

Biographies of Writers

In order to present the historic Baptist understanding of the Lord's Kingdom, three writers have been chosen who have written extensively on this topic. Knowing that these men may be unfamiliar with many readers, it seemed prudent to begin this course by sharing a short biography of each. The biography selected for each brother is intentionally short. One lesson is provided which I wrote a short while back. My own biography is left out for obvious reasons. The goal of this chapter is to help the reader understand the significance of the writings of these brethren.

The biographies provided are in the order in which they will be used in this course. To this end, the biographies are provided in the following order:

- Brother Alonzo Nunnery (1861 - 1939)
- Brother D.B. Ray (1830 - 1922)
- Brother J.R. Graves (1820 – 1893)

Please find the biographies on the following pages.

Biography of Alonzo Nunnery

It is to me a privilege to have the honor of relating a few things I knew about Brother A. Nunnery. He was born at Camden, Tennessee on September 8, 1861. He departed this life to go be with the Lord on September 24, 1939, at Eleven P.M. He was 78 years old. He was educated at Lexington, Tennessee, in the Baptist Academy. He pastored Baptist Churches around Jackson, Tennessee and in southeast Missouri. In 1907 he moved to Granite, Oklahoma. There he was a Baptist leader and was pastor of the Lake Creek Baptist Church for fifteen years. At Granite, he established the Baptist Worker, which was a credit to Baptist publications in the South. In 1921, he moved the Baptist Worker and his family to Chickasha, Oklahoma, where he lived the rest of his life.

While he was at Chickasha he organized the Ninth Street Baptist Church, and was pastor there for ten years. He also led a number of Churches to buy property in Chickasha, and established an orphans home which cared for two hundred children. Brother Nunnery loved children, he knew what it was to be an orphan, his father and mother died when he was a young man, he was left with several younger brothers and sisters to care for. I have heard him tell what hard times they went through in making a home for them, and providing for them. He determined to keep the family all together, even under difficult times. Brother Nunnery was saved when he was sixteen years old, and felt from the beginning he felt

himself called to preach the gospel. He was too poor to buy a Bible, so a friend loaned him one. He begin read (sic). He read with two things in mind. He said, "I want to know if Christ established the Church, what does it believe, and can I find it."

Months passed. One day a man came and said that J.N. Hall was to be at a certain place to preach. Brother Nunnery went to hear him. He said, "I sat there and listened to that man preach for two hours and a half, and I thought I was in Heaven." He had never heard a man preach like that. He said, "I cried, my heart overflowing. He is the smartest man I have ever heard. He preaches the Bible." That was in June, 1885. On October the first, Brother Nunnery joined the Mount Lebanon Baptist Church, and there he was baptized into the fellowship of the Baptist Church.

Brother Nunnery was a minister of the Gospel, of the Lord Jesus Christ for over fifty two years. He held over one hundred public debates, for the defence(sic) of the faith, once delivered to the Saints. He never challenged anyone for a debate, but he never refused, when he was challenged. He was a very kind and hard working Gentleman. He became pastor of the Bridge Creek Baptist Church, where my folks belonged. This was in 1921, the year he moved to Chickasha, Oklahoma. He was pastor there for eighteen years, until his death. This Church was seven miles northwest of Blanchard, Oklahoma. During this time I was made to realize I needed to be saved, and in 1933 I was saved and joined the Bridge Creek Church, and Brother Nunnery baptized me August 20, and he performed our wedding the next day, August 21,

1933. He told us that day, he had ties a knot with his tongue, that we could not untie with our teeth. This next August, will be 56 years.

I loved Brother Nunnery, and had the highest respect for him. His integrity, and character was unquestionable. He was a very spiritual and able Minister of the Gospel.

Brother Alonzo Nunnery was laid to rest at Chickasha, Oklahoma September 26th, 1939. Following is a statement made by Dr. W.A. Chriswell, who helped conduct his funeral: "There is no man who ever attracted me quite like Brother Nunnery did. I have known ministers by the thousands, I have gone to school with them. I have heard them speak from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to Mexico. I have heard them from many foreign nations, but I never quite saw a man like Brother Nunnery to whom I could look to give me things of his faith and life. There never was to me a person that influenced me quite the way Brother Nunnery has, I want to picture him to you as I saw him, and I want you to look at Brother Nunnery from my point of view, for I want to see if I can point out to you the thing that motivated and moved this man of God. If there ever lived a defender of the faith, that man was Brother Nunnery. Through the years, through sermons, through writings, he constantly fought for the truth."

Dates and portions of the above Introduction was taken from the September 1939 BAPTIST WORKER. By ... William T. Swanson.

Biography of D.B. Ray

Burcham Ray (30 Mar 1830 – 2 April 1922) was a noted Kentucky Baptist pastor, missionary, author, debater, and historian. He was born in Hickman County to Dennis (1798-1874) and Nancy (1803-1884) Ray. His father and his uncle, Stephen Ray (1788-1871), had moved from Maryland to Washington County, Kentucky, and then to Hickman County in far west Kentucky. The Rays were all committed Baptists. D.B.'s uncle Stephen was a pastor in west Kentucky and often wrote doctrinal articles for J.R. Graves' "The Baptist" newspaper. In 1846 Stephen and Willis White led in the establishment of Clinton Seminary, a Baptist school in Hickman County that had a ministerial department. D.B.'s brothers Francis Marion (1822-?) and John S. Ray (1832-1881) as well as his cousin G.W. Ray (1831-?) all taught at the school. D.B.'s younger brother Cyrus Newton Ray (1837-1904) was also a Baptist pastor in west Kentucky and an author.

At the age of fourteen D.B. Ray was converted and baptized by Pastor Willis White into the fellowship of the Little Obion Baptist Church in Graves County. For two years he attended Clinton Seminary and then was principal of the high school in Milburn, Kentucky from 1852-1856. During these years he sensed the Lord was calling him to preach. After supply preaching for two years, he resigned as principal to devote himself to full-time ministry. In 1856, he was ordained to the gospel ministry by the Hopewell Baptist Church in Carlisle County. While in west

Kentucky Ray married Maron Francis James (1830-1894). After her death, he remarried Elva Cecelia Stockbridge (1872-1968). His two marriages produced fifteen children.

From 1856-1861 D.B. Ray served as a pastor and missionary in west Kentucky. He pastored the Hopewell, Emmaus, New Hope, and Mayfield Baptist churches. He also served as a missionary of the West Union Baptist Association. In 1857 he reported he had “labored 208 days, preached 186 sermons, traveled 2,262 miles, baptized 54 converts, constituted two churches, helped to ordained two ministers, and collected on behalf of the Board \$51.25.”

Ray relocated to west Tennessee in 1859, but he remained active in west Kentucky for two more years. In Tennessee, he pastored in Paris, Lexington, and Humboldt and took an active role in the West Tennessee Baptist Convention and Central Baptist Association. These were extremely difficult years as Confederate and Union armies occupied the area at alternating times and guerilla forces were constantly moving through the region. Yet Ray later recalled that the greatest revivals in his ministry were during this me.

Early on Ray recognized the importance of Baptist writing. From 1867-1873, Ray served as co-editor of “The Baptist Sentinel,” based in Lexington, Kentucky. A.S. Worrell was the senior editor. In 1870 Ray moved from Humboldt, Tennessee to Kentucky to begin pastoring the Athens and Salvisa churches. In 1873 Ray moved to Missouri to pastor the LaGrange Baptist

Church. He and his brother C.N. Ray then started the “Baptist Bale Flag and Church Historian.” In 1879 the paper was moved to St. Louis and the title was changed to the “American Baptist Flag.” Under Ray’s leadership, the paper reached a circulation of 30,000 and had a powerful influence west of the Mississippi River. In 1898 the “American Baptist Flag” was sold to J.N. Hall who moved the editorial office to Fulton, Kentucky. Ray then started the “National Baptist Flag,” which continued publication until 1908.

Today D.B. Ray is most widely known for his book “Baptist Succession.” First published in 1870, this book has gone through over 30 editions. It was completely revised by Ray in 1912 and remains in print today. It is one of the most influential Landmark Baptist history books ever written. The 1949 edition contains the following quote by Kentucky Baptist pastor Clarence Walker in the introduction: “Every Baptist family, not only in America but throughout the entire world, ought to have a copy of D.B. Ray’s ‘Baptist Succession.’” Ray also published “Text-Book on Campbellism,” “Papal Controversy,” several transcribed debates as well as numerous pamphlets.

In 1901 Ray moved to Oklahoma City. He continued his editorial work as well as supply preaching. He was even elected as chaplain to the Oklahoma House of Representatives in 1907. By 1913 his deteriorating health had forced him to retire from public ministry. His funeral service was conducted by seven Baptist

ministers, including F.M. McConnell. D.B. Ray is buried in the Rose Hill Burial Park in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. – Ben Stratton

By Ben Stratton, shared by email March 20, 2021.

Biography of J.R. Graves

Baptist and Reflector, June 29, 1893, p. 9.

It is with a sad heart we chronicle the decease of Dr. J. R. Graves, L.L.D., Monday morning, June 26th, at 1 o'clock, at his home near Memphis, Tenn. The bare fact was telegraphed the *Baptist and Reflector*, but too late for an extended notice of his life and work in this issue. He was an important factor in the Baptist denomination in the South for more than half a century and one of the ablest exponents of Baptist faith in the world. He was a great warrior in the cause of truth. He was indeed a valiant soldier of the cross of Christ. But his warfare is over and his triumph is now complete.

Dr. J. R. Graves

By Edgar E. Polk, Editor

Baptist and Reflector, July 6, 1893, p. 8

Only brief mention could be made last week of the death of Dr. Graves, for so long the editor of this paper. But for the absence of the editor in Chicago at the time he would have attended the funeral of his former associate and honored friend. Bro. Hailey, however, has given some account of his last hours and also of his funeral services. It only remains for us to give a brief summary of his life-work and pay some tribute to his memory.

James Robinson Graves was born in Chester, Vt. April 10, 1820, and was consequently a little over seventy-three year of age at the time of his death. His father was of Huguenot extraction, whose family fled to America at the revocation of the edict of Nantes. Young Graves was converted at fifteen and was baptized into the fellowship of the Baptist Church at North Springfield, Vt. At first he was a teacher and taught in Ohio and Kentucky. On July 3, 1845, at the age of twenty-five, he came to Nashville and opened a school on Vine street, and shortly afterward united with the First Baptist Church. But from the time of his conversion he had felt called to preach, though he had tried to put the feeling away from him. But while in Kentucky the church, against his desire, had called for his ordination. When he first to Nashville he did not attempt to exercise his gifts as a minister. In a long and pleasant conversation with last summer he told us how he had been forced against his protests to begin preaching here, and how from the first crowds attended upon his ministry and success followed his labors.

In the fall of 1845 he took charge of the Second Baptist Church on Cherry street, now the Central Baptist Church, this city, and the following year, in 1846, he was elected editor of the *Tennessee Baptist*, which had been started by Dr. R. B. C. Howell. This paper he conducted at Nashville with signal ability and growing influence until the war, at the close of which he removed it to Memphis, but in 1887 it was consolidated with the *Baptist Reflector*, then published in Chattanooga, and again removed to Nashville. In 1848 he originated the Southwestern Publishing

House at Nashville, and afterwards the Southern Baptist Sunday-school Union, both of which were destroyed by the war. In 1874 he originated the Southern Baptist Publication Society, which, owing to the financial crisis, soon afterwards suspended.

As an author Dr. Graves was quite prolific. The following books are published of his pen, besides numerous sermons and articles and innumerable editorials: "*The Trilemma*," "*The Great Iron Wheel*," "*The Middle Life*," "*Modern-Spiritism*" "*Old Landmarkism*," "*Intercommunion*," "*The Seven Dispensations*," "*The First Baptist Church*," "*John's Baptism*," and other smaller ones.

As indicated by this bare outline of his life, Dr. Graves was no ordinary man. In fact, he might be called great. Certainly he was great as a preacher, one of the greatest, we think, America ever produced. His fire, his logic, his simplicity, his eloquence made him peculiarly powerful before an audience, and altogether with the fact that he always gave them something to think about, enabled him to hold their attention as long as he pleased. We spoke recently of having once heard him preach for two in succession, twice each day and two hours each time without becoming tired. Dr. Eaton told of having heard him preach three hours and a half once, without wearing the people. What other preacher of modern times could have done it? Even in Dr. Graves later years, when enfeebled by disease, he still retained much of his power over an audience. In the last sermon we heard him preach, the one preached at Brownsville before the big Hatchie Association three years ago,

though sitting in a chair, he thrilled and moved his audience as but few men in perfect health could have done. His "Chair Talks" after his paralysis have been a source of the greatest delight to many people. It is a matter of regret that he was not able to write them out before his death and so give them to the public in a permanent form.

But great as was Dr. Graves as a preacher, he was if anything still greater as a writer, both as author and editor. His style in writing was, we think, not so interesting as in speaking. But his writing produced even greater effect and exerted a wider audience. Bold, uncompromising, with the strongest convictions himself, he toned up the conscience of Southern Baptists and gave to them a moral backbone, such as they had not before possessed. And the fact that the Baptists of the South are more loyal to Baptist principles, more orthodox, as they believe, than their brethren of the North, can largely be traced to the influence of Dr. Graves. There are some even in the South who believed that Dr. Graves was too strict and too partisan in his views, but there are none who will deny the influence which he exerted upon Southern Baptists. This we may say: However stern he may have seemed in his writings, in his personal relations he was as gentle as a woman. For our part we have always found him exceedingly pleasant and companionable in all of our personal intercourse with him, extending over some ten or twelve year, and it was always a pleasure for us to be with him. Others also found him the same way, often to their surprise. In his family he was kind and

compassionate. To young ministers especially he showed much sympathy and always stood ready to help them to the extent of his ability. Many young ministers in Tennessee to-day owe their education to his efforts and will feel his loss as a benefactor and a friend.

Dr. Graves had his faults. We shall not deny it. To admit it is not to admit that he was human. But he only claimed to be a "Sinner saved by grace." Salvation by grace through faith in Christ, not by works nor by water, was the constant theme of his tongue and pen, and he was never more powerful as a speaker and writer than when discussing this theme. He was a man of the deepest piety and always, but especially in his last years when the hand of affliction was laid heavily upon him, he loved to talk about the religion of Jesus and the great salvation which it had brought to him.

But he had finished the work God gave him to do. The only desire he expressed for living longer was to write out his "Chair Talks" for publication, which, we believe, was denied him. But his life work was unusually well rounded out so far as human appearances go, and from his bed of suffering the Lord called him home on June 26th, and from Him he has received the welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Upon his seventy-third birthday, April 10th, he wrote a short note to the *Baptist and Reflector*, the first he had been able to write in some time and the last publication, we

believe, which came from his pen. He closed by quoting that beautiful little poem, which will be of interest here

[The poem located here is too poor in quality on the copy to transcribe it here.]

He waited and the blessings have come in all their fullness. He had fought a good fight, he had finished his course, he had kept the faith and now he has received the crown of righteousness.