

I. **Introduction.** It is an established fact of history that as far back as the fourth century those churches refusing to go into the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and refusing to accept the baptism of those baptized in infancy, and refusing to accept the doctrine of “baptismal regeneration” and demanding rebaptism for all those who came to them from the Catholic church hierarchy were called “Anabaptists” – **rebaptizers**.

## II. The origin of the Anabaptist churches.

- A. For the first century or so, nearly all the churches remained comparatively pure in doctrine and practice.
1. With the growth of error concerning church government, doctrine, ordinances, etc., there came a widening of the separation between those churches departing in error and those remaining loyal.
  2. Those churches who remained loyal were called “Anabaptists” from the very beginning.
  3. One of the first great errors to divide the churches were “baptismal regeneration” and “infant baptism.” Remember, in a previous lesson, the author described the establishment of church hierarchy as a major error along with baptismal regeneration (the belief that baptism is a necessary part of salvation, and that regeneration only occurs after baptism.)
- B. As all the groups who bore many different names held true to “believer’s baptism” they were all called Anabaptists. The Montanists, Novatians, Donatists, Paulicans, Henricans, and Arnoldists were all Anabaptists.
- C. Near the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the “Ana” was dropped, and the name was shortened to simply “Baptists,” and gradually all other names were dropped.
- D. No definite beginning can be ascribed to the Baptists of today this side of Christ himself.
1. First, all churches were true New Testament believing and practicing the doctrine held by Baptists today.
  2. For centuries the loyal, true, New Testament churches were called by many different names and were always classified as “Anabaptists.”
  3. The Baptists of today are a continuation of this line.

## III. He character of the Anabaptists.

- A. Never in any age, did the Anabaptists form any hierarchy that bound their churches together.

- B. Not all churches that were called Anabaptists remained true to the New Testament. Each age and each locality had its deflections and errors but it is marvelous to see how the truth was preserved through these churches.
- C. With no connecting link of communication and with no history to go with, these churches scattered all over the world and in every age fit into the same pattern of doctrine and practice.
  1. All this was accomplished without any centralization of authority, the establishment of hierarchy, etc.
  2. This is the miracle of the fulfillment of God's promise, "the gates of hell shall not prevail." Matthew 16:18 *18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

**The Great Confession** (refers to Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God): *13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? 14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.*

#### IV. The persecution of the Anabaptists.

- A. The Anabaptists were always hated and despised by those seeking to bring about the establishment of error.
- B. During the 1,200 years of the "dark ages," it is stated that fifty million died of terrible persecution. The great majority of those were Anabaptists.
- C. During this period it is recorded that along one single European highway, thirty miles distance, stacks were set up every few feet along the highway the top of the stakes sharpened, and on the top of each stake was placed the gory head of a martyred Anabaptist.

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### The Anabaptists:

Anabaptists are the originators of the “free church.” Separation of church and state was an unthinkable and radical notion when it was *introduced by the Anabaptists*. Likewise their defense of religious liberty was regarded as an invitation to anarchy.

In the court records of 16th century South and Central Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, only *12,522 Anabaptists* can be counted. Their numbers were never very large, yet they managed to *populate 2088 towns and villages* of that region!

**Protestantism did not make inroads without the backing of princes and powers of state.** From the beginning Anabaptism was an *underground movement* that lost virtually all its leaders in the first two years.

It was partly because of Anabaptism that Protestant churches adopted the *confirmation service*, and *baptismal registers* (the boon of genealogists) came into being. A 16th century man who did not drink to excess, curse, or abuse his workmen or family *could be suspected of being an Anabaptist* and thus persecuted.

Anabaptists were the *first reformers to practice church discipline*. Under their influence the Reformer Martin Bucer attempted without success to introduce discipline into the church in Strassburg. He succeeded in convincing John Calvin, who was able to establish church discipline in Geneva. Without knowing when the Anabaptist Schleithem Confession was formulated, *Calvin* read it in 1544 and *concluded* “these unfortunate and *ungrateful people have learned this teaching and some other correct views from us.*” Calvin was an 18-year-old Catholic at the time of Schleithem.

Direct descendants of **Anabaptists today** number 730,000 in 57 countries, with the largest numbers in North America, Zaire, Indonesia, and the U.S.S.R. Over half live in third world countries. There are *21 distinct groups*, among them *Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, Mennonite Brethren, and Brethren In Christ.*

Facing arrest as an Anabaptist, Dirck Willems fled for his life across a frozen lake. When his pursuer broke through the ice, *Willems gave up his chance to escape by turning to save his persecutor.* He was then captured, imprisoned and burned at the stake in 1569.

### Some cousins of Anabaptists (or modern day Baptists)

- **Mennonites** are the most diverse group of modern day descendants. They share a common view of Christ and in not bearing arms but are not uniformly distinguished by a separation from the world in lifestyle or dress.
- **The Amish** split from their Swiss-German brethren in 1693 over the issue of shunning or avoiding excommunicated members. Today Amish are recognized for their *strong communal values* enforced by *strict nonconformity* to the world in matters of dress and use of technology. Amish are located primarily in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana.
- **The Hutterites**, who originated in Moravia in 1529, *practice Christian communalism*. They dress simply in a style influenced by the folk costume of eastern Europe. In the 1870's they migrated to America and settled in South Dakota and later in other western parts of the U.S. and Canada.
- **The Mennonite Brethren** had their beginning in 1860 as a renewal movement among transplanted Dutch Mennonites in southern Russia but has since been transplanted to North America, Paraguay, and other countries. The Mennonite Brethren distinguished themselves from Mennonites, not in the area of belief, but in the practice of *baptism by immersion*, rather than sprinkling.
- **The Brethren in Christ** originated in 1750 in Pennsylvania but only gained official status during the Civil War when their young men were drafted into the army. They were nicknamed "*River Brethren*" because of their habit of baptizing in a river.