

Module Details

Who'd be a Baptist?



Who'd be a Baptist? Module

A good question! Today there are approximately 40 million people who attend Baptist churches around the world, and you may be one of them. Over the last 400 years Baptist churches have grown and spread, so that now there are Baptist churches in the majority of countries in the world. World-wide, Baptists are now one of the major groups within the whole Christian church? So a lot of people have chosen to be Baptists, and if you are part of a Baptist church then you belong to a very large family.

But people attend Baptist churches for many reasons. Some have been brought up in one; some have deliberately and specifically chosen to belong to a Baptist church because they agree with the 'Baptist' way of doing things; others find themselves Baptists almost by accident, attending their local Baptist church because it is nearby and meets their particular needs at that time. We will all think of ourselves as Christians first, but there may be some who are very involved in Baptist churches who are unaware of what brought Baptist churches into existence and what has been important to Baptists over the years.

There is of course much in common between Baptists and other Christians, such as a belief in God as Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, the significance of the Bible. But there are also those things that are different, and this course concentrates on some of these differences – things we might say are distinctive about Baptists. We believe that it is important to know what these distinctive issues might be. We live at a time when society is rapidly changing and challenging the church, and churches are also working much more closely together. In both contexts it is important to know what we think is important.

So this course will ask a number of questions:

- How did the Baptist Church come into being?
- Where were the first Baptist Churches?
- What are the origins of the Baptist Union?
- How did we get to where we are today?
- What is there about church life that is distinctively Baptist?
- What can we learn from the past that can help shape our future development?

In encountering the stories of some of our forebears in the faith we will find inspiration and guidance for the outworking of our own stories today.

Module Outline

What can I expect from the course?

You can expect to hear **stories** about Baptist churches from their beginning to the present day. We will concentrate mainly on churches in England, but will sometimes look beyond. Hopefully you will be inspired by hearing about the past.

You can expect to think about **key principles** of Baptist thinking, the values that have shaped Baptist identity and the distinctives that generations of Baptists have thought to be important. Hopefully you will be challenged to think about what is important in a church.

You can expect to make **connections** between the stories from Baptist history and the concerns you have for the life and mission of your church. Hopefully you will leave with new insights and new ideas.

You can expect the tutors to speak from their knowledge and experience. But you can also expect opportunities to discuss, question and work through issues together and in smaller groups.

What will I have to do?

Beyond attending the evenings and enjoying the course you do not have to do anything!

However if you wish to use this course to gain credit for recognition as a Baptist Lay-preacher or lay-pastor you need to do two assignments, each between 1200-1500 words.

What will help me?

One key book that will help is *English Baptist History and Heritage*, by Roger Hayden. This was first published by the BUGB in 1990 and a revised version will be available any time soon.

Other recommended books are:

Beasley-Murray, Paul, *Radical Believers*, (BUGB 1992)

White, B R, *The English Baptists of the 17th Century*, (Baptist Historical Society, 1996)

Brown, Raymond, *The English Baptists of the 18th Century*, (Baptist Historical Society, 1986)

Briggs, John, *The English Baptists of the 19th Century*, (Baptist Historical Society, 1994)

Sparkes, Douglas, *The Home Mission Story*, (BUGB, 1995)

Programme

WHO'D BE A BAPTIST?

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| Session 1 | What do Baptists stand for?
Setting the context
The place of mission |
| Session 2 | Living as the People of God
Who's in and who's out
Belonging to a wider family |
| Session 3 | Life in a Local Church
The call to ministry
The centrality of worship |
| Session 4 | Rites and Rights
Exploring baptism
Meeting around the Lord's table |
| Session 5 | Engaging with Society
Thinking differently
Seeking change |
| Session 6 | Unity and Diversity
Discovering other Christians
Working better together |

