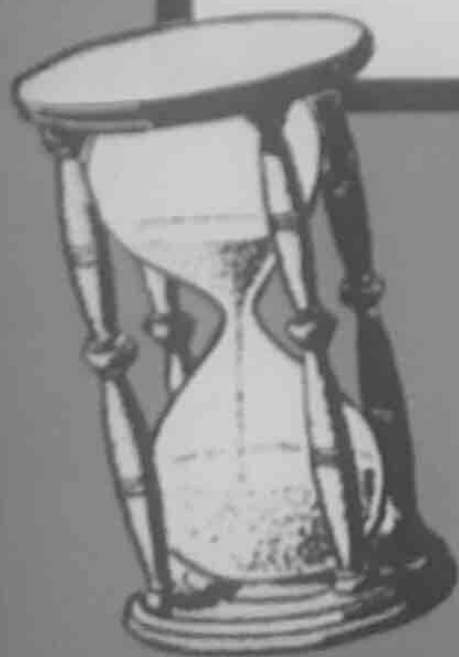


A
HISTORY
of the
BAPTISTS



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A HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS (Volume 1)

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CHAPTER I.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES

The Great Commission—A Definition of a Church—A Voluntary Association—A Church Not National or General—The Officers of a Church—The Ordinances—The Proper Subjects of Baptism—The Form of Baptism—The Lord's Supper—The Ordinances as Symbols—The Churches Missionary Bodies—The Continued Existence of the Churches.

AFTER our Lord had finished his work on earth, and before he had ascended into glory, he gave to his disciples the following commission: "All authority is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28: 18-20). Under the terms of this commission Jesus gave to his churches the authority to evangelize the world.

A New Testament Church is a company of baptized believers voluntarily associated together for the maintenance of the ordinances and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The distinctive characteristics of this church are clearly marked in the New Testament.

Such a church was a voluntary association and was independent of all other churches. It might be, and probably was, affiliated with other churches in brotherly relations; but it remained independent of all outward control, and was responsible to Christ alone, who was the supreme lawgiver and the source of all authority. Originally the teachers and the people conjointly administered the affairs of the church.

In the New Testament sense of the church there can be no such an organization as a National or General Church, covering a large district of country, composed of a number of local organizations. The church, in the Scriptural sense, is always an independent, local organization. Sister churches were "united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independence and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution" (Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, I. 554. Boston, 1854). Gibbon, always artistic in the use of material, continues: "Such was the mild and equal constitution by which the Christians were governed for more than a hundred years after the death of the apostles. Every society formed within itself a separate and independent republic; and although the most distant of these little states maintained a mutual, as well as friendly, intercourse of letters and deputations, the Christian world was not yet connected by any supreme or legislative assembly" (Ibid, 558).

The officers of the church were first, pastors, indifferently called elders or bishops, and, secondly, deacons. These were the honorable servants of a free people. The pastors possessed no authority above their brethren, save that by service they purchased to themselves a good degree of glory.

The more recent Episcopal writers, such as Jacob and Hatch, do not derive their system from the ancient Scriptural form of government, but always acknowledge the primitive congregational form of government, and declare that episcopacy is a later development. In the New Testament, elder and bishop are different names to describe the same office. Dr. Lightfoot, the Bishop of Durham, in a very exhaustive discussion of the subject, says: