

A Biblical Basis for the Study of Baptist History

Doctrine and history are important. To many people history is boring because we live in an “image” based society instead of a “word” based society. As an overview of our society, people want pictures to look at and videos to watch instead of books to read. The natural by-product of the lack of reading is history is boring and only for weirdoes. Regardless of why people don’t like history we are shamefully ignorant of our national heritage and our Baptist heritage. We are watching the heads of our society destroy our national heritage, and then reconstruct it without God so they may reshape our future. Please understand that our constitution, which is supposed to outline and control our government, was formed from Bible-Baptist principles of freedom. When we were considered a “Christian” nation our constitution was considered important and binding. The reason our constitution seems invalid and in need of revising today is because the religious tenure of our nation has changed. Our constitution is obsolete when viewed through non-spiritual or secular eyes. As our nation moves down the “humanism-socialism-communism” path, I must remember my Baptist heritage. My Baptist heritage reminds me that I am to seek first God’s Kingdom and point people to Jesus Christ regardless of what is happening politically, socially or economically.

The study of our Baptist heritage is a journey backward on a road where we meet many great heroes of the Baptist faith. We are introduced to true freedom fighters. We see men and women who seemed to give the whole of their existence in surrender to God, so that subsequent generations could worship the Lord Jesus Christ in full liberty of conscience. We discover stories of real men and women who worked tirelessly to further the Gospel and the Baptist faith. As we look at it more closely we see that it is covered with blood! This blood is not the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ but rather it is the blood of millions of Baptist martyrs. The boldest of the bold and the bravest of the brave walked here. This is where they lived. This is where they stood for their Saviour. This is where they raised their families, and this where they died. As we examine this trail, we must agree it is truly a “trail of blood.” It is a hallowed road where character abounded, faith was multiplied, and God was glorified in the most sacrificial way possible. The things we see here and what they do to our hearts can never be felt and learned if we do not walk the trail.

We begin our study of Baptist History with the Apostles. Charles Haddon Spurgeon firmly believed Baptists were the original Christians. “We believe that Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the Reformation, we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never come from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it, but we have an unbroken line up to the Apostles themselves.” Some non-Baptist historians have agreed, including Methodist historian John Clark Ridpath who wrote the following in the 19th Century: “I should not readily admit that there was a Baptist church as far back as 100 A.D., although without doubt there were Baptist churches then, as all Christians were then Baptists.”

Like we mentioned before, there is a great disinterest in studying our Baptist heritage. Some question whether it is important or just a waste of time. Many fail to see the relevance for today. This misunderstanding has caused us great damage. Because we are more acquainted with baby-baptizing Protestants than we are Baptists, we copy Protestant doctrine and principles and think we are Baptists. We claim a fundamental heritage instead of our Baptist heritage and we actually think they are one in the same. There are Biblical grounds for studying Baptist history. We should study our heritage and share it with our children.

The Bible Promotes the Study of Baptist History

When you look at Joshua 1:1-5, Israel is ready to cross the Jordan River and enter into the promised land. This is a huge event in the history of Israel. God is fulfilling a promise He made to Abraham a long time ago. This was a long-awaited event. It was the biggest thing to happen to Israel up to this time in history. Joshua 4:1-9 reveals God never wanted the Jews to forget this piece of history. God commanded the Jews to set up twelve stones in the Jordan River on this big day. These stones were set up to teach the generations to come about their heritage. God did not want the

future generations to forget how God worked in the past in the lives of their forefathers. It is sad that our generation seems to have forgotten its own history.

There are many Bible examples of stones of remembrance one of them is – Joshua 24:26-27 *“And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.”* God clearly teaches us that without looking back to past memorials, God’s people could easily deny Him.

When a New Testament deacon was brought before the Sanhedrin to defend against the charge of being a Christian, he didn’t tell his religious accusers that the history of God’s dealings with His people were dull, boring unimportant and irrelevant. Stephen went back in history nearly 2,000 years to describe how the *“God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia...”* (Acts 7:2). Stephen then described how God worked in His people’s lives for 2,000 years! As Baptists we have a heritage that spans 2,000 years back to the Jordan. If you had to defend yourself today against the charge of being a Christian, could you, as Stephen did, go back in history and describe God’s wonderful works for the last 2,000 years? Or, based upon your testimony and interest in your heritage, would your accusers conclude that your God was dead, asleep, or impotent?

1 Peter 1:12-13 *“Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”* God used the Apostle Peter to teach us that remembrance is a key to staying stirred up. When you learn of the millions of bleeding, suffering martyrs, it will stir you up to live for God. It is very important to our present generation that we learn of what our forefathers went through in light of the possibility of coming persecution.

The Book of Acts is a perfect example of God’s interest in you and I knowing Baptist history. Acts is a running history of the early churches. **Hebrews 11** is another proof of God’s interest in His people knowing history. Other scriptures that point us to studying our history are as follows: **Deuteronomy 32:7, Psalm 44:1-3, Psalm 78:1-6, Psalm 90:1-2, Jeremiah 6:16, Jeremiah 18:15-17**. You can be sure that God’s Word is the most accurate history book in the universe and of all time. The fact that God wrote the Bible is proof of His interest in passing down history.

Baptists Have Been Ignorant of Their Own Heritage For Many Years.

The following quote is from *“The Christian Review,”* Jan. 1851 by Dr. Sewell S. Cutting:

“No Christian denomination has been so indifferent to its own history as our own.

Our fathers have been left to sleep in unhonored graves. The labors they performed, the sufferings they endured, the heroic characters they bore have alike been forgotten. The books, which amid penury and toil they wrote in defense of their persecuted faith, are almost wholly unknown to those who now possess the noble heritage of religious freedom and Christian truth which they bequeath. It is time for the honor of our name as a Christian people that this indifference were broken up, and that we begin to study for ourselves and to teach our children the lives and deeds of the founders and fathers of our churches.

We hail therefore with delight, any discussion which shall make our brethren acquainted with the early history of their own denomination, or lead them to linger in pious reverence around the graves of those who amid obloquy and contempt first taught the faith we cherish and first established the institutions of religion and learning to which we are so largely indebted.”

If Dr. Cutting was right about Baptists over 150 years ago, what do you suppose is our condition today? We have learned that if we become disconnected from our heritage, we both forget and deny God. We have also learned that a lack of stirring could be a lack of remembrance. Don’t read books on church history, or Christian history but Baptist history. All of the church and Christian histories are written from a Catholic and Protestant slant as if the church struggled through the dark ages and then reemerged during the Reformation with finding the lost gospel. Local Baptist churches didn’t struggle through the dark ages but suffered at the hands of monsters calling themselves Christians.

I hope this helps see the importance of our heritage because it certainly isn’t boring.

