

**American Baptist Churches of New York State
Lay Study Program**

BAPTIST HERITAGE

STUDENT GUIDE

Curriculum Committee
of the
ABC/NYS Lay Study Team

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Course Description

The general format of this course will be learning based on some instructor presentation, much in-class discussion, the student's reading of the assigned material and a few meaningful student generated projects that will be completed outside of the class sessions but whose presentation will be shared with the entire class. The reading assignments for each session should be completed prior to that session, as much of the lecture and discussion will require that the student has had some prior exposure to the session's topic(s).

General Texts

The Curriculum Committee group that constructed this syllabus recommends the following texts:

A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice

by Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson

This has been the standard text for this course for many years. It is available from Judson Press for \$19.20. It is a hard cover book of 286 pages. It has been a very useful text for this course, but some readers have found it a little tedious in places. I would recommend this text.

The Baptist Identity/ Four Fragile Freedoms by Walter B. Shurden

This soft cover book is available through barnesandnoble.com for \$9.95 plus shipping. (also available through amazon.com) It has a March 1995 copyright date and is 119 pages. This book has been used along with the Maring book for several years. Some instructors have not found it too useful but others like this book a lot. Personally I think it is an excellent supplement to a more comprehensive text, and I would recommend its use.

Baptist and the Bible by L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles

This is a new soft cover book that is available from amazon.com for \$22.39 plus shipping. It is dated July 1999 and is 448 pages. It received the highest rating from the Amazon reviewers. It is more comprehensive than the Maring and Hudson and would stand well as a sole text for this course. The material is a little slanted to the Southern Baptist.

The Free Will Baptist in History by William F. Davidson

This February 2001 paperback book is too new to have received reviews. It is available from amazon.com for \$28.95 plus shipping. It is 400 pages.

More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity

by R. Stanton Norman and Stan Norman

This 198-page paperback is available through barnesandnoble.com for \$16.99 plus shipping. It was published in August 2001. It is too recent to have been reviewed. The table of contents indicate that this book deals primarily with the various Baptist distinctives.

Scriptures

The use of any standard Bible is recommended. Among such recommended scriptures are: The King James Version (KJV), The New International Version (NIV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New King James Version (NKJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New Living Translation (NLT), 21st Century King James, NIV formatted, or the Amplified (AMP).

Study Tools

These web sites are available on the Internet:

Bible Gateway: <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible>

Bible Study Tools: <http://crosswalk.com>

Blue Letter Bible: <http://www.blueletterbible.org>

Multiple search engines such as: <http://www.dogpile.com>

Other Reference Material

It is not intended that the instructor (or student) need to purchase these reference materials. They may well have access to other materials, which would be adequate for their purposes in this course. These are meant to serve as reference material that might be available in local libraries or through inter library loans.

The Baptist Heritage by Leon H. McBeth and H. Leon McBeth

This is the most comprehensive Baptist History text that I have seen. It has been widely used in seminaries. It is available from amazon.com for \$34.99 plus shipping. It is 850 pages and has a December 1987 publication date. It received the highest possible rating from each of the Amazon reviewers. It would probably be more useful as a reference than as a text for this course, and I would strongly recommend it as such.

The prices listed and availability were as of November, 2002. We would further suggest that you check these and other sources for current availability and price so that you will be able to purchase the book(s) at the most reasonable price.

Dr. W. Kenneth Williams wrote the original syllabus for this course in 1995. Dr. Joseph Perry of the Curriculum Committee of the Lay Study Team revised and updated the original syllabus to conform to the current Lay Study Team standards for course construction.

LESSON SCHEDULE, OBJECTIVES, ASSIGNMENTS & ACTIVITIES

General Course Objectives

A brief summary of the goals of the class would be that the students should understand two basic principles that are inherent in the Baptist tradition.

1. That a major Baptist distinctive is freedom. There are several forms of the freedoms that the Baptist church member has insisted upon throughout the history of the faith. These are evident in the believer's relationship with God, his/her belief system,

his/her relationship with the church (both visible and invisible) and with his/her relationship to the world of mankind.

2. That along with the freedoms that we as Baptist claim, we must accept numerous individual and collective responsibilities. These would include our individual and collective commitment to service, prayer, worship, study of God's Holy Word and Christian fellowship.

Student Requirements and Assessment

The students are expected to read the material as assigned. Each student will complete as scheduled several projects/presentations from the list of projects included in the session-by-session schedule. Items such as bringing in a copy of their local church budget or constitution do not count as such project. Neither would brief definitions of subjects such as leadership. It is recommended that each student complete no less than two of the larger projects but also not more than three projects. The size of the class will be a factor in determining the quantity of the student projects. In a large class generally each student would need to do fewer reports. It is important that the student receive feedback (both positive and any constructive suggestions for improvement) from the instructor (and possibly the other students) as close to the end of the presentation as is possible.

The instructor's assessment of the student's work in the class will consist of his/her evaluation of the student's oral presentations and any written work and the quality and degree of the student's participation in the class discussions. An instructor may also choose to use "take home" quizzes. The final grade will be either pass or not pass.

Session One

Premise

Two of the freedoms that Baptists claim are Bible Freedom and Soul Freedom. These will be explored during this session.

Specific Goals for the First Session

Each student knows and understands the concepts of Bible Freedom and Soul Freedom as are current in the Baptist faith of today.

Assignments for First Session

The student should complete the first reading assignments prior to the first class.

Meaningful brief student oral presentations that could be assigned (or volunteered) for presentation at the next class could include:

1. John Smyth
2. Thomas Helwys
3. General Baptists
4. Particular Baptists

Discussion Questions

1. What is the Bible? How has it come to have such significant authority for Christians?
2. Why do Baptists insist on freedom of access to the Bible?
3. Why do Baptists insist on their individual freedom in interpreting the Bible?
4. What is meant by individual "revelation?"
5. What are the dangers of progressive revelation?
6. What is the difference between a creed and a covenant?
7. Why do the Baptist oppose the concept of creeds?
8. How are freedom of conscience and soul freedom similar?
9. In which ways do they differ?
10. What in your opinion is the number one caveat that a Baptist must face in regard to the above- mentioned freedoms?

Session Two

Premise

Session Two explores the historic roots of the group of worshipers know as Baptists.

Specific Goals for the Second Session

The student and instructor will explore the historical roots of Baptist Thought and Polity with the goal of the students understanding the broad based heritage of the Baptist faith and how this heritage has been indicated by practices that are current to the Baptists in today's society.

Assignment for Second Session

Prior to the class please read the material in the recommended text or in any collateral reading that covers this material.

Student Oral Presentations (if due on topics from first session)

Thomas Helwys, John Smyth, General Baptists, Particular Baptists.

Thumbnail review of previous session

Discussion Questions

1. How did the congregational principles of the early Baptists differ from those structural and theological beliefs of other Christian faiths of that era? This should include the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutherans, the Calvinists-Presbyterians, The Methodists and others.
2. The doctrine of who is to be saved is quite different in various branches of the Christian Church. How do the differences between the particular and the general Baptists reflect the variances in this doctrine of "election?"
3. Organize the principles of: scriptural authority, personal religious experience, freedom of conscience and issues relating to church structure and autonomy into

a priority that would have been consistent with the early Baptists. Please give reasons for this hierarchy.

4. In what ways was the early Baptist Church the "Israel of God?"
5. What happens to believers under a "theocracy?"
6. Discuss thoroughly the issue of "believer's baptism."
7. Discuss thoroughly the issue of freedom of churches from the influence of civil government.

Suggested Action Learning Projects

Possible student reports on: Roger Williams, John Leland, Isaac Backus

In all of the "Action Learning" projects for this course it is expected that the student will go beyond the coverage of the topic from any text the instructor chooses to use and do further research.

Session Three

Pending Action Learning Projects

Begin session three with student oral presentations on Roger Williams, John Leland and Isaac Backus.

Premise

Among the Baptist distinctives was the concept of Religious Freedom. This freedom was manifest in the beliefs and practices of the early Baptists.

Specific Goals for the Third Session

The student will know and understand the various forces that pressured the early Baptists to seek an environment where they could practice their beliefs in a free and unencumbered manner. The students will also know and understand what the early Baptist responses were to these pressures.

Assignment for Third Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Thumbnail review of material from previous session

Discussion Questions

1. The issue of the power of a secular ruler over the church has been a major issue in the history of the Christian Church. What are your views on this subject in light of the situations in today's world?
2. The issue of the power of the ruler or "head" of the church over people has also been of major debate throughout the history of the Christian Church. What are your views of this claimed "power" in light of the situations in the world today and Biblical authority?

3. What do YOU think the United States Constitution means in relationship to the articles dealing with the relationship between church and state?
4. In light of the conditions in the world today, what is your view about establishing certain criteria for candidates for public office? Would you support candidates who are pro-choice? Would you support candidates who are admitted homosexuals? Would you support candidates who are atheists? Would you support candidates who are anti-Semitic or racially prejudiced?
5. Just how much "diversity" do you want in your local church? Just how much diversity should the church (as a collective of like-minded congregations) tolerate?

Suggested Action Learning Projects

A good project to open session four would be to have a student report on the "Baptist Doctrine of the Church." (This can be found in the Maring and Hudson book.) Reports could also be done on Obadiah Holmes or John Clarke.

Session Four

Action Learning Projects

Begin session four with student reports on the Baptist Doctrine of the Church, Obadiah Holmes or John Clark.

Premise

Church Freedom is an important Baptist distinctive. That concept will be explored in this session.

Specific Goals for the Fourth Session

The student will gain knowledge and understanding of the concept of church freedom. In doing so he/she will learn of what the meaning of the term "church" both connotes and denotes.

Assignment for Fourth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Thumbnail review of material from previous session

Discussion Questions

1. What is the relationship of the pastor of a local church to the members of the congregation in a Baptist church?
2. What is the relationship of the various members of a local church to each other in a typical Baptist congregation?
3. In YOUR church are these relationships clearly stated in your church documents and is the practice as documented? Please comment on this.

4. In which way should our principle of regenerate membership lead to a democratic governance pattern in our churches?
5. When (if ever) is it time for a group of people from a local church to break off from that church and form a new congregation?
6. When (if ever) should a person or family leave a particular church and begin to attend another?
7. What is the place of ecumenicism in the Baptist faith?
8. What is YOUR opinion about confessions and creeds? Do you believe that a confession "affirms" and that a creed "prescribes?"
9. To what extent do you favor a democratic discussion making process in your church? Majority rules or consensus?

Suggested Action Learning Projects

Have students bring in copies of their church documents. This would include covenants, mission statements, statements of goals, identity, constitutions and by-laws.

Session Five

Action Learning Projects

Begin session five with any oral presentations that might be pending. The instructor may review with the student materials from their local church documents that they have brought in to share with the class.

Premise

This session deals with the important relationship between the church and its membership. This collective membership is crucial to the believer's discipleship, but the sovereignty of the self-revealing God must remain the believer's first allegiance.

Specific Goals for the Fifth Session

The student will know and understand the role the church should have in the believer's life. The student will explore the history of the "church" and how it has developed into the institution that it is today.

Assignment for Fifth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Thumbnail review of material from previous session

Discussion Questions

1. In what way is a church not the end in itself but an accompanying element in one's faith experience?
2. Does a church derive from individual's faith or does faith experience come from the church?

3. Is a "church" a "type" of our Lord, Jesus Christ? If this were true, in what ways would it be true?
4. Does our concept of a church fit in with the principle of progressive revelation?
5. What are the three main functions of a church?
6. Does a majority vote indicate the true will of the congregation?
7. How does a true representative democracy manifest in your local church meetings and governance?
8. Under what circumstances should a new congregation form out of an existing one? How should this be done?
9. How are the ordinances of baptism and communion served in your church?
10. Do you favor open or closed membership and why?
11. How does the concept of "priesthood" of all believers direct your life?

Suggested Action Learning Projects

Have each student bring in their individual definitions of the principles of "priesthood of all believers" and of "ordination."

Session Six

Action Learning Projects

Begin session six by reviewing with the students their definitions of the principles of "priesthood of all believers" and of "ordination."

Premise

This session covers the role of ministry in the Baptist tradition. This would include the roles of each believer and also that of the ordained or "professional" clergy.

Specific Goals for the Sixth Session

The student will know and understand the various roles that a pastor plays in the church. They will be given insight into the "calling" and requirements of pastoral leadership. The student will also know and understand the ministerial roles of the laity within the church.

Assignment for Sixth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Thumbnail review of material from previous session

Discussion Questions

1. In your opinion, how necessary is trained, professional clergy in your church today?
2. Could and should many of the tasks of a church's pastor be done well by the laity?
3. How can the training of the professional clergy be improved so that he/she might be a better servant of God through their service at a local church?

4. How can the training of the laity be improved so that he/she might be a better servant of God through their service at a local church?
5. What functions could an informed laity take over for a pastor who for one reason or another (bi-vocational, part-time, age, ineptness, a very large congregation, etc.), the pastor is unable to do well?
6. Do you favor or not favor the ordination of certain laity within the church and why? (Deacons, Music Director, Teachers?)
7. In what ways do you serve the Lord as a minister of God? (By Baptist Tradition)
8. Just how much freedom are you as an individual willing to allow to the pulpit?
9. Just how much freedom should your congregation allow to the pulpit?

Suggested Action Learning Projects

The students should bring a copy of their local church budget documents to the next session. They should also bring in their individual definitions of leadership to share with the class.

Session Seven

Action Learning Projects

Begin session seven with any oral presentations that might be pending.

Premise

The topic of session seven is Leadership and the Governance of the Baptist Congregation.

Specific Goals for the Seventh Session

The student should have knowledge and understanding of the various styles of leadership and their application to ministry within the church. The students should also have knowledge and understanding of the manner in which Baptist congregations have organized themselves to form a true church for the service of God.

Assignment for Seventh Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Thumbnail review of material from previous session

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the problems that governance by purely democratic methods might lead to?
2. In what ways could a strong denominational system aid the struggling local church?
3. How could some of these (from question 2) be incorporated in the Baptist tradition without the distinctive being lost?
4. How is the church the body of Christ?
5. Are you by your individual temperament more of a "regular" or "separates" Baptist and why?

6. What leadership style are you most comfortable with? For yourself in the leadership role? And for you in the role as a follower of a particular style?
7. What leadership style is needed most in your church at this time and why?
8. What is your view of the role of women in leadership positions in the church? Should they be deacons, trustees, and should they be ordained as clergy?

Suggested Action Learning Projects

The students should bring into the next class a brief autobiographical statement about their own decision to be baptized (if done as a believer's baptism) and memorable occasions on which they have participated in the Lord's Supper.

Session Eight

Action Learning Projects

Begin session eight with allowing the students to share their autobiographical statements and statements about their participation in memorable Lord's Supper celebrations.

Premise

The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are important in Baptist Heritage. This session explores the tradition and "meanings" of such ordinances.

Specific Goals for the Eighth Session

The student will have knowledge and understanding of the Baptist tradition in 1. The concept of ordinances versus sacraments, 2. The position of baptism in the Baptist tradition, 3. The position of the Lord's Supper in the Baptist tradition.

Assignment for Eighth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Thumbnail review of material from previous session

Discussion Questions

1. Are you personally concerned with the concept of ordinance versus sacrament?
2. In your point of view is the grace of God given through baptism and/or communion or are baptism and/or communion a symbol of grace that has already been received?
3. Should baptism be administered only to believers?
4. Is baptism a necessary prerequisite to salvation? Why do you believe as you do?
5. How valid is a baptism done in a manner other than by immersion?
6. If a person was baptized as an infant, should they be re-baptized as a believer later in their lives?
7. Is it logical that communion follows baptism in the normal progression of faith? Why do you hold such a view?

8. Do you hold that the Lord's Supper is a symbolic act (the elements symbolize the body and blood of Christ) or do you believe that the body and blood of Christ are actually present during the service?
9. Should communion be open only to members of a particular faith (closed communion) or open to all believers (open communion)?
10. What is the Baptist tradition of the manner in which the Lord's Supper is given to the sick and shut-in?

Suggested Action Learning Projects

Students should be assigned to do oral presentations on Ann and Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice, John Mason Peck and William Carey. Please have the students stress the support that these missionaries received.

Session Nine

Action Learning Projects

Session nine will begin with oral presentations on Ann and Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice, John Mason Peck and William Carey.

Premise

Even though the Baptist tradition indicates a strong desire for individual and collective freedom, the Baptists also have a strong tradition of bonding together with others to better do the Lord's work. In this ninth session we will explore some of the associations that Baptists have made with other groups and other Baptists as well in "partnership" to advance the Kingdom of God.

Specific Goals for the Ninth Session

The student will gain knowledge and understanding of the "associational principle as exemplified in the Baptist tradition. The student will also understand the "tensions" that such a principle has often caused with the Baptist tradition of autonomy.

Assignment for Ninth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Thumbnail review of material from previous session

Discussion Questions

1. How can self-governing churches relate to each other as partners in mission without giving up freedom?
2. Can Baptists stand apart in a world when other Christians are finding that the things they have in common are more important than that which each has in particular?
3. Can we keep freedom by standing apart?

4. Do the same common concerns that caused our forebears to separate now require Baptists to join in common front with other Christians in a secular world which may threaten not the variation but the Christian themes themselves?
5. Are all followers of Christ expected to be the "united" body of Christ?
6. How would a stronger tie in with an association of Baptist churches aid a local congregation?
7. How would a tie in with other Christian churches aid a church in fulfilling its Christian mission?
8. Is the principle of local autonomy making it difficult for Baptist churches to form strong associational bonds? In what way?

Suggested Action Learning Projects

Ask each student to research the history, purpose, structure and function of the American Baptist Churches. The various ABC websites might prove a welcome resource, as would be your local pastor or field minister.

Session Ten

Action Learning Projects

Review with the students their findings from their research on the American Baptist Churches.

Premise

Session ten focuses on the various types of congregations that use the appellation "Baptist" in their names. Our concentration will be on the American Baptist Churches.

Specific Goals for the Tenth Session

The students will have knowledge and understanding of the various denominations that refer to themselves as being "Baptist." The student will gain knowledge of the heritage and practices of those Baptists who are now the American Baptist Churches.

Assignment for Tenth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Thumbnail review of material from previous session

Discussion Questions

1. In your opinion would God's Kingdom be advanced or slowed down if all of the churches that call themselves "Baptist" were united into one denominational structure of governance?
2. If in your opinion several of these congregations would slow down or exacerbate the work of the Kingdom, are there some Baptist denominations that could or should be able to so combine for the greater glory of God?

3. In reviewing the various American Baptist Churches documents did you discover any aspects of the faith that you would like to further discuss with your classmates?
4. In your opinion has the American Baptist Churches sufficiently addressed and solved the problem of balancing individual congregational freedom with the needs of the associational principle? Why do you feel as you do?
5. Why do you attend an American Baptist church? Was this class a positive affirmation of your American Baptist fellowship or did it cause you some internal conflicts or doubts? Please explain your feelings.
6. What is your view on the status of your local church and your denomination in the near future? 5 yrs? 10 yrs? 25 yrs? etc.

Capsule Review of Course and Course Concluding Needs