

# CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH



An Updated History of the Baptists

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## Foreword

In C. H. Spurgeon's August, 1868, review of J. M. Cramp's *Baptist History*, he lamented the lack of knowledge of their own history among Baptist people. Spurgeon ventured three reasons for the historical deficit. One was that readers believe "religious communities which indulge too much in these investigations are apt to trust to the past, which in view of present necessities is about the worst thing a religious body could do." Another reason was that Baptists "have had enough to do to fight for their very existence" to spend time "presenting the past history of their body." Then, thirdly, he speculated that Baptist history "has been, for the most part, obscure and scanty."

The first two reasons may be viable, but with the publication of **Contending for the Faith, An Updated History of the Baptists**, the third excuse disappears. This historical volume is a collaborative project of the History and Archives Committee and the Baptist Sunday School Committee of the American Baptist Association.

The purpose of **Contending for the Faith** is to update the **History of the Baptists**, written by John T. Christian in 1922 and 1926. Information from other authors has been added, as well as four chapters that brought the history from 1845 to the present. The intent is to present historical material within a format that would be clearly organized, thus enabling readers to better understand the history of the Baptists.

Dr. Robert Ashcraft was asked by the Baptist Sunday School Committee to lead in the research and preparation of the manuscript. His first historical research was "A Historical Study of Higher Education in the American Baptist Association" which was done as a Ph. D. dissertation at East Texas State University in 1968. Other historical publications include: **Pioneer Faith, The History of Missionary Baptist Associations and Churches in Arkansas from 1818 to 1920; History of the Pine Bluff Missionary Baptist Association; History of the Missionary Baptist Seminary; History of Texarkana Baptist Orphanage; History of Mexican Baptist Institute; History of the American Baptist Association, and Landmarkism Revisited.**

Dr. Ashcraft serves as Vice-chairman of the History and Archives Committee, which was chartered in 1974 by the American Baptist Association. He has been chairman of the State Association of Arkansas History and Archives Committee since 1987 and has been a regular participant among associational Baptists since 1947. His work in editing **Contending for the Faith** is the fruition of over fifty years of active ministry and historical study within the churches of the American Baptist Association.

It is our prayer that **Contending for the Faith** will be helpful to students of church history in clearly presenting the history of the Baptists from the first century to the present.

Larry E. Clements, Editor in Chief  
American Baptist Association

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## Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the Baptist Sunday School Committee for their understanding in resuscitating and continuing the project that resulted in this updated history of the Baptists. The History and Archives Committee initiated this project several years ago with the idea of abridging the History of the Baptists as written by Dr. John T. Christian in 1922 and 1926. After the project was given new life and direction, the Committee felt an entirely new history should be developed rather than an abridgement of the work of Dr. Christian. The Sunday School Committee requested the History and Archives Committee to prepare the manuscript for Bogard Press. The History and Archives Committee requested this writer to research and prepare the manuscript.

Larry E. Clements, Editor-in-Chief, asked that at least one member of the History and Archives Committee read each chapter. The committee members—Donald Britton, Michael Thompson, L. D. Perdue, Larry Crouch, Philip Pevehouse and Terry Parrish—co-operated in honoring this request. Mike Yoho, Robert Francis and Dennis Richey, members of the Sunday School Committee, each read two chapters. Additionally, R. W. “Buddy” Keese, pastor of Baseline Missionary Baptist Church, and Melvin Burris, pastor of West Bauxite Missionary Baptist Church, read most of the chapters. John Owen, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Malvern read the final four chapters.

Also thanks to Larry E. Clements, Editor-in-Chief; Sally McInvale, Production Manager; Kyle Elkins who converted the Word document into a Quark PDF file and Jim Jones for the final editing. Wayne Sewell, Business Manager, was efficient in directing the actual publication of **Contending for the Faith**.

An important commendation goes to my faithful wife who read and made suggestions for revising the manuscript several times. We both spent many hours editing and improving the manuscript, then tediously reduced it to the specified length.

A posthumous thanks to Dr. Paul Goodwin, who as pastor and later as instructor, fostered an early interest in church history, especially in recommending **Baptist Succession** by D. B. Ray as one of the first three books to be read after I surrendered to the ministry in 1950.

However, ultimate gratitude is given to our Heavenly Father who supplied the grace and ability to work through a manuscript and persevere until the work was completed.

Therefore, thanks to all who had any part in producing **Contending for the Faith**, which I firmly believe will be a great help in teaching and understanding the history of the Baptists.

Robert Ashcraft  
March 22, 2006

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## Introduction

**Contending for the Faith, An Updated History of the Baptists**, basically follows the concepts of church succession presented by John T. Christian in his two volume History of the Baptists published in 1922 and 1926. Those familiar with the setting of Christian’s history will be aware that these volumes were the full development of Christians’ previous studies, **Did They Dip? An Examination into the Act of Baptism as Practiced by the English and American Baptists Before the Year 1641**.

Then in 1902 Christian updated his studies in **Baptist History Vindicated**, as he further answered the contention of William H. Whitsitt that the Baptists did not immerse until the year 1641. Ben M. Bogard wrote, “This is the most valuable history published in recent years. Facts, hitherto unknown, or imperfectly known, are brought to light in this able work,”

Students of history attempting to read and study from Christian's history encounter the section headings being grouped at the beginning of each chapter, thereby they attempt to study long sections of the text without the benefit of headers to remind of the context and guide in the study. In addition, the documentation is in the body of the text. Also, the Christian history ends in 1845, which was before the organization of the Southern Baptist Convention, J. R. Graves and Landmarkism, the Fundamentalists movement of the 1920's and the Baptist Resurgence, which began in 1979.

In addition to Christian's scholarly presentation of Baptist succession and his thorough exposures of the fallacy of Whitsitt's contention that the Baptists did not dip until 1641, **Contending for the Faith** develops the basic concepts within the first century churches that have continued throughout the intervening centuries as essential doctrines and practices in developing the "Spiritual Kinship" aspect of church history so ably documented and presented by Thomas Armitage in his **History of the Baptists**, published in 1886.

**Contending for the Faith** clarifies the rise of the Particular Baptists in England, and also substantiates the claim that the first Baptist church in America was established in Newport, RI through the ministry of Dr. John Clarke, with the assistance of Marke Luker.

### **Identifying "The Faith"**

Chapter I is titled, "Essentials of "The Faith" in the Early Churches." This chapter identifies six "essentials" of "The Faith":

- A. The Sacred Scriptures as the Authority for Faith and Practice
- B. Salvation by Grace Through Faith
- C. Baptism of the Believer by Immersion
- D. The Lord's Supper as a Memorial or "In Remembrance"
- E. The Nature of the New Testament Churches
- F. Liberty of Conscience-No Church-State Relationship

The subsequent chapters of this study identify these threads of "the faith" as they are interwoven into and preserved by different groups of Christians throughout the respective periods of church history. Needless to say, we may not identify them by name, but by beliefs and practices that emulate the Christians of the first churches.

L. D. Foreman and J. R. Graves both used illustrations of how "The Faith" has been preserved through the ages.

Foreman gave the illustration of a passenger train going thru a mountain tunnel. If we can visualize the train entering the tunnel, we can catch the Railroad logo and number on the locomotive, count the number of passenger cars, a baggage or mail car, and possibly other cars; as the train emerges from the tunnel we can positively identify the locomotive by the Railroad logo and number, count the number and kind of cars. Most would agree that if these essentials were the same, this is positive identification of the train that entered the tunnel.

### **Benefits of Church History Study**

J. R. Graves suggested, "Nothing can be more becoming a Christian than a general knowledge of Church History<sup>9</sup>" "It teaches us religion, it shows us what we are to believe and practice, what errors are to be rejected, what things we are to imitate; it furnished us with abundance of examples of heroic virtue, and instructs in duty."

Graves questioned,

Ought not Christians to interest themselves to learn the fulfillment of those promises of Christ himself concerning his Church and people? "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," "lo, I am with you always even unto the end." These promises certainly secure the integrity and

perpetuity of churches of Christ in and through all subsequent ages, even unto the end of this dispensation.

Thomas Armitage wrote,

The best service that can be rendered to the Baptists is, to trace the noiseless energy and native immortality of the doctrines which they held, after all their conflicts, to the glory of Christ, for it is exactly here that we see their excellency as a people. If it can be shown that their churches are the most like the Apostolic that now exist, and that the elements which make them so have passed successfully through the long struggle, succession from the times of their blessed Lord gives them the noblest history any people can crave.