

THE BAPTIST STORY

DISCUSSION GUIDE



About

Founded in 1938, the Baptist History & Heritage Society is a nonprofit organization of Baptist scholars, clergy, laity, students and congregations committed to helping Baptists discover, conserve, assess and share their history. BHHS' vision is to bridge the world of the academy and the congregation while sharing the stories of Baptists.

We offer several important ways for you to join in supporting our 87-year ministry sharing the Baptist story:

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Description

The Baptist Story is a 200-plus page collection of articles from noted Baptist historians and scholars offering brief introductions to the stories and histories of Baptist women, Black Baptists, Latino/a Baptists, Native American Baptists and Global Baptists. This special volume also explores Baptist beginnings and the Baptist commitment to and advocacy for religious liberty.

The Baptist Story is an excellent and accessible introduction to Baptist history and identity for ministers, church leaders, students and academics—a helpful resource for congregations.

Articles from *The Baptist Story* include:

- ◆ Baptist Beginnings (Dr. Leon McBeth)
- ◆ John Clarke: The Neglected Founder (Dr. Stanley Lemons)
- ◆ Baptists and the First Amendment (Dr. Doug Weaver)
- ◆ The Metaphor of the Wall of Separation (Dr. Bill Underwood)
- ◆ John Leland: The Consistent Separationist (Dr. Rosalie Beck)
- ◆ British Baptist Women, 1609-1700 (Dr. Pam Durso)
- ◆ American Women's Roles in Twentieth-Century Baptist Life (Dr. Melody Maxwell)
- ◆ African American Baptist Women: Making a Way out of No Way (Dr. Pam Smoot)
- ◆ The First Black Baptist (Dr. Ed Gaustad)
- ◆ Black Baptists, African Missions and Racial Identity, 1800-1915 (Dr. Sandy Martin)
- ◆ Richard Henry Boyd: Shaper of Black Baptist Identity (Dr. Joe Early)
- ◆ Baptist Mission Work among Hispanics in the United States (Dr. Twyla Hernandez)
- ◆ Baptists and the Native Americans of North America, 1674-1845 (Dr. Robert Gardner)
- ◆ Who and Where in the World Are the Baptists? (Dr. Denton Lotz)

How to Use This Discussion Guide



This discussion guide is designed to help congregations, small groups, Sunday school classes, and students engage deeply with the rich history, theology, and witness of Baptists across 400-plus years. Each session centers on a key reading from *The Baptist Story*, accompanied by a concise summary, thematic highlights, discussion questions, and optional enrichment prompts and activities. Together, this guide invites participants not only to learn Baptist history but to wrestle with issues of identity and theology in the life of the local Baptist church.

You may choose to follow the sessions in order for a comprehensive sweep through Baptist history, or select specific topics that connect with your group's interests or current ministry focus. The sessions are designed to stand alone, making them flexible for single-session use, thematic series, or integration into a larger curriculum.

Each session includes five main components:

1. **Summary** – A brief overview of the reading, capturing its main arguments, historical context, and key figures.
2. **Key Themes** – Concise bullet points highlighting central ideas for easy reference.
3. **Discussion Questions** – Divided into “Understanding the Story” (historical comprehension), “Connecting to Broader Themes” (linking past to present), and “Critical Reflection & Synthesis” (application and deeper thinking).
4. **Optional Enrichment** – Quotes, exercises, or creative prompts to extend learning beyond the group setting.
5. **Conclusion Prompt** – A final question or action step that encourages participants to identify concrete ways to apply the session's insights in their own congregational context.

To make the most of the guide:

1. **Read ahead:** Encourage participants to read the assigned pages before meeting.
2. **Mix voices:** Invite different group members to read summaries or questions aloud.
3. **Connect past and present:** Use the “Connecting to Broader Themes” and “Conclusion Prompt” sections to bring historical insights into your congregation's current life.
4. **Encourage participation:** Create space for diverse perspectives.

We want to hear from you! Please reach out to share how you or your congregation have used this discussion guide in your study of *The Baptist Story*. E-mail BHHS Executive Director Aaron Weaver at aweaver@thebhhs.org.

Session 1



Baptist Beginnings

Leon McBeth, "Baptist Beginnings" (pp. 14-23)

Summary

Dr. Leon McBeth introduces Baptist origins in early 17th-century England out of the Puritan–Separatist tradition, emphasizing believers' baptism, congregational autonomy, authority of Scripture, and religious liberty. He distinguishes General Baptists (general atonement; Helwys/Smyth; 1608/09 Amsterdam; London 1611) from Particular Baptists (particular atonement; JIJ church stream; 1633/1638) and traces the shift to baptism by immersion in the 1640s. McBeth highlights early worship practices (long services, no singing; later hymn-singing controversies) and the rise of associations and General Assemblies, with Particular Baptists guarding local church autonomy. He concludes with the "new and old" paradox: Baptists as a 17th-century denomination with a first-century faith.

Key Themes

- ◆ Origins among English Puritans/Separatists; believers' baptism and congregational autonomy (pp. 14–16).
- ◆ General vs. Particular Baptists; confessions and atonement debates (pp. 16–18).
- ◆ Immersion recovered and normalized by mid-17th century (pp. 18–19).
- ◆ Worship evolution and the singing controversy; Keach's hymnal (pp. 19–20).
- ◆ Associations, General Assemblies, and strong local church autonomy (pp. 21–22).
- ◆ "New and Old": denominational origins vs. apostolic faith continuity (pp. 22–23).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ What factors in the English Reformation set the stage for Baptist emergence?
- ◆ How do McBeth's distinctions between General and Particular Baptists help us understand later Baptist diversity?
- ◆ Why did immersion become the normative mode of baptism—and how did that change spread?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How does McBeth's "new and old" paradox shape Baptist identity today?
- ◆ What are the strengths and risks of robust local church autonomy as described here?
- ◆ How did worship changes (e.g., hymn-singing) reflect broader theological and cultural shifts?



Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ If you were explaining Baptist origins to a new group, which two turning points from McBeth would you highlight, and why?
- ◆ What cautions does McBeth suggest regarding "successionist" histories, and how should that shape teaching Baptist heritage?
- ◆ Where do you see Baptist commitments to liberty and autonomy serving congregational health—and where might they hinder cooperation?

Optional Enrichment


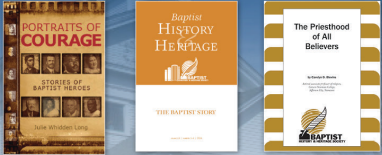
- ◆ Quote prompt: "The way and manner of the dispensing of this Ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under the water (p. 19)" Discuss why immersion mattered.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one way you or your congregation could tell Baptist beginnings in a way that is historically accurate and pastorally helpful?

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Session 2



John Clarke: The Neglected Founder

J. Stanley Lemons, "John Clarke: The Neglected Founder," (pp. 24-37)

Summary

Dr. Stanley Lemons recovers the under-told story of John Clarke—founder of the Newport Baptist church, architect of Rhode Island’s 1663 Royal Charter, and advocate for religious liberty and church–state separation—whose legacy has been overshadowed by Roger Williams. He traces Clarke’s leadership in forming a flexible, lay-participatory congregation (allowing women to “prophesy”) and his decades-long civil service, including negotiating a charter that guaranteed unprecedented liberty of conscience. Lemons also details the later mismanagement of the John Clarke Trust and the unintended entanglements with civil authority that followed.

Key Themes

- ◆ Re-centering John Clarke alongside (not beneath) Roger Williams (pp. 24–26).
- ◆ Newport Baptist church’s early openness (multiple preachers; women “prophesying”) (p. 28).
- ◆ Royal Charter of 1663 and the “lively experiment” of religious liberty (pp. 30–31).
- ◆ Ironies of the John Clarke Trust: separation ideals vs. later civil entanglement (pp. 33–34).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ Why has John Clarke been eclipsed in public memory, and what sources does Lemons use to correct that?
- ◆ What features of Clarke’s congregation stand out for early Baptist practice?
- ◆ Which provisions of the 1663 Charter were most distinctive for liberty of conscience?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How does the John Clarke Trust story caution churches about finances, governance, and state entanglement?
- ◆ What does John Clarke’s civil service suggest about faithful Baptist participation in public life?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ If you were to craft a brief “Clarke and Williams” teaching moment for your group, what would you emphasize about each leader?
- ◆ How could Baptist churches today embody the Charter’s “lively experiment” in pluralistic communities?
- ◆ What governance safeguards would prevent a repeat of the John Clarke Trust’s unintended consequences?

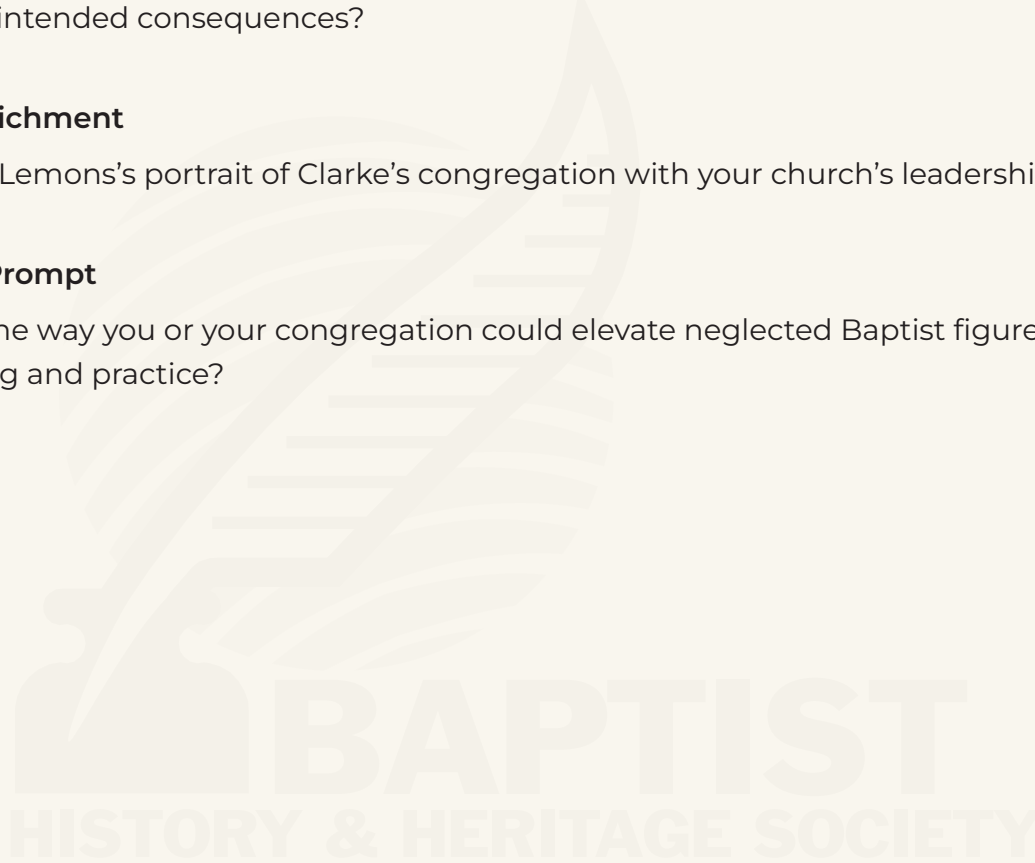


Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Compare Lemons’s portrait of Clarke’s congregation with your church’s leadership patterns.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one way you or your congregation could elevate neglected Baptist figures (like Clarke) in teaching and practice?



Session 3



Baptists and the First Amendment

C. Douglas Weaver, "Baptists and the First Amendment: An Historical Overview" (pp. 40-58)

Summary

Dr. Doug Weaver traces Baptist advocacy for religious liberty and the First Amendment from Thomas Helwys to John Leland and forward to 20th-century jurisprudence, showing how Baptists both shaped and sometimes departed from separationist convictions. He calls Baptists to renew their historic witness in a pluralistic society.

Key Themes

- ◆ "Soul liberty" as theological ground for religious freedom (pp. 40–42).
- ◆ Baptist influence on constitutional developments and legal reasoning (pp. 42–49).
- ◆ Moments of departure from separationist heritage (pp. 49–51).
- ◆ Renewed Baptist witness in contemporary contexts (pp. 56–58).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ How does "soul liberty" underpin Baptist commitments to religious freedom?
- ◆ Which Baptist figures and episodes most clearly shaped First Amendment thinking?
- ◆ Where does Weaver see Baptists diverging from their separationist roots?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ What opportunities and challenges come with articulating Baptist liberty in a pluralistic society?
- ◆ How might churches engage public life without diluting separation principles?
- ◆ Which contemporary debates could benefit from a recovered Baptist vision of liberty?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ Imagine a Baptist statement on church–state relations in your context—what two commitments must it include, and why?
- ◆ Which practices would help your congregation model "liberty for all"?
- ◆ How can remembering Baptist advocacy for minorities shape today's public engagement?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Define “soul liberty” in one sentence and contrast it with modern notions of “religious privilege.”

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one way you or your congregation could embody a robust Baptist commitment to religious liberty?



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The Metaphor of the Wall of Separation

William D. Underwood, "The Metaphor of the Wall of Separation: Baptists and the First Amendment"
(pp. 59-75)

Summary

Dr. Bill Underwood tracks the "wall of separation" metaphor from Roger Williams's imagery through Thomas Jefferson's 1802 Danbury letter, then into U.S. Supreme Court usage (*Reynolds*, 1878; *Everson*, 1947). He critiques contemporary rejections of separationism and argues that religious vitality thrives in a free marketplace rather than with state preference.

Key Themes

- ◆ Williams's "hedge or wall" and Jefferson's Danbury articulation (pp. 60–66).
- ◆ Judicial uptake: *Reynolds* (1878), *Everson* (1947), and later establishment cases (pp. 66–71).
- ◆ Responses to Christian-nation claims; "neo-Baptists" and separation (pp. 67–69, 70–71).
- ◆ Free market in religion as a Baptist good (pp. 72–73).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ How do Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson each frame the "wall," and why did Baptists resonate with it?
- ◆ What did *Reynolds* and *Everson* do with the metaphor, and why did *Everson* prove so influential?
- ◆ Where does Underwood think public misunderstandings arise in establishment vs. free-exercise questions?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How should Baptists answer "Christian nation" arguments in light of constitutional history?
- ◆ What are the strengths and limits of the "wall" metaphor for today's public conversations?
- ◆ Where do you see churches benefiting from a free religious marketplace—and where do you see vulnerabilities?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ Would you keep the “wall” metaphor in a contemporary Baptist statement—or replace it? Defend your choice with one historical and one present example.
- ◆ Which congregational practices best model principled separation without withdrawal?
- ◆ How might reclaiming Williams–Jefferson insights recalibrate your church’s civic engagement?

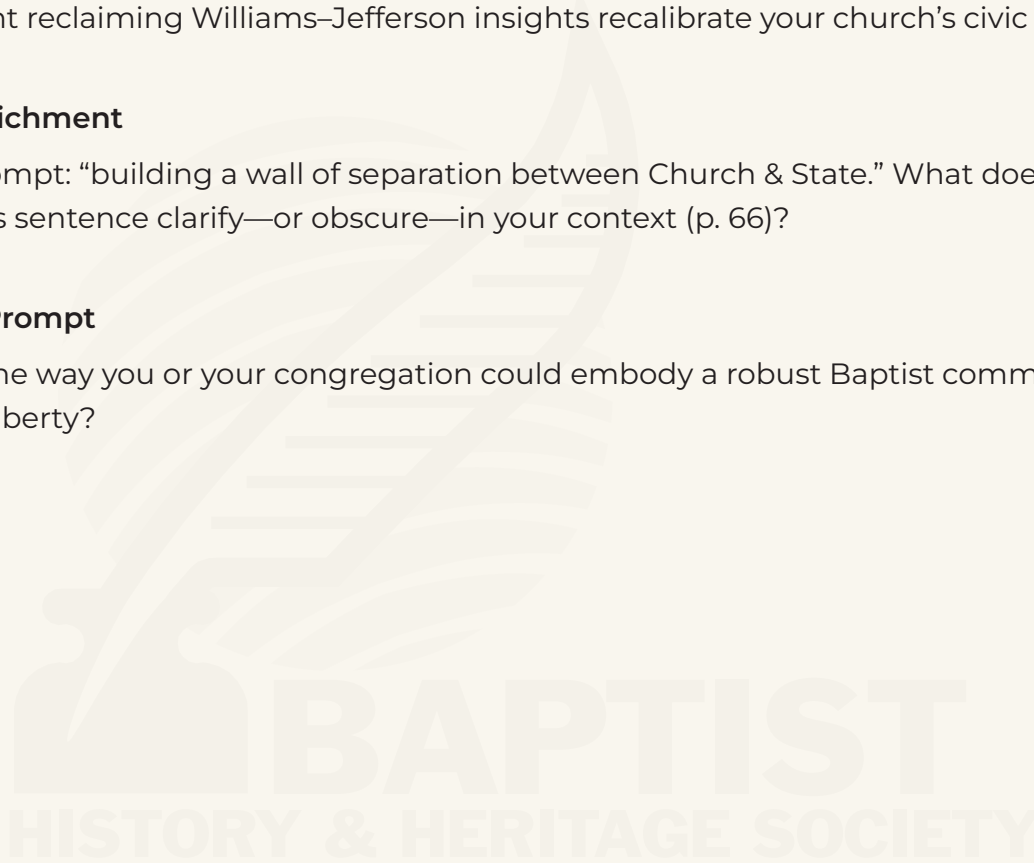


Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Quote prompt: “building a wall of separation between Church & State.” What does Thomas Jefferson’s sentence clarify—or obscure—in your context (p. 66)?

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one way you or your congregation could embody a robust Baptist commitment to religious liberty?



John Leland: The Consistent Separationist

Rosalie Beck, "John Leland: The Consistent Separationist" (pp. 76-88)

Summary

Dr. Beck examines the life and influence of John Leland, an itinerant Baptist preacher, prolific pamphleteer, and tireless political advocate for religious liberty in both Virginia and Massachusetts. Rooted in a theology of *soul liberty*—the conviction that faith must be free from coercion—Leland championed the separation of church and state as essential to genuine religious experience. He forged strategic alliances with civic leaders, pressed for constitutional protections for liberty of conscience, and used his preaching and publications to challenge both state-established religion and laws infringing on free worship. Leland also linked religious liberty to broader moral issues of his day, framing freedom of conscience as inseparable from the well-being of a just society.

Key Themes

- ◆ Soul liberty and voluntary faith as Leland's bedrock.
- ◆ Strategic partnerships with political leaders for constitutional protections.
- ◆ Applications to public issues (e.g., opposition to coercion, advocacy for marginalized).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ How did John Leland's itinerant ministry and public advocacy reinforce each other?
- ◆ What was John Leland's rationale for constitutional safeguards for religion?
- ◆ Where do we see his convictions shaping concrete public stances?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ What can Baptists today learn from John Leland's ability to collaborate without compromising convictions?
- ◆ How does Leland's insistence on voluntarism challenge church-state entanglements today?
- ◆ Where might Leland's holistic vision for liberty expand current Baptist conversations?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ If Leland were writing today, what issues might he name as threats to conscience—and how might he respond?
- ◆ What practices could your congregation adopt to safeguard liberty “for all,” not just for ourselves?
- ◆ Where does zeal for advocacy risk eclipsing pastoral care, or vice versa, and how might Leland advise balance?



Optional Enrichment

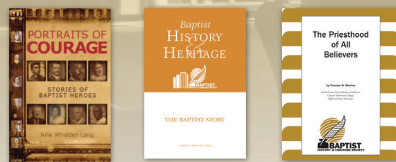
- ◆ Quote prompt: “Liberty of conscience is ‘the right that each individual has, of worshipping his God according to the dictates of his conscience, without being prohibited, directed or controlled therein by human law, either in time, place, or manner’” (p. 82). Where do you see this conviction affirmed—or challenged—in current debates about religion and public life?

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one way you or your congregation could follow John Leland’s example in championing liberty of conscience for all people?

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Session 6



British Baptist Women, 1609–1700

Pamela R. Durso, “She-Preachers, Sisters, and Messengers from the Lord: British Baptist Women, 1609-1700” (pp. 92-105)

Summary

Dr. Pamela Durso explores the active and often overlooked leadership of women in early British Baptist life, highlighting their roles as deacons and deaconesses, preachers, church founders, and prophetic writers. While often the majority in congregations, these women participated in ways that exceeded those in Anglican or Presbyterian churches—preaching, organizing congregations, and advising political leaders. Figures such as Mrs. Attaway, Dorothy Hazzard, Sarah Wight, and Elizabeth Poole modeled Spirit-led service, often risking social scorn or political backlash. Durso emphasizes that these women did not seek modern gender equality but rather responded to a divine call, leaving a legacy of courage and conviction that broadened the possibilities for Baptist ministry.

Key Themes

- ◆ Women as a majority presence in Baptist congregations, often enjoying broader participation than in other traditions (pp. 92–93).
- ◆ Deaconesses at Broadmead Church—named in records from 1670 and 1671—serving alongside male leaders (pp. 95–96).
- ◆ Women preachers, such as Mrs. Attaway, who defended her ministry with Scripture and welcomed open discussion in meetings (pp. 96–98).
- ◆ Dorothy Hazzard’s leadership in forming the Broadmead Church and guiding it toward believers’ baptism (pp. 98–101).
- ◆ Writing prophetesses like Sarah Wight and Elizabeth Poole, who addressed both spiritual and political matters in 1640s England (pp. 101–103).
- ◆ Service grounded in obedience to the Spirit rather than political advocacy for women’s equality (pp. 103–104).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ Why might have British Baptist women been able to participate more fully in church life than their contemporaries in other denominations?

- ◆ How does Mrs. Attaway's defense of her ministry reveal both the openness and the boundaries of early Baptist preaching?
- ◆ What aspects of Dorothy Hazzard's leadership show both risk-taking and pastoral care?



Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How do these women's ministries challenge common assumptions about Baptist origins and leadership roles?
- ◆ How do the prophetic writings of Sarah Wight and Elizabeth Poole reflect Baptist values in politically charged contexts?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ How might early Baptist women's integration of pastoral care, public proclamation, and community leadership serve as a model for today's church?
- ◆ What practices could your congregation adopt to better recognize and affirm leadership from women?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Quote prompt: At a mixed gathering, Mrs. Attaway "then opened the floor for discussion, 'for that was their custom to give liberty in that kind'" (p. 97). Discuss how such liberty could be practiced in your congregation today without losing order and clarity.
- ◆ Exercise: Create a short "Baptist Women Hall of Fame" for your congregation, highlighting historic and contemporary women who have shaped your church's witness. Share it publicly as a teaching tool.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one concrete way your congregation could "release" women's gifts in preaching, deacon care, or public testimony this year.

Session 7



American Baptist Women in the Twentieth Century

Melody Maxwell, "A Winding and Widening Path: American Women's Roles in Twentieth-Century Baptist Life"
(pp. 106–120)

Summary

Dr. Melody Maxwell uses the image of a labyrinth to describe the diverse and non-linear journeys of American Baptist women in the 20th century. While some pursued ordination and leadership in congregations, missions, or denominational structures, others chose or combined roles in homemaking and lay service. Maxwell traces changing opportunities—such as the gradual opening of pastoral ministry roles—alongside persistent resistance from some male and female Baptists. She highlights how women navigated both constraints and opportunities, contributing in formal leadership, mission organizations like the Woman's Missionary Union, theological education, and denominational service. By century's end, Baptist women occupied a "widened path" of ministry possibilities unimaginable to their predecessors, yet their progress remained shaped by negotiation, perseverance, and faithfulness rather than a simple march toward equality.

Key Themes

- ◆ Labyrinth metaphor captures the winding, reflective, and sometimes indirect nature of Baptist women's leadership journeys (p. 106).
- ◆ Early 1900s saw few ordained women; mission societies like WMU became key spaces for women's leadership (pp. 110–111).
- ◆ Mid-century tensions: expansion of women's service in education, missions, and social ministries, alongside cultural and denominational resistance (pp. 112–114).
- ◆ Late-century breakthroughs in ordination, denominational leadership, and theological education (pp. 115–116).
- ◆ Ongoing negotiation between traditional expectations and Spirit-led calls to new forms of ministry (pp. 118–119).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ How does the labyrinth metaphor help explain the varied paths Baptist women took in the 20th century?
- ◆ In what ways did mission organizations like WMU both empower women and reflect existing limitations?

- ◆ What turning points in the century most expanded Baptist women's ministry opportunities?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How does Maxwell's portrait of gradual, negotiated change compare with Durso's account of 17th-century Baptist women?
- ◆ Where do you see parallels between resistance faced by women in Maxwell's account and other Baptist struggles for inclusion?
- ◆ How can congregations honor both traditional ministries and new callings for women?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ If you were to tell your congregation's history of women's ministry, what "winding path" moments would you include?
- ◆ What strategies from WMU and similar groups could be adapted today to mentor women into broader ministry roles?
- ◆ How might your church's leadership structures better reflect the widened path of possibilities Maxwell describes?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Quote prompt: "Labyrinths are not designed to provide the fastest route to the center, but are made of winding paths that allow space for contemplation and prayer" (p. 106). How could this image reshape your church's view of ministry calling and preparation?
- ◆ Exercise: Create a visual "labyrinth timeline" of women's roles in your church over the past century, marking points where the path widened or narrowed.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one intentional step your congregation could take this year to make the ministry path wider for women in leadership and service?



African American Baptist Women: Making a Way Out of No Way

Pamela A. Smoot, "African American Baptist Women: Making a Way Out of No Way," (pp. 121-135)

Summary

Dr. Pamela Smoot surveys the enduring contributions of African American Baptist women from Reconstruction through the twentieth century, describing them as both "indoor and outdoor agents" whose work bridged church ministry and community reform. She organizes her study into four arenas: (1) missionaries such as Louise "Lulu" Fleming, Nora Gordon, Emma Delaney, Sarah Williamson, and Shirley Russell; (2) leaders like Maggie Lena Walker, a pioneering entrepreneur, and Nannie Helen Burroughs, an institution-builder; (3) civil rights workers including Mary Fair Burks and Joanne Robinson of the Montgomery Bus Boycott; and (4) founders of new ministries such as Diana Marshall's New Dawn Beginnings Outreach Ministries in Pittsburgh. Smoot underscores that these women's ministries flourished despite entrenched racism, sexism, and limited formal recognition—embodying the resilience of "making a way out of no way."

Key Themes

- ◆ African American Baptist women as "indoor and outdoor agents," serving both in the church and in broader reform work (p. 121).
- ◆ Missionaries in Africa and Haiti advancing spiritual and humanitarian aims, often at personal risk (pp. 122–124).
- ◆ Leadership in economic empowerment, education, and institution-building—e.g., Maggie Lena Walker and Nannie Helen Burroughs (pp. 125–127).
- ◆ Civil rights activism through figures like Mary Fair Burks and JoAnne Robinson (pp. 128–130).
- ◆ Founding innovative ministries to meet community needs, such as Diana Marshall's New Dawn Beginnings (pp. 130–132).
- ◆ Resilience rooted in faith, with women forming the majority of African American Baptist church membership and sustaining its vitality (p. 133).

Discussion Questions



Understanding the Story

- ◆ How does Smoot's use of "indoor and outdoor agents" illuminate the breadth of African-American Baptist women's ministry?
- ◆ What common traits emerge among the missionary, leadership, activist, and ministry founder roles Smoot describes?
- ◆ How did figures like Maggie Lena Walker and Nannie Helen Burroughs use economic and educational tools for ministry impact?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How do the challenges faced by these women mirror those encountered by earlier Baptist women in Britain and America?
- ◆ In what ways did these leaders bridge the church and the wider community?
- ◆ What can present-day Baptist churches learn from their models of persistence and adaptability?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ Which of Smoot's four arenas—missions, leadership, civil rights, ministry founding—resonates most with your church's current context, and why?
- ◆ What structures or attitudes in your congregation might unintentionally limit "making a way out of no way" leadership today?
- ◆ How might honoring these women's stories influence your congregation's approach to community engagement and justice?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Quote prompt: Smoot notes that "more than 60% of the members of African-American Baptist churches are women" (p. 133). How should this reality shape leadership development and decision-making in the church?
- ◆ Exercise: Map your congregation's own "indoor" and "outdoor" ministries, identifying where women's leadership has been essential and where new opportunities could emerge.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one tangible way your congregation could empower women to lead both "inside" and "outside" the church this year?

Session 9



The First Black Baptist

Edwin S. Gaustad, "The First Black Baptist" (pp. 138–141)

Summary

Dr. Ed Gaustad tells the story of "Jack, a colored man," who joined John Clarke's Newport congregation in 1652—making him the earliest recorded Black Baptist in America. Church records note Clarke and other members extensively but give no further detail about Jack's origins or life. Gaustad frames this absence as a challenge to historians: Why is there so little information about the first Black Baptist, and what might this silence reveal about race, memory, and early Baptist life in colonial America? The piece situates Jack within the broader narrative of early Black presence in New England and raises questions about how Baptists have recorded (or failed to record) the lives of marginalized members.

Key Themes

- ◆ Jack's 1652 membership in Clarke's Newport congregation as the first documented Black Baptist in America (p. 138).
- ◆ Absence of historical detail about Jack despite extensive records of other members (p. 139).
- ◆ Challenges in reconstructing early African American religious history from sparse sources (pp. 139–140).
- ◆ Early Black presence in New England before large-scale 19th-century Black Baptist growth (p. 140).
- ◆ Historical silences as both a limitation and a call to deeper archival work (pp. 141–142).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ Who was Jack, and what makes his 1652 membership historically significant?
- ◆ Why might church records contain extensive details about others but almost nothing about Jack?
- ◆ How does Gaustad connect Jack's story to the broader history of Black Baptists?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How does the absence of detail about Jack's life reflect broader patterns in documenting marginalized people's histories?

- ◆ In what ways could uncovering more about Jack reshape our understanding of early Baptist diversity?
- ◆ What responsibility do churches today have to preserve the stories of all members, including those often overlooked?



Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ If you were to introduce Jack's story to your congregation, how would you frame its significance for Baptist history and racial justice today?
- ◆ What practices could your church adopt to ensure that future generations have a fuller, more inclusive record of its members' lives?
- ◆ How might Jack's near-invisibility in the records challenge Baptists to re-examine whose stories get told and why?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Quote prompt: Gaustad asks, "Where did this first Black Baptist come from, and why was there no more information about him?" (p. 140). How do you interpret this gap in the record—and how might your church respond to similar silences in its own history?
- ◆ Exercise: Search your church's membership rolls from past decades. Identify members whose stories are unknown or under-documented and explore ways to recover and share them.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one concrete way your congregation could honor the contributions of overlooked members, past or present?



Session 10



Black Baptists, African Missions, and Racial Identity, 1800–1915

Sandy Dwayne Martin, “Black Baptists, African Missions, and Racial Identity, 1800–1915: A Case Study of African-American Religion” (pp. 143–157)

Summary

Dr. Sandy Dwayne Martin argues that African-American Baptists’ embrace of Christianity and commitment to African missions were powerful tools for developing and sustaining a positive racial identity in an era of rampant racism. Drawing on biblical interpretation, Pan-African consciousness, and the creation of independent Black churches, Martin shows how missions to Africa and other Black communities affirmed African Americans’ equality, cultural heritage, and divine calling. He traces early mission leaders like George Liele, David George, Lott Carey, and Hilary Teague, and organizations such as the Richmond African Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (1815), Baptist Foreign Mission Convention (1880), National Baptist Convention (1895), and Lott Carey Baptist Convention (1897). Martin concludes that Christian-supported racial identity equipped African Americans to challenge segregation and pursue freedom—linking the roots of the Civil Rights Movement to much earlier Black Baptist mission work.

Key Themes

- ◆ Christian faith and African missions as resources for positive racial identity in the face of prejudice (pp. 143–144).
- ◆ Biblical interpretation and Pan-African worldview connecting African Americans with Egypt, Ethiopia, and a providential mission (pp. 150–152).
- ◆ Independent Black congregations and denominational structures as expressions of racial pride and autonomy (pp. 152–153).
- ◆ Overseas mission initiatives by early leaders—George Liele (Jamaica), David George (Sierra Leone), Lott Carey and Hilary Teague (Liberia)—and mission societies (pp. 154–155).
- ◆ Continued influence of Christian-based racial identity on later freedom struggles, including abolition, Reconstruction, and Civil Rights (p. 155).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ How did Martin link Christianization and African missions to the development of a strong racial identity among African Americans?

- ◆ What role did biblical interpretation—especially of Egypt and Ethiopia—play in shaping a Pan-African consciousness?
- ◆ How did early mission leaders and organizations model both evangelism and racial empowerment?



Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ In what ways did independent Black congregations parallel other freedom movements in African-American history?
- ◆ How does Martin's account challenge or complement prevailing narratives about the origins of the Civil Rights Movement?
- ◆ What lessons can churches today draw from the dual focus on spiritual mission and racial justice?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ What would it look like for churches to reclaim a sense of “providential mission”?
- ◆ Where do you see potential tensions between racial identity, cultural heritage, and cross-cultural mission work—and how might they be addressed?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Exercise: Research one early Black Baptist mission leader mentioned by Martin (e.g., Liele, George, Carey, Teague). Create a short profile and present it to your group, noting how their work blended evangelism and racial pride.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one concrete way your congregation could integrate racial justice and global mission in the coming year?

Richard Henry Boyd: Shaper of Black Baptist Identity

Joe Early Jr., "Richard Henry Boyd: Shaper of Black Baptist Identity" (pp. 158–171)

Summary

Dr. Joe Early Jr. profiles Richard Henry Boyd, a visionary leader born into slavery in 1843 who became one of the most influential Black Baptist entrepreneurs of the early 20th century. After emancipation, Boyd pursued education, ministry, and organizational leadership, founding and pastoring churches, helping form the Texas Negro Baptist Convention, and participating in national Baptist life. His most enduring legacy was the creation of the National Baptist Publishing Board (NBPB) in 1896, which broke white-controlled monopolies on Baptist literature, empowered Black authors, and fostered theological education and identity among African American Baptists. Boyd's business acumen and independence also led to sharp conflict within the National Baptist Convention, culminating in the 1915 schism between the Incorporated and Unincorporated factions. Beyond publishing, Boyd co-founded Nashville's One-Cent Savings Bank, supported civil rights causes, and modeled racial pride in an era of Jim Crow oppression.

Key Themes

- ◆ From slavery in Mississippi/Texas to national Baptist leadership, demonstrating resilience and strategic vision (pp. 158–160).
- ◆ Founding of the National Baptist Publishing Board to provide literature by and for African Americans, independent from white control (pp. 162–164).
- ◆ Tensions with NBC leadership over NBPB governance, leading to the 1915 denominational split (pp. 165–166).
- ◆ Entrepreneurial initiatives beyond publishing—bank founding, civic leadership, racial pride in public life (pp. 167–168).
- ◆ Boyd's legacy as both a unifier of Black Baptist identity through literature and a polarizing figure due to his uncompromising independence (pp. 169–170).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ How did Boyd's early life and self-education prepare him for leadership in Baptist life and business?
- ◆ Why was the founding of the NBPB a turning point for African American Baptist autonomy?
- ◆ How did Boyd's leadership style contribute to both his successes and controversies?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How does Boyd's work compare to earlier Black Baptist mission leaders in terms of advancing racial pride and independence?
- ◆ In what ways did the NBPB shape African American Baptist identity beyond printed literature?
- ◆ What does Boyd's story reveal about the intersection of faith, business, and racial justice?



Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ If Boyd were alive today, what publishing or media strategies might he use to strengthen Black Baptist identity?
- ◆ How can churches today balance strong, independent leadership with the need for cooperative governance?
- ◆ What lessons from Boyd's conflict with the NBC could guide denominational relationships now?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Quote prompt: Boyd "gave dignity to the NBC through his publishing endeavors and influenced the Black Baptist identity" (p. 170). Discuss how access to culturally relevant resources impacts a denomination's vitality.
- ◆ Exercise: Identify an area in your congregation's ministry where independence from outside control could foster greater creativity or relevance. Outline a plan for developing that capacity.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one concrete way your congregation could invest in producing or supporting resources that reflect its cultural identity and theological convictions?

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Session 12



Baptist Mission Work among Hispanics in the United States, 1837–1989

Twyla Hernandez, "Baptist Mission Work among Hispanics in the United States, 1837–1989" (pp. 174–189)

Summary

Dr. Twyla Hernandez traces the history of Baptist mission work with Hispanic communities in the United States from the earliest recorded efforts in the 1830s through the close of the 20th century. She highlights initial missions in the Southwest following U.S. territorial expansion, the influence of borderlands culture, and the growth of ministries through denominational mission boards. Hernandez examines key figures, churches, and organizations, including the work of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, Southern Baptist mission efforts, and the roles of Hispanic pastors and lay leaders. She also notes tensions—such as paternalism, cultural insensitivity, and language barriers—that often hindered the work. By the late 20th century, Hispanic Baptists had formed their own associations and conventions, building on both the legacy and the limitations of earlier mission work to create vibrant, self-governing ministries.

Key Themes

- ◆ Early Baptist engagement with Hispanic communities tied to territorial expansion and cultural contact zones (pp. 173–174).
- ◆ Role of denominational mission boards—American Baptist Home Mission Society and Southern Baptist mission efforts—in shaping ministry approaches (pp. 175–176).
- ◆ Significant contributions of Hispanic pastors, evangelists, and lay leaders in church planting and community outreach (pp. 177–179).
- ◆ Tensions over cultural assimilation, language, and paternalistic mission models (pp. 179–181).
- ◆ Formation of independent Hispanic Baptist associations and conventions by the late 20th century (pp. 182–184).
- ◆ Continuity between historical mission challenges and present-day multicultural ministry needs (pp. 185–186).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ How did U.S. territorial expansion shape Baptist mission opportunities among Hispanic communities?

- ◆ In what ways did Hispanic pastors and lay leaders influence the development of these ministries?
- ◆ What challenges did language and cultural differences present for mission work?



Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How does Hernandez's account compare to earlier Baptist mission histories among African American or immigrant communities?
- ◆ What lessons can be drawn from the shift toward independent Hispanic Baptist conventions?
- ◆ How might the strengths and shortcomings of past mission work inform current multicultural ministry efforts?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

- ◆ How could Baptist mission work today move beyond assimilation toward true cultural partnership?
- ◆ Where do you see parallels between the challenges Hernandez describes and your own church's cross-cultural ministry experiences?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Exercise: Identify a ministry in your community serving a cultural group different from your own. Brainstorm three ways your congregation could build authentic, reciprocal relationships with that ministry.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one concrete way your congregation could support and learn from Hispanic Baptist leaders in your area this year?

Session 13



Baptists and Native Americans

Robert G. Gardner, "Baptists and Native Americans, 1674–1845" (pp. 190–201)

Summary

Dr. Robert G. Gardner traces two distinct eras in Baptist engagement with Native Americans: an early period when small numbers joined white-dominated churches or formed Native-led congregations in the East, and a nineteenth-century shift to frontier missionary work with organized support (e.g., the Triennial Convention and the American Indian Missionary Association). He maps the emergence of all-Native congregations in New England and New York; the expansion of mission structures, personnel, and geographies among tribes such as the Cherokees, Potawatomis, Creeks, Ojibways, Ottawas, Choctaws, and Shawnees; and the mixed statistical outcomes—by 1845, Native American Baptists remained a small but growing minority. The study balances sobering numbers with specific evidence of institutional investment, sustained presence, and Native leadership.

Key Themes

- ◆ Two-era framework: early participation in white-dominated churches and Native-led congregations in the East; later, a frontier missionary era (p. 190).
- ◆ First documented Native American Baptist (Japheth, 1674) and eighteenth-century participation patterns across Baptist groups and colonies (pp. 190–191).
- ◆ Nine all-Native Baptist churches formed without white missionaries; growth/decline trends through 1845 (pp. 191–192).
- ◆ Early-nineteenth-century strategy shift: sending resident missionaries; strongest sponsorship from the Triennial Convention (from 1817) and later the American Indian Missionary Association (1842) (pp. 192–193).
- ◆ Scope of work: at least 241 named missionaries (211 with precise records) across multiple states/provinces among major tribes (pp. 193–194).
- ◆ Outcomes & funding: 2,030 Native American Baptists by 1845 ($\approx 0.25\%$ of all Baptists; $\approx 2.5\%$ within tribes where Baptists worked); mission expenditures led by the Triennial Convention, with AIM Association support (pp. 199–200).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ What changes mark Gardner's shift from local/eastern church membership to frontier missionary efforts?

- ◆ How do Native-led congregations in New England/New York complicate a simple “missionary-to-the-frontier” narrative?
- ◆ Which sponsoring bodies or strategies seem most decisive for the nineteenth-century expansion, and why?



Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How do Gardner’s statistics help us evaluate “success” in mission history—what counts, and for whom?
- ◆ Where do you see tension between evangelistic zeal and cultural respect in the record Gardner presents?
- ◆ How might Native leadership within these churches reframe Baptist mission stories we usually tell?

Critical Reflection & Synthesis

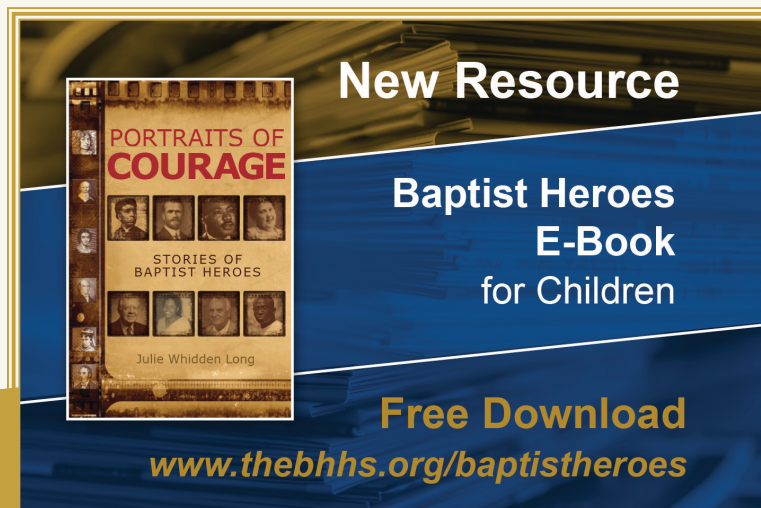
- ◆ If your church engages Native communities today, what would partnership look like that honors sovereignty, history, and local leadership; how might you measure faithfulness beyond raw numbers; and which parts of your mission budget, training, and accountability would you redesign so your practice does not repeat paternalistic patterns?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Exercise: Map Gardner’s two eras onto your church’s mission philosophy: identify one current practice that aligns with respectful, locally-led ministry—and one practice you would change this year to strengthen mutuality and accountability.

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one concrete step your congregation could take in the next 12 months to learn from, listen to, and collaborate with Native Christian leaders in your region?



Who and Where in the World Are the Baptists?

Denton Lotz, "Who and Where in the World Are the Baptists?" (pp. 202–212)

Summary

Dr. Denton Lotz surveys the global Baptist family, offering a statistical and geographic overview of Baptist presence at the start of the 21st century. Drawing on Baptist World Alliance (BWA) membership reports, he identifies regions of significant growth (notably in Africa, Asia, and Latin America), areas of plateau or decline (including parts of North America and Europe), and the complex factors shaping these trends—migration, evangelism, political change, and religious freedom or restriction. Lotz reflects on the theological diversity within Baptists worldwide and the unifying convictions of believers' baptism, congregational autonomy, and evangelistic mission. He emphasizes that the Baptist story is now truly global, with the majority of Baptists living outside the historic North American/European centers, and calls for renewed commitment to unity, cooperation, and mission across cultural and national boundaries.

Key Themes

- ◆ BWA statistical snapshot of Baptists worldwide by continent and country (pp. 202–204).
- ◆ Growth in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; decline or plateau in North America and Europe (pp. 204–206).
- ◆ Factors influencing growth and decline: migration, religious freedom, political conditions, evangelistic movements (pp. 206–208).
- ◆ Theological diversity within global Baptist life and shared commitments to believer's baptism, congregational autonomy, and mission (pp. 208–210).
- ◆ Shift in Baptist "center of gravity" to the Global South; implications for leadership and mission strategy (pp. 210–212).

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Story

- ◆ According to Lotz, where are Baptists growing most rapidly, and what factors are driving that growth?
- ◆ How do migration and political change affect Baptist presence in different regions?
- ◆ What unifying convictions connect diverse Baptist groups globally?

Connecting to Broader Themes

- ◆ How does the global shift in Baptist population challenge North American churches to rethink mission partnerships?
- ◆ In what ways could your congregation learn from Baptist churches in the Global South?
- ◆ How does theological diversity within the Baptist family strengthen or strain cooperation?



Critical Reflection & Synthesis

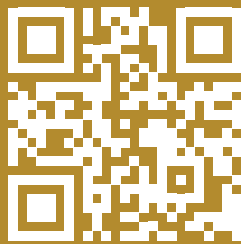
- ◆ If your church were to form a partnership with a Baptist congregation in another country, what mutual gifts and insights could you exchange?
- ◆ What would it look like for your congregation to embrace the reality that the “center” of Baptist life is now in the Global South?
- ◆ How might acknowledging global diversity in Baptist life expand your congregation’s theology, worship, or mission strategy?

Optional Enrichment

- ◆ Quote prompt: Read aloud: “The Baptist family is now truly global, with more members in the Global South than in the North.” (p. 210). Discuss what this demographic shift means for leadership and decision-making in Baptist networks. How could your congregation ensure global voices are heard in your denominational or mission planning?

Conclusion Prompt

- ◆ What is one concrete step your congregation could take this year to engage meaningfully with the global Baptist family?



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