

William W. Watson (69)
President, 1961-1962

W. W. Watson was born on November 4, 1912 to Mr. and Mrs. William Denver (Mary Etta) Watson of Mulberry and Bradenton, FL.

He attended the public schools of Florida. As a teenager he moved to Keyville, FL and worked in the phosphate mines as a plumber.

He married the former Miss Theda Leona Hunter of Lithia, FL, and to their union was born one son and three daughters: David Joseph Watson, Geraldine Theda Farmer, Mary Annel Mitchell and Jennifer Lee Davis.

He was saved at the age of twenty-two years at the Beulah Baptist Church of Lithia. Rev. John B. Simmons was pastor, and Rev. John H. Dorman was the visiting evangelist in a revival meeting. He surrendered to the call to the ministry and was licensed to preach by the Beulah Baptist Church in 1941. He was later ordained to the ministry by that Church on May 30, 1943.

He preached his first sermon on February 23, 1941. His first pastorate was Beulah Baptist Church of Lithia, FL, 1942-43. Others were: First Baptist Church of Canal Point, FL, 1942-43; Pearson's Chapel, TX, 1944; First Baptist Church, Laneville, TX, 1944; Line Baptist Church, Dew, TX 1945-46; Shady Grove Baptist Church, Carthage, TX 1945-46; Lone Oak Baptist Church, Plant City, FL 1947; and again in 1968-79; First Missionary Baptist Church, Auburndale, FL 1948-1966.

He pastored the Texas churches while he was a student at Jacksonville Baptist College, Jacksonville, TX. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He received the Honorary Doctor of Divinity from Florida Baptist Schools at graduation ceremonies in 1965.

After returning to Florida, he was called by Lone Oak Baptist Church in Plant City in 1947. In 1948 he was called by the First Missionary Baptist Church of Auburndale where he served for eighteen years.

Bro. Watson led in the founding of Florida Baptist Institute and Seminary in 1954, which later became Florida Baptist Schools of Lakeland, FL. He was the first president of the school, and was later Vice-President and a trustee, and taught on the faculty for many years.

His burden for the ministry and young preachers was manifest in his labor at Florida Baptist Schools. He led in the establishment of Florida Baptist Institute with the first classes being held at First Missionary in Auburndale. He was elected as the first President and taught Homiletics and English for many years. Bro Watson later served on the Board of Trustees and as Vice-President, a position he held until the time of his death.

Dr. Watson was always a mission-minded pastor and led the churches he pastored to support and establish missions and churches.



While he was pastor of the Auburndale church, he led them to establish eight churches, and while he served the Lone Oak church, he led them to establish the Grace Baptist Church of Lake Wales, Florida.

He served as President of the American Baptist Association for the years 1961-1962. He served on the Missionary Committee of the American Baptist Association and was its chairman for five years. He served on the Sunday School Committee for twenty-two years, and served as its chairman for twenty years.

Dr. Watson was also Moderator of the Florida State Association for five years, 1949-1953. He was elected to the position of Secretary-Treasurer of Missions in July of 1958 and served in that position for 30 years.

Wayne Hunter, his nephew wrote, "Bro. Watson had a love for missions that was as big as life itself. Many churches were established through his leadership and ministry. He served as Secretary/Treasurer of Missions for 30 years and became the heartbeat of the missions program for the state of Florida."¹

Dr. Watson retired from the pastorate in 1979. He lived his last years in Auburndale where he and Theda were members of the First Missionary Baptist Church. Bro. Watson died on April 28, 1997, at the age of 84.

John W. Kesner (70) **Vice President, 1951, 1961**

Bro. Kesner was born January 11, 1897 and departed this life March 20, 1973 at the age of 76

He was reared in Southeast Missouri, John W. Kesner was baptized by Dry Bayou Baptist Church near Hayti. After service in the U. S. Navy in World War I, he moved to western Arkansas, settling in Greenwood. For a few years he operated a barbershop, but he sold his business to devote all his time to the ministry.

While pastoring various churches in the Mt. Hope Association, he also preached wherever an opportunity presented itself – on the street, in schools, plants, factories, and jails.

When Central Baptist Church was organized in 1930, he became pastor, a position he held for twenty-seven years when poor health forced him into semi-retirement.

Bro. Kesner was an energetic man, a fiery preacher, an effective evangelist, and an able debater and writer. Two of his debates were printed, and for several years he edited a religious paper, *The Sword and*



¹ Wayne Hunter, *The Baptist Anchor*, June-July, 1997, p. 7.