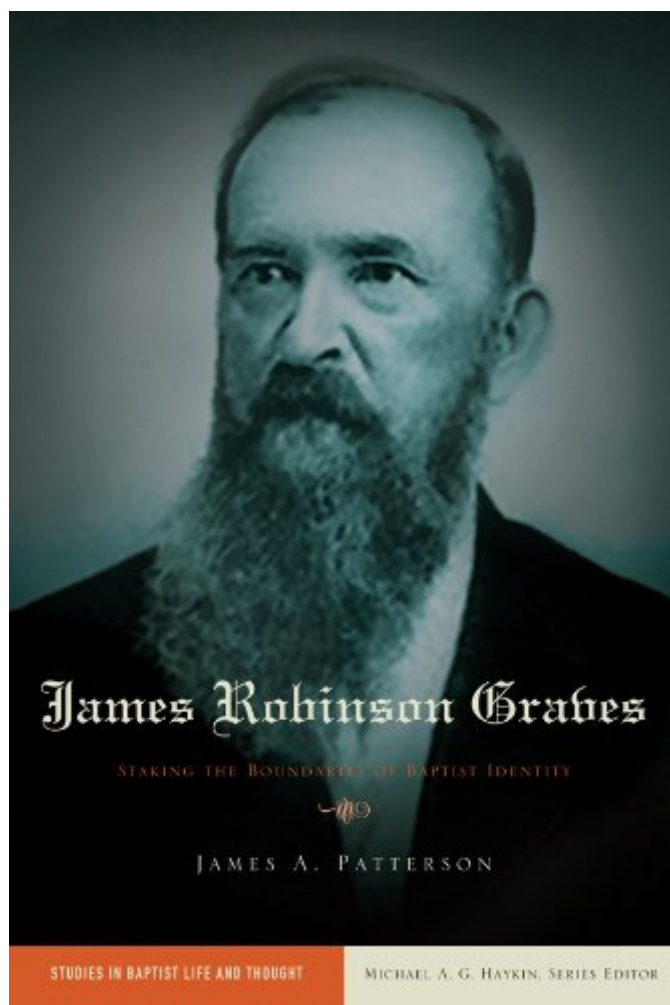


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James Robinson Graves: Staking The Boundaries Of Baptist Identity (Studies In Baptist Life And Thought)



Synopsis

James Robinson Graves (1820-1893) is known for firmly believing that Baptists of his day needed clearly distinct markers in order to preserve a meaningful denominational identity. The founder of Landmarkism, his theology emphasized church succession (an unbroken trail of authentic congregations dating back to the New Testament), the local church (rather than the idea of a universal Body of Christ), and strict baptism guidelines. In this first biography of Graves in more than eighty years, author James A. Patterson portrays the man as bold and brash. A native of Vermont who moved south to Nashville in 1845, the self-educated preacher and budding journalist would become a combative defender of the Baptist cause, engaging in public controversy with Methodists, Restorationists, and even fellow Baptists. Ultimately, Graves sought to influence the direction of the Southern Baptist Convention in its formative period and was the primary shaper of the "Tennessee Tradition," now considered a key strand of Southern Baptist life and identity. By focusing on Graves's understanding of essential Baptist boundary markers, this book assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the Landmark legacy. It concludes with an epilogue that discusses the enduring influence of his ideas in the decades after his death.

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Customer Reviews

In the Studies of Baptist Life and Thought series (edited by Michael A. G. Haykin), B&H Academic seeks to reintroduce great, historical Baptist figures to a new generation. The series consists of works penned on John A. Broadus, Andrew Fuller, Adoniram Judson, and James Robinson Graves. This volume, written by James A. Patterson, professor of Christian Thought and Tradition and associate dean of the School of Theology and Missions at Union University, seeks to blend biographical insight with a more thematic approach that focuses principally on [Graves's] controversial beliefs about ecclesiology, Baptist history, and eschatology (xv). Graves's life spanned most of the nineteenth century, in which he was an educator, a pastor, a journalist, an author, and a Confederate soldier. He was born in 1820 to Lois Schnell and Zuinglius Calvin Graves in Chester, Vermont where he grew in the shadow of Separate Baptist stalwarts such as Isaac Backus, John Leland, and J. Newton Brown "each contributing to a unique aspect of the young Graves's ecclesiological development. He was licensed in 1842, albeit without his knowledge, and ordained shortly thereafter (23). The bulk of Graves's ministry took place in Nashville, and later, Memphis, where he would leave an indelible mark upon middle Tennessee and upon Southern Baptists as a whole. Graves's increasing interest in Baptist life and thought developed alongside the rise of Campbellism, which, while similar to much of Baptist doctrine, held to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and opposed any practices that could not be squared with the letter of the New Testament" (24). As such, Graves was uniquely poised to grow into the great defender of Baptist beliefs. This Baptist warrior "a term applied to him by Baptist historian, W.W.

Dr. James A. Patterson, a professor at Union University, wrote an excellent book about J. R. Graves, who was the founding father of Landmarkism, a specific "high-church" Baptist ecclesiology (the "Tennessee Tradition"). The book is a unique biography of a forgotten Southern Baptist hero, not only because it introduces Graves' life, his thought and doctrinal development very well, but also because it provides a broader theological and historical context of the Landmark movement. In other words, 19th c. Landmarkism is inseparable from Graves. The author rightly does not separate Graves from a specific American political and theological context, in which, he believes, Graves was formed as a theologian, who desired to defend Baptist identity. First of all, chapter 1 correctly traces the influences of American Separate Baptist tradition on the thought of Graves in his early years

(1820-1845). Graves was a theologian who affirmed many tenets of Separate Baptists, however, later on in life he pushed Baptist distinctive theology too far. Chapter 2 analyzes Graves' Nashville years (1845-1862), where his theological conflict with J. Waller emerged over "alien immersions." The Cotton Grove Meeting, where authority and legitimacy of non-Baptist churches and their pastors were questioned, was a result of Graves-Waller polemics. The chapter is ended in describing the contribution of J. M. Pendleton and A. C. Dayton to the Landmark movement. Chapter 3 analyzes the setting of the boundaries between Graves' Landmarkism and other denominations. Majority of denominations, including Roman Catholic church, Presbyterian church, Campbellites and Methodists, were attacked theologically.

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