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PREFACE

Baptist History is a subject with which every member of the Baptist faith ought to be familiar. The contributions, which the Baptists made to the founding of our nation and to religious history, are extremely significant, yet they are often overlooked or ignored. Though there have been many volumes written about the Baptists, it has been many years since an in depth study of the Baptists in America has been presented. Sadly, during those intervening years, there have been some who have chosen to forsake the name, character, and principles of the Baptists. Consequently, there is an urgent need for our people to be stirred to remembrance.

America in Crimson Red accurately chronicles the rise of the Baptists and their struggle for religious liberty. It is evident that the author has spent much time in researching many credible documents and histories of a bygone era. He has collated the facts of history with unusual insight and candor. The result is an excellent treatise that is a must read for every Baptist. The reader can expect to gain a good working knowledge from the following narrative and will be rewarded with a greater appreciation for the labour, sacrifice, and courage of the many Baptists who stood firmly upon scriptural principles despite severe persecution.

The best way of preserving our history is to acquaint ourselves with the stories of the past. Then our history will become a personal heritage to be lived before a future generation. It is our belief that those who read this book will be strengthened in their faith.

Pastor Jeff Faggart
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FOREWORD

Samuel Butler opined, "God cannot alter the past, but historians can." That statement is surely proven in many American history textbooks that are set before the youth in America's public school systems in this twenty-first century. One cannot read so-called modern historical accounts of America without the realization that historians have distorted and obliterated our past that they might shape and control our future. Tragically, these "historians" have followed the three steps necessary to re-write history. They have put the "spin" on our history by omitting some records of vital truth, adding ingredients to make history politically correct, and altering the true accounts to further their own ends. The media and academia have merged in this all too successful revision of our history. Our once proud Constitutional Republic has been portrayed as a mere democracy. Our Bible-laced past has been brought into doubt, distorted and finally denied. Our honored heroes of the past have been re-evaluated without any historical evidence and made to appear as reckless, godless men of ill repute.

How pleased I have been to discover that James Beller has taken upon himself the task of researching and restating historical truth in his latest book, *America in Crimson Red*. As he has researched ancient archives, Pastor Beller has discovered the long-forgotten role played by Bible-believing Baptists in the early days of our republic. This volume will cause every American reader to hold his or her head high and honor our revered past. Believing that this tome deserves a large audience, I am pleased to write this recommendation. Those who read this book will discover long-forgotten details of our history, and hopefully, many youth in America will as a result of this volume, be enabled to serve God with unfeigned fervency.

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INTRODUCTION

No historian is able to give facts alone. I say the historian cannot hide his heart, for if he does he becomes the reason the reader is disinterested. I cannot divorce myself from the fervor of our historic testimony. I pray you will feel the same.

I knew what *I* wanted from the experience of our five years of research. I wanted the testimony of our forefathers to transform my own life. I wanted to thirst for God like them, to preach with fervency like them, and for God to use me in like fashion. I also wanted to search for our distinctives and discover how our people maintained them through the years.

The knowledge of our heritage has changed our church. We have dedicated ourselves in our own small way to birthing churches. I have more desire to continue to preach to the lost and birth new works than at any time in my entire ministry. So my purpose was to fire my own soul and help my church gain a greater vision for the lost. From that, emerged the absolute *necessity* of preserving the testimony and distinctives of our forgotten forefathers.

America is a Baptist nation. Her principles are altogether Baptist and her heritage is imbued with Baptist ideals, courage and blood. She is governed by Baptist polity, ingrained with the higher plane of soul-liberty and under girded by a hidden, yet profound Baptist history.

Our reader must not dismiss this seemingly outlandish premise. Historians have been rewriting for the last 50 years and honest and forthright commentators have slipped on plain issues while sitting on the toadstools of the obvious.

To recognize that historic America is indeed Christian is somewhat like admitting that fire is hot. Those who argue against that premise are guilty of dishonesty and do not deserve a hearing. Verily, a junior high student with access to a public library can come to the realization of America's Christian heritage. However, the outrageous premise of

America being a *Baptist* nation is harder to accept; yet one of the aims of this book will be to enlighten you on this truth and stir up your mind.

The *baptized believers* have always been the embarrassing remnant of those who are called *Christian*. The so-called *re-baptizers* (Anabaptist a name of scorn) go back to the New Testament and Acts 19:2-5.

A baptism that was not upon a profession of faith in Christ was *no baptism* and our Anabaptist forefathers were not *re-baptizers*. They were *baptized believers*. They have been known by various derisive names through the years, and in most cases their tormentors and accusers named them.

The first case of this in ancient history was the Donatists. They suffered persecution by Augustine and the Catholics in the middle of the 4th century. They practiced baptism for believers and demanded that the bishop who baptized should also be a believer.

Baptist faith and theology has historical roots not in the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, but in the independent congregations of the first three centuries following the resurrection of Christ. Those separate churches birthed from Asia minor and spread to Syria where the Paulicians flourished; Southern France, from whence the Albigenses sprang; the Alpine regions and their valleys, where the blood of the Waldenses flowed; and into the British Islands, where the evangelist Patrick baptized over 100,000 converts **by immersion**. But Europe and Asia from A. D. 50 to 1600 is not the subject of this volume.

Our narrative focuses on America between 1620 and 1905. What will be presented to you is the astounding story of how a band of disfranchised and banished believers went from the sewer of New England to become the most influential voice in the foundation of the greatest republic in the history of mankind.

I know of no historian, secular or Christian, who seems willing to discuss the enemy of souls and our *adversary*, the devil. Ignoring his devices is unwise. His device of diversion is one of his greatest weapons. When Baptist origins in America are discussed, we are usually pointed to Roger Williams. Williams was indeed a great man but as we shall discover, he was not our founder. We have been diverted from our truly great American pioneer pastor, Dr. John Clarke. This diversion has

continued throughout American history. This is just one error in history which this narrative seeks to uncover and correct.

Every American should be aware of the testimony of Isaac Backus, Shubal Stearns, Samuel Harris, James Ireland, Daniel Marshall, John Gano, Thomas Baldwin and Isaac McCoy. Perhaps you have read of Silas Mercer, James Furman or John Leland. But what of Obadiah Holmes, who was beaten on the streets of Boston for visiting and holding an unauthorized church service; or John Weatherford, whose wrists and hands were lacerated while he preached from a Virginia jail; or John Waller, who was incarcerated several times for preaching without a license; or James Ireland, whose family was poisoned in retribution for his pointed preaching?

What a pity this generation has forgotten about the real history of America, and has neglected even the resting-places of the most influential of early American patriots. Blame must be placed upon the shoulders of the last generation of historians, educators and preachers who failed to raise memorials to our departed servants of Christ.



The recording of progress of the Baptists in American history began with the preservation of *the Diary of John Comer*, circa. 1730. Comer began to gather materials for a comprehensive history of all of the colonies. However, God called John Comer home early in his life. His materials landed in the hands of John Callender, his successor at the Baptist Church at Newport, Rhode Island.

Callender delivered as a discourse, and printed the first written history of the Baptists of America in 1734. His focus was primarily on Rhode Island.

Arguably, the greatest American Baptist historian was the incomparable Isaac Backus. Backus obtained the papers of Comer and Callender. He diligently gathered the testimonies of our suffering ancestors. Backus published his *Church History of New England* in 1804 and gave the triumphant details of the Baptist struggle in Puritan New England. Our nation is eternally indebted to Elder Backus for gathering

the tremendous archive known collectively as *the Backus Papers*. Much of these papers have yet to be examined by sympathetic eyes.

David Benedict was the next widely read historian and was one of the first to tie the American *baptized believers* to their European forefathers. His *History of the Baptist Denomination* was published in 1813 and was a catalyst for the advancement of church planting and missions in this country.

The diligent William Cathcart gave us the fabulous *Baptist Encyclopedia*. It contains hundreds of short biographies and historical narratives so valuable in understanding our heritage. The *Encyclopedia* was published in 1883.

In 1887, Thomas Armitage gave a thorough view of the Baptists in his *History of the Baptists, traced by their Vital Principles and Practices* and provided a historic bridge into the 20th century. His work complimented Cathcart.

The last widely read Baptist historian in America was Henry Vedder. Vedder was heavily influenced by the theories of Dr. William Whitsitt of the late 19th century. Vedder incomprehensibly could not find *immersion* as a sure point of distinction within the ranks of the *baptized believers*. We shall discover the source of his error.

The most passionate of all Baptist historians in America was Robert B. Semple. Writing in 1810, his view of the great grace and rapid spread of the Separate Baptists stirred a multitude of hearts in his definitive, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists of Virginia*. His account of the powerful revival that transformed the south still burns. It is with the spirit and passion of Semple that hopefully, *America in Crimson Red* is penned. For what good is history if after you have been told the truth, it motivates you to do nothing.

For this narrative, I have used the standard sources listed above. I have also given some attention to the Brown University scholar, William McLoughlin, whose work on the Backus Papers was helpful. McLoughlin attempted to make observations on the lives of early American Baptists through 20th century sociological lenses, something I believe to be a mistake. But we are grateful for his sorting of many facts contained in the Backus Papers.

On several trips to New England and the eastern seaboard I have attempted to find and record those things from our heritage which have been ignored, glossed over or misrepresented. The journeys included digging in archives, old periodicals and wherever our gracious God led me. I have found that if an old warrior for God was considered controversial, it was usually because he was right. If some flaming evangel was considered eccentric, it usually meant he was consecrated beyond what the critics would consider normal.

I approached the records assuming that those who recorded our heritage were sincerely moved by the spectacle they observed. I do not explain away what was recorded. The actions of God's servants continually inspire all of us to strive for that which He has ordained us to do. When I read about the Apostle Paul and the mighty wonderful works that God wrought through him, I believe it, and long and pray for God to use me also. Don't you? And if you do not, why bother to read the Bible or narratives such as this unless your aim is to criticize, pick, and explain away the power of God. May Almighty God confound you in your purposes!

Let us not be doomed to repeat the folly of ignorance of our heritage and theology of which the Baptists of 1800-1850 were guilty. Let us not repeat the error of our early 20th century brethren who nearly buried our heritage. Can our churches and our colleges survive without their true roots? History has proven they cannot. Moreover, let us not be satisfied to have a religion of mediocrity with no burden, no tears, no passion, and no true holiness.

I contend there were 12 outstanding men in the forming of our nation. On this list of 12, only four were politicians. Eight were preachers. Six of the eight preachers were Baptist preachers. They were in the correct order of their influence Shubal Stearns, Samuel Harriss, George Whitefield, John Clarke, Roger Williams, Jonathan Edwards, George Washington, Isaac Backus, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Leland, and Patrick Henry.

Lest this assertion astound some, let me direct the critic to the pages of this narrative where concrete proof will be given, although to some it will seem only as solid as last winter's snow. The politicians on the list

you already know. The preachers you really ought to meet. We will begin in a boat on the Connecticut River.

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