

Church History

**Core Seminar**

Class 12: Baptist History, and the World Missions Movement

*"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”* Matthew 28:18-19

**Introduction**

Many of us are familiar with this passage, and know it as the Great Commission, Jesus’ charge to all believers to be evangelists throughout the world, to all peoples. This morning we want to talk about two subjects, both mentioned in this verse. The first is related to the matter of baptism. We are a Baptist church. Now we don’t want to be too parochial, for we are first and foremost a Christian church, we can enjoy fellowship with Christian believers who affirm the biblical Gospel though they may differ on matters such as baptism and church governance. Yet, we are a Baptist church, and we want to understand our particular Baptist history. We are also a church that supports the spread of the gospel ministry to nations and people groups. So we also want to understand the history of the World Missions Movement, and we will see that Baptists played a significant role in its origins.

**Baptist Origins – 4 groups**

There is not just one point of historical origin for Baptists, we can locate at least four different possible origins to the Baptist story—though I believer only the latter two form part of our authentic, organic history.

We are going to do this by looking at Origins – Beliefs – Descendants of these four streams. I want to give an overview of these four streams, but first I think it is appropriate to distinguish a very bare bones definition of a Baptist. One that distinguishes them from Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregationalists and many others.

***Religious Freedom***. This is a freedom of conscience from the State—(God alone judges the conscience; the state cannot judge the heretic or the atheist). This idea effects our polity and how we congregational autonomy.

***Believers baptism.*** The pure church consists of those who have repented of their sins and place their faith in Christ—thus only professing believers are baptized and admitted into church membership.

**Anabaptists (1525)**

***Origin***

In the context of the Reformation that we talked about a couple weeks back, we didn’t really touch on Radical Reformers. In Zurich, where Ulrich Zwingli was reforming the church some individuals (Conrad Grebel) were frustrated with pace of reform. They thought it too slow. They argued that Luther, Zwingli worked with officials/authority. These individuals wanted separation. In 1525, many leaders of these radical reformers rejected the practice of infant baptism. Local authorities denounced them – “Re-baptizers.” They viewed their ideas as heretical (child abuse) & seditious (anarchy). The Reformers and others heavily persecuted and even executed some of the Anabaptists. Throughout the 1530’s you had a number of Anabaptist groups and churches pop up.

***Beliefs***

There is considerable diversity among the Anabaptists in their theology and practice. But it is their extreme elements that distinguish them from one another and from other Reformers. They were generally pacifists and did not want to hold government office. They questioned the idea of original sin, some were semi-pelagian in their theology. They were also radically egalitarian, and were suspect of state and ecclesiastical authority, or any form of discernible authority in the church. This led many to pursue a religious perfectionism, and separation from the world around them.

***Descendants***

Their decedents would be what we know as Mennonites and the Amish.

**General Baptists (1608)**

***Origin***

1607 – Led by John Smyth (1565-1612; a parish preacher in Lincoln): Christians fled to Amsterdam to escape persecution and establish a pure church.

1609 - Smyth became convinced that believer's baptism was biblical and infant baptism was not and after having adopting Baptist principles in Holland, Smyth baptized first himself and then 40 others, including Thomas Helwys (1550 -1616), later an influential London Baptist. First English General Baptist church formed in Holland under John Smyth. Smyth was later excommunicated by his church when he tried to make them become Waterlander Mennonites (1610).

Thomas Helwys took several with him back to England founded first Baptist church in England, in Spitalfields in 1612 [They disagreed with the Waterlanders on a) lawfulness of oaths; b) “celestial flesh” of Christ.] Imprisoned at Newgate prison in 1615 for his views; died in 1616.

***Beliefs***

They are so called General Baptists because they held a “general” view of atonement. They held Christ’s death applied generally to all people, freely accept or reject, can lose it.

*Smyth's 1610 Confession*: "God . . . has ordained all men (no one being reprobated) to life." AND "There is no original sin, but all sin is actual and voluntary . . . and therefore infants are without sin.”

***Descendants***

There were 47 General Baptist churches by 1650, formed general assembly 1564. However, like their founder in Smyth, they suffered doctrinal ambiguity, and became virtually extinct by 1800 (although some became Unitarian).

**Particular Baptists**

***Origins***

Particular Baptists emerged from a Puritan-Separatist congregation which Henry Jacob had formed in 1616. In 1638 the First English Calvinistic Baptists began meeting. By 1644, seven particular Baptists churches were associating together—issued London Confession 1644 to distinguish themselves from General Baptists and Anabaptists.

***Beliefs***

These Baptists because they grew out of English Calvinistic Puritanism, they were known by their view of Particular atonement: Christ’s death had a saving significance only for those particular souls regenerated by the Holy Spirit. (Thus contra the General Baptists).

***Descendants***

Both General & Particular Baptists grew rapidly during English Civil War (1642 – 1649) & Commonwealth / Interregnum (1650-1660) – degree of freedom – 300 Baptists churches by 1660. Some of the early Particular Baptist leaders: William Kiffin (1616-1701); Benjamin Keach (1640-1704); John Gill (1697-1771); Andrew Fuller (1754-1815).

[In the next century Andrew Fuller emerged as perhaps the greatest theologian ever to come from the ranks of English Baptists. During Fuller’s day, a few churches had begun to adopt what some scholars call “hyper-Calvinism,” characterized by the overdetermined beliefs that since God had ordained every last event, people could not be held responsible for their own sin, and preachers had no business proclaiming the Gospel to all hearers, but only to those they determined to be elect. Against these excesses and misunderstandings, Fuller held firm to God’s complete sovereignty in salvation while still urging Christians to resist sin and preach the Gospel to everyone – and let God sort out who would be saved. Fuller helped spark a great revival in England during the last years of the 18th century]

Two of the most famous Particular Baptists: **John Bunyan & Charles Spurgeon.**

**John Bunyan (1628-1688)**

Baptized in 1653 (age 24), began preaching, imprisoned 1660 (Charles II) to 1672 (no permission of magistrate – refused to stop preaching) again in 1675; In prison – Pilgrim’s Progress (1678 & 1684) – Christian classic – allegory of Christian journey; In prison – Grace Abounding – autobiography of his spiritual journey

**Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)**

Baptized in 1850 – at 19 pastor of largest congregation in London; continued to outgrow buildings – Metropolitan Tabernacle (1861), built to hold 5,000 seated and 1,000 standing; 1887 – “Down-grade” – growing liberalism in the Baptist Union; Preached 3,600 sermons, 49 volumes of commentaries and devotions

**American Baptists**

***Origins***

First Baptist church in America was established in 1639 by Roger Williams. Roger Williams—Attended Cambridge ordained as Anglican but became Puritan—Came to Mass Bay Col in 1631. Williams argued Puritans had no right to Indian land; Felt it wrong for magistrates to enforce church attendance and other spiritual duties. John Winthrop banished Williams to England; Williams chose to leave in October 1635; arrived at the head of Narragansett Bay in April 1636 where he founded Providence.

Baptists only held a slight presence until the First Great Awakening in the 1740s. So Baptist churches grew (primarily Particular - Calvinists); North (New England: 25 in 1740 to 312 in 1804); Into the southern colonies (Thousands by 1770s).

***Beliefs***

Early American Baptists were both General and Particular. Particular in Philadelphia—1707 Association of Baptists—First organized fellowship of Baptist churches in America.

The American Baptists developed the idea their English forefathers had touched on, religious freedom and freedom of conscience. Baptists across the colonies began to raise questions: 1) Wisdom of the church-state establishment; 2) With emphasis on conversion raised questions about infant baptism.

U.S. not a place of pure religious freedom (exception: Pennsylvania and Rhode Island). Baptist and other outside groups often felt the pangs of persecution…from other Protestants! Baptists were leaders in advocating for the idea that the church is an entity ordained by God and it is used to his ends, mainly the worship of his name and the proclamation of his Gospel. The church is not a state entity. The state has no authority over it. In the Puritan Northeast, and Anglican South, Baptists and other outsiders were regularly persecuted. [Obadiah Holmes]

***Descendants***

**Isaac Backus (1724-1806)** – converted during 1st GA – founded Baptist church; Mother arrested for not paying to state congregational church; Prolific writer to promote freedom of the church from the state; “taxation without representation” applies to church.

**John Leland (1754–1841)** -- Friends with James Madison & Thomas Jefferson

Fought for disestablishment of religion – Bill of Rights; Anglican Virginia (worse); Worse – (license to preach if not Anglican); Baptist preachers imprisoned – whipped; Mobs broke up worship services; Magistrates shut down churches.

We spoke briefly about the Second Great Awakening last week – 1795 – 1820s (30s); Democratic appeal (free choices of people); Baptists & Methodists joined democratic appeal and effective leadership; 1812 – 200,000 Baptists in the U.S. – 1850, more than a million; Frontiers Ohio, Virginia, KY, TN; Revivals created organizations that supported an increasing interest in missionary outreach.

**Baptist Confession**

Now, let’s correct a misunderstanding about Baptists – some have accused Baptists of asserting that there is no “no creed, but the Bible.” A creed, or confession, is a statement of belief, it spells out the doctrinal principles to which a person or group of people hold – so the Apostle’s Creed. Some say Baptists so individualistic (reject authority), so fragmented, so ignorant of church history, so squishy on doctrine, that they don’t articulate what they believe. From the beginning, Baptists have written statements of faith to outline specifically what they believe – I want to briefly walk through those statements, or confessions.

First London Confession of 1644 (Particular – 1638) – a warm, devotional, gently Calvinistic confession (midst of English Civil War) – distinguish from General Baptists and a defense against charges of Anabaptism.

Second London Confession of 1689 – Baptists revision of the Westminster Confession (1646 – statement of faith for Church of England) <written in 1677 – Act of Toleration>; Intentional in utilizing same language as Westminster, to strive for unity in belief, and drawing distinctions over some matters such as baptism, congregational government

1833 New Hampshire Confession – (triennial convention) - most widely used among English-speaking Baptists – CHBC Statement of Faith - 1878 – we still affirm - 1925 - SBC adopted and adapted it as Baptist Faith & Message - Revised in 1963, and in 2000 – SBC seminaries and agencies - “explicit statement of our faith in the Bible, and of what we take it to teach, and it is useful in cultivating unity among us and remaining faithful to teaching what is true” - Don’t have to affirm it to be a Christian, but you do to join this particular congregation. – mark of unity.

*Bible: “it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error, for its matter”*

**World Missions Movement**

With the rest of our time I would like to highlight that second them I mentioned at the beginning: foreign missions. My point is not to suggest that Baptists began foreign missions. We have encountered lots of previous missions work, from the monastic orders of the Middle Ages, to Calvin’s pastors sent abroad, to Jonathan Edwards and his colonial counterparts to Native Americans Eliot and Brainerd. Baptists though have had a particular role in the advancement of missions. How did they do this?

***William Carey (1761-1834)***

English pastor, who is known as the “father of the modern mission movement”. He worked in a shoe shop – books next to bench to learn languages – Dutch, French, Latin, Indo-European languages. In 1792, he and several friends organized the Baptist Missionary Society (out of Andrew Fuller’s home) to send preachers to remote parts of the world - became the model for other denominations – independent organization

He sailed with family to India – Suffered significant trials – death of child / wife’s severe depression - Focused on an embedded ministry – learning local languages and culture – With colleagues - Translated Bible into 42 Asian languages – established 20 churches in India

Following Carey’s lead, others established organizations for foreign missions.

In1806, in response to evangelical preaching of the 2nd Great Awakening a group of Williams College (MA) students, who were Congregationalists were stuck in a thunderstorm, held a prayer meeting and a fire was lit within them for foreign missions. In 1810, the Congregationalists in MA formed the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. They sent out a contingent in 1812, among them: **Adoniram Judson (1788–1850)** & **Luther Rice (1783–1836).**

While on the boat to India they became convinced of believer’s baptism, they worked for a Congregationalist organization so they ran into a quandary. Rice would return to US from India and Judson would continue on to Burma. Rice went on to push for the organization in1814 of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United State for Foreign Missions (Triennial Convention; met every 3 years).

Judson, like Carey, endured significant trials but in Burma – lost three wives, long periods of imprisonment; Impact – 7,000 Christians and 100 national ministers.

This **Triennial Convention** was the first national organization of Baptists in the U.S. It’s primary impulse was foreign missions, but it also gave itself to other work including the founding of a college in DC, Columbian College.In its first 20 years, by 1834, sent 100 missionaries. In 1845, the convention was renamed the American Baptist Missionary Union, and in 1930 it became the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. This leads us to a sad story in Baptist history…

**Southern Baptist Convention**

By 1830s, growing tension between northern and southern Baptists over slavery. In the 1840s, the national mission’s agencies began to raise strong objections to certifying candidates who owned slaves. In response, Baptist churches in the South withdrew their support.

Baptists up to this point had largely been democratic and sought equality. Many were involved in the abolition movement. Plus, there were many black Baptist churches and leaders in the antebellum period. Why did this happen? A new generation of ministers accommodated to southern culture, wishes of upper class. So they developed defenses for slavery. This was not unique to Baptists, you see it in the Presbyterians as well.

A shameful blight on Baptist history—Publically repented of slavery its history with slavery - Formally denounced all forms of racism 1) Repudiated historic acts of evil such as slavery; 2) Repented of all forms of racism in the past, 3) Asked for forgiveness from African Americans for its role in such forms of racism.

That was the first of two big crises that have shaped the SBC. The second was the theological liberalism that American churches encountered in the late 19th 20th century—characterized by a denial of the authority and truth of the Bible, this is the topic of our class next week. The Southern Baptist Convention, grew to be the largest protestant denomination in the United States, and it is the denomination that CHBC is in friendly cooperation with today, working to send people to the far reaches of the Earth to proclaim God’s gospel to people who have not heard it.

I would like to end with a quote from a letter that Andrew Fuller sent to William Carey…

*“I could as often have made similar complaints in return. But let us rather pray for each other and strengthen each other’s hands in the Lord. It is wonderful that God should do anything by such poor, grovelling sinners as we are.*

*One thing, however, is manifested by it: the work is entirely His own and if we should reach the kingdom of God at last, it must be by great grace. God has honoured us not a little by employing us in this great work. But as the honour does not belong to us, we must return it.*

*The crowns do not seem to fit our heads. Therefore, they must be cast at the feet of Jesus.”*

–Andrew Fuller, as quoted in James Culross, *William Carey* (New York: A.C. Armstrong, 1882), 78. This is excerpted from a letter Fuller wrote to Carey in 1803.

Choice Baptist Quotes:

*“This therefore should encourage them that for the present cannot stand, but that do fly before their guilt: Them that feel no help nor stay, but that go, as to their thinking, every day by the power of temptation, driven yet farther off from God, and from the hope of obtaining of His mercy to their salvation.*

*Poor creature, I will not now ask thee how thou camest into this condition, or how long this has been thy state; but I will say before thee, and I prithee hear me: O the length of the saving arm of God! As yet thou art within the reach thereof; do not thou go about to measure arms with God, as some good men are apt to do.*

*I mean, do not thou conclude, that because thou canst not reach God by thy short stump, therefore He cannot reach thee with His long arm. Look again, ‘Hast thou an arm like God’ (Job 40:9), an arm like His for length and strength?*

*It becomes thee, when thou canst not perceive that God is within the reach of thy arm, then to believe that thou art within the reach of His; for it is long, and none knows how long.”*

–John Bunyan, All Love’s Excelling: The Saint’s Knowledge of Christ’s Love (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1692/1998), 13-14.

*“Now I saw in my dream that they sat talking together until supper was ready. So when all was prepared and ready, they sat down to eat.*

*Now the table was furnished with savory foods and with wine that was well refined, and all their conversation at the table was about the Lord of the hill. They spoke with reverence about what He had done and why He did what He did and the reason He built that house.*

*And by the things they said, I perceived that He had been a great warrior. He had fought with and slain ‘him that had the power of death,’ but not without great danger to Himself.*

*Hearing this made me love Him even more.*

*They said, and I believe (as said Christian), that He did it with the loss of much blood. But what made it most glorious and gracious was that He did it all out of pure love to His country.*

*And besides, some of the household said they had spoken with Him since He died on the cross; and they have attested that they heard it from His own lips that there is nowhere to be found, no matter how far one might travel, anyone who had a greater love for poor pilgrims than He.*

*They, moreover, gave an instance of what they heard Him say, which was that He had stripped Himself of His glory that He might do this for the poor.*

*They also heard Him say and affirm ‘that He would not dwell in the mountain of Zion alone.’ They said also that He had made many pilgrims into princes, even though by nature they were born beggars, and their original dwelling had been the dunghill.”*

–John Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come, Ed. C.J. Lovik (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 80.