

The Baptist History Series

Number 2

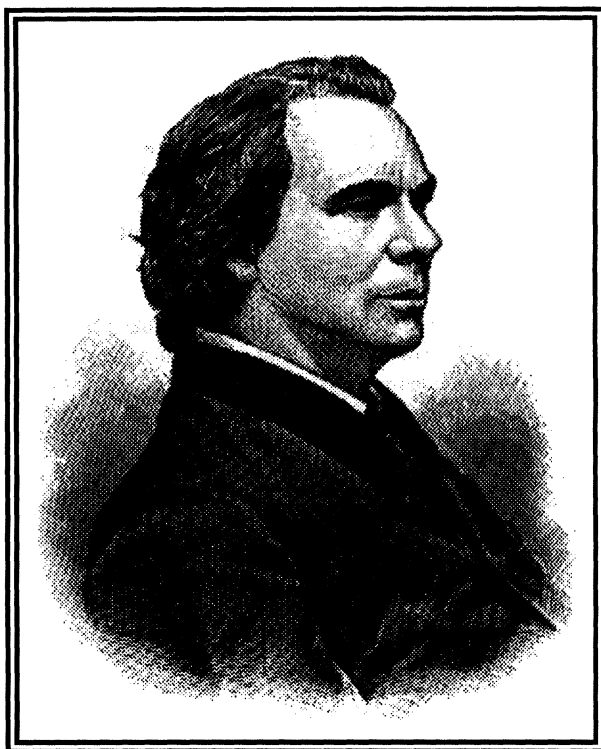


A History of the Baptists

Volume 2 of 2

Thomas Armitage

A
History of the Baptists



THOMAS ARMITAGE
1819-1896

A
History of the Baptists:

TRACED BY THEIR

VITAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES,

FROM

THE TIME OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

TO THE YEAR 1886

BY THOMAS ARMITAGE

Volume Two

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Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth.
-- *Psalms 60:4*

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THE WALDENSIAN EMBLEM

lux lucet in tenebris

“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

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Preface

The question has been asked, Why is so much space occupied, in the first volume of this History, by the New Testament period and the post-apostolic times before the sixteenth century? The weighty words of William Jones, the ripe historian, might be a sufficient answer to the first part of this inquiry. He says: 'We must first settle the important question, What are the constituent principles of the Church or kingdom of Christ-the doctrine on which it is founded, the King whose authority it acknowledges, the laws by which it is regulated, and so forth? And, having ascertained these points upon scriptural grounds, it will serve us as a polar star by which to direct our course through all the mazes and intricacies of what is denominated ecclesiastical history.' Then, speaking especially of the Acts of the Apostles, he pronounces this book 'A perfect specimen of what a history of the Christian Church ought to be . . . I venture to uphold it as an inimitable model both as to style and materials. All this, indeed, naturally follows from the fact of its having been written under divine inspiration.'

Acting himself on this high and broad principle, in 1816, he devoted above two hundred pages out of about a thousand to an examination of the New Testament times. With a vastly enlarged view of this necessity, the learned Schaff gives entirely volume I. of his invaluable History, consisting of eight hundred and sixty-three pages, to 'Apostolic Christianity, A.D. 1-100.' The more thoroughly ecclesiastical historians come to reject the assumption that the Roman Catholic communion has an unbroken and changeless history for nearly nineteen centuries, the more directly they must make their appeal to the New Testament as the only standard of Church life and purity. In our times, the application of this test is needful in writing the history of any Christian body, but it is an indispensable in writing that of the Baptist as is the key-stone to the arch, the tap-root to the tree or the foundation to the building. To claim that the Baptist churches of today are a copy of the New Testament churches, without first taking the most sedulous care to ascertain and set forth what Christ and his apostles required the churches of the first century to be and what they were, is only to be arrogant. Many other Christians deny what Baptists claim, and not to submit substantial proof of our position from the New Testament is simply on our part to assume the supercilious air of Phariseeism in our treatment of Christian brethren. If our historians honestly believe that the Bible is the spring of our history as a people, let us evince our self-respect and our deference for others' by an honest attempt to find our principles and practices there. If all that specially distinguishes the Baptists of today from other Christians is not found in the New Testament when we have no standing in its realm of narrative, fact and teaching. It is of little consequence where else our principles are found if

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they are not fully set forth there; we might as well have sprung up with the Reformation as at any other period after New Testament times. Without a standing for them in the history of the first churches we have none of any value anywhere. On the other hand, if our churches are a copy of the New Testament churches, breathing their spirit and following their example as perfectly as we can ascertain what it is, then to write their history is largely to write our own.

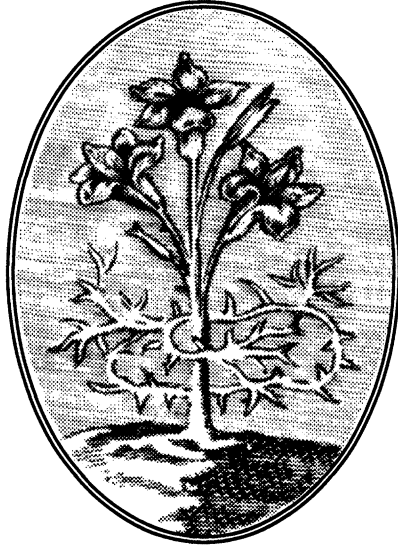
Although the term 'Baptist' is of New Testament use, we assume it merely as a conventional title for the convenience of characterizing a people who now hold to certain tenets which distinguish them from others. The leading doctrine of Baptists relates to the regenerated membership of which the churches of Christ should be composed; then follow the character and uses of Gospel ordinances; the constitution and polity of such churches; the order and office-work of their ministry, and the relations of such churches to each other and to civil governments. On the principle that the same seed ever yields the same harvest, we hold that the vital forces of the Gospel will, if faithfully administered, reproduce the same spiritual result in modern as in apostolic times. Hence all the distinguishing features of Baptist existence today must be gathered from the numerous teaching which are found in the divine mission, character and ministry of John the Baptist; the person, teachings, work and example of our Lord Jesus Christ; in the training and missionary labors of the apostles and the sort of churches which they planted under the direction of the Holy Spirit. These have been set forth in this work, to use the expression of William Jones, 'as a polar-star' among the motley admixtures of truth and error, those strange charts of human invention, which have corrupted the pure and simple religion of the New Testament. Therefore it is to be fervently hoped that a hundred and fifty pages of plain, old-fashioned Gospel truth touching the points which separate Baptists from other Christ-loving people, may not work serious mischief either to them to them or to other folks. Having seen what stamp of stalwart saints the ministry of the Baptists, the Saviour and his apostles wrought, and what order of churches they furnished to the world, the writer may be pardoned for borrowing all his germinal ideas of post-apostolic church life from the 'perfect specimen of what a history of the Christian Church ought to be.' If the Baptists of today are not a moderately fair facsimile of the New Testament Christians, then, possibly, the author has had too much to say about the Gospel in this work; but if they are, they will not suffer much by being brought back to the 'rock from which they were hewn,' and historically linked up to the truth as is in Jesus.

The chief reason why so much space has been used in treating of post-apostolic times before the sixteenth century is found in the necessity of guarding against the unsustained assumptions both of Baptists and others in regard to

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the many sects which existed in those centuries. Not a few of our writers have rashly affirmed that the Montanists, Novatians, Donatists, Paulicians, Cathari, Waldensians and other so-called heretics held all the marked views which distinguish the Baptists of today, while others have as rashly denied that in this respect they had any thing in common. These wholesale statements are neither utterly false nor utterly true. All these sects were marked, more or less, by Baptist peculiarities while none of them, as a whole, held them in their entirety, so that they cannot be indiscriminately classed either with Baptists or against them. Then is the careful Baptist investigator to pass them all by, without an honest effort to find the exact line of truth in each case? Certainly not. His duty is to seek for that line and, if possible, determine something between bold assumption and direct proof, rash claims and equally rash denials. His task, however, is the more difficult and thankless because his means of determining this question are so very scant. The chief sources of information on this subject now open to him are found in those distorted fragments of history which Catholic writers have left of the 'heretics' whom they neither loved nor understood, and in a few polemical works which have escaped destruction. Of necessity the most patient research is rewarded with comparatively little fruit, for no honest man will attempt to make new historical 'brick without straw,' for the purpose of suiting or serving any party whatever.

Gospel principles early became so thoroughly mixed with human corruptions that it is hard to trace them anywhere in their purity much beyond the second century. In and after that time Christian sects multiplied so rapidly that Gratian gives a list of eighty-three, down to the middle of the sixth century. It is very questionable, however, whether any one of them held the full unity of the apostolic faith without addition or diminution. The civil power prevailed over the churches till the decree of Justinian, A.D. 533, when the will of the emperor was the law of the empire, and all were 'heretics' whom the civil ruler so branded. After that the ecclesiastical power prevailed till the close of the Council of Trent, in 1563, during which period the dominating sect inflicted every cruelty upon others, who attempted to revive the type of primitive Christianity. By the sixteenth century, fully one hundred sects had arisen, most of them on issues which are not involved at all in the faith of modern Baptists, or if at all, to a very limited extent. That writer, therefore, who will demonstrate either that Baptists and their principles did not exist before the Reformation, or that one or more of these sects were Baptists, will earn the gratitude of all honest men.



Sicut lilium inter spinas sic amica mea inter filias

On The Cover: We use the symbol of the “lily among the thorns” from Song of Solomon 2:2 to represent the Baptist History Series. The Latin, *Sicut lilium inter spinas sic amica mea inter filias*, translates, “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.”

“A HISTORY of the Baptists should be understood in its objects and aims; and cleared, in the beginning, of misapprehension and perversion. It is not the history of a nationality, a race, an organization, but of people, *traced by their vital principles and gospel practices*. The unity to be exhibited and demonstrated was not brought about by force, by coercion of pains and penalties, by repressive and punitive Acts of Conformity; but by the recognition and adoption of a common authoritative and completely divine standard... the WORD OF GOD.”

Dr. J. L. M. Curry (1825-1903)

President of Howard College,

Professor of English & Philosophy at Richmond College,

Trustee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and

United States Ambassador to Spain

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