

“Remembering the Righteous: Baptist Historians”
Psalm 112:6

Introduction: The following is a list of the major Baptist historians.

1. Isaac Backus (1724-1806)
2. David Benedict (1779-1874)
3. Thomas Armitage (1819-1896)
4. William Cathcart (1826-1908)
5. Richard B. Cook (1838-1916)
6. John T. Christian (1854-1925)
7. Robert B. Semple (1769-1831)
8. George W. Beale (1842-1921)
9. James B. Taylor (1804-1871)
10. George B. Taylor (1860-1942)

Body: Let us notice a history of these men and their writings.

- I. Isaac Backus (1724-1806)
 - A. Isaac Backus born at Norwich, Conn., Jan. 9, 1724.
 - B. He was converted in 1741 during the Great New England Awakening, but did not join himself to the church until ten months later. From this church — the First Congregational of Norwich — he and others soon separated themselves, and began to hold meetings on the Sabbath for mutual edification.
 - C. His first pastorate being that of a Separate church at Middleborough, to which he was ordained in 1748.
 - D. The subject of baptism was agitating the church of which Mr. Backus took charge, and it was only after a long and bitter struggle with himself that two years later he was enabled to put aside all doubts and perplexities on the subject and come out unreservedly for baptism through a profession of faith, His stand on this subject and his baptism by Elder Peirce, of Rhode Island, soon led to his exclusion from the church, although he did not consider himself a Baptist, nor did he desire to connect himself with that denomination. He continued his labors as an evangelist until 1756, when, with six baptized believers, a Baptist church was formed in Middleborough, and Mr. Backus was ordained its pastor.
 - E. In 1765 he was elected a trustee of Brown University, which position he held for thirty-four years.
 - F. At this time the Baptists were subject to much oppression and persecution by the civil powers of Massachusetts. They were taxed for the maintenance of the state churches, and upon refusal of payment of rates their lands and goods were distressed, and themselves put in prison. In 1774, Mr. Backus was chosen agent of the Baptist churches of Massachusetts, and to his faithful and untiring labors we owe much of our present civil liberty. For ten years he labored and struggled and wrote for exemption from the burdens laid upon the Baptists; but although not entirely

unsuccessful he did not live to see the fruit of his work, the entire severance of church and state in Massachusetts not taking place until 1833.

- G. In 1774, Mr. Backus was sent as the agent of the Baptist churches of the Warren Association to Philadelphia to endeavor to enlist in their behalf the Continental Congress, which met there at that time. He with agents from other Associations conferred with the Massachusetts delegation and others, and President Manning, of Brown University, read a memorial setting forth the grievances and oppressions under which the Baptists labored, and praying for relief therefrom. The result of this effort on the part of the New England Baptists to obtain religious freedom was hurtful rather than advantageous. After the adjournment of the Continental Congress most unjust and untruthful reports were circulated in regard to the proceedings of the conference. The Baptists were accused of presenting false charges of oppression in order to prevent the colonies uniting in defense of their liberties.
- H. In 1789, Mr. Backus visited Virginia and North Carolina, at the request of the brethren, for the purpose of strengthening and building up their churches. He spent six months in this work, and was the means of accomplishing much good. The distance he traveled while there — some 3000 miles — and the number of sermons preached — 126 — show the marvelous energy of the man, and the immense amount of work he must have accomplished during his ministerial life.
- I. The historical works of Mr. Backus are of great value on account of the deep research he made in the collection of his material, and his impartiality in presenting the facts. The Baptists owe much to him for the discovery and preservation of many interesting and important events concerning their history during colonial times.

II. David Benedict (1779-1874)

- A. David Benedict, the Baptist historian, was born in Norwalk, Conn., Oct. 10, 1779. His love for historical reading and investigation developed itself in early life.
- B. At twenty he made a profession of his faith in Christ. Religion did for him what it has done for so many thousands of others, — quickened his intellectual nature, and made him aspire after something elevating. He entered Brown University, where he graduated in 1806.
- C. Soon after he was ordained as pastor of the Baptist church in Pawtucket, R.I., where he remained twenty-five years.
- D. During all this time he had been busy in gathering, from every part of the country, the materials out of which to form a comprehensive history of the Baptist denomination, and had sent to press several volumes relating to the subject of his investigations. After retiring from his pastorate, he gave himself with great diligence to the work of completing the task he had undertaken. He felt it to be his special vocation to do this work, and he made everything bend to its accomplishment.
- E. Among his published writings are the following: “History of the Baptists,” 1813; “Abridgment of Robinson’s History of Baptism,” 1817; “Abridgment of History of the Baptists,” 1820; “History of all Religions,” 1824; “History of the Baptists Continued,” 1848; “Fifty Years among the Baptists,” 1860. He wrote also a history of the Donatists, which was completed just before he was ninety-five years of age, and which, since his death, has been printed.

- F. All through his life he was in the habit of writing much for the public press. He took a leading part in the founding of various religious organizations in his denomination, in promoting the cause of education, in the formation of new churches, etc. He carried the habits of hard work, which he had formed in the maturity of his years, down to the close of life.

III. Thomas Armitage (1819-1896)

- A. Thomas Armitage was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1819.
- B. He lost his father in infancy, and his mother at six years of age. His mother had great faith in Jesus, and prayed often and confidently for the salvation of her oldest son, Thomas. At her death she gave him her Bible, her chief treasure, which she received as a reward from her teacher in the Sunday-school. Her last prayer for him was that he might be converted and become a good minister of the Saviour.
- C. The religious influence of his godly mother never forsook him. While listening to a sermon on the text, "Is it well with thee?" his sins and danger filled him with grief and alarm, and before he left the sanctuary his heart was filled with the love of Christ.
- D. In his sixteenth year he preached his first sermon. His text was, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden., and I will give you rest." The truth was blessed to the conversion of three persons.
- E. Like many Englishmen he imbibed republican doctrines, and these brought him in 1838 to New York. He received deacon's orders from Bishop Waugh, and those of an elder from Bishop Morris. He filled many important appointments in the M.E. Church in New York, and when he united with the Baptists he was pastor of the Washington Street church in Albany, one of its most important churches, where the Lord had given him a precious revival and eighty converts.
- F. He was requested to preach in the Norfolk Street church, New York, in the following June, 1848. In 1853-54, 140 persons were baptized, and in 1857, 152, while other years had great blessings. The membership of the church is over 700.
- G. Dr. Armitage is a scholarly man, full of info information, with a powerful intellect; one of the greatest preachers in the United States; regarded by many as the foremost man in the American pulpit. We do not wonder that he is so frequently invited to deliver sermons at ordinations, dedications, installations, missionary anniversaries, and to college students.

IV. William Cathcart (1826-1908)

- A. William Cathcart was born in the County of Londonderry, in the north of Ireland, Nov. 8, 1826.
- B. He was ordained pastor of the Baptist church of Barnsley, near Sheffield, England, early in 1850.
- C. From political and anti-state church considerations he determined to come to the United States in 1853, and on the 18th of November in that year he arrived in New York. In the latter part of the following month he became pastor of the Third Baptist church of Groton, in Mystic River, Conn. In April, 1857, he took charge of the Second Baptist church of Philadelphia, Pa., where he has since labored.

- D. In 1876, on the retirement of Dr. Malcom from the presidency of the American Baptist Historical Society, Dr. Cathcart was elected president, and has been re-elected at each annual meeting since.
- V. Richard B. Cook (1838-1916)
- VI. John T. Christian (1854-1925)
- A. Dr. John T. Christian was professor of Christian History in the Baptist Bible Institute, New Orleans, an SBC school, when he wrote *A History of the Baptists*, published by Broadman Press and copyrighted by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1922.
- B. Dr. Christian was “pastor, professor and historian,” and “made seven trips to Europe for postgraduate work.” He served as chairman of a group who met to consider the founding of a theological seminary at New Orleans, and finally brought the matter before the SBC in 1917.
- C. He “traveled repeatedly in Europe and the Near East for study and the collection of books.” His library consisted of 15,000 volumes. He was “a member of the Society of Christian Archaeology of Greece, the Academy of History of France, the Academy of Science, Arts and Belles Lettres of the Mediterranean, and the American Society of History”
- D. But, even though Dr. Christian’s scholarly work was used by Southern Baptists for many years, when it went out of print they refused to reprint it. *Why?* Because those recognized in their seminaries as historians *no longer agreed with it*. The leadership of the denomination had done an about face, and was now proclaiming that Baptists were Protestants coming out of the 16th century Reformation.
- VII. Robert Baylor Semple (1769-1831)
- A. He was baptized in December, 1789, by the Theodoric Noel, and joined the Upper King and Queen church.
- B. In 1790, the Bruington Baptist Church was constituted, and Semple became its pastor. This church he served until his death, a period of forty years.
- C. He made frequent and extensive tours throughout lower Virginia, strengthening the churches and proving a great blessing to the people.
- D. He was deeply interested in the cause of missions, and was one of the first in Virginia to advocate their claims.
- E. Semple served as president of the Baptist Convention of Virginia in 1813, trustee of Columbian College in 1821, moderator of General Meeting of Correspondence, 1807, and first president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in 1823. In 1820, he was elected president of the Triennial Convention, serving until his death.
- F. The General Committee of the Baptists in Virginia in 1788 appointed six of its members “to collect materials for compiling and publishing a history of the Baptists in Virginia.”
- G. The unique contribution of Virginia Baptists to modern life is religious freedom. Baptists in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and elsewhere made singular pioneering efforts, but the major installment for religious liberty was paid in Virginia. The testing ground was there; there the decisive battle was fought and won. Patrick

Henry, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Leland and the Baptists played key roles in gaining a victory for mankind. It is fitting that Semple's history should continue to live, if for no other reason, to tell something of the price paid for this prize trophy.

H. Note on the 1810 Book:

1. Inscription by John Chiles
 - a. John Chiles was born in Caroline, Virginia.
 - b. John Married Judith Cobb and had nine children.
 - (1) Judith Cobb was born in Golansville, Caroline, Virginia on 1762.
 - (2) She died on September 21, 1829.
 - c. John Married Polly Hargraves.
 - d. He passed away on 1817 in Caroline, Virginia.
2. Child – Silas Mercer Chiles

VIII. George William Beale (1842-1921)

- A. He was born at Cabinford, Westmoreland County, Virginia, August 21st, the oldest son of Gen. R.L. T. Beale and Lucy Maria Brown.
- B. George William Beale was a student of Fleetwood Academy, Culpeper Military Institute, Piedmont Academy and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Greenville, S.C. On April 30, 1861, he joined Company C, Ninth Virginia Cavalry, and was wounded in the battles of Reams Station and Hatcher's Run.
- C. In the summer of 1861 he was baptized at Nomini Ferry, Westmoreland County, by Rev. G.H. Northam; in the same waters in 1873 he baptized his own father.
- D. October 18, 1868 he was ordained by the Machodoc Church, his presbytery being J.B. Jeter, Addison Hall, R.H. Bagby, W.H. Kirk and G.H. Northam. He served these churches: Machodoc and Pope's Creek (1868-74); Gay Street, Georgetown (1874-79); Beth Car and Black Walnut (1879-83); Buchanan and Enon (Hollins) (1883-94); Coan and Fairfield (1894-1905); Menokin and Nomini (1905-19). He was a trustee of Richmond College and the Virginia Baptist Orphanage; for two years he was moderator of the General Association of Virginia.
- E. During his pastorate at Hollins he prepared and published the "Revised Edition of Semple's History of Virginia Baptists." A "History of the Ninth Virginia Cavalry," left in manuscript by General Beale, was edited and published by his son. Dr. Beale also wrote and published "A Lieutenant in Lee's Army," his own story, simple and intensely interesting of four years' acquaintance with all the fortunes of war."
- F. He was the author of: *A Lieutenant of Cavalry in Lee's Army*

IX. James Barnett Taylor (1804-1871)

- A. At the age of thirteen young Taylor was baptized, and united with the First Baptist church of New York.
- B. At the age of sixteen he began to speak publicly for Christ, and in 1824 he was licensed to preach.
- C. Soon after he was appointed by the General Baptist Association of Virginia to labor as a missionary in the lower section of the Meherran district.
- D. He was ordained, May 2, 1826, at Sandy Creek. In 1826 he became pastor of the Second Baptist church of Richmond, Va., in which relation he continued sixteen

- years, during which the church was greatly enlarged and strengthened. Six hundred and sixty members were added to the church, three new churches were organized by members mainly from his congregation, and ten or twelve of those whom he baptized entered the ministry.
- E. He was a very efficient worker, also, in behalf of foreign missions. Dr. Taylor preached frequently in the surrounding country and in the adjacent cities. As the result of his labors in Baltimore, in connection with the Rev. John Kerr, the Calvert Street Baptist church was formed.
 - F. In 1838 he traveled West as agent of the Virginia Baptist General Association. In 1839 he was elected chaplain of the University of Virginia, where his labors among the students and in the community resulted in great good.
 - G. In 1840 he became pastor of the Third Baptist church (Grace church), Richmond, and through his labors their beautiful church edifice was built.
 - H. In 1844 he traveled South with the missionary Kincaid, stimulating the churches to greater zeal in the cause of missions, and collecting large sums of money for the Northern board.
 - I. He traveled constantly; preached three times on almost every Sunday; addressed letters of encouragement to missionaries, and of exhortation to churches and individuals; edited several journals, and accomplished an amount of good of which his immediate associates alone were cognizant.
 - J. He served for three years as Confederate post-chaplain.
 - K. He was for a short time editor of the *Religious Herald*; he originated the *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* and *Dome and Foreign Journal*. He wrote a "Life of Lot Cary," a "Life of Luther Rice," and two volumes of the *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*," containing more than a thousand pages, a most valuable work, the materials of which were collected only after vast toil and innumerable hindrances. He also began a "History of Virginia Baptists," for which he was specially fitted, but which he did not live to complete.
 - L. Virginia Baptist Ministers
- X. George Braxton Taylor (1860-1942)
 - A. He was the grandson of James Barnett Taylor.
 - B. He was the son of George Boardman Taylor, missionary to Italy.

Conclusion: Psalm 85:5- "*Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?*"