denominations.

Through these efforts, the Reconstruction Era witnessed one of the greatest periods of church growth in the history of the church as hundreds of thousands of formerly enslaved persons were baptized into membership of Baptist churches. This really is one of the most amazing stories of God’s grace in the history of the church. I remember reading a Tweet by Rebecca McLaughlin to the effect that if Christianity’s complicity with slavery is the greatest apologetic against the truth of Christianity, the growth and flourishing of the Black church is one of the greatest apologetics for the truth of Christianity. It’s a subject that well repays study and contemplation.

Just consider a few statistics. In 1892, black Baptists were estimated to number around 1,200,000 church members.[[92]](#footnote-91) By 1899, the National Baptist Convention claimed 14,462 churches, 449 local and regional associations, 10,190 ordained ministers, and a total membership of 1,731,636.[[93]](#footnote-92) If that number is reliable,[[94]](#footnote-93) then of the three major Baptist families in America (Southern Baptists, Northern Baptists, and the “Negro Baptists” as they called themselves), the black Baptists were the largest of the three.[[95]](#footnote-94)

We can speculate about the causes for this but there is no doubt that it was a mighty work of God.

* **Discussion Question:** How does the existence of black churches, despite all the injustice they have faced, particularly demonstrate the grace and power of God through the gospel?

# 5. The Southern Baptist Convention and the Conservative Resurgence

The final part of the Baptist story we’ll cover in this class has to do with the recovery of doctrinal fidelity within the denomination we are currently in “friendly cooperation with”: the Southern Baptist Convention, a recovery that you could arguably say is still a work in process today.

In the 20th century, the Northern Baptist Convention was quickly tracking liberal and the Southern Baptist Convention was following suit. By liberal theology, I am referring to:

(i) anti-supernatural thinking about the Bible

(ii) seeking a middle-way for Christianity between orthodoxy and modern scientific discoveries

(iii) challenging major historic Christian doctrines (such as the Virgin Birth or the bodily return of Christ).

(iv) emphasizing ethics over doctrine (as if you could have the one but not the other).

All of these ideas were slowly seeping into Southern Baptist seminaries and institutions, but the churches began to push back. The two major hot-button issues that came to the foreground were inerrancy and women’s ordination.

## Inerrancy

Inerrancy means that “The Bible is truthful in all things that the biblical authors assert.”[[96]](#footnote-95) By the mid-twentieth century this doctrine was coming under neglect if not outright attack from major Southern Baptist institutions. In 1961, Midwestern professor, Ralph Elliott published a commentary on Genesis[[97]](#footnote-96) with the SBC-affiliated Broadman Press which denied Mosaic authorship of Genesis and a literal six-day creation.[[98]](#footnote-97) This created an outcry among Southern Baptists who were concerned, not just by Elliott’s conclusions, but by his modernist methods. Elliot, and other moderates “saw biblical history and science as conditioned by the times in which it was written” and only believed that “its religious truths were really without error.”[[99]](#footnote-98)

Thus, they found the term “inerrancy” deeply unhelpful, as it carefully exposed that which they were most eager to conceal.[[100]](#footnote-99)

For liberals, “Ultimate commitment,” they believed, “should belong to a person, Jesus Christ, not to a book.”[[101]](#footnote-100) As one SBC-moderate explained, “People who are hungry and hurting and lonely do not come saying, ‘Help me understand the doctrines of the virgin birth, direct creation, and verbal plenary inspiration.’”[[102]](#footnote-101) “Whether there were real people named Adam and Even was far less important than an affirmation of God’s role in creating the universe.”[[103]](#footnote-102) These were the arguments being made by leaders and professors within the Southern Baptist Convention.

## Women’s Ordination

The second issue at the heart of the controversy, distinct though not unrelated, was the ordination of women, or complementarianism. By 1988 over 500 women had been ordained by local Southern Baptist Churches—with perhaps a dozen of them serving as senior pastors.[[104]](#footnote-103) In 1985, *The Student*, the official Baptist student magazine, devoted an issue toward women in ministry, whether ordained or unordained, concluding that “our churches could wisely ordain anyone, male or female, who had a special call of God,” because of Galatians 3:28.[[105]](#footnote-104)

## The Conservative Resurgence

When Elliot’s commentary on Genesis was published in 1961, a former pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Dr. K. Owen White, had just been elected President of the Southern Baptist Convention. He preached a sermon that was widely publicized entitled, “Death in the Pot,” in which he quoted sections of Elliot’s commentary on Genesis at length before concluding, “The book from which I have quoted is liberalism, pure and simple.” White called for three responses: (1) Encouraging theological liberals to leave the denomination, (2) Calling on trustees to investigate the beliefs of seminary faculty members, (3) Urging the Baptist Sunday School Board to be on guard against liberalism in its publications.

This marked the start of a decades-long battle for control of the Southern Baptist Convention.[[106]](#footnote-105) They realized that to change Southern Baptist institutions, you needed to get a majority of conservative trustees on their individual boards. Trustees were appointed by the Committee on Nominations (at that time called the “Committee on Boards”), which was in turn nominated by the convention President. In other words, they needed to get a conservative president elected for enough years successively to eventually be able to get a majority on each trustee board.

The whole process of appointing trustees took three years—from a president being elected, to trustees taking their places—so they realized they needed to work for the long-haul. In the meantime, conservatives like Charles Stanley, Adrian Rogers, W.A. Criswell, Jerry Vines, Fred Wolfe, and Robert Tenery founded *The Southern Baptist Journal*, to publish their criticisms of the SBC and put forward a viable conservative orthodoxy. Separate seminaries were formed, such as Mid-America Baptist Seminary in Memphis and Luther Rice Seminary in Jacksonville. The whole process, started in 1979, took nearly a decade until, by 1988, a majority conservative trustees sat on every major SBC entity.[[107]](#footnote-106)

* **How much doctrinal agreement is necessary to partner together in missions and theological education? What are the dangers of requiring too much agreement or too little?**

# Conclusion

What does it mean to be Baptist today? It means to be *confessional*. We stand in the tradition of Henry Jessey, Benjamin Keach with the historic Baptist confessions of 1644 and 1689 and 1742 and 1853. It means to be *calvinistic*: to stand firmly on the doctrines of grace as articulated by the Protestant reformers, not ashamed of an explicitly God-centered view of the universe. It means to be *congregational*: committed the independence and autonomy of the local church and the fact that every member has a job to do. Yet it also means to be *connectionalist*, not separatist, but committed to partnering with of churches of ‘like faith and order’ for the furtherance of the mission of the church and the extension of Christ’s kingdom. It means to be *covenantal*: convinced of the unity of the Covenant of Grace, progressively revealed throughout the Scriptures, and inaugurated at Christ’s death. It means to be *credobaptist*: that only such as are truly converted ought to be baptized and thereby enter into the mutual duties and privileges of church membership. It means to have a high view of the *conscience*: to deny that the State has any coercive power to bind the conscience and to affirm the independence and autonomy of the local church in all matters of faith and practice. And finally, it means to live with *contradictions*: the lingering effects of slavery and Baptist complicity with the unjust system of slavery.

In a sermon on “Baptists Doctrine,” at the anniversary celebrations of the First African Baptist Church, in Savannah, Georgia in 1888, Rev. S.A. McNeal, a black pastor from Augusta, reflected on what made Baptists distinct from other denominations.

“Every denomination has its peculiar pride or religious forte. The Catholics have stood because they had the power over man and coerced them into their pale; hence all that they have done. The Church of England had the money; hence all men gladly bowed to her footstool. It is said of the Presbyterians that because of their education and high doctrine that none could comprehend but the learned. Of the Methodists it is said that they have sung their way around the world. But Baptists have gone into many parts of the world, and all the places where they have not gone *they will go upon the word of God*.

… Our fathers believed in the Baptist form of government and they stuck to it, though their masters were members of another church. When they would feel a change of heart and wish to unite with the church, they would have to get a pass from their masters. When asked to what church they wished to connect themselves, adn the Baptist church was named as the church of their choice, they were asked, ‘Why can't you join Mr. A's or Mr. B's church.’ ... They chose to take punishment rather than to join any other than the church of their faith.”[[108]](#footnote-107)

What made Baptists a force for good in the world and the advance of the gospel, at the end of the day, was their commitment to the Word of God and to obeying God’s Word, whatever it cost them. May that be true of us still today.

1. “When one examines the published works of baptistic congregationalists during the 1640s, one does not find them adopting labels like 'Baptist' and 'Particular Baptist,' terms which suggest an identity based upon a distinctive sacramentology. Instead, one finds a group of people seemingly at a loss to determine the most appropriate self-appellation.” Matthew C. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. The 1644 First London Baptist Confession of Faith was originally titled, “A confession of faith of seven congregations or churches of Christ in London, *which are commonly, but unjustly called Anabaptists*.” For the text, see William Joseph McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 171-89; William Latane Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Judson Press, 1969), 153-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. In *The English Separatist Tradition*,historianBarrie White says that “for many it was but a short step from impatient Puritanism within the established Church to convinced Separatism outside it.” One might paraphrase White to say that if it was but a short step from impatient Puritanism within the established Church to convinced Separatism outside it, then surely it was an even shorter step from frustrated Separatism to a convinced credobaptism. B.R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. This is the argument put forward in Matthew C. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. The following three paragraphs are taken, with the author’s permission, from Caleb Morell’s, “The Story of John Smyth: How Congregationalist Polity Led to Believer’s Baptism” (October 23, 2019), and summarized based on James R. Coggins, *John Smyth’s Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Coggins, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Coggins, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Coggins, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Coggins, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Coggins, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Coggins finds this covenant so similar to the covenant of the Ancient Church in 1591 that he wonders if Smythe was influenced by the work of his former Cambridge tutor Francis Johnson (34). The Covenant of the Ancient Church reads: “Wee doe willinglie joyne together ot live as the Churche of Christs… To this ende wee doe promise henceforthe to keep what soever Christe our Lorde gath commanded us, as it shall please him by his holie spirit out of his worde to give knowledge thereof and abilitie there unto” (34). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Coggins, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Coggins, 35, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Smyth, *Works* 1:256. Cited in Coggins, 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Suffolk, England: Boydell Press, 2006), 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. Much of the following is summarized from documents contained in Jason G. Duesing, *Counted Worthy: The Life and Work of Henry Jessey* (Borderstone Press, 2012) and taken, with permission, from Caleb Morell’s, *Introducing Henry Jessey (1601-1663): Baptist Pioneer, Bible Translator, and Faithful Pastor* (August 6, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Belden C. Lane, “Two Schools of Desire: Nature and Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism,” *Church History* 69, no. 2 (2000): 372–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. Mark Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. For more on the relationships between non-conforming and conforming Puritans see Francis J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community, 1610-1692* (UPNE, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. Duesing, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. Duesing, 92-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. Duesing, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. Duesing, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. Duesing, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. Duesing, 71-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. Duesing, 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. Duesing, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. The whole discussion and resolution of this issue is recorded in a manuscript known as *An Account of Diverse Conferences*, kept in a repository by Benjamin Stinton, the son-in-law of Benjamin Keach. A full transcription of the so-called Stinton Repository with historical introduction is available in *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* 1 (1908-9), 193-245. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. Duesing, 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. Duesing, 81. Jessey later described baptism in the following way: “Baptisme is an Ordinance of the Lord annexed to the Word of the Covenant; wherein persons repenting, and believing in Jesus Christ, yielding up themselves to him, in his Name, are solemnly dipt in water, and arise; signifying, representing, and sealing up to them, their Union with Christ; and their Communion with him in his Death, and Burial, and Resurrection” (198). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. Duesing, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. As Steve Weaver writes in a review of Duesing’s dissertation, “Unlike most others who embraced this viewpoint, however, Jessey did not believe that this belief should cause a separation between those who were sprinkled as infants and those immersed as believers. The JLJ church, therefore, became a mixed-congregation with members of both persuasions who were in full fellowship and communion with one another. This naturally resulted in the congregation practicing a mixed-communion at the Lord’s Table. This would be a minority view among the Particular Baptists of the seventeenth century, but Jessey and John Bunyan were among the notable exceptions to the typical restricted communion of their Baptist contemporaries.” (Steve Weaver, *Themelios*, Vol. 41 - Issue 3. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/henry-jessey-puritan-chaplain-pastor-millenarian-politician-and-prophet/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. 1 Roger Williams, “The Bloody Tenant of Persecution for cause of Conscience” in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, Vol. 3 (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Baptists believe that the one Covenant of Grace was progressively revealed through the Old Testament but formally inaugurated at the cross. See Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, trans. Mac & Elizabeth Wigfield (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013). For more on how Williams’ views on toleration were informed by Baptist covenant theology see Caleb Morell, “Radically [In]tolerant: How English Baptists Changed the Early Modern Toleration Debate” (2016) <http://hdl.handle.net/10822/1040657>. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. *Journal of the House of Commons*, Volume 3, 1643-1644 (Originally published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1802), 585.

    Although the incorrect name is recorded (“concerning the tolerating of all sorts of Religions”), this is undoubtedly referring to Roger Williams’ Bloudy Tenent, published that same year in London, 1644. A recent work identifies this book ordered to be burned on August 9, 1644 as Roger Williams' “Bloudy Tenent.” See Donald Francis McKenzie, Maureen Bell, *A Chronology and Calendar of Documents Relating to the London Book Trade 1641-1700:* Volume I: 1641-1670 (OUP Oxford, 2005), 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. John Cotton, *The Bloudy Tenent, Washed, and Made White in the Bloud of the Lambe* (London: 1647), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. John Cotton, *The Bloudy Tenent, Washed, and Made White in the Bloud of the Lambe* (London, 1647), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. Roger Williams, *Bloudy Tenent* (London: 1644), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Judson Press, 1999), 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Baptist. 1860* (R. Carter and brothers, 1860), xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. Kidd and Hankins, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
46. Ammerman, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
47. Ammerman, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
48. Albert Henry Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States* (Christian Literature, 1898), 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
49. *History of the American Baptist Publication Society: From Its Origin in 1824, to Its Thirty-Second Anniversary in 1856* (American Baptist Publication Society, 1859), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
50. Ammerman, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
51. Ammerman, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
52. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
53. Kidd and Hankins, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
54. Kidd and Hankins, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
55. *Minutes*, Virginia Baptist General Committee, 1790, 7. Cited in Menikoff, 89-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
56. Kidd and Hankins, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
57. Menikoff, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
58. Matthew Hall, *Removing the Stain of Racism*, 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
59. As Raboteau explains, “The danger beneath the arguments for slave conversion which many masters feared was the egalitarianism implicit in Christianity. The most serious obstacle to the missionary’s access to the slaves was the slaveholder’s vague awareness that a Christian slave would have some claim to fellowship, a claim that threatened the security of the master-slave hierarchy.” Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford University Press, 2004), viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
60. “Offences against public policy,” Title 54, Chapter 198; “Assembling of negroes. Trading by free negroes,” Section 32; in *The Code of Virginia* (William F. Ritchie: Richmond, 1849), 748. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
61. *Memoirs*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
62. Conversation recounted in *Memoirs*, 15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
63. Richard Furman, *Exposition of the Views of the Baptists Relative to the Coloured Population in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Charleston, SC: A.E. Milner, 1833), 13. Cited in Menikoff, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
64. Menikoff, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
65. William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Baptist. 1860* (R. Carter and brothers, 1860), 793. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
66. Annals, 791. Cf. James Stacy who notes that Law’s labors were “chiefly among the colored people” (*History of the Midway Congregational Church*, Liberty County, Georgia, 137). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
67. Campbell, 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
68. Sprague, 793. The word “negroes” is replaced here with “slaves” for clarity and to avoid giving offense. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
69. W.H. McIntosh, Pastor of Marion Baptist Church in Alabama, writing in Sprague, *Annals*, 793. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
70. Sprague, 793. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
71. Sprague, 793. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
72. Josiah Spry Law, “Religious Oral Instruction of the Colored Race”(May 18, 1846) in *The Georgia Pulpit*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Fleming (Richmond, VA: H.K. Ellyson, 1847), 439. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
73. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
74. Jesse Harrison Campbell, *Georgia Baptists: Historical and Biographical* (J. W. Burke, 1874), 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
75. Campbell, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
76. Sprague, *Annals*, 793. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
77. <https://libertyhistory.org/history/timelines/timelines-1800-1849/signs-of-the-times-missionaries->. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
78. Sprague, *Annals*, 794. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
79. Walter F. Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion: The Afro-Baptist Ritual in the African Diaspora* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
80. Pitts, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
81. John B. Boles, *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
82. Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 53. Whereas in civil courts, blacks could not testify in courts, this was not so in Baptist churches who allowed blacks to testify (24). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
83. Boles, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
84. Pitts, 49. Much of the following paragraphs and examples are taken, with author’s permission, from Caleb Morell’s *Sketches in Black Baptist History from A.W. Pegues, “Our Baptist Ministers and Schools” (1892)*. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
85. Kennedy and Parker, *Official Report*, 23. Cited in Menikoff, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
86. Pitts, 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
87. As Robert Ryland writes, “The *constitution* of the African Church [of Richmond], was so formed as to modify, in some degree, the democratic elements of the regular Baptist churches, and to make its government rather more presbyterial than congregational. This was deemed essential to the judicious control of so large a mass of persons, many of whom could scarcely be judged competent to the task of government.” Robert Ryland, “Reminiscences of the First African Baptist Church, No. 1,” *American Baptist Memorial* 15, September 1855, 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
88. Elisha Winfield Green, *Life of the Rev. Elisha W. Green* (Forgotten Books, 2018), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
89. Ibid, 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
90. “The History of the Church and its Organization” in *One hundredth anniversary of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., 1839-1939. Fifty-seventh anniversary, Rev. Walter H. Brooks, D.D., 1882-1939.* (Washington DC: Murray Bros, Inc). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
91. *One hundredth anniversary of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., 1839-1939. Fifty-seventh anniversary, Rev. Walter H. Brooks, D.D., 1882-1939.* (Washington DC: Murray Bros, Inc). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
92. Albert Witherspoon Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools* (Willey & Company, 1892), 555. Hereafter, “Pegues.” [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
93. “Statistical Table” in National Baptist Convention of the United States of America, *Journal of the Annual Session of the National Baptist Convention* (National Baptist Publication Board, 1899). [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
94. According to a Census Bureau report in 1926, “The lack of close ecclesiastical relations, characteristic of all Baptist bodies, is emphasized in the Negro Baptist churches, with the result that it has been very difficult to obtain satisfactory statistics of the denomination.” United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies, 1926: Separate Denominations : Statistics, History, Doctrine, Organization, and Work* (Norman Ross Pub., 1929), 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
95. *Journal of the Nineteenth Annual Session of the National Baptist Convention, September 13-18, 1899* (Nashville, TN: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1899), 42-43. <http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/aaa/nbc/NBC_1899.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
96. Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible: 2nd Ed.* (Kregel Publications, 2021). Cf. Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone—The Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters* (Zondervan Academic, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
97. *The Message of Genesis* (Broadman Press, 1961). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
98. Same thing happened to Davis and Honeycutt’s commentary on *Genesis and Exodus* in 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
99. Ammerman, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
100. Ammerman, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
101. Ammerman, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
102. Ammerman, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
103. Ammerman, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
104. Ammerman, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
105. Ammerman, 92-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
106. For Pressler’s account of these events, see Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die: One Southern Baptist’s Journey* (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
107. Ammerman, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
108. Emanuel King Love, *History of the First African Baptist Church, from Its Organization, January 20th, 1788, to July 1st, 1888: Including the Centennial Celebration, Addresses, Sermons, Etc* (Morning news print, 1888), 224-225. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)