

PORTRAITS OF COURAGE



STORIES OF
BAPTIST HEROES



Julie Whidden Long



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Baptist History and Heritage Society
Atlanta, Georgia

www.thebhhs.org



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Timeline of Events	6
Introduction: What Makes a Baptist Hero?	8
John Smyth: Baptist Trailblazer	13
John Clarke: Baptist Freedom Fighter	19
Ann Hasseltine Judson: Baptist Missionary Pioneer	25
Jesse Mercer: Baptist Denominational Leader	33
Lottie Moon: Baptist Teacher	41
William Knibb: Baptist Liberator	49
Louise (Lulu) Fleming: Baptist Missionary Doctor	57
Walter Rauschenbusch: Baptist Prophet	63
Martin Luther King, Jr.: Baptist Dreamer	71
Addie Davis: Baptist Pastor	79
Jimmy Carter: Baptist Peacemaker	87
Leena Lavanya: "Baptist Mother Teresa"	95
Theo Angelov: Persecuted Baptist	103
Olu Menjay: Baptist Rebuilder	111
Conclusion	119

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



1570 **John Smyth** is born in England.

1607 Smyth and followers move to Holland fleeing religious persecution.

1609 The first Baptist church is founded in Holland by John Smyth and followers. **John Clarke** is born in England.



1638 John Clarke goes to Providence.

1638 John Clarke founds Newport, later home of the second Baptist church in the colonies.

1651 John Clarke and Obadiah Holmes are jailed for their Baptist ideas.

1663 Charter for religious liberty is granted for colony of Rhode Island, thanks to John Clarke.



1769 **Jesse Mercer** is born in North Carolina; he soon moves to Georgia.

1784 Georgia Baptist Association is founded, with Jesse Mercer becoming a leader.



1803 **William Knibb** is born in England.

1806 **Ann Judson** commits her life to Jesus.

1812 Ann and Adoniram Judson leave for India to become missionaries.



1814 **The Triennial Convention** is formed to support foreign mission work.

1833 **Mercer Institute** (later becomes Mercer University) is founded. The English Parliament enacts law to free slaves in Jamaica.



1840 **Lottie Moon** is born.

1845 William Knibb dies.

1861 **Walter Rauschenbusch** is born.

1861 **Louise Fleming** is born.



1865 Slaves are freed in America.



1886 Louise Fleming is appointed as a missionary to Africa.
Walter Rauschenbusch becomes pastor in "Hell's Kitchen" area of New York City.

1888 The annual Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions begins.

1895 Louise Fleming earns medical degree and returns to Africa.

1899 Louise Fleming dies.

1912 Lottie Moon dies aboard ship in China.

1918 Walter Rauschenbusch dies.



1924 **Jimmy Carter** is born.

1929 **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, is born.

1944 **Addie Davis** begins preaching.



1945 World War II ends, leading to rise of Communist government in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe.

1955 The Montgomery Bus Boycott gets Martin Luther King, Jr., involved in Civil Rights Movement.



1956 **Theo Angelov's** father is freed from prison.

1964 Addie Davis is ordained to the gospel ministry.
Martin Luther King, Jr., is awarded Nobel Peace Prize.



1968 Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated.

1971 Addie Davis is voted Vermont's "Pastor of the Year."

1976 Jimmy Carter is elected President of the United States.

1989 Civil War begins in Liberia.

1990 Theo Angelov becomes pastor of Sofia Baptist Church.

1991 The Communist government of Bulgaria falls from power.



1998 Theo Angelov begins service as General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation of the Baptist World Alliance.

2002 Jimmy Carter is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work for human rights.



2005 Addie Davis dies. **Olu Menjay** returns to Liberia.

2006 **Leena Lavanya** continues work with the poor of India.



INTRODUCTION
**WHAT
MAKES A
BAPTIST
HERO?**



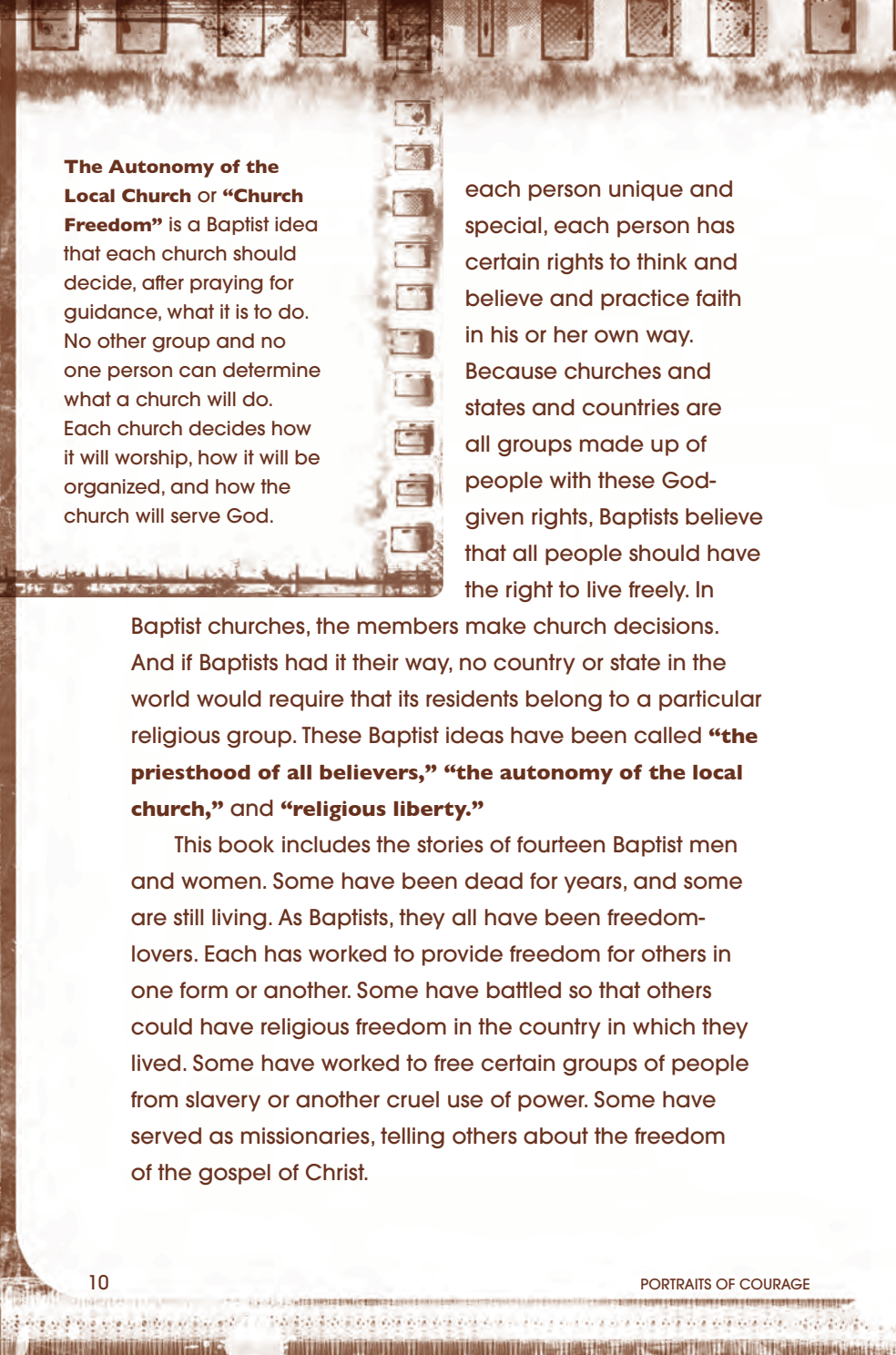
Baptists have been around for four hundred years. We began in Holland and England and traveled across the Atlantic Ocean to America. Baptists have since spread all over the world.

Baptists are a mixed group of people. Some are light-skinned Baptists, and some are dark-skinned Baptists. Some speak English, while others speak Spanish or French or Japanese or Korean or one of many African languages. Some Baptists worship with only a few others in someone's home, and some worship with thousands of other people in large churches. Some listen to a pipe organ as they sing hymns that are hundreds of years old, and some beat drums and dance and chant about the love of their God. Baptists are different all over the world. So what holds all these diverse Baptists together?

Baptists are Baptists because they believe in freedom. Baptists believe that every person is free to worship, pray, read the scriptures, and believe in the way that God leads him or her. Baptists believe that our lives are accountable to God.

Because God created

The Priesthood of All Believers is the idea that all people, not only priests or ministers, have direct access to God. Each believer can pray directly to God and, through prayer and Bible study, decide what he or she believes and how to act. The priesthood of all believers means that every believer is both free to serve God and responsible for serving God!



The Autonomy of the Local Church or “Church Freedom” is a Baptist idea that each church should decide, after praying for guidance, what it is to do. No other group and no one person can determine what a church will do. Each church decides how it will worship, how it will be organized, and how the church will serve God.

each person unique and special, each person has certain rights to think and believe and practice faith in his or her own way. Because churches and states and countries are all groups made up of people with these God-given rights, Baptists believe that all people should have the right to live freely. In

Baptist churches, the members make church decisions. And if Baptists had it their way, no country or state in the world would require that its residents belong to a particular religious group. These Baptist ideas have been called **“the priesthood of all believers,” “the autonomy of the local church,”** and **“religious liberty.”**

This book includes the stories of fourteen Baptist men and women. Some have been dead for years, and some are still living. As Baptists, they all have been freedom-lovers. Each has worked to provide freedom for others in one form or another. Some have battled so that others could have religious freedom in the country in which they lived. Some have worked to free certain groups of people from slavery or another cruel use of power. Some have served as missionaries, telling others about the freedom of the gospel of Christ.



Olu Menjay at Rick's Institute

Each of these persons is Baptist. But what makes them Baptist heroes? Let a story from one of our present heroes, Olu Menjay, paint a picture.

Olu Menjay is currently the principal of Ricks Institute School in Liberia, Africa. After coming to the United States for his education in 1991, Olu returned to Liberia to help rebuild his nation after it was destroyed by a civil war. Olu explains why his ministry and leadership in Liberia have been so important. He says,

In Liberia, when people have the opportunity to study in the United States or other Western countries, they typically go back to Liberia to serve the government, not schools like Ricks. They serve the government and become a "big shot" But people see me at Ricks with my students painting, or with volunteers out working in the community. That is a new portrait in Liberia, because to be a "big shot" you cannot volunteer. You just sit in your big car and drive around and have people drive you around. Teaching students to volunteer and serve is one of our big things at Ricks, which I am very proud of.

Religious Liberty or Religious Freedom is the belief that every person has the right to worship God as the person pleases or the choice not to worship God at all. Baptists believe that religious liberty is a right given by God because God created people with the freedom to make their own choices.



Olu is painting a new portrait in Liberia. Instead of looking for success or fame or money, he has listened to God's calling to do a new good work in achieving freedom in Liberia.

Olu and these other Baptist heroes have painted new portraits in their parts of the world. They have encouraged new ideas. They have worked for change in their societies. They have stood up against the crowd when they believed strongly about a cause. They are heroes because they have listened to God's calling to make a difference in their own parts of the world.

As you read these stories, I hope that you will be challenged to become a Baptist hero, finding a way in your own part of the world to make a difference and to work for freedom!

JOHN SMYTH BAPTIST TRAILBLAZER



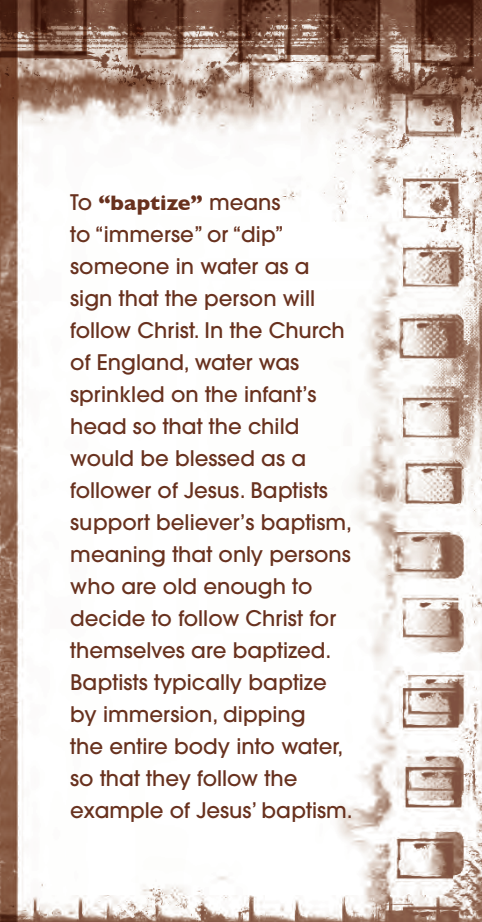
Who: John Smyth

Where: England and Holland

When: c. 1570-1612

What he did: Led a group of people who formed the first Baptist church in the world

Most historians consider John Smyth to be the first Baptist. He was a Baptist trailblazer, forging a new way, but John's own beginnings are a mystery. He was born around 1570 in England. No one knows the date or place of his birth or anything about his family. In fact, not much is known of John at all, until he attended Christ's College at Cambridge in 1586. At Cambridge, he studied to become a priest in the Church of England. While he was intelligent and able, his teachers and classmates thought he had "an unsettled head," always thinking about new ideas and never settling on what he believed.



To “**baptize**” means to “immerse” or “dip” someone in water as a sign that the person will follow Christ. In the Church of England, water was sprinkled on the infant’s head so that the child would be blessed as a follower of Jesus. Baptists support believer’s baptism, meaning that only persons who are old enough to decide to follow Christ for themselves are baptized. Baptists typically baptize by immersion, dipping the entire body into water, so that they follow the example of Jesus’ baptism.

At that time, the Church of England was the official church for the country. The country required all citizens to be members of the Church of England. They had their babies **baptized** in the church, attended the church worship services, gave their money to the Church of England, and accepted the Church’s beliefs. Those people who refused to do so were punished by fines, whippings, and jail time.

As John asked questions about God, the Bible, and the church, he began

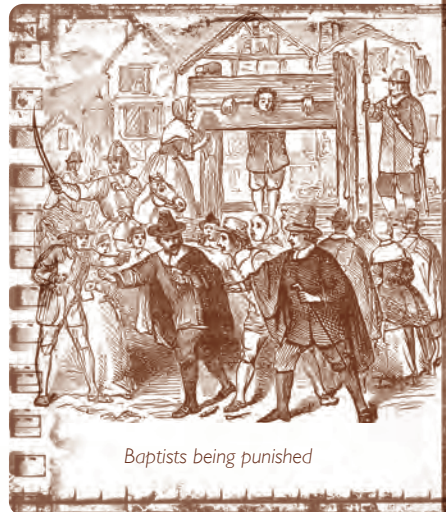
to believe that the Church of England was not the “true church.” He became a Separatist, part of a group that decided to “separate” from the Church of England. John spoke out against the church’s teachings and practices so loudly and critically that he was punished by spending time in an English prison.

In 1600, a church in the city of Lincoln asked John to be their pastor. He got himself in trouble by preaching sermons that criticized some of the town’s leading citizens.

The people of the church wanted to reform the Church of England. They did not want to separate from the church completely, as John did. They rejected John's beliefs, and he was asked to leave the church. Little is known about his life for the next three years.

In 1606, John founded a church that accepted his beliefs more readily. He became pastor of a church in Gainsborough. He also served the town as a doctor. In Gainsborough, John taught that only the members of the congregation should give money to support their church. No money was accepted from nonmembers, which was a change from how the Church of England operated!

By 1607, John's congregation was growing, and they were afraid of being discovered and persecuted by the Church of England. They did not want to give up their beliefs, and they did not want to be punished for their practices. They left England and fled to Amsterdam, Holland, a safe place for people who did not agree with the Church of England. John was a leader of the group, along with a man named Thomas Helwys, who funded the trip. The group settled in Holland



Baptists being punished



and began to worship and study the Bible together.

As John studied the New Testament, his ideas continued to grow and change. He prepared a writing in 1609 that expressed his new views. *The Character of the Beast, or the False Constitution of the Church* described some views that later became known as Baptist ideas.

The first of John's ideas concerned baptism. He believed that infants should not be baptized. Why? Because he thought that the scriptures taught that that only those who could make a choice to be believers for themselves should be baptized. No infants were baptized in the New Testament. John pointed out that Jesus told his followers to make disciples before baptizing them. John decided to start a new church made up of believers who were baptized by their own choice.

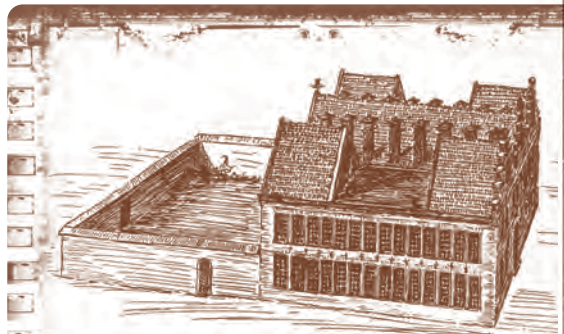
So, John and his congregation started a new church. Because no church existed that he believed to be a true church, he first baptized himself and then baptized about forty others. Although some people criticized John for baptizing himself, the first Baptist church in the world began with his self-baptism.

John had long struggled with the idea of the "true church." He rejected the Church of England, and he had

not yet found another church that seemed to follow the teachings of the New Testament. His Bible study led John to believe that the church should be made up of baptized believers only, people who chose to be a part of the church. He also thought that every local congregation of believers should have the right to make its own decisions and determine its mission.

John also spoke out for religious freedom. Obviously, religious freedom was important to his congregation, as they fled England because of religious persecution. John wrote that the government should not interfere with the church or with a person's religious beliefs. He also thought that worship should be free and "inspired by the heart," not forced. John and his small group of Baptists influenced England and America to be open to the religious views of all their citizens.

John's leadership for this first Baptist church was creative. Not only did the church members develop new beliefs and practices, but they found creative ways to support themselves. John worked as a medical doctor in the village. Members of the congrega-



*Building in which Baptists worshipped
and baked biscuits*

tion made a living by baking biscuits to sell to those on ships in the harbor. The first Baptists worshipped together and shared the message of Christ and their church with those in their community.

When John and his congregation had left England in 1607, they were not Baptist. They simply sought religious freedom. But as they continued learning and practicing what they read in the Bible, new beliefs and practices came about: believer's baptism, church freedom, and religious freedom. These ideas have shaped Baptists for four hundred years. John Smyth and his first Baptist followers painted a new portrait of following Jesus and of being church together.

Just as his beliefs changed earlier in his life, John's beliefs continued to change after he became Baptist. He later decided that the Mennonite Church was the "true church," and he tried to join their membership. He died in August 1612 before he was accepted by the Mennonites, without membership in any church.

John Smyth, considered the first Baptist, was neither a Baptist at the beginning of his life nor a Baptist at the end of his life. During the short period of time that Baptists can claim him, however, he was a Baptist hero! He helped to form the Baptist tradition, a tradition that has grown and developed into a large group of faithful Christians. He has been called a Baptist "pathfinder" and a Baptist "trailblazer," because he led his congregation to find their own way and to blaze a trail on which many more Baptists would follow.

JOHN CLARKE BAPTIST FREEDOM FIGHTER



Who: John Clarke

Where: England, then Boston and Newport in the new colonies

When: 1609-1676

What he did: Worked for religious freedom in the new colonies

No one is quite sure of when John Clarke became a Baptist, or why he began to accept Baptist views, but Baptists are thankful that he did. John, who was born into a family who attended the Church of England, eventually became a Baptist and remained a faithful Baptist for more than forty years. In those forty years, he did more for Baptist history than most Baptists do in a lifetime.

John was born in England in 1609, the same year that John Smyth and Thomas Helwys started the Baptist movement by separating from the Church of England.

As a baby, John was baptized in the Church of England. He probably grew up in Holland and was well-educated at the University of Leyden. Little is known about his early life. But when he was about thirty years old, he moved to Boston, a city in the new English colonies.

Along with his wife, Elizabeth, John arrived in Boston

in the middle of a troubling time. They had left England because they wanted to escape the **religious persecution** going on there. In England, the government required that all citizens be members of the Church of England. Citizens were not allowed to express their disagreement with the church or its leaders. Since some of John's views differed from those of the church, he was not free to worship as he

Religious persecution

is the unfair treatment of a person or group of people because of their religious beliefs or practices. Religious persecution can take the form of physical punishment or other forms of discrimination.

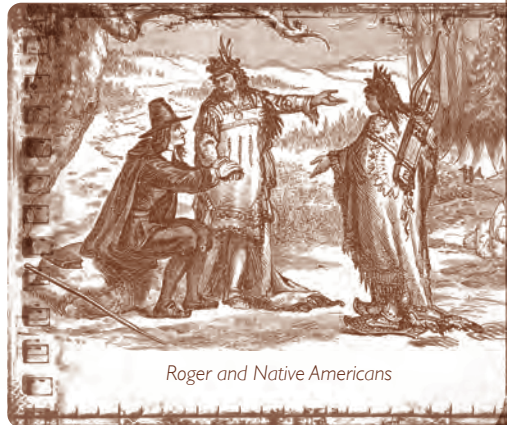
wished. Moving to the new colonies, he thought, would give him the chance to experience religious freedom.

When the Clarkes arrived in Boston, they found trouble brewing. A woman named Anne Hutchinson had begun questioning the teachings of the town's minister. She disagreed with his understanding of the Bible, and she taught her own personal interpretations of scripture to people who gathered at her home. John did not agree with all that Hutchinson taught. He did agree that she had a right to differ from the minister and to try to understand the Bible

for herself. John joined Anne's group because he believed in religious freedom.

John was disappointed to find that the religious people of the colonies did not allow much freedom to disagree with the popular religious views, either. Imagine his disappointment. He had come all the way from England to find freedom, but full freedom was not found in the new land! John wrote that he was not surprised to see people disagree about God and religious matters. He was upset, however, that they "were not able to so to bear with each other in their different understandings and consciences, and. . .to live peaceably together." John declared that one year of religious persecution was enough for him. He and Elizabeth decided to create a new place where people could come and have full freedom of thought and religious belief.

In the spring of 1638, John and a group of fellow colonists set out for the settlement of Providence. Roger Williams had established that settlement, which offered religious freedom, and Roger within the next year founded the first Baptist church in America in Providence. When John arrived in Providence, Roger helped him purchase an island on which to begin a new



Roger and Native Americans



town. By 1639, John had founded the town of Newport, located in the area that later became Rhode Island.

Within a few years, John and his group organized a church in Newport. John became the minister of this Baptist church, which was only the second Baptist church formed in the colonies.

He opened the doors of the church for any people who looked for religious freedom.

By 1648, the church practiced believer's baptism by immersion, meaning that believers' entire bodies were dipped into the water. The Newport church may have been the first one in the colonies to baptize by immersion. John served as pastor of the Newport church for forty years. He also served as the town doctor, treating people with medicine along with the Bible and prayer.

In 1651, John experienced one of the most memorable events of his life. Along with his assistant pastor, Obadiah Holmes, and another member of his church, John Randall, John traveled to Massachusetts to the home of William Witter, a blind man. During the visit with William, John began to preach to William and the neighbors who had gathered there. When the word got out that John was preaching against infant baptism, the practice of the government's church, John and his friends were arrested and thrown in jail.

The men stayed in prison for ten days before their trial. John and Obadiah refused to pay the fine they

were charged, believing they had done nothing wrong. An unknown supporter paid John's fine. **Obadiah Holmes** refused to have his fine paid. Instead, he took a terrible beating for his punishment. Had someone not paid John's fine for him, he would have faced the same harsh whipping.

While John was in England, he wrote a book called *Ill Newses from New England*. He told the story of the incident in Boston and the whipping of Obadiah Holmes. John's work significantly influenced the people in England and in the colonies as it described the punishment of those seeking religious liberty. He wrote that scripture does not give anyone power to take away freedom from others, and that only the Holy Spirit can guide one's values. Religious liberty, he believed, is a right given by God that cannot be taken away by humans.

In *Ill Newses from New England*, John Clarke told of the whipping of **Obadiah Holmes**. Obadiah's hands were tied to a stake, and he was stripped to the waist. The "whipper" struck him thirty times across the back with a three-corded whip. As he was beaten, Obadiah continued to preach to the crowd. He said he had a sense of God's presence like he had never had before. The pain was removed from him so that the beating seemed easy. When they untied him from the post, he had joyfulness in his heart and cheerfulness in his face. He told those who sentenced him, "You have struck me as with roses." Obadiah was injured so badly that he was unable to leave Boston for several weeks, and his back bore the scars of his beating for the rest of his life.

ALL NEWES
FROM
NEW-ENGLAND:
OR
A Narrative of *New-Englands*
PERSECUTION.

WHEREIN IS DECLARED

That while old *England* is becoming new,
New-England is become Old.

Also four Proposals to the Honoured Parliament and
Council of State, touching the way to *Propagate*
the Gospel of Christ (with small charge
and great safety) both in Old
England and New.

Also four conclusions touching the faith and order of the
Gospel of Christ out of his last Will and
Testament, confirmed and justified.

By JOHN CLARK Physician of Rhode Island in America.

Revil. 2. 35. Hold fast till I come.
2. 11. Behold I come quickly.
22. 30. Amen, even so come Lord Jesus.

LONDON,

Printed by Henry Hills living in Fleet-Yard next door to the *Ross*
and *Crown*, in the year 1692.

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In *Ill Newes from New England*, John also defended the Baptist practice of believer's baptism, the idea that only those who are able to believe in Jesus Christ for themselves should be baptized. He also wrote that baptism by immersion, or dipping in water, is a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection, as baptism pictures one being buried and rising to new life. *Ill Newes* was a bold and courageous statement for Baptists who believed strongly in believer's baptism by immersion

and in religious liberty.

John Clarke's portrait holds a special place in Baptist history. As a doctor, he shared God's love by offering medical attention as well as prayer for his patients. He served as pastor of the second Baptist church in the colonies. He worked to obtain the first charter that granted full religious liberty. He wrote a book that influenced people in England and in the colonies to understand the Baptist ideas of religious liberty and believer's baptism by immersion. Now Baptists are challenged to remember these freedoms that John Clarke dreamed about and worked so hard to achieve.

ANN HASSELTINE JUDSON BAPTIST MISSIONARY PIONEER



Who: Ann Hasseltine Judson

Where: From the United States
to India to Burma

When: 1789-1826

What she did: Served as a missionary

As a teenager in 1806, Ann Hasseltine committed herself to Jesus. After finding the peace of God in her own heart, she wrote in her journal that she “longed to have all intelligent creatures love him.” She spent the rest of her life teaching others how to love God as she did.

After making her decision to follow Christ, Ann devoted all of her life to religious activities and service. She studied the Bible and read other Christian writings. She attended

Bradford Academy in Bradford, Massachusetts, one of the first schools for women, so that she could learn more and use the gifts God gave her.

As a young woman, Ann's interest in religion, particularly in missions, grew. One evening, her family hosted a dinner for twenty-eight ministers who came to Bradford to discuss church issues. One of those ministers was Adoniram Judson.



Adoniram's interest in missions excited him as a student at Andover Theological Seminary. He and other ministers met to plan an organization through which missionaries would travel to other places in the world. He came to Ann's hometown to ask this group of ministers to encourage their churches to support missionaries. Adoniram and his friends organized the first mission society, a group of churches committed to sending missionaries to foreign lands.

Ann impressed Adoniram when they met at her home, and he wrote to ask her to marry him, but Adoniram was going to be a Christian missionary in a foreign country. Ann's father did not want her to marry Adoniram. He said that he would tie her to a bedpost before he would let her live in another country.

Ann prayed for God's guidance in making her deci-

sion. She wrote:

I am a creature of God, and he has an undoubted right to do with me, as seems good in his sight. I rejoice, that I am in his hands—that he is everywhere present, and can protect me in one place as well as in another. . . . But whether I spend my days in India or America, I desire to spend them in the service of God.

Ann's father eventually gave her his blessing to marry Adoniram and to serve as a missionary with him. Ann and Adoniram married on February 5, 1812, and they left for India two weeks later. At this point, the Judsons belonged to a Congregationalist church. They were not yet Baptists.

The long trip to India tested Ann and Adoniram. Both almost died, and Ann grew so weak that she had to be carried off the ship. During their journey, both Ann and Adoniram read the Bible, and they studied the New Testament's teaching on baptism. As Adoniram studied the word "baptize," he realized that he agreed with the Baptists. Baptists believed that only those who could make a decision for themselves could be baptized, not babies. Baptists practiced believer's baptism by

Congregationalist

churches are a group of churches in which each church is independent in deciding its own mission, ministry, and organization. Congregationalist churches are like Baptist churches in the way that they are governed!



immersion, meaning that the believer's whole body was dipped in water.

At first, Ann told Adoniram that she would not become a Baptist. But as she studied with him, she changed her mind. When they left America, they were Congregationalists. When they arrived in India, Adoniram and Ann were Baptists

and were soon baptized by immersion by a British Baptist missionary.

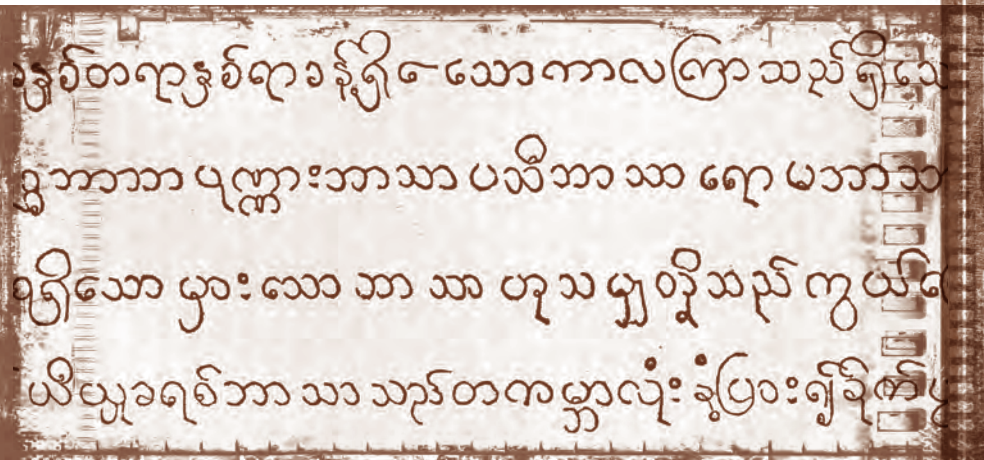
Adoniram and Ann were unsure if their Congregationalist mission society would continue to support them since they were now Baptists. Without the financial support of the Congregationalists, the Judsons could not stay in India as missionaries. Adoniram wrote to Baptists in the United States asking for support. The word spread, and soon American Baptists raised money for the Judsons.

While they waited for the news, William Carey, one of the British Baptist missionaries in India, gave them the funds needed to do their mission work. Carey encouraged the Judsons to leave India to do mission work in the nearby country of Burma. In 1814, Baptists in America formed a Baptist mission society, which they named the Triennial Convention because it met every three years. The Triennial

Convention supported the Judsons in Burma as well as future Baptist missionaries.

The Judsons' first year of mission work challenged them. They were lonely, missed Christian friends, and suffered from health problems as they adjusted to a new place. The Judsons' first child, Roger, was born, but he died only eight months later. His death saddened Ann and Adoniram deeply. Still, Ann worked with her husband to translate the Bible into the language of the Burmese people. She learned the language quickly since she talked with their servants and townspeople about her daily work.

Writing in the Burmese Language



She eventually translated the books of Daniel, Jonah, and Matthew for the Burmese Bible.

Ann became famous for the many letters she wrote back home to ask for support. Her letters were read in

homes and churches, and they told interesting stories about day-to-day life in Burma. Her letters and her visit to the United States in 1822 helped many Baptists learn about missions and encouraged them to support the Judsons and other missionaries.

Ann and Adoniram worked patiently. After six long years, Adoniram baptized the first Burmese Christian. After ten years, only eighteen Burmese had become Christians. Ann and Adoniram did not grow discouraged by the slow response of the people. They knew that being a Christian was dangerous, because the Burmese emperor had threatened to kill anyone who accepted the new religion. Nonetheless, they kept telling people about the one true God and God's son, Jesus Christ. They soon organized a Baptist church in Burma.

During a war between Burma and Great Britain, Adoniram was captured and put in prison. Ann worked for his freedom, writing letters to the government. She paid \$100 for permission to see him, and she walked two miles to the prison and back each day. She secretly exchanged notes with him in the spout of the teapot that she took to the prison each day.

Ann worried that Adoniram's translation of the New Testament into the Burmese language would be found and destroyed while he was in prison. She buried the manuscript in the garden at their home. Later, Adoniram asked her to dig it up and bring it to him. She hid it in "an old looking pillow, so hard that no jailer would ever want



Ann visiting Adoniram in prison

to steal it," so that Adoniram could sleep with it and protect it. When Ann delivered their second child, a baby girl, she missed visiting her husband for a few weeks. When baby Maria was only three weeks old, her mother took her to the prison to visit her daddy.

After spending nineteen months in prison, Adoniram was allowed to return home, and the Judsons set up a new mission in another city. Adoniram sought the Burmese government's permission to open the mission. While he was away working to set up that mission, Ann got sick with a fever and died. Baby Maria died six months later. These two difficult deaths depressed Adoniram, but he continued to work on his New Testament translations and preached to

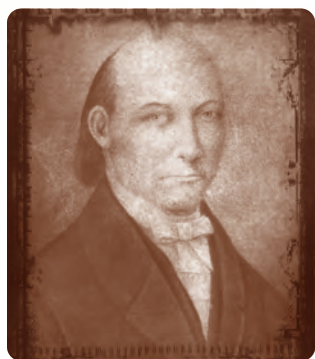
the people.

Although she was Baptist only for a short while before her early death, Ann Hasseltine Judson painted a new portrait for Baptist missions. She served as one of the first American Baptist missionaries overseas, and she was the first female missionary sent by Americans to another country. Ann proved that a woman could serve as a missionary just as effectively as her husband could. Her letters and visits taught Baptists to believe in her and in the importance of missions.

In Burma, the Judsons launched a work that was continued until 1966, when the Burmese government ordered all missionaries to leave. Even so, a strong collection of Burmese Baptist churches continued what the Judsons started—sharing the message of Christ with the people there. Today, Burma is called Myanmar. Baptists are the largest group of Christians in that country, largely due to the work that Adoniram and Ann Judson began.

The Judsons opened the eyes of American Baptists with regard to missions, giving them a reason to start the Triennial Convention. Since that convention began in 1814, Baptist groups have sent and supported thousands of missionaries who have continued the work of Ann and Adoniram in Burma and around the world. Baptists around the world, but especially in Burma, can declare that Ann Judson is a Baptist hero.

JESSE MERCER BAPTIST DENOMINATIONAL LEADER



(Photo courtesy of Jack Tarver Library,
Mercer University)

Who: Jesse Mercer

Where: Georgia

When: 1769-1841

What he did: Encouraged Baptists to work together; worked to begin Georgia Baptist Association and Mercer University

Jesse Mercer's Baptist experience started early. He was born in Halifax County, North Carolina, on December 16, 1769. His father, Silas, was a minister. Although Silas Mercer grew up as an Episcopalian, he disagreed with their form of baptism. Instead of having his infant son sprinkled, he had the baby dipped in a barrel. And from that point on, Jesse Mercer was raised as a Baptist. Jesse's family moved to Georgia when he was a child. He later said that he went back and forth between



praying and sinning. His faith in Christ came at the end of a long process. In 1787, however, Jesse decided for himself to follow Jesus. He was baptized for the second time in his life by his father.

After his baptism, Jesse began preaching, and people encouraged him to become a minister. He was ordained at the age of twenty by Phillips Mill Baptist Church in Wilkes County, Georgia. Jesse married Sabrina Chivers, who was his wife for nearly forty years.

During Jesse's time, many Baptists thought education for ministers was unnecessary. Schools for ministers were rare, particularly in the South, but Jesse believed in education. After his ordination, he studied with a Presbyterian minister, John Springer. John had been educated at Princeton University, and he taught Jesse more about the Bible and how to be a minister. Jesse studied for an additional year at Salem Academy, a school led by his own father. Salem Academy was the first private Baptist school in Georgia.

While he was studying with Springer, Jesse also served as pastor of Hutton's Fork Baptist Church in Wilkes County. After his father died in 1796, Jesse moved back to his family's home and became pastor of the churches that his father had served before his death. Jesse served churches


at Phillips Mill for thirty-nine years, Bethesda for thirty-two years, and Powelton for twenty-eight years. He eventually was pastor of seven churches in his area of Georgia, an area where two-thirds of the population of Georgia lived, and he also volunteered as an itinerant preacher, traveling to preach to people in areas where no churches or ministers existed.

Jesse believed strongly that Baptist churches should work together to share the gospel with others. He encouraged churches in Georgia to join **associations**. In Georgia, churches had begun working together when the General Association of Georgia Baptists was formed in 1784. Jesse became one of the leaders of this group.


In 1801, a conference of Georgia Baptists was held in Jesse's Powelton church.

At that conference, Georgia Baptists committed to work together to do mission work with the Creek Indians. As the association continued to meet and to grow, Jesse was involved. Seven of the first eleven meetings of the group were held at churches that he pastored.

In 1822, the Georgia Baptist Association influenced the rise of the Georgia Baptist Convention. Jesse was chairman of the committee that wrote the organization's constitution, and he became the convention's first president. He



Associations are groups of Baptist churches in the same area who work together to support missions and ministry in their communities and around the world.



continued to serve as president until his death in 1841. He also served as clerk of the association for twenty-one years and moderator for twenty-three years. Jesse also attended national Baptist meetings, such as the Triennial Convention, as a delegate from Georgia.

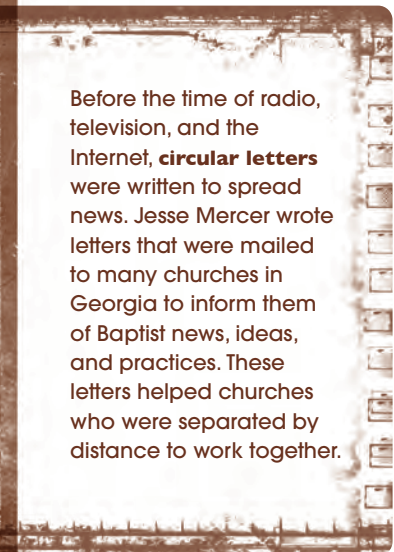
Jesse used his influence as a Baptist minister and leader to participate in state politics. As a delegate to Georgia's Constitutional Convention in 1798, he worked to defeat a proposal that would have prevented ministers from holding public office in Georgia. The convention also gave Jesse the responsibility of writing the section of Georgia's constitution that allowed religious freedom to all citizens of the state.

Later, Jesse himself ran for Senate but was defeated. After his loss, he claimed that “few occasions should call

down ministers from their elevated office to engage in legislation.”

Despite his influence in public affairs, Jesse was first a minister and considered his involvement in larger organizations to be a part of his ministry.

Jesse's writings served as another important part of his ministry to Baptists in Georgia. Most influential were his **circular letters**. Before Baptist newspapers existed, circular letters were distributed and



Before the time of radio, television, and the Internet, **circular letters** were written to spread news. Jesse Mercer wrote letters that were mailed to many churches in Georgia to inform them of Baptist news, ideas, and practices. These letters helped churches who were separated by distance to work together.

read at churches. These letters communicated Baptist ideas and practices so that churches around the state could be unified.

Jesse observed in his ministry that many Baptist churches in Georgia lacked hymnals. In 1810, he published *The Cluster of Spiritual Songs, Divine Hymns, and Sacred Poems*. This hymnal became very popular. Seven editions were published, and copies were distributed as far away as Philadelphia. More than 35,000 copies were sold in the forty years that the *Cluster* circulated around the South. The hymnal was so special to Jesse that he sang hymns from it to comfort his wife upon her deathbed in 1826.

In 1833, Jesse purchased a religious newspaper called the *Christian Index*, and he moved it from Washington, D.C., to Washington, Georgia. He wrote articles and edited the newspaper so that Georgians could know what was happening with Baptist work around the state. He later gave the newspaper to the Georgia Baptist Convention, and it has become the nation's oldest continuing weekly religious paper.

Jesse published another newspaper, *Temperance Banner*. This newspaper contained articles about the dangers of drinking alcohol. In 1838, Jesse wrote *A History of the Georgia Baptist Association*, sharing the story of the Baptists whom he influenced in so many ways. Jesse's writings helped to connect Baptists to those in other churches so that they could better work together for a common purpose.

Jesse was a Baptist preacher, denominational leader, and publisher. He was respected for all of these accomplishments, and rightly so. But his most recognizable gift to Baptists was his work for Baptist education. His first efforts in education came about when his father died. Jesse became the principal of his father's school, Salem Academy. For two years, he helped to train young ministers in the first Baptist school in Georgia. Salem Academy provided an important first step for Baptist education in Georgia. Jesse later became a supporter of Columbian College in Washington, D.C., and served as a trustee of the school and gave money for its support.

Jesse is most recognized for his support of the school that now bears his name—Mercer University. Jesse and the school's other founders opened the school in Penfield, Georgia, in 1833. The Georgia Baptist Convention proudly blessed the school with Jesse Mercer's name, calling it Mercer Institute.

*Mercer Institute at Penfield, Georgia
(Photo courtesy of Jack Tarver Library, Mercer University)*



At its beginning, the school was not intended to be a college. When Jesse saw how the Presbyterians in the state had opened Oglethorpe College in 1835, he pushed to make this new school into a college for Baptists. Mercer Institute became Mercer University in 1837, and Jesse Mercer served as the first president of the board of trustees. Of all his involvements and activities, Jesse devoted his best energies to Mercer University. He gave the school large sums of money.

As Jesse's health began to decline, he moved to Washington, Georgia, so that he could slow down in his work. Once there, he founded the First Baptist Church and became its pastor. He and his second wife, Nancy Simons, gave large gifts of money to many organizations and causes, including the Georgia Baptist Convention.

On the Saturday before his death, Mercer asked his friend, James Carter, if he remembered a song in the *Cluster* with the words, "I did to him my all commit." When his friend replied that he remembered the song, Mercer stated, "That is continually in my mind. Forty odd years ago I committed my all to the Lord . . . and there is my dependence now." Jesse died on September 6, 1841, at Carter's home and was buried at Penfield, the original site of Mercer University.

Jesse Mercer's dying thoughts were correct: he committed his life to doing the Lord's work. His influence among Baptists in his own state makes him a Baptist hero. He served as pastor and preacher of many Baptist churches. He helped to organize a state convention for



*Jesse and Julie Long, author of Portraits of Courage
(Photo courtesy of Julie Long)*

Baptist cooperation. He founded a university to educate young ministers. He published a newspaper and wrote articles to educate church members about Baptist ideas and Baptist life. He published a hymnal to serve churches all over the South. He gave money to support many good organizations from which Baptists benefit. Jesse Mercer was committed to the Baptist cause and to the cause of Christ, and that makes him a Baptist hero.

LOTTIE MOON BAPTIST TEACHER



Who: Charlotte (Lottie) Moon


Where: From Virginia to China

When: 1840-1912

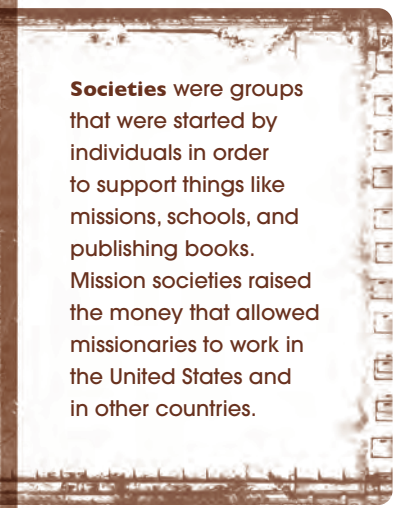
What she did: Worked as a missionary in China, teaching Baptists that women could do God's work

When Charlotte Diggs Moon was born into a wealthy and privileged family in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1840, no one would have guessed that she would die in a harbor in Japan seventy-two years later with no possessions to her name. But Moon did just that. Why did she give up all that her childhood offered her? She heard a calling from God, and she followed it, all the way across the world from her old Virginia home.

As a young girl, however, Charlotte Moon, who was called Lottie, did not concern herself with listening for God's will. Even though her family raised her as a Baptist, she held no interest in religion until "God touched her heart" as a teenager.



Lottie and her sisters were very intelligent. While most girls did not have opportunities for education, Lottie's family could afford to send her to the best schools. Her parents believed that their daughters should have the same chance for learning as their sons. Lottie loved to learn new languages. She studied French, Italian, and Latin, and she mastered the languages of the Bible. Lottie graduated from the Albemarle Female Institute in 1861. She became one of the first Southern women to receive a Masters of Arts degree. For several years after her graduation, Lottie taught school in Cartersville, Georgia.



Societies were groups that were started by individuals in order to support things like missions, schools, and publishing books. Mission societies raised the money that allowed missionaries to work in the United States and in other countries.

After the Civil War, opportunities arose for women that had not been available before, and Lottie began asking questions about women's roles in the church. She wondered why women could have opportunities in society, but could not serve God's church in new ways.

Lottie sensed a call to be a Christian missionary early in her life. At that time, however, **mission societies** did not allow single women to go alone as missionaries. In order

for her to do mission work, she would have to marry a missionary. But the wives of missionaries serving in China had recently learned that only women could minister to Chinese women, and the missionary wives sent word for help.

They said that even single women would be welcomed to serve in China. In response to the call for help, Lottie's sister Edmonia went to North China in 1872. Soon after, Lottie heard God's calling to China "as clear as a bell."



She followed her sister to China a year later and began work at the Baptist station at Tengchow.

Lottie worked in China just as she had in the United States. She taught school. Lottie taught reading, arithmetic, and geography to her Chinese students. She also gave them singing lessons. For Lottie, teaching was a way of doing ministry. She ran a girls' school, and then other schools for boys and girls. At one point, she managed six schools at one time.

Although Lottie was committed to education, she soon discovered that the schools did not have to be her only avenue of ministry. She was concerned with the spiritual lives of Chinese women. She preached to them, taught Bible studies to them, cared for poor women in her home, and traveled from village to village teaching women to read and work. She even made cookies to give to children in order to build relationships with them. The children affectionately called her "the cookie lady," and her reputation in her village spread. In doing these tasks, Lottie found that



Lottie and her Chinese friends

she could share the love of Jesus with the Chinese people.

When Lottie first arrived in China, she admitted that she considered the Chinese as people less valuable than Americans. She had been raised in a wealthy family, and she had a fine education. She wore American clothes to set herself apart from the Chinese. Separating herself from the Chinese comforted Lottie.

Soon Lottie realized that the Chinese people acted more interested in getting to know her if she showed concern for them. She began wearing Chinese clothing, mastered the Chinese language, and came to respect the Chinese culture. Because she appreciated their traditions, the Chinese people accepted Lottie.

Lottie told of her discovery in a letter back home to one of the Baptist mission leaders. She wrote, "I am more

and more impressed by the belief that to win these people to God we must first win them to ourselves. We need to go out and live among them, manifesting the gentle and loving spirit of our Lord. . . . We need to make friends before we can hope to win converts," or people who decide follow Christ. Lottie learned to do missions in a new way and became a model for sharing Jesus' love.

Believing that God granted her, an unmarried female missionary, gifts equal to those of the men, Lottie declared that women should receive the same opportunities for ministry and mission work as men. She wrote about her views of women's roles and influenced others to believe in the rights of women to perform professional roles.

Lottie continued teaching, and her Bible studies for women became so popular that sometimes men would sit in the next room to listen. At that time in both China and America, women did not customarily teach men. When men began attending her classes, Lottie continued teaching. She claimed that she could not turn men away who wanted to be taught the Bible while "some young man among Southern Baptists in America who *ought* to be" in China stayed home. When some criticized her for preaching, she said that if they did not like what she was doing, they could send men to do it better.

While in China, Lottie wrote letters to leaders at the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board to tell them of the desperate need for more missionary workers in China. She wrote to Baptist women to encourage them



Lottie near the end of her career

to create mission societies in their churches for the support of foreign missions. In 1888, Lottie suggested that a Christmas offering be collected to send missionaries to help her and to support her work. Her plea succeeded, and the offering became a tradition each Christmas for Southern Baptists. Through the 2006 offering, the Lottie Moon Offering had raised a total of \$2,883,824,379.98 for foreign missions. What a gift!

Lottie experienced many joys during her missionary years. She saw Chinese people accept the

gospel message and become followers of Jesus. She saw lives changed through the relationships she formed. Lottie also experienced sadness, loneliness, and hardship. When China entered a war with Japan in 1894, Lottie and other missionaries were accused of being spies for the Japanese. A famine struck China in 1912. Lottie's devotion to the Chinese people motivated her to give up her own money and food so that they could eat. Sadly, her sharing affected

her own health. She gave so much away and refused to eat until she weighed only fifty pounds. Her failing health concerned the other missionaries. They arranged to send Lottie home to the United States to recover. Sadly, she did not make it home. Lottie Moon died aboard a ship in a Japanese harbor waiting to return to the United States.

Lottie's legacy is best known because of the offering that bears her name. Her story is still told in Baptist churches almost one hundred years after her death. The letter she wrote home in 1888 requesting that an offering be taken to support foreign missions started a tradition for Southern Baptists. Each year, churches give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering to raise money for missions not only in Lottie's China, but all around the world. Tens of millions of dollars are collected each year, making it one of the largest offerings collected by Christians.

Lottie Moon painted a new portrait for Baptist women. Her example and devotion as an unmarried woman missionary proved that women had gifts and skills to do ministry. Women's roles in ministry did not change quickly, but Lottie became a role model for many Baptist women. Her example encouraged them both to support missions and to commit their lives to serving as missionaries and ministers themselves.

Lottie's work in China provided opportunities for the Christian message to be shared among the Chinese people. She opened doors for missionaries to go and work among the people there, and she opened the hearts

of the people to hear and believe the gospel.

Lottie was a teacher. She taught girls and boys how to read and write, and she gave them a chance to become successful. More importantly, however, Lottie taught about Jesus. She taught God's children of all ages about the Bible and about God's love for them. She showed them how to live faithfully and how to love their neighbors. Lottie Moon, through her love for God and for the Chinese people, emerged as a Baptist hero who still teaches us how to follow Jesus today.

WILLIAM KNIBB BAPTIST LIBERATOR



Who: William Knibb

Where: From England to Jamaica

When: 1803-1845

What he did: Helped bring freedom to slaves in Jamaica

Many Baptists do not know the name of William Knibb, but Baptists should know his amazing story. As a missionary to Jamaica in the early 1800s, William worked for the rights of all people. Thanks to William's preaching of the gospel, his influence with the English government, and his concern for the well-being of people, over 300,000 slaves were freed in Jamaica. How did this Baptist hero do it?

William's story began in 1803 in England. He grew up with a twin sister, two other sisters, and three brothers. His father did not attend church or show any interest in religious faith, but his mother was a Christian believer who made sure that her children attended Sunday School and church. When William was twelve years old, he joined his

brother, Thomas, in learning from a printer. The two boys worked in a print shop together.

As a teenager, faith was important to William. He was baptized and joined Broadmead Baptist Church in Bristol, England, where he taught a Sunday School class and preached in poor areas of the city. At the print shop, William read the reports of the Baptist Missionary Society that were printed there, and he learned about mission work.

William's brother, Thomas, also grew interested in mission work and went to Jamaica as a missionary. Baptist missionaries had been working in Jamaica since 1814. William expressed his interest in serving as a missionary with his brother, but mission society leaders thought that he lacked Thomas's gifts of preaching and teaching.

One day in 1823, William's pastor told him that Thomas had contracted yellow fever and died only three months after arriving in Jamaica. Saddened by this news, William's desire to be a missionary grew stronger. He married Mary Watkins, who agreed to go to Jamaica with him, and he studied to be a missionary. In 1825, William, who was then twenty-one years old, took his brother's place in Jamaica. At that time, blacks were slaves in Jamaica. William was assigned to teach slave children at the same school where his brother had taught.

When they arrived in Jamaica one month after their marriage, the Knibbs found the schoolhouse in poor condition. William rebuilt the wrecked schoolhouse and built another school for girls nearby. He reopened his brother's

chapel at Port Royal and began to preach there. The crowds who attended worship services grew so large

that the chapel was expanded. William also traveled the island to encourage Baptists to work together in a group called the Jamaica Baptist Association.

As William worked with the slave children, their stories opened his eyes to the ways that the slaves lived. He saw that the slave owners mistreated their slaves. The owners beat them and literally worked them to death so that the owners could make more money. Slave owners resented the missionaries and their concern for the well-being of the slaves. The owners wanted their "property" to hear nothing of the gospel. They feared that the slaves would hear the gospel message of love and equality and would demand freedom. Despite the hostility of the slave owners, William continued preaching and teaching. He soon realized, however, that teaching the slaves to follow Christ was not enough. Preaching the gospel meant that he would have to work to get rid of slavery on the island.

William began speaking out against slavery. He claimed that slavery was unchristian and should be abolished. The Baptist Missionary Society had warned him before leaving England not to interfere with "civil



or political" affairs. Now, the slave owners told him that missionaries should keep the slaves happy and satisfied, not aggravate them. William faced a difficult decision in how he would relate to the slaves and slave owners.

In 1831, several slaves revolted against their owners, refusing to work without pay. The owners put down the slaves' uprising. After that incident, owners did not allow slaves to gather or attend religious services or activities, one of the deacons in William's church was arrested and



whipped. When William protested, he was accused of contributing to the revolt. He admitted his disagreement with slavery but explained that he was not responsible for the riots, because he was opposed to use of violence as a way to gain freedom. Even so, William was arrested and jailed. His opponents destroyed slave

schools and chapels, and his mission closed. While he waited in prison, William thought of a plan of action. He would go to England to have a law passed that would free all slaves on the island. After seven weeks in prison, he was tried in court and freed upon a lack of evidence. He made plans to return to England.

In England, William worked with two Methodist missionaries to influence Parliament, the English lawmakers, to pass a law to free slaves. William attended many meetings, and he told of the slaves' mistreatment. His opponents argued that the slaves would refuse to work if they were free. They thought that the slave owners in Jamaica would not make any money without slave labor. William argued that the issue was a moral, Christian one, and not only about money. At a meeting in London, he declared,

I look upon the question of slavery only as one of religion and morality. All I ask is that my African brother may stand in the family of man; that my African sister shall, while she clasps her tender infant to her breast, be allowed to call it her own; that they both shall be allowed to bow their knees in prayer
to God who has made of one blood all nations.

Because of William's pressure, Parliament enacted a law to end slavery in the British colonies in the West Indies, including Jamaica. They set the hour of midnight on July 31, 1833, as the time when slaves would be free.

They also voted to send money to rebuild the slaves' destroyed chapels, schools, and churches.

William wrote that when he and Mary arrived in Jamaica after the slaves' freedom, they "were nearly pushed into the sea by kindness. Poor Mrs. Knibb was quite overcome. They took me up in their arms, they sang, they laughed, they wept, and I wept too."

Even after their freedom, the former slaves still suffered

through the **apprentice system**. William worked hard against this system. By 1838, the former slaves were fully freed. As midnight approached on the night before the apprentice system was scheduled to be abolished, William gathered with the slaves at the chapel in Falmouth to celebrate. When the clock struck midnight, William shouted, "The monster is dead! You are free! Thanks be to God!" The following day was spent in celebrating the new freedom. The peaceful way in which

When the Emancipation Act was finally passed in 1833, it did not automatically give the slaves their freedom. Because the slaves were not used to being independent, lawmakers thought that they needed help and training to be free men and women. Slaves therefore became "apprentices" and continued to work for low wages under their old masters. Supposedly, they were being trained to be free. The **apprentice system** was seen by many as another form of slavery. True freedom came in 1838, when the apprentice system was abolished. But even then, many of the freed slaves had no option but to continue working for their old masters for low wages.


this freedom was achieved made William very happy.

Although the slaves were freed, they still faced challenges. Planters paid black people low wages so that they could barely afford the basic necessities for life. William saw their struggles and realized that something must be done for the freed slaves or they would not survive. He borrowed money and bought land to sell to the former slaves at a low cost. The slaves could then build homes and grow crops to feed their families and to sell for income.

In addition to his work with the slaves, William founded Calabar Theological College in Jamaica. He founded thirty-five churches, twenty-four missions, and sixteen schools, and he baptized over 6,000 new Christians. He translated the Bible into Creole, the language of the slaves. While William was not thought to be as “gifted” as his brother, Thomas, he proved his God-given talent through his leadership and his devotion to what he believed.

Not long after the liberation of the slaves, William came down with yellow fever. He grew very sick and died in 1845 at the young age of forty-two. Those who knew him from the surrounding villages came to his funeral. They were thankful for one who had been so meaningful and influential in ending their slavery.

In his short life, William Knibb accomplished much. This Baptist hero used his gifts and his passion to work for justice for those around him. He helped to free people who were mistreated by others because he saw the worth



and dignity that God had given each of them. He helped raise money to offer them ways of earning a decent living. He encouraged a law to be passed in England to free all slaves in British colonies. This act influenced other English Baptists to encourage Americans to overthrow their own system of slavery. William Knibb painted a new portrait of a better life in Jamaica, both for the slaves and for a healthier society. His courage to act on behalf of others and his commitment to freedom make William Knibb a Baptist hero!

LOUISE (LULU) FLEMING BAPTIST MISSIONARY DOCTOR



(Photo courtesy of Florida Baptist
Historical Society)

Who: Louise (LuLu) Fleming

Where: From Florida to Africa

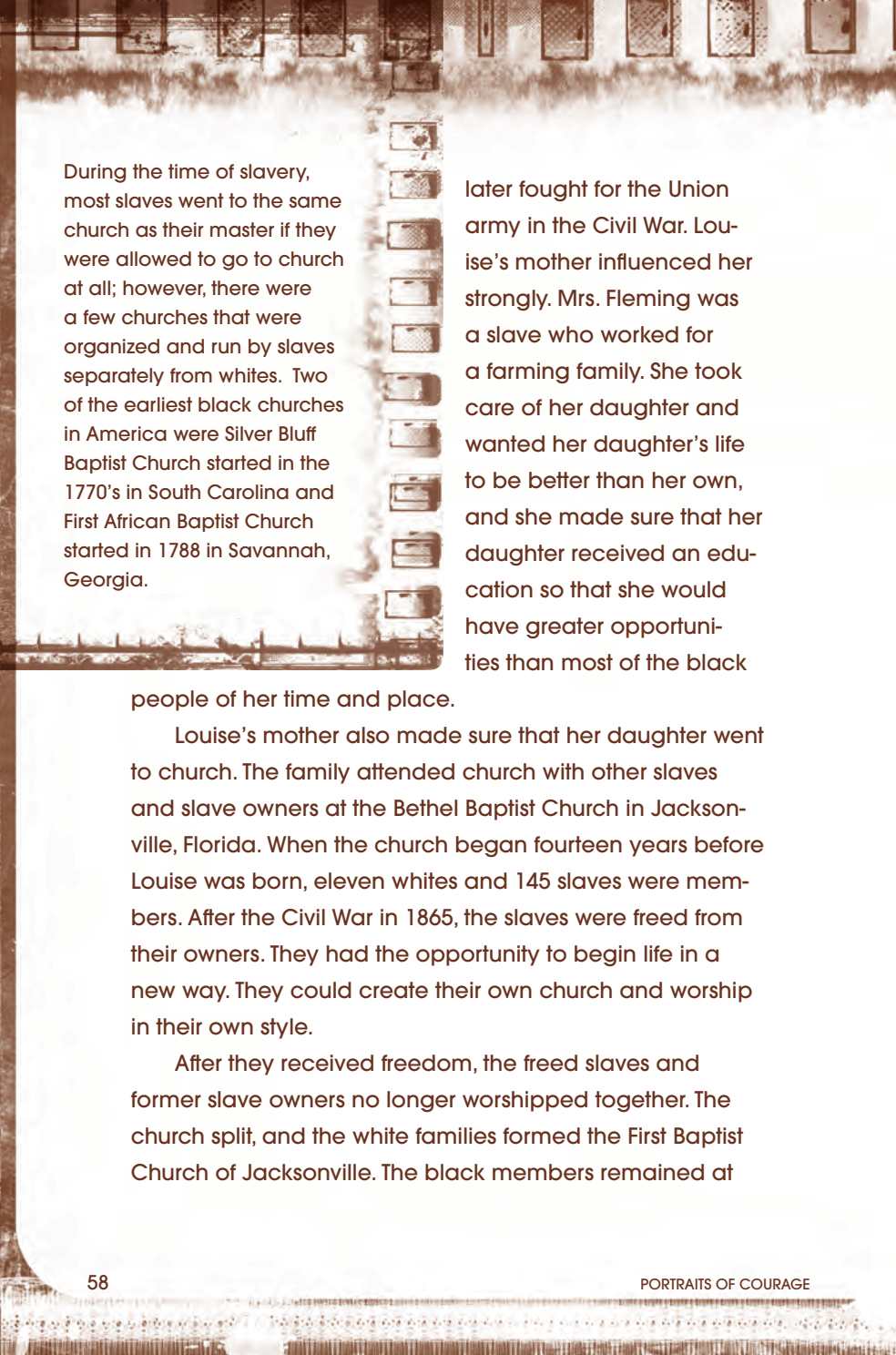
When: 1862-1899

What she did: Went to medical school and served as missionary in Africa

Louise Fleming is a Baptist hero whose life ended with much more prominence than it began. At the beginning of life, Louise was a slave child with few

and little opportunity. By the end of her short thirty-seven-year life, Louise had made history as a woman working in the areas of missions and medicine.

Louise Fleming, nicknamed “LuLu,” was born in Clay County, Florida, in 1862. Her father left home when Louise was less than a year old, and she never saw him again. He



During the time of slavery, most slaves went to the same church as their master if they were allowed to go to church at all; however, there were a few churches that were organized and run by slaves separately from whites. Two of the earliest black churches in America were Silver Bluff Baptist Church started in the 1770's in South Carolina and First African Baptist Church started in 1788 in Savannah, Georgia.

later fought for the Union army in the Civil War. Louise's mother influenced her strongly. Mrs. Fleming was a slave who worked for a farming family. She took care of her daughter and wanted her daughter's life to be better than her own, and she made sure that her daughter received an education so that she would have greater opportunities than most of the black

people of her time and place.

Louise's mother also made sure that her daughter went to church. The family attended church with other slaves and slave owners at the Bethel Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. When the church began fourteen years before Louise was born, eleven whites and 145 slaves were members. After the Civil War in 1865, the slaves were freed from their owners. They had the opportunity to begin life in a new way. They could create their own church and worship in their own style.

After they received freedom, the freed slaves and former slave owners no longer worshipped together. The church split, and the white families formed the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville. The black members remained at

Bethel Baptist Church and continued to meet together. They were led by Pastor C. B. Simmons.

From her mother, Louise learned that church was important. From Pastor Simmons and other teachers, Louise learned about Jesus and the Bible. When she was fourteen years old, she made a promise to follow Jesus. She began to teach a Sunday School class. The church leaders and even the pastor were amazed at how much she knew about the Bible.

After completing the tenth grade, Louise moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, and taught school. She was such a good teacher that a visiting pastor noticed her gifts and arranged for her to go to college. She was proud to have a chance to receive an education, just like her mother wanted her to do. Louise attended Shaw University, graduating as valedictorian, at the top of her class, in 1885.

During the time of Louise's graduation from college, African American women were forming mission societies to carry out mission work around the world. They first organized groups in local churches, and then churches gathered together in national organizations. These women worked together to raise money to send missionaries to other parts of the world.

Because of her interests in service, teaching, and missions, Louise was appointed to serve as a missionary in 1886 by the Women's American Baptist Missionaries Society. This group of women affiliated with the American Baptist Missionary Union. Louise became the first African

American woman appointed by that society to serve as a full-time missionary in Africa, going to the Congo. During the time that Lottie Moon served as a missionary in Asia to spread the gospel, Louise worked on another continent as she ministered to the people of Africa.

Louise was excited about her opportunity to serve. On board the ship in 1887, she wrote: "I was truly happy then, and since I have set sail . . . I am happier; when I reach the doleful shores I shall be happiest."

When she arrived in the Congo, Louise continued her teaching. She spent much of her time with young African women who came to the mission school. She worked hard to educate them, teaching English and sharing God's love with them. The condition of the women there touched her heart. In her report to J. W. Murdock of the American Baptist Historical Society in 1888, she wrote, "All our converts thus far are men. Oh, how I long to see the women reached." As she developed relationships, she visited with these women in their homes in the

afternoons so that she could share the gospel with them.

Louise served in the Congo for five years until she became ill and had to return to the United States. When she



sailed, however, she brought with her several African young people whom she enrolled in American schools so that they could receive the same quality education that she had.

While Louise recuperated from her sickness, she realized how much that the people of Congo needed medical care. She decided to stay in the United States to train to be a doctor so that she could go back and help them. She enrolled in medical school and was the first black woman to attend the Women's Medical College at Philadelphia. She received her degree and returned to Africa in 1895.

When she returned to Africa, Louise went to Irebu in the upper Congo. There she served as a medical missionary for a large area and treated and healed many people. She was a popular speaker, sharing with mission groups in different denominations about her experiences in Africa. Sadly, despite her medical experience, Louise could not heal herself when she became sick in 1898 with a disease known as African sleeping sickness. She returned to the United States for treatment, but she died in Philadelphia in 1899.

Louise Fleming is a role model for Baptist women. She valued education, coming out of a childhood in slavery to finish college and medical school so that she could teach and care for others.



The Medical School that Lulu attended

She was a faithful missionary, committing her life to missionary service in Africa and making her way as the first black woman missionary sent there by her mission society. She even inspired other black women to begin other foreign mission programs and societies. Louise Fleming was a Baptist hero, faithful to her early Baptist upbringing and continuing to serve Baptists all over the United States as their representative in the mission field.

WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH BAPTIST PROPHET



Who: Walter Rauschenbusch

Where: New York City

When: 1861-1918

What he did: Preached and worked to change the poor conditions of his community

When young Walter Rauschenbusch's mother asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, he did not give her a typical answer. He replied that he wanted to be John the Baptist.

Walter did not grow up to be John the Baptist, but he did grow up to become a famous Baptist in his own right. Like John the Baptist, Walter followed Jesus, and he spoke out about the sin he saw in his world. His honesty and challenging message angered some people, but he spoke the gospel truth. He was a Baptist hero.

Walter was born in 1861 in Rochester, New York. His

father was a German pastor who had come to America as a missionary. When he arrived, he became influenced by Baptists. He found in their teachings many of the truths he had discovered in his reading of the Bible. As Walter Rauschenbusch grew up and studied the Bible, he, too, discovered that he wanted to be a Baptist. He later said, "I began by being a Baptist because my father was, but today I am a Baptist because, with my convictions, I could not well be anything else. I now stand on my own feet and am ready to give account of the faith I hold."

When the time came for Walter to decide what he really did want to do with his life, he prayed for God's help. As he prayed, seventeen-year-old Walter felt God tugging very deep within his heart. When he experienced God in that way, he believed that God had a special mission for his life. He attended college at the University of Rochester and studied to be a minister at Rochester Theological Seminary.

At first, Walter wanted to go to India as a missionary. When a Baptist missionary society turned down his application, he explored other options. He began to believe very strongly that God called him to be a pastor. He told a fellow student in seminary, "I want to do hard work for God—I want to be a pastor, powerful with men, preaching to them Christ. . . . And if I do become anything but a pastor, you may believe that I have sunk to a lower ideal or that there was a very unmistakable call to duty in that direction." When Walter graduated from seminary, he did

become a pastor, but his first pastorate was not exactly the experience that he expected.

In 1886, Walter became the pastor of the Second German Baptist

Church in New York City. The church was located in an area nicknamed “Hell’s Kitchen” because it was one of the city’s worst slum neighborhoods. In “Hell’s Kitchen,” God changed Walter’s life.

Many changes were taking place in society. The Industrial Revolution was bringing about a different type of work environment in the cities. New machines helped factories to produce goods more quickly. Many people moved from the country to the city to work in these factories. Immigrants moved from other countries to get jobs in the factories for very low wages. Many business owners focused more on making money than on being fair to their employees. Inner-city neighborhoods were turning into slums, filled with poor people who did not have ways to meet their needs. Sadly, churches in the cities were not meeting those needs either.

When Walter moved to “Hell’s Kitchen,” he began to see first-hand how rough the conditions were, and he became concerned. What he saw touched him deeply and he wrote:



When I saw how men toiled all their life long, hard toilsome lives, and at the end had almost nothing to show for it; how strong men begged for work and could not get it in the hard times; how little children died—oh, the children's funerals! They gripped my heart—that was one of the things I always went away thinking about—why did the children have to die?

As a pastor, he preached about Christ and taught about the Bible, but Walter began to serve his people by helping them with the practical problems they faced. He worked with the poor to find jobs, receive medical care, fight against crime, and fill their stomachs.

As Walter saw the troubles of the people in his community, he also saw many “good” Christians who were unconcerned about what was going on. For them, being a Christian meant having only a personal relationship with God. They did not understand that they should also be concerned with the social problems of others.

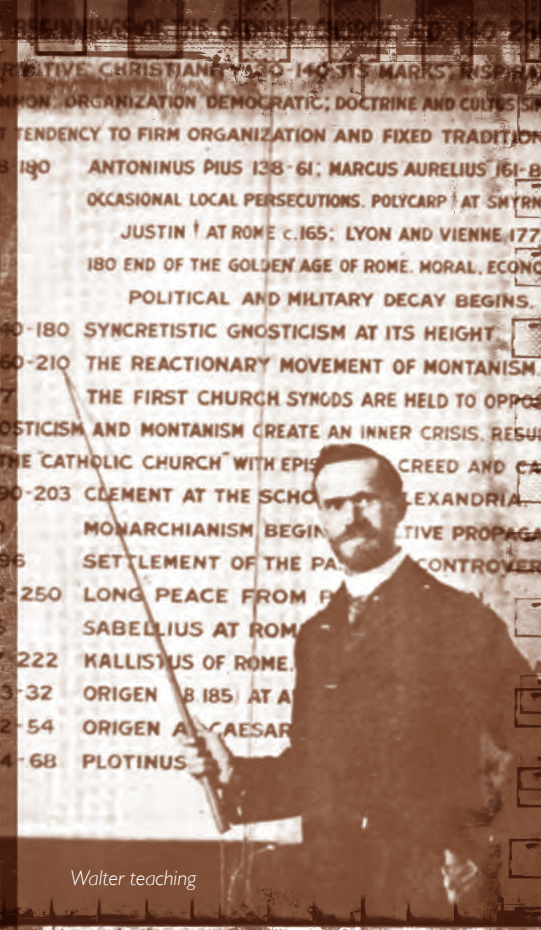
Ministering among the poor and watching them suffer inspired Walter to find ways to help improve the social conditions. He studied the Bible and discovered that Jesus spoke not only about changing individual lives, but changing the community as well. From Jesus, Walter picked up clues about how his faith should influence the way he lived in his community. This new reading of the Bible gave Walter a fresh experience of God's calling. To live out the message of the gospel, Christians must help meet the social needs of their communities and world.

Walter began to write about what he had discovered

while living in “Hell’s Kitchen.” He wanted other Christians to think about how their faith influenced the way they treated others. After suffering an illness that left him deaf in 1888, Walter turned his attention toward writing even more. He wrote eleven books and many articles about what he called the “social gospel,” and he became a popular speaker. Walter eventually left the pastorate to teach at Rochester Theological Seminary. In 1892, he also formed a group called “Brotherhood of the Kingdom,” which worked for better working conditions for the poor of the cities.

What did Walter write and speak about that was so important? He believed that the goal of the “**Social Gospel Movement**” was to apply the teachings of the gospel to society, and he wrote about a new understanding of the “Kingdom of God.” For Walter, the Kingdom of God was not a goal to be reached in the future, like heaven. As he read the prayer our Lord taught us to pray in the Bible, Walter took seriously Jesus’ words: “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Walter truly believed that people could work to establish life as God wanted it to be on

Rauschenbusch was a leader of the “**Social Gospel Movement**.” This movement tried to encourage people to understand that the Christian faith required that followers of Jesus use their resources to help the poor and change the injustices of society. The gospel should impact the society not just spiritually, but physically.



Walter teaching

earth. That meant no suffering, hatred, or violence. All God's people would have all that they needed and would live peacefully together.

Walter believed that the church existed to help make this goal possible. The purpose of the church, he said, was not only to communicate the importance of a personal Christian faith. The church also must work to transform society so that God's

Kingdom could exist on earth. He also believed strongly in the need

for a personal experience with God. In fact, he considered the Baptist emphasis on individual faith one of the primary reasons he was a Baptist, but he knew that faith was not meant to be a purely individual matter. While their personal relationship with Jesus was certainly significant, Christians were called to devote their lives to changing the world.

Walter did much good in helping to improve society in

his lifetime. When he died from cancer in 1918, much work was left to be done. Before he died, he said, "I am not sorry to be leaving a world where there is so much hate and to be going to a country where there will be so much love." He believed that God's Kingdom could be real on earth, but it had not happened yet.

Why is Walter Rauschenbusch a Baptist hero? He was a Baptist prophet. Often, people think of prophets as those who predict the future or think about future events. In the Bible, however, prophets were those people who took a good look at the world around them and demanded change. They believed that faith was not something that was only in a person's heart or head. Faith calls people to act, to do something practical about present-day situations. They did not predict the future, but they looked forward to a future when the gospel was lived out.

Walter was this kind of prophet. He saw problems in the world around him, called people to take action to change them, and hoped for the day that the world would be a better place because of the church.

As a prophet, Walter also challenged the church. He reminded Christians of the meaning of the gospel when it would have been much easier for them to sit comfortably in their pews. Some people told him that the church's job was to "save souls" by preaching the gospel, not dealing with people's physical problems. Walter agreed that the church was responsible for preaching the gospel, but he turned to the Bible and reminded them that Jesus was also

concerned with helping the poor, sick, and needy with their physical needs as well as their spiritual needs.

Walter was a hero because he found a way to live out the gospel in his own community. His passion for service and his ideas about the “social gospel” came out of his experience with the people in “Hell’s Kitchen.” He could not just keep the message of Jesus within the walls of the church he pastored. He took that message to the streets and told the people who had no jobs, food, or housing that they could know a better way.

Walter Rauschenbusch is still a hero for Baptists today. His teaching and work have influenced many people, Baptists and non-Baptists, to take seriously Jesus’ commandments to love God and love their neighbors. One important person he influenced was another Baptist hero—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Baptists can continue to learn from Walter Rauschenbusch. We should read the Bible and take seriously Jesus’ instructions about caring for those treated unfairly. We should look around us and speak out about the wrong things that are happening in our world. We should take action to make our communities better places. We should do our part to make the world like God’s Kingdom, a place with no suffering, hatred, or need. Like Walter Rauschenbusch, we may never see that goal met, but we can know that we are trying to do what Jesus asked of his followers.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BAPTIST DREAMER



Who: Martin Luther King, Jr.

Where: Georgia and Alabama

When: 1929-1968

What he did: Worked for equal rights for all people

In 1929, Martin Luther King, Jr., was born into a society much different than today. Life in America, especially for African Americans, has changed since his birth. Much of the change is due to Martin Luther King's work and influence.

Growing up in Atlanta, Georgia, young Martin experienced the world as a second-class citizen. Segregation was a way of life that kept white people and black people separated from each other. Some white people set up laws because they thought blacks were not as good as whites. Often whites treated blacks in rude ways. Black people



used different schools, different restaurants, and even different water fountains from their white neighbors. Martin grew up seeing signs that said, “Whites only,” or “Colored only,” or “No negroes.”

Martin’s father was a Baptist minister. Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., did not like the segregation laws and sometimes refused to obey them. One time, King, Sr., took his son to buy shoes. The shoe salesman told the father and son that they would have to move from their seats and sit in the black section of the store. Reverend King told him, “We’ll either buy shoes sitting here or we won’t buy shoes at all.” As they left the store without new shoes, King, Sr., told his young son, “I don’t care how long I have to live with this system, I will never accept it.”

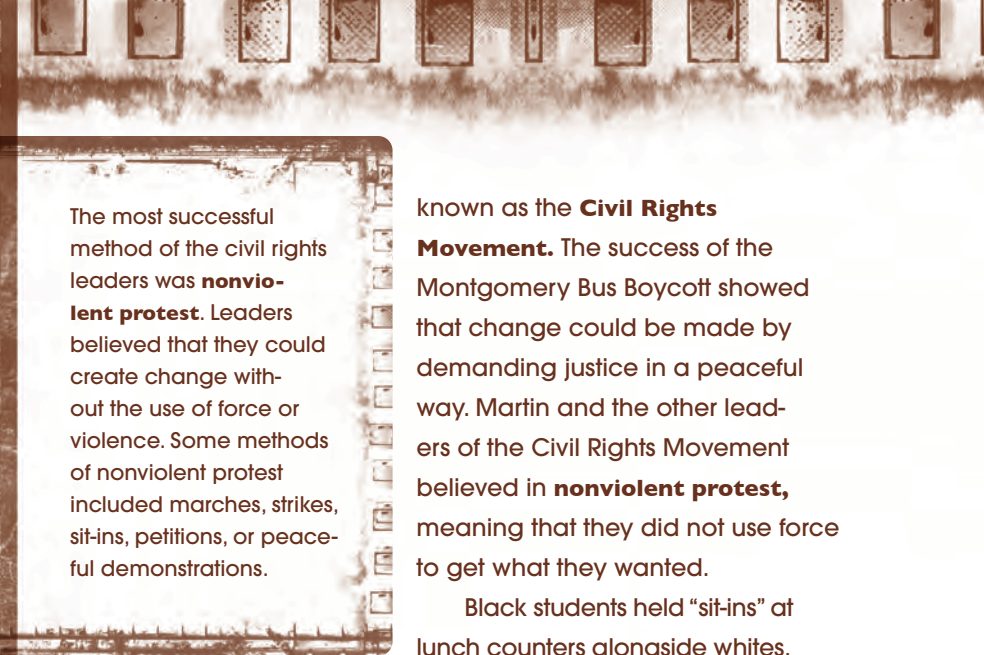
Martin was very bright and a good student. He attended Morehouse College in Atlanta at the age of fifteen. After graduation, he went on to Crozer Seminary in Pennsylvania to train to become a Baptist minister like his father and grandfather. He then enrolled in Boston University to receive a doctoral degree in theology. As he finished writing the paper to complete his degree, King was called to be the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, when he was only twenty-five years old. He thought this opportunity would be a good chance for him to finish writing his paper while he served a church.

After Martin and his wife, Coretta, had been in Montgomery for one year, something significant happened in Montgomery that changed their lives. Segregation law allowed white people to sit at the front of a bus and forced black people to sit in the back seats. A black woman named Rosa Parks got on a public bus, found a seat near the front, and then refused to give up her seat to a white man when the bus filled up. The police came and arrested her because she had broken segregation laws. Black people were angry. Instead of reacting with violence, they planned to boycott the bus system. By not riding buses, they hoped to draw attention from the public and cost the bus system enough money that changes would be made.

Martin and other black leaders in the community had to make some decisions about how they would be involved. Martin had come to Montgomery to finish his doctoral degree and pastor his church. He had not intended to stir up political debates. But he knew that he had to do something. All of his life, he had lived in an unfair society. He could not simply sit by and watch when he had an opportunity to do something about the way Southern society worked. God had called him to this place for a reason, and soon the world would find out why.

Martin quickly became a leader of what became

The **Civil Rights Movement** aimed to stop racial discrimination toward African-Americans in the United States, particularly in the South. The height of the movement was 1954-1968.

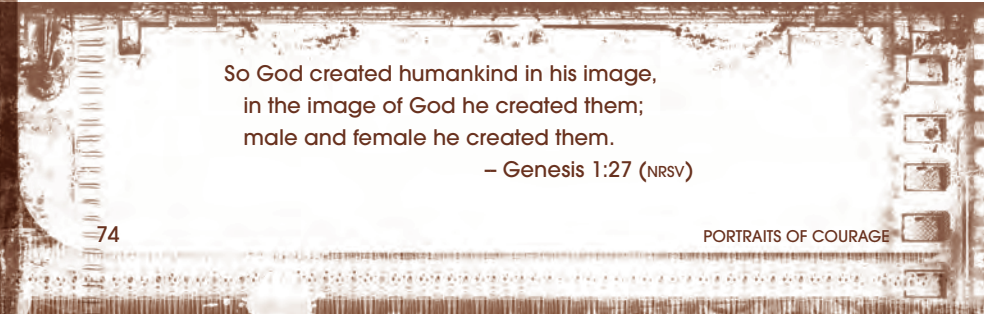


The most successful method of the civil rights leaders was **nonviolent protest**. Leaders believed that they could create change without the use of force or violence. Some methods of nonviolent protest included marches, strikes, sit-ins, petitions, or peaceful demonstrations.

known as the **Civil Rights Movement**. The success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott showed that change could be made by demanding justice in a peaceful way. Martin and the other leaders of the Civil Rights Movement believed in **nonviolent protest**, meaning that they did not use force to get what they wanted.

Black students held “sit-ins” at lunch counters alongside whites, sitting on stools until the stores closed. Protestors rode buses throughout the South on “Freedom Rides” until the buses were safe for blacks and whites to ride together. Some, including Martin, even went to jail for breaking segregation laws.

Why did Martin care so much about changing segregation laws? What made him risk his life to stand up for civil rights? Martin viewed himself first as a minister called by God. His political and social action rose out of his faith. For Martin, the inner life of faith and prayer led to an outer life of social action. Public action was a sign of personal faith.



So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

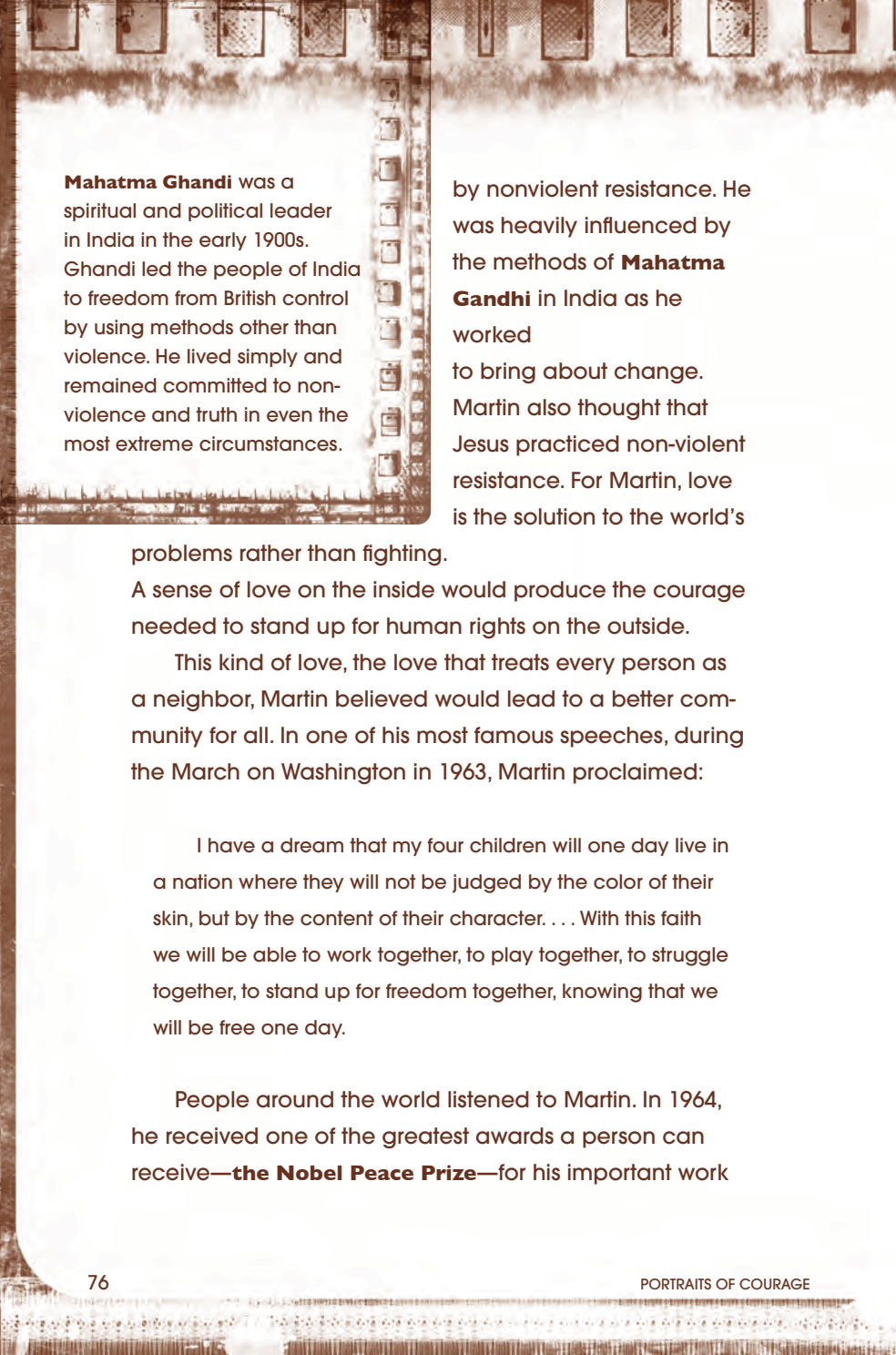
– Genesis 1:27 (NRSV)

Martin believed that every human is created by God in God's image. Because everyone is someone special, Martin wanted to make sure that black people and poor people had hope and were treated with a sense of dignity. Every person has equal dignity, regardless of race, wealth, or social status. So every person should be equally free. His Baptist faith had taught him this lesson.

In one of his sermons, Martin said, "The question is not, 'If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?' The question is, 'If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?' That's the question." There's no question that Martin's courage came out of his deep sense of his Baptist beliefs, his Christian faith, and his commitment to human freedom.

Martin believed strongly that freedom must be sought





Mahatma Gandhi was a spiritual and political leader in India in the early 1900s. Gandhi led the people of India to freedom from British control by using methods other than violence. He lived simply and remained committed to non-violence and truth in even the most extreme circumstances.

by nonviolent resistance. He was heavily influenced by the methods of **Mahatma Gandhi** in India as he worked to bring about change. Martin also thought that Jesus practiced non-violent resistance. For Martin, love is the solution to the world's

problems rather than fighting.

A sense of love on the inside would produce the courage needed to stand up for human rights on the outside.

This kind of love, the love that treats every person as a neighbor, Martin believed would lead to a better community for all. In one of his most famous speeches, during the March on Washington in 1963, Martin proclaimed:

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. . . . With this faith we will be able to work together, to play together, to struggle together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

People around the world listened to Martin. In 1964, he received one of the greatest awards a person can receive—the **Nobel Peace Prize**—for his important work

in civil rights.

Sadly, Martin did not live long enough to see his dream become reality. On April 4, 1968, he was shot while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. He was in Memphis to help lead a protest against low wages and poor conditions for city workers. On the night before he died, he preached a sermon in which he said:

I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will, and He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Martin hoped that all people would one day be treated equally. He never saw what his work would do for African Americans, but he had faith that God

The **Nobel Peace Prize** is an award given out every year "to the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between the nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing [armies](#) and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses." The award was created by Alfred Nobel, a Swedish scientist, who left these requirements in his will.

would see his people through their struggle.

Martin Luther King, Jr., is a hero—a hero for African Americans, a hero for Americans, and a hero for all people who believe in equal rights. But what makes him a Baptist hero?

Martin understood himself first as a minister of the gospel. He got involved in social action because his faith pushed him to do it. Faith was not only about going to church or praying or reading the Bible. Faith required putting his beliefs about God and the Bible into action. Martin stood by his faith convictions no matter what it cost him, even as it cost him his life. Like Walter Rauschenbusch, Martin believed that faith must impact society.

As a Baptist, Martin learned to believe in freedom for all people. God created every human, and every human had the right to be treated with respect. Baptists like John Smyth and John Clarke fought for that freedom from the beginning of their history. Martin worked for freedom in his own time and place.

Finally, Martin is a Baptist hero because he followed God's voice. Martin did not look to stir up action when he moved to Montgomery. Yet, when he saw God moving, he did what God called him to do. Martin's portrait teaches all of us that we can serve God when and wherever we live. When we love people and find ways to help them, God will be with us and will call us to follow.

ADDIE DAVIS BAPTIST PASTOR



Who: Addie Davis


Where: North Carolina

When: 1917-2005

What she did: First woman minister to be ordained by a Southern Baptist church

August 9, 1964, was a historic day for Baptists. In the same year that Martin Luther King, Jr., won the Nobel Peace prize for his work for human equality, a Baptist church in North Carolina acted to give a woman status equal to a man. On that August day, Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, ordained Addie Davis to the gospel ministry. Addie and the members of the church did not know that they were making history. They simply thought they were listening to God's voice and following God's calling.

Why was that event so special? Addie's **ordination** was a turning point for some Southern Baptist churches. Southern Baptists, like many other Christian groups, were divided



Ordination is the process of setting apart a man or woman for the ministry. Baptists believe that the local church ordains those whom it believes to be called by God to minister. Ordination is the church's blessing upon a person to perform the rituals and practices of ministry, including preaching, conducting weddings or funerals, and performing the rituals of communion or baptism.

over the role of women as leaders in the church. Northern Baptists had ordained women and had had women pastors since the 1880s. Women all over the country had served as youth ministers, ministers of education, and ministers of music, but no white Southern Baptist women had ever been ordained as

pastors.

By the 1960s, women were beginning to rethink their roles in society. More women were going to college, getting jobs, and finding independence in ways that had been reserved for men. Women were becoming leaders in businesses, education, politics, and in many other areas of society. When Baptist women went to church, they wanted to be leaders there as well. Young Baptist girls began to dream not only of serving God as missionaries but also as local church pastors.

Addie Davis had grown up as a young girl in a Baptist church in Virginia. She faithfully attended church with her family "every time the doors were open." Baptized at age eight, Addie always showed interest in faith and religious activities. At church, Addie learned about Baptist missionaries. She thought that God might be calling her to be a

missionary as well.

But Addie also dreamed to be a pastor like her grandfather. She often practiced preaching to her friends and dolls. Because she had no female role models or encouragement, she kept her dream to herself. Although many years passed before it was fulfilled, her dream remained alive.

Addie grew up and went to Meredith College, a Baptist women's school in Raleigh, North Carolina. She directed a church's education ministry and then became dean of women at a Baptist college.

She decided to go to seminary to become a minister, but her plans were interrupted. When her father died in 1944, she moved back home to help her mother. During this time, she preached at a small church without a pastor.

While she lived with her mother, Addie grew very ill with appendicitis. As she recovered, she promised God and herself that if she lived, she would do what she had always felt in her heart that she should do—preach! Her experience made her want to try again to go to seminary, and she did.

At Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Addie's



professors helped her and supported her. They also told her that being a female pastor would be very difficult. They were right! When she graduated from seminary, she could not find a Baptist church in the South that would call her to be its pastor. The churches were afraid to be the first to call a woman pastor. She decided to move north to become the pastor of First Baptist Church of Readsboro, Vermont.

Before Addie moved to Vermont, she wanted to be ordained and receive the blessing of her home church. Most Baptists in the South did not agree that women should be ordained as pastors, but since all Baptist churches are free to make their own decisions, no rules prevented a local church from ordaining whom it wished. Even so, the leaders at her home church were afraid that ordaining a woman would cause a controversy. Addie decided to seek ordination elsewhere.

Addie contacted several churches in the area about ordaining her. When she finally talked to Warren Carr, pastor of Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, she found a supporter. After talking to Addie, Carr believed that God had called her to be a preacher. The congregation discussed and debated the matter and voted to ordain Addie, and she later remarked that “the whole congregation wholeheartedly backed me.”

Many Baptists did not agree with Addie's ordination. Addie and the church received letters from people who disapproved of their decision. Pastor Carr received nearly fifty letters that criticized the church. Addie received letters



Addie at Watts Street Baptist Church in 2004 with the church's pastor, Mel Williams, and associate minister with adults, Diane Hill

(Photo courtesy of Jere Judd)

telling her to give up her ordination. One man told her to learn from her husband, although she never married. Another man called her a “child of the Devil.” Addie never bothered to answer any of the letters. She believed deeply that she was doing what God called her to do. No one could convince her otherwise.

In Vermont, Addie discovered the churches to be more gracious and open towards women leaders. One young



Addie reading scripture
(Photo courtesy of Jere Judd)

girl in Addie's church did not know that men could be ministers because she had only known Addie as her pastor. As the girl and her friends played church, they took turns acting as the minister. When the girl's brother wanted his turn as the preacher, the girl told him, "You can't be the preacher! Only women are preachers!"

Addie went on to serve several churches as pastor. As a minister, she tried to care for people. She showed them compassion. She believed that as a woman, she had special gifts that were different from those of men. She saw ways that her gifts were needed and appreciated. She

was even named Vermont's Pastor of the Year in 1971.

Addie taught other women to use their gifts to serve in ministry. She told them, "We are not carbon copies—each of us is unique, redeemed and called of God to fulfill a particular ministry. BE YOURSELF! . . . Your gift to God and to the people you serve is YOU—you're one of a kind." Addie Davis was one of a kind, and she knew that God had created her for a special purpose.

In 1998, a group called Baptist Women in Ministry, formed by a group of Baptist women ministers who were influenced by Addie's ordination, began presenting the Addie Davis Awards. Each year, these awards are given to outstanding Baptist women ministers in both preaching and pastoral leadership. Many of these Baptist women have been inspired by Addie's story and are carrying on her example and influence as women called and gifted by God.

In 2004, Addie celebrated the fortieth anniversary of her ordination at Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham. She even preached during the service. But soon Addie became ill, and she died December 3, 2005, in her hometown of Covington, Virginia.

Few Baptist women ministers have had as much influence as Baptist hero Addie Davis. Her ordination service marked a new era for Baptists in the South, and it was a historical event for Baptists everywhere.

Addie did not seek ordination to make history or to cause conflict. In fact, at the time of her ordination, she

did not know that she was the first Southern Baptist woman to be ordained. She was not trying to be first. She was only trying to follow the dream that God had placed in her heart as a young girl.

Addie is a Baptist hero because she followed her heart by listening to God's calling for her life. Baptists believe that every individual is free to serve God in the best way he or she knows how. For Addie, the best way was to become a pastor. She believed in her own freedom to follow that dream. She also believed in the local church's freedom to choose to ordain her no matter what others thought. Addie Davis is a Baptist hero because she believed in freedom.

Addie painted a new portrait of leadership for Baptist churches. She became a role model to the many Baptist women who have followed in her footsteps. Since Addie's ordination in 1964, nearly 2,000 Baptist women in the South have been ordained. Most of these women serve as chaplains, others are missionaries or campus ministers, but many serve as associate pastors or even pastors like Addie did. In 2007, 607 women were identified as pastors and co-pastors in Baptist churches in the United States.

Addie gave this advice to women: "Don't give up if you have a call from God to enter the ministry." Even though the task might be hard, God calls both men and women to be faithful to their calling and to follow their dreams.

JIMMY CARTER BAPTIST PEACEMAKER



Who: Jimmy Carter

Where: Georgia

When: 1924-present

What he did and does: President of the United States, works for human rights around the world

James Earl Carter, Jr., is most well-known for the four years of his life that he served as the thirty-ninth president of the United States, but before he was president, he was a Baptist, and he still is! Jimmy Carter's Baptist roots were an important part of his life as President. Jimmy's Baptist heritage continues to influence his own life and the lives of others around the world.

Jimmy was born October 1, 1924, in the small farming town of Plains, Georgia. He grew up in the nearby town of Archery. Jimmy's father was a farmer. He grew peanuts, fruit, and vegetables, and he raised animals for their milk, meat, and wool. Jimmy's mother worked as a nurse. As



a boy, Jimmy and his three younger siblings helped on the farm, gathering eggs and milking cows. He was a good student and enjoyed reading and learning.

Jimmy's family attended Plains Baptist

Church, where he studied the Bible and learned about Jesus. At church and at home, his faith was molded by prayers and Bible readings. When he was eleven years old, he committed his life to Jesus, became a member of the church, and was baptized. From then on, Jimmy loved going to church and wanted others to love church, too. He even borrowed his mother's car to drive around looking for boys his age whom he could take to church.

After graduating from high school in Plains, Jimmy went to Georgia Southwestern College. In the midst of World War II, he took courses at the Georgia Institute of Technology in order to prepare for an appointment to the United States Naval Academy. He graduated from the Naval Academy and served as a submariner in the Navy. In 1946, he married a young woman from Plains, Rosalynn Smith, who had been a friend of his sister.

In 1953, Jimmy's father grew sick and died, and Jimmy and Rosalynn decided to leave the Navy and return to Plains to take over the family farm and business. Together, they ran Carter's Warehouse, a farming supply store.

Jimmy quickly got involved in the community and returned to Plains Baptist Church as a Sunday School teacher.

In 1962, Jimmy decided to enter politics. He won an election to the Georgia Senate. In 1966, he ran for governor and lost. He won the next election in 1970, becoming Georgia's seventy-sixth governor. As governor, he tried to help those whom others did not care for. He provided more school funding to both the rich and the poor. He hired black employees for state jobs. He improved prisons and mental health facilities, and he worked to protect the environment. The biggest issue Jimmy faced as governor, however, was **racial discrimination**.

In the 1960s, leaders in Georgia and other southern states had struggled to break down segregation laws. In those days, people were treated differently because of the color of their skin. Black people and white people had been separated from each other in public



Jimmy when he was governor

Racial discrimination is the act of treating a person or group of people differently or unfairly because of their skin color or appearance.

places, like schools, churches, buses, and even public restrooms. Leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., were working to change the way society treated African Americans unfairly.

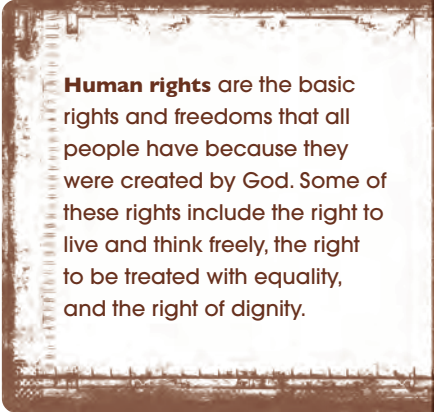
Jimmy's father had believed in segregation, but his mother did not. As a boy growing up on the farm, Jimmy had many black friends with whom he played and worked. He remembered, "We ran, swam, rode horses, drove wagons, and floated on rafts together. We misbehaved together and shared the same punishments. We built and lived in the same tree houses and played cards and ate at the same table. But we never went to the same church or school."

Because Jimmy's mother had taught him that treating people unfairly because of the color of their skin was wrong, he tried to make changes in the state. He also spoke out against segregation in his community. In 1965, the pastor and eleven deacons of Plains Baptist Church voted that blacks should not be allowed to worship there on Sundays. Jimmy, the twelfth deacon, had missed the meeting due to a trip to Atlanta. When he returned, he stood up on Sunday morning and urged the church to vote against the deacons' decision. Jimmy told the congregation that the church was God's house, not theirs. Sadly, most members of the church voted with the deacons. Later, when another minister tried to allow blacks to attend and was fired, Jimmy's family joined other families in beginning a new church that would accept all people, Maranatha Baptist Church.

In 1976, Jimmy Carter was elected president of the United States. As president, Jimmy thought of himself as a servant of the nation, and he wanted to make a positive impact on America and on the world. He promised never to lie to the people. He tried to lead the government to be caring and compassionate to people and nations.

Human rights sat at the top of Jimmy's list of priorities. He worked to stop governments that abused people. He worked for equal rights for women and African Americans. He created an energy plan to help take care of the environment. He tried to help create peace in fighting countries, and he was the first president in a long time not to send troops to fight in a war.

Jimmy believed strongly in the Baptist heritage of religious liberty for all people. He refused to treat people unfairly who did not follow his religion. He believed that the government should be separate from churches and that the government should not sponsor religious events. Some people grew angry that he would not approve of teachers leading prayers in public schools. He would not hold worship services in the White House. Jimmy worked hard to follow in the footsteps of his Baptist ancestors, like Roger



Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that all people have because they were created by God. Some of these rights include the right to live and think freely, the right to be treated with equality, and the right of dignity.



Jimmy helping with Habitat for Humanity

Rosalynn returned to Plains. He began to use his influence as the former president to get involved in many other positive causes. He continued to work for peace and human rights, and he created a place where unfriendly groups could work out their problems. The Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, was created as a place to address health, peace, and political issues from around the world. Through

Williams and John Clarke, who worked to protect religious freedom for people of all religions in the United States.

Jimmy upset some people who did not agree with his positions on race, religion, or other political issues. Yet, he believed that he was doing what was right. His actions were motivated by his faith, his Christian principles, and his Baptist heritage.

After Jimmy lost the presidential election in 1980, he and


the Carter Center, Jimmy Carter has personally worked with world leaders to end wars, promote human rights, free prisoners jailed for their political beliefs, provide food for the hungry, and prevent disease around the world.

The Carters have also given much time after his presidency to working with Habitat for Humanity. Habitat is an organization that helps poor people in the United States and around the world by building houses for them. The Carters help to raise money and advertise for the organization, helping Habitat spread to ninety-two countries, but the Carters also hammer nails and saw wood. They volunteer a week of each year to work on Habitat houses.

Throughout his life, Jimmy has also remained a faithful Baptist. He has been a Sunday School teacher since 1936 and a deacon since 1958. He is still a member of Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia. He regularly teaches Sunday School at the church to a large group of visitors from around the world.

During most of his life, Jimmy was most closely identified with the Southern Baptist Convention. He now identifies himself with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance. Most recently, Jimmy helped to organize the New Baptist Covenant Celebration, a gathering of different Baptist groups from across North America. The goals of the covenant are to unite Baptists on the issues of poverty, peace, and justice around the world.

In 2002, Jimmy Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to find peaceful solutions to conflicts



around the world. Jimmy has been a champion of the Baptist idea that every individual is a child of God and has the right to live freely and safely. He works hard to ensure that those basic human rights are protected. He loves people, no matter if they are male or female, black or white, rich or poor, powerful or lowly.

Jimmy Carter is a Baptist hero because he is a Baptist peacemaker, fighting the evils of our world with love, respect, kindness, and compassion. He has worked for peace between individuals and nations. He has offered a sense of peace to the poor and the neglected by providing for their basic needs. He has been a voice of freedom in our world, bringing peace to the hearts of people created by God to live freely.

LEENA LAVANYA "BAPTIST MOTHER TERESA"



(Photo courtesy of Roy O'Bryan)

Who: Leena Lavanya

Where: India

When: Present

What she does: Cares for the poor and outcast of her community

Leena Lavanya rises early in the morning to pray before she has breakfast and gets ready for her day. By 8:30 a.m., she is working. She visits the village school for poor children. She then travels nearby to the sewing school for their mothers and other women. At another school that she began, she checks on the older students learning how to use computers to find jobs. After lunch, she visits the **AIDS hospice** and the **leper colony**, and cares for individuals who need her help.

Leena has dinner before driving to one of the surrounding villages to visit with the people there. She also teaches their preachers. After a worship service or meeting,

Leena spends time with the village people and lays her hands on those who seek her special touch and prayer. She returns home after midnight to go to bed and get rest for tomorrow, another day of ministry to those who need her most.

Who is this Leena? Leena Lavanya is an Indian woman who works with the poorest people of her state of Andhra Pradesh, India. She has begun ministries for many groups of people who need her assistance—AIDS patients, people with leprosy, street kids and their desperate mothers, village people, and uneducated, unskilled youth and adults. These people are the ones who many people in Leena's community will not even talk to or associate with, much less help. Leena has offered her life in service to others. She lives without much money or many things so that others may have a better life.

AIDS is a disease that attacks the immune system, making it difficult for the infected person to fight off illness. No cure for AIDS currently exists.

Hospice is a facility in which dying people can get medical treatment that helps them to be comfortable and die with dignity. Rather than providing a cure, hospice treatment relieves suffering and improves the quality of life for patients.

A **leper colony** is a home for people with leprosy. People with leprosy have been cast out from society because the disease creates visible disfigurement and has been believed to be highly contagious. Effective medical treatment for leprosy now exists.

Leena grew up as a Baptist in India. Her great-grandfather became a Christian after learning about Jesus from an American Baptist missionary. Her family influenced her



to serve others as Christ served. Leena was raised by her grandparents, following an Indian tradition that firstborn children are often given to the grandparents as a gift of love. Leena's grandparents died when she was eighteen years old, and she returned to live with her parents in the town of Narasaraopet, where she still lives and works today.

When Leena moved to Narasaraopet, her life changed. Her grandparents had protected her, and she had grown up with many advantages. Her grandfather, B. R. Moses, taught Leena to serve poor people whom others overlooked. She remembered her grandfather caring for lepers, people carrying a disease that mangles their bodies and destroys their skin. Leena's father, Rathna Kumari, went to law school so that he could learn how to work for laws to help the poor.

As an adult, Leena worked as a biology teacher. She moved from a nice, safe home to a place of mud streets and worn-down settlements, and her eyes were opened



I SURRENDER ALL

All to Jesus, I surrender;
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

*I surrender all, I surrender all,
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.*

All to Jesus I surrender;
Humbly at His feet I bow,
Worldly pleasures all forsaken;
Take me, Jesus, take me now.

All to Jesus, I surrender;
Make me, Savior, wholly Thine;
Let me feel the Holy Spirit,
Truly know that Thou art mine.

All to Jesus, I surrender;
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and
power;
Let Thy blessing fall on me.

All to Jesus I surrender;
Now I feel the sacred flame.
O the joy of full salvation!
Glory, glory, to His Name!

Judson W. Van DeVenter, 1896

to all of the difficulties that her poor neighbors faced. She began to try to meet some of their needs by ministering to them in various ways.

In 1993, Leena traveled to Zimbabwe to attend a conference for youth sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance. While she was there, she attended a workshop led by Tony Campolo, an American Baptist preacher and teacher. Campolo challenged the group that while they often sang the hymn, "All to Jesus, I Surrender," few Christians ever surrendered very much. Leena decided then to take the words of that hymn seriously and to surrender her life to serving Christ by caring for the poorest people in India.

One day, while riding on a bus in her town, Leena met a woman who had no husband and no skills to find a good job. She could not provide food, shelter, and clothing for her children. Leena and her family decided to give up their own breakfast money for three months so that they could purchase a sewing machine for the woman. They bought the machine, taught the woman to sew, and gave her a way to earn a living.

When Leena saw how much of a difference that sewing machine made for the woman's family, she began a sewing school to help other poor women learn the skills needed to make a living. While they learned to sew, Leena told the women stories about Jesus. The women saw how Jesus' love had led others like Leena to care for them. The school has now taught over four hundred women to sew so that they can earn enough money to support their families.

Leena raised goats and sold their milk to make money for the school. She raised enough money so that the women who graduated from the school received new sewing machines. Then they could begin their own businesses and make money for their families.

As she worked with these poor women in her community, Leena learned that their children were not allowed to attend school because they did not know their fathers. Leena knew that these children would never escape poverty without an education. She began a school for the street children near her home.

The school grew so that 150 children were given a



Leena visits children at their school
(Photo courtesy of Roy O'Bryan)

meal and basic education each day. The children learned the stories of Jesus. Their teachers showed the love and attention that they needed. Leena's school is in one of the poorest places in the world. Serve Trust Elementary School now has two teachers and over eighty children who are learning so that they might have a new way of life.

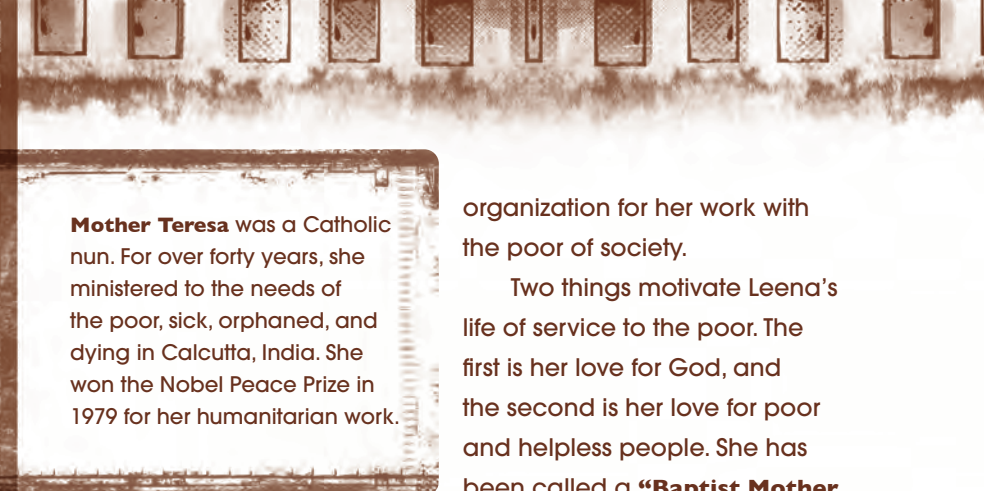
As Leena walked along the street one day, she noticed a dirty, ragged beggar on the side of the road. Many had passed by, but Leena was the first person to stop. As she helped the woman get up and get to the hospital, Leena learned that this woman had HIV/AIDS, a disease that weakened her body so that it could not fight off sickness.

Because no cure for AIDS exists, this woman would eventually die.

Leena knew that AIDS sufferers do not receive the help they need because many people are scared to be near them. Even relatives and friends will disown the people with AIDS because they are afraid they will catch the disease. In that way, AIDS sufferers are like those with leprosy. Leena began a hospice facility for AIDS patients, a place that they could go to receive medical care that would ease their pain and allow them to feel loved. Each month, around 110 AIDS patients come to Leena for medicine and food. Although she is not a doctor, she can give them vitamins that will help them feel better. This help is not enough for

the patients to become healthy, but Leena offers what she can and keeps them from being abandoned and lonely.

Leena has begun many other ministries to help the people of South India. She ministers to lepers who have been abandoned, much like AIDS patients, by their families and communities. She began a computer school for unemployed youth so that they could develop skills and find jobs. She leads a village outreach ministry, preaching and sharing God's love with the villagers. She stands up for the rights of women and the poor. When a tsunami hit Southeast Asia in December 2005, Leena was the first person to reach four Indian villages with food. In 2007, Leena and her Serve Trust ministries received the Mahatma Gandhi award for the most effective non-governmental



Mother Teresa was a Catholic nun. For over forty years, she ministered to the needs of the poor, sick, orphaned, and dying in Calcutta, India. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for her humanitarian work.

organization for her work with the poor of society.

Two things motivate Leena's life of service to the poor. The first is her love for God, and the second is her love for poor and helpless people. She has been called a "**Baptist Mother**

Teresa," named after the Catholic nun who was known around the world for serving the poor in the name of Jesus. Leena's ministries are also becoming recognized around the world because they have been so effective in providing for the needs of the poor.

Why is Leena Lavanya a Baptist hero? She is a hero because she has read the Bible and learned about Jesus' care for the poor. She has committed her own life to modeling the life of Jesus, and she has given herself to the work of Jesus in the world. Her Baptist faith and Baptist family taught her to serve others, and she has taken that calling seriously.

Leena Lavanya has found that she can serve God in her own community. By serving the poorest of the poor, she gives them hope. By showing them a picture of freedom, Leena is painting a new portrait of life for the people of India.

THEO ANGELOV PERSECUTED BAPTIST



(Photo courtesy of United Bible Societies/Dag Smemo)

Who: Theo Angelov

Where: Bulgaria in Eastern Europe

When: 1940-present

What he did: Endured religious persecution to be a Baptist leader in Bulgaria

Baptist Theo Angelov remembers the earliest years of his life fondly. He was born into a Christian pastor's family in Bulgaria. Going to church, praying, and reading the Bible have been a part of his way of life since birth. Celebrating Christmas and Easter, being part of children's groups in the church, and traveling with his father who preached in nearby churches are some of Theo's brightest memories. As he says about his early childhood, "It was good to be a Christian."

Along with all of those fond memories, Theo experienced hard times as a child. The joy of Theo's



Communism is a system of government in which the state plans and controls the economy. Often a single political group holds power, claiming to make progress toward a higher goal in which all goods are equally shared by the people.

childhood was destroyed as his country suffered through World War II and the new government that came to power following the war. These hard experiences helped Theo to learn about true happiness at two special times. Those occasions were the day his

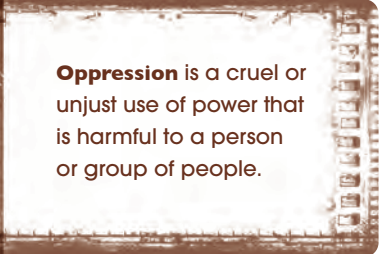
father came home from prison after eight years, and the day **Communism** fell.

After World War II, Bulgaria fell under control of a Communist government. The Communist leaders planned to create a society in which everyone was equal. The nation would own all property and possessions so that no person could be richer or poorer than others. While people being equal sounded like a good idea, Communism actually became a form of **oppression**. The Communist leaders

grew powerful and ruled very strictly. The people of Bulgaria had little power or influence.

Communists did not believe that religion had much value in society. They thought of religion as “old-fashioned.” They believed that

the nation should be a citizen’s first loyalty. All of a sudden, being a Christian in Bulgaria became dangerous. The



Oppression is a cruel or unjust use of power that is harmful to a person or group of people.

church became a state enemy. Members of churches risked their jobs, positions in society, and possibilities for education.

The Communist time was difficult for Christians like Theo and his family. The government took over or destroyed some church buildings. Bibles and Christian literature were outlawed. The government allowed no schools or seminaries for the training of pastors. Church members were ridiculed at school, work, and even on the street for their beliefs.

Pastors like Theo's father particularly threatened the government because they had influence over church members. The government feared that pastors would speak out to their people about the injustice of the state leaders. Theo's father was concerned that the church would suffer under the government, but he carried on with his preaching. Then, on an August day in 1948, the Angelov family's lives changed.

Theo, age eight, was playing in the yard when two police officers came looking for his father. As the officers searched, Theo's father told Theo to run to the other pastor's home to warn him that the police had come. Theo was too late. Officers were already waiting to take that pastor away, too.

Theo and his family soon discovered that almost all



of the Baptist ministers had been arrested. No one knew where they had been taken. Finally, they learned that the pastors were imprisoned in the town of Sofia. On the night after the arrests, Theo's mother gathered her children. "Children," she said, "let's see if the Lord has something to say to us." She opened the Bible and read the verses where the page fell open, Isaiah 51:12-14:

I, I am he who comforts you; why then are you afraid of a mere mortal who must die, a human being who fades like grass? You have forgotten the LORD, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. You fear continually all day long because of the fury of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction. But where is the fury of the oppressor? The oppressed shall speedily be released; they shall not die and go down to the Pit, nor shall they lack bread.

These words from the Bible applied to the Angelovs' situation: Their father and husband was in prison, and they feared the oppression that they suffered. They felt like this Bible passage was God's encouragement to them during a challenging time.

The pastors in prison waited nine months for their trial. During that long and lonely stay, the pastors had no contact with each other. Communists interrogated the men and tortured them to try to force them to confess. The prisoners ate only scraps of bread with sips of water and were often forced to stand until they fainted.

When the trial began, the Communists accused Theo's father and the other pastors of being American spies and being disloyal to their government. He was sentenced to ten years in prison. Young Theo could not believe it. His father would have to stay in prison for more years than Theo had been alive.

Over the next years, Theo's family struggled. They missed his father deeply. His mother could not find work because her husband was in jail. His uncle, a farmer, helped them to survive those difficult years by offering food. For the span of eight years, Theo visited his father only once—for ten minutes.

Theo's father served his time and was freed from prison on December 20, 1956. He preached to his congregation the next day. Many of the Baptist preachers had now been released, and all of them had remained true to their faith.

During the time that his father was in prison, Theo decided to remain a faithful Christian. He and a friend whose pastor father was also imprisoned agreed that they would not hide their faith and remained active in a Baptist church. When Theo was fifteen, he made a personal decision to follow Christ no matter the cost, and he was baptized. He wrote to his father in prison to tell him, and the wonderful news encouraged his father.

Because his father had been in prison, Theo's academic achievements were not recognized at school. He could not be admitted to a university because the city hall would not give him the proper paperwork. He entered the army instead and was assigned to the building brigade,

a position to which Communists assigned those they did not trust. After the army, Theo took a chemistry course to get a job in a chemical firm. There he met his wife, Annie. He continued to study in the evenings to get his university degree, and he earned a job as a researcher.

Theo also followed in his father's footsteps as a preacher. Because most Baptist ministers had been arrested, deacons and church members took their places in the pulpit. He had begun leading the youth groups of the church as a teenager, and he had preached sermons since age seventeen. He did not have training to be a preacher, but he had listened to his father's sermons, read his books, and imitated his commitments. The good example of his father motivated him to do the work that needed to be done for the churches of Bulgaria.

Because of his involvement in the church and his father's imprisonment, the government watched Theo suspiciously. During his studies, he was regularly questioned by police. Christians were still being persecuted, and the officials wanted to know what was going on in his congregation.

Theo and Annie also became involved in secretly giving out Bibles and Christian literature. They received Bibles from other countries, and their house became a secret distribution center. This practice was dangerous. Their house was searched, and Theo had to explain to the police where the Bibles came from. Once he was arrested, but he was freed because they did not have enough evidence to convict him.

How did Theo and other Baptists in Bulgaria endure

Theo working with children

(Photo courtesy of Bulgarian Bible Society)

such persecution for so many years? Theo believes that they survived by standing together. Theo says, "It was only by the grace of God that believers continued to serve God in spite of persecutions. Moreover, because of the



prayerful support of believers around the world, Baptists in our region were able to stand strong for their Savior." In 1990, Theo became pastor of the church of Sofia. He tried to continue his work as a researcher, but eventually gave up his position to give full attention to his congregation.

The Communist government fell from power in 1991. Theo remembers, "The fall of the Communist regime was the most unexpected event. We did not believe that this . . . government would give up power voluntarily by itself. It was really a new time—new opportunities, new ways to live and serve. It was wonderful to breathe the air of freedom."

While a new and fair government did not appear immediately, the persecution of Christians disappeared. Churches began to overflow with visitors. New congregations and church buildings sprang up. Young people became believers. Missionaries from other countries arrived. Rebuilding the churches and buildings was not

easy with limited resources and few pastors. But they were free, and the people were filled with great enthusiasm.

With their new freedom, Baptists in Bulgaria elected new leaders for their union. Theo Angelov was elected as president of the Bulgarian Baptist Union. He became more involved with the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), a worldwide group of Baptists who work together for global issues. He served as the General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation of the BWA in 1998-2004.

Theo works for human rights and religious freedom in Eastern Europe and in other places around the world. Living fifty years of his life in a dictatorship where no religious freedom existed, Theo learned to value the Baptist idea of religious freedom. He now helps others understand the importance of the separation of church and state so that other believers will not be persecuted as Bulgarian Baptists have been. His passion for religious freedom for all people comes out of his own experiences. He also works for rights and better living conditions for orphans and other abandoned people who live in terrible situations.

Theo Angelov's portrait as a Baptist hero is painted with strokes of his faithfulness to Christ and to other Baptist Christians in a time and place of persecution. All that he has done has come out of his desire to live out his calling. His story is an inspiration to all Christians to stand firm and to hold on to the hope of Christ in times of despair and darkness.

OLU MENJAY BAPTIST REBUILDER



(Photo courtesy of
Collen Burroughs)

Who: Olu Menjay


Where: Liberia, West Africa

When: Present

What he does: Rebuilds a school in Liberia to give hope after a destructive civil war

Morning begins at the Ricks Institute School near **Monrovia, Liberia**, in Africa as students gather around the flagpole at 7:30. They recite the pledge of allegiance and sing the national anthem and school song before going to the auditorium for a time of devotion and announcements. Following the assembly, the students report to their classroom space to continue the school day by studying different subjects. Students carry a notebook for each class into which they copy down notes from the blackboard. In class, they discuss their reading assignments from the day before.

This description of an average school day at the Ricks



Liberia is an African country that started as an American colony in 1821 to give freed slaves a place to return to Africa. Liberia became an independent country in 1847. The capital of Liberia is Monrovia.

Institute sounds much like a typical school day at any number of schools in the United States or in other parts of the world. But life at Ricks Institute presents many more challenges than most schoolchildren or teachers face.

At Ricks Institute, textbooks are rare. The school's buildings are under repair after they were nearly destroyed by armies in the nation's recent civil war. Teachers make a salary of only \$120 per month, which is a tremendous increase from the \$17-per-month salaries when the school reopened after the war. The school's principal, Olu Menjay, tries to rebuild and revive this school to offer hope and a future to Liberia's children.

Olu Menjay was once one of those Liberian children. The son of a Baptist preacher, Olu was born in a Baptist hospital in Nigeria while his father attended seminary there. When he was two years old, Olu's family moved to the northern part of Liberia. Since Olu grew up in the home of a Baptist pastor, church was a significant part of his life. At age eleven, Olu decided to accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior and was baptized in Ebenezer Baptist Church in Sanniquellie.

Although his family was Baptist, Olu attended a Catholic school. As he studied and made friends with

people from other Christian backgrounds, he learned the importance of being open to the beliefs and practices of others. At church, Olu took leadership in the Royal Ambassadors (RA) program, a Baptist program that teaches boys about missions. He spent vacations from school at RA camps and as a teenager was appointed the vice president of the RA program for all of Liberia. The RA program taught Olu much about the Bible and gave him opportunities for leadership in his church.

Olu's family moved to the capital city of Monrovia when he was a teenager. There he attended a national Baptist high school, Suehn Mission School. During his twelfth-grade year, Olu's high school education was interrupted. On Christmas Eve in 1989, a rebel army attacked Liberia's army. The two armies fought for control of Liberia for many years, with the violence continuing until 2003. Food was scarce, the nation was overtaken by disorder and chaos, and violence and death were all around. Olu completed his coursework, but due to the war, he never graduated. Instead, the war forced him to separate



from his family. He hitchhiked to northern Liberia to escape the tragedy. As a refugee, he went to the Ivory Coast where he worked on a farm to survive.

While living and surviving in the Ivory Coast, Olu got in contact with a Southern Baptist missionary couple from the United States who served in Liberia. The missionary couple made arrangements for Olu to leave Africa to go to college in the United States. Olu received scholarships to attend Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Georgia, where he earned a degree in business.

Olu arrived at Truett-McConnell in the winter of 1991 with nothing but the clothes on his back. As he studied at the college, he was disappointed that some of the students there teased him about the way he talked. He was discouraged that he had come so far to a place that he thought would offer him respect, but instead he had been ridiculed. One of his teachers, however, gave him encouragement by telling the other students that Olu was one of the best students at Truett-McConnell.

Upon Olu's graduation from Truett-McConnell, the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Cleveland befriended him and helped him continue his education at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. There Olu studied religion and sociology. He planned to learn about public policy so that he could work for the betterment of his country.

During his time at Mercer, however, Olu began to understand a calling from God to go into the ministry. Olu had experienced this outward calling since his days of

participating in the RA program, as others had encouraged his preaching and leadership skills. Now, he experienced an inward calling as he felt calmness about what God wanted him to do. Olu graduated from Mercer and went to seminary at Duke Divinity School in North Carolina.

In North Carolina, Olu studied missions. Following his graduation, he served at Lewis Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina. There he learned administrative skills and got ministry experience. His three and a half years there were very meaningful.

In 2001, Olu enrolled in Boston University to study theology. He completed his coursework and was called to go back to serve in Liberia. He had always wanted to



Olu preaching in the chapel of Rick's Institute (Photo courtesy of Michael Helms)

go back to Liberia, and he thought that he might return to teach missions at the Baptist seminary there. Instead, a new opportunity arose.

As the war in Liberia had slowed down, Baptist leaders in Liberia asked Olu to come home and try to rebuild Ricks Institute. Ricks Institute had been a prestigious boarding school where only the brightest and the wealthiest children attended. Ricks had been known for its excellent education. Some of the best leaders in Liberia were graduates of Ricks Institute. Olu was excited about the opportunity to go there.

But the Ricks Institute that Olu remembered from before the war was not the same Ricks Institute that he found when he returned to Liberia in 2005. When the fighting had begun in 1989, armies took over the school grounds. The buildings were vandalized and looted. Dirt roads were torn up by military vehicles. The grass had grown high. Lizards lived in the empty dormitories. When Olu stood at the gate of the school and looked at what had become of it, he nearly turned around and went back to the United States. He was discouraged, and the school faced so many challenges. One question kept him there: "If I don't do it, who will do it?"

Olu stayed, and he began to try to figure out where to start with the rebuilding of Ricks. He began by cutting the grass. He wanted to give the students and the teachers there a sense of pride in their school, so they cut the grass and started making repairs on the classrooms. Since Olu arrived in February of 2005, they have painted art scenes



*Olu with Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf
(Photo courtesy of Olu Menjay)*

on walls and rebuilt the girls' and boys' dormitories. A free medical clinic provides health care for students as well as nearby villagers and communities. They have planted new banana trees and added chickens, goats, pigs, and cows so that the students can help to support the school financially. Ricks Institute has committed to a five-year plan to offer quality education for students in kindergarten through sixth grade—completely free. The school is the only private school in the country to launch such a program. Olu has worked to create hope and dignity at Ricks Institute again.

Ricks Institute, like the country of Liberia, still has much

rebuilding to do and faces many challenges. But Olu wants the Liberians to take responsibility for their future, and he is committed to helping them continue forward. In addition

to his work at the school, Olu spends time in rural Liberia working with the pastors and leaders to get them involved in rebuilding their communities and their country. He believes that leadership with integrity is important. He offers that kind of leadership as well as teaching others to lead.

Olu says, "I keep asking myself . . . what is the essence of being here? Is it more helpful being here than in the States? It's not an easy walk. But I am reaching more people here. It's a calling to come and change society." Olu keeps going because he finds hope in any transformation or change, no matter how small, in the lives of the students and the school.


Olu Menjay is a Baptist hero. His Baptist background has taught him the freedom to be his own person and to follow the direction that God has led him. His Baptist faith gave him the sense of assurance that he is somebody and that he could be free in the midst of all of the things that were happening to him. Olu is a Baptist hero because he has listened to God's calling to do God's work in his part of the world, and he paints a portrait of hope in Liberia!

CONCLUSION

Baptists are a mixed group of people! The Baptist heroes whose stories appear in this book are no exception. These Baptists are from all over the world. Some lived about four hundred years ago, and some still live today. These Baptists are missionaries, teachers, politicians, social workers, doctors, ministers, and more. Some of these Baptists are wealthy and use their money to help others. Others have little money because they have given away all that they have.

Each of these diverse Baptists holds at least three things in common. First, each of these Baptists worked for freedom. Some, such as John Smyth, John Clarke, and Theo Angelov, have fought for religious freedom as they worked to ensure the rights of all people to believe freely. Some, such as Leena Lavanya, William Knibb, Walter Rauschenbusch, Jimmy Carter, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Olu Menjay, have toiled to free others from the oppression of poverty or government or prejudice. Others, like Ann Judson, Louise Fleming, Lottie Moon, Jesse Mercer, and Addie Davis, have striven to help people understand the freedom that Christ brings to all people who follow him. All of these Baptist heroes are freedom lovers!

Second, all of these Baptists are ordinary people. Few were born into a special place in society or stood apart from those around them. Each of these heroes followed



Christ in ordinary places in the world, and their faithfulness resulted in extraordinary contributions. These everyday heroes can show us that when we take part in God's work around us, even ordinary people can make an extraordinary impact on our society and our world.

Third, each of these Baptists believed in the power of the individual. Baptists believe that the individual is important. Each individual has certain rights, and each individual has certain responsibilities! These Baptist heroes demonstrate that each person, with God's help, can make a significant contribution to God's work in the world around us.

Throughout the last four hundred years, Baptists have passed down their heroic makeup. They have shared their courage, their character, their insight, and their compassion. Those who have followed have been inspired by their stories. Through them and others, God has given each of us a colorful world of promise and hope.

You can follow their examples. What new portrait will you paint right where you are? As you remember the stories of these heroic Baptists, I hope you will be challenged to do your part to make a difference as you create your own strokes of faith in your community and our world!

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Introduction

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

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PORTRAITS OF COURAGE

STORIES OF BAPTIST HEROES

Written by Julie Whidden Long, this 128-page book, designed especially for younger youth and older children, presents the stories of Baptist heroes. These heroes lived in various countries and centuries and represent many phases of Baptist life. By highlighting the biographical dimension of the Baptist past, these inspiring stories help readers appreciate the personal contributions of heroic Baptist men and women.



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