

Matt 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

(Note: there is no higher authority than the local church.)

I. EARLY BAPTIST MISSIONARY HISTORY

A. Early American Baptist History¹

1. On May 18, 1814 a “general meeting of delegates from missionary societies and other religious bodies of the ‘Baptist persuasion’ in various parts of the United States” met in Philadelphia to “organize a plan for eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the ‘whole denomination’ in one sacred effort for sending the glad tidings of salvation to the heathen . . .”.
2. The “environment from which the above quote is taken is most telling
 - a. It was published in 1850, only five years after the Southern Baptist Convention was formed over the issue of slavery
 - b. The second set of quotes (beginning with ‘organize a plan ...’) are from an original document published in 1814.
 - c. It is difficult to tell exactly who was represented in this group of men who called themselves the “whole denomination” in 1814.
 - (1) They might be the less conservative group
 - (2) But, they probably would have chosen language that fits their day
 - (3) They did represent both North and South but the dichotomy was not as strong in 1813 as it would become in the mid 1800’s.
3. The point of the quote is:
 - a. They were comfortable calling themselves a ‘denomination’
 - b. They planned to represent Baptists in the U. S. with this ‘convention’

B. Events leading up to the formation of the missionary ‘convention’

1. Judson and Rice sailed for Burma on February 19, 1812 via Calcutta
2. Another missionary party departed the 24th of the same month
3. “[Judson] adopted the belief that none but professed believers in Jesus Christ are intended to be subjects of baptism, and that immersion alone is the primitive mode in which the rite was administered ²” while aboard ship on the way to Calcutta. He was baptized (again) by Rev. Mr. Ward of the English Baptist Mission upon arrival in Serampore, India.
4. This meant that they would not any longer be appropriate for support as missionaries under the “Board” that had sent them.
5. In 1813, before the Judson’s arrived in Burma, Mr. Rice was sent back to the U. S. to “awaken the interest of Baptists” in the U. S. for the propagation of the gospel.
6. Ultimately, Rice was able to generate enough support to create the “Triennial Convention” to support Baptist missionary efforts
 - a. The beginnings of this convention proceed Mr. Rice’s arrival
 - b. It was a cooperation of many other missionary societies
7. The sudden conversion of Judson and Rice to Baptist doctrines acted as a catalyst which produced much cooperation among Baptist churches in missionary efforts

¹ William Gammell, A.M., *History of American Baptist Missions*, Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, Boston, MA, 1850, pp. 17-18.

² *Ibid*, p. 6.

8. The resulting convention was known as “The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions.”

II. SOUTHERN BAPTIST BEGINNINGS (by Robert A. Baker) ³

- A. The Southern Baptist Convention was originally formed over the issue of slavery
 1. “In 1844, Georgia Baptists asked the Home Mission Society to appoint a slaveholder to be a missionary in Georgia. After much discussion, the appointment was declined. A few months later, the Alabama Baptist Convention asked the Foreign Mission Society if they would appoint a slaveholder as a missionary. When the society said “no”, Virginia Baptists called for Baptists of the South to meet at Augusta, Georgia, in early May, 1845, for the purpose of consulting ‘on the best means of promoting the Foreign Mission cause, and other interests of the Baptist denomination in the South.’”
 2. “Thus, on May 8, 1845, about 293 Baptist leaders of the South gathered at the First Baptist Church, Augusta, Georgia, representing over 365,000 Baptists. They concluded, with expressions of regret from their own leaders and from distinguished northern Baptist leaders, that more could be accomplished in Christian work by the organization in the South of a separate Baptist body for missionary work. The Methodists in the South had already separated over the issue of slavery, and southern Presbyterians would do so later.”
 3. “On May 10, 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention was provisionally organized under a new constitution, which was ratified the following year in Richmond, Virginia. In their address to the public, Convention president William B. Johnson and other Southern Baptist leaders pointed out that Baptists North and South were still brethren; that separation involved only the home and foreign mission societies and did not include the third national society for tract publication; and that this new organization would permit them to have a body that would be willing to appoint Southerners to home and foreign mission fields.”
 4. “At the 1845 meeting, Southern Baptists were faced not only with the question of whether to organize a separate body but also with the problem of what kind. Baptists, like other denominations which give final authority to the local churches, have had difficulty in trying to form an effective general body without threatening the local authority. This was the reason that the association-type plan had been viewed with suspicion by some churches, resulting in the adoption of the society plan for missionary and other Christian work.”
 5. “In safeguarding the authority of the churches, however, the society plan made it difficult to secure unity and effectiveness in denominational work. Southern Baptists, at their meeting in 1845, deliberately rejected the method of having a separate society for each kind of Christian service. They chose instead to follow the more centralized pattern of the older associational plan to form only one general convention closely related to the churches for all Christian ministries.”
- B. Therefore, events which began with Judson and Rice culminated in the formation of two prominent groups of Baptists – one in the North and another in the South.
 1. The Northern group remained less closely connected and then drifted towards liberalism in the early 1900's
 2. The Southern group “chose to follow the more centralized pattern” and became more centralized and heavy handed towards local churches
- C. It should be remembered that there was also a philosophical difference between Northern and

³ <http://www.baptisthistory.org/facts.htm>

Southern Baptists regarding the presence of a central denominational organization. The South favored such an organization and the North opposed it.

III. EARLY INFLUENCES ON THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

- A. The Civil war disrupted the efforts of the Southern Baptists as their territory was ravaged by the war and left with few resources.
 - 1. In 1846, the Foreign Mission board supported two missionaries for a total of \$11,735
 - 2. By 1891, 91 missionaries were supported for over two million dollars.
- B. *Landmarkism* became popular in the 1850's as a result of the writings of J. R. Graves.
 - 1. He had migrated to the South from Vermont and brought "the typical New England Baptist fear of conventions."
 - 2. He wrote much, including a book in 1880 introduced for "dissemination throughout the Denomination committed to every Baptist . . ."
 - 3. The name "Landmarkism" came from Mr. Graves who gave the title "An Old Landmark Reset" to a tract written at his request by J. M. Pendleton (of KY) in 1854. The tract was to address the question of whether or not Baptists should recognize Pedobaptists (baby baptizers) as ministers.
 - 4. J. R. Graves stated the goals of the Landmarkists as three.
 - a. Bible over tradition
 - b. Strict observation of local church ordinances
 - c. Omission of all those not qualified to participate in the ordinances
 - 5. The emphasis of Mr. Graves' position was to denounce the universal church theory and particularly the interdenominational tendencies of his day.
- C. Until the 1880's the Southern Baptists had continued to utilize Northern Baptist publications. In 1891 the Southern Baptist Sunday School board was formed for the purpose of publishing materials, books, and supplies for the Southern Baptists.

IV. THE GENERAL HISTORY OF THE SBC

- A. In 1845 there were just over 350,000 members in the SBC of whom 130,000 were Negroes.
- B. Following the creation of the SBC in 1845, its churches and states were ravaged by the Civil War
- C. After the war, the SBC became very "healthy" and prospered under its centralized government and doctrinal authority. SBC Churches were theologically solid with the exception of polity. Their doctrinal position was very similar to the Northern Baptists (as is seen by the fact that they shared publishing efforts).
 - 1. There was, however, an anti-missionary movement after the war that reduced the ranks
 - 2. The Negro Baptists withdrew to form their own convention
- D. By 1890 there were 1,235,000 members in the SBC, all of whom were white.
- E. In 1954 there were over 8 million members which outnumbered the Northern Baptists 5 to 1.
- F. The SBC began its own colleges; there were 7 theological seminaries formed with over 5,000 students in the mid 1900's. There were also 30 colleges and 22 junior colleges, 29 hospitals and 24 orphanages.
- G. In the early 1950's the SBC circulated more than 58 million items
- H. The SBC has held an annual conference since 1869. Issues voted on include doctrinal and practical matters confronting the SBC.
- I. In the 1960's, the SBC rapidly drifted away from its former theological moorings. Today it is almost impossible to find an SBC church that holds a solid position on the King James Bible and presents a clear picture of the gospel.

V. THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF THE SBC

- A. In 1990, Nancy Ammerman published "Baptist Battles." She sent questionnaires to over 1,000 SBC pastors and laymen, and did extensive field work at SBC conventions, etc. Her book disclosed many of the following facts.
- B. Cave-in to evolution
 - 1. In 1961 Ralph Elliot wrote a book which denied the literal interpretation of Genesis. He was removed from his position as a professor in an SBC school, but the reason was not heresy, but rather insubordination for his refusal to withdraw the book after the school ordered him to do so. (p. 64).
 - 2. In 1970 G. Henton Davies adopted a nonliteral reading of Genesis in a commentary he wrote for publication by Broadman Press. The SBC ordered the volume replaced, but the Sunday School board proceeded to sell the original commentary through a British publisher. (p. 68).
- C. Compromise with heresy
 - 1. In 1985 15% of SBC pastors did not agree that "the scriptures are the inerrant Word of God, accurate in every detail" (p. 74).
 - 2. In 1985 only 38% of SBC pastors disagreed with the statement that "The Genesis creation stories are there more to tell us about God's involvement than to give us a precise how and when."
 - 3. In 1985 only 44% insisted on a literal interpretation of Genesis. Less than 40% insisted that Genesis is a literal account.
 - 4. In 1985 37% of SBC pastors did not agree with the statement that "God recorded in the Bible everything He wants us to know"
 - 5. In 1985 41% of SBC pastors did not agree that "The Bible clearly teaches a pre-millennial view of history and the future." (p. 75)
- D. Composition of mediocrity
 - 1. 10% of SBC members at the 1985 conference were "Self-Identified moderate (liberal)"
 - 2. 9% Moderate/Conservative
 - 3. 43% Conservative (middle of the road)
 - 4. 23% Conservative/Fundamentalist
 - 5. 14% Fundamentalist (but don't like to be called that) (p. 77)
- E. Confusion of translations (as of mid 1980's)
 - 1. 20% of the most fundamental SBC'ers dislike the KJV
 - 2. 84% of the moderate SBC'ers dislike the KJV
 - 3. Many of those who claim to believe inerrancy do not use the King James Bible.
- F. By 1988 over 500 women had been ordained by local SBC churches (p. 89)
 - 1. About 12 were serving as senior pastors.
 - 2. The first was Addie Davis of Durham, NC in on August 9, 1964.
 - 3. In 1983 Women were added to the faculties of the theology schools at Southern and Southeastern (p. 92).
 - 4. 48% of SBC pastors in the 1980's did not think ordination of women is a major issue in the SBC. (p. 94)
 - 5. 26% of 944 respondents thought women could be ordained as pastors.
 - 6. 11% of 310 said their SBC church ordains women
 - 7. 37% of 944 said women could be ordained as deacons
 - 8. 55% of 939 said schools and agencies that support women's ordination should not be censured
- G. Other interesting opinions found in the 1980's at a conference
 - 1. 42% of 966 conference attendees in the 1980's thought the rights of Gays should be

- protected
- 2. 9% don't agree Christians should avoid drinking alcoholic beverage
- 3. 33% don't agree Christians should avoid smoking
- 4. 54% don't agree Christians should avoid dancing
- 5. 54% don't agree Christians should avoid non G-rated movies
- 6. 64% don't agree Christians should avoid playing cards
- H. Doctrinal shift – in 1963 the SBC altered its doctrinal statement to redefine the church from local to universal and to soften its position against ecumenism.

VI. DEMOGRAPHICS

- A. There were about 15 million SBC members in the U. S. in 2000.
- B. In 1990, the five states with the most SBC members per capita were Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The average was around 30% of the population.
- C. Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina had the largest number of SBC members with over a million each. (Texas had over 3 million)
- D. The percentage of U. S. Citizens who claim the SBC in a Gallup Poll is dwindling to six percent in 2001 from ten percent in 1993
 - 1. 2001 6%, 2000 8%, 1999 9% , 1998 8%, 1997 8% , 1996 8% , 1995 10%, 1994 10% 1993 10%

VII. CONCLUSION

- A. The SBC is a byproduct of the split of the Northern and Southern churches which had cooperated to send out foreign missionaries
 - 1. Split over slavery
 - 2. Split over central control
- B. In the early 1900's the SBC was doctrinally effective and even spurred movements such as Landmarkism. The doctrine of SBC churches during this period was not perfect but was well above average. The reason for this was that the SBC had a strong doctrinal statement and some level of autonomy in its churches.
- C. The mid 1900's and the 1960's in particular saw the SBC drift into doctrinal liberalism and a gross reduction of its standards.
- D. The SBC eventually gave in to mainstream pressure and now submits to modern versions of the Bible, ordaining women as pastors, doctrinal heresy and liberalism.
- E. Personal observations
 - 1. We have heard numerous people who call themselves members of SBC churches who trust in their baptism for salvation, and noticed a disproportionately high number of Mormons in Utah who were former SBC members.
 - 2. One SBC church member who had been in the SBC church his whole life in Northern New Mexico made the comment that he did not know what was wrong with the Mormons as they are “Christians too.”