

Baptist Basics University
Truth Must Be Preserved For Future Generations

Baptist History 101
Lecture Notes

Prepared by

Matthew B. Gage

If you enjoy this course, please visit www.BaptistBasics.org for more resources.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/).

Lesson 1

Introduction

One area that Baptists have always deemed important is that of their history. They make a very bold claim that few other groups do not; which is that they have existed under one name or another all the way back to the church at Jerusalem in Acts. Baptists claim that they hold the same beliefs as groups or movements, many of which no longer exist, in unbroken succession to this present day.

It is indeed a bold claim, and one that has stirred great debate. Much confusion has been added today through the rewriting of church history. Many heretics are now called heroes, and much heresy is now called heritage. Sadly, many times we possess more information about heretics than true men of God.

Importance

Baptist History is a very important subject that must be burned into our minds. It is a foundation built by our forefathers in the Faith that we must not let disappear or disintegrate. We must know our history and pass it on.

I contend that the early church was the purest form of the church. True, there were elements such as Apostles which are no longer present. However, the core doctrines and teachings were the purest at this time. Therefore, if a group can trace their doctrine back to this early church than they may be able to claim to have the purest doctrine.

Heritage also give identity. Possessing this sense of heritage will prevent men from turning to other doctrines or denominations.

My Personal Theory

I contend that some men and groups have held all or most of the Baptist Distinctives at every point in church history, from the beginning until now. These doctrines that Baptists call their own have been passed down from one group to another in unbroken succession for the past 2000 years. This would mean that the modern Baptist doctrine is essentially the same as that of the Early Church.

I contend that many of these churches were often small congregations who did little to impact history but much to impact eternity. Often they had a loose fellowship with other like minded churches. They never conquered. They never ruled. They never built monumental cathedrals. They didn't convene "councils" to define doctrines. What they did was serve God and proclaim the Gospel to their generations.

You see, much of what we know about these groups is from gleaning information from the writings of their enemies. They didn't write history books or build great theological schools. Until Gutenberg's printing press it would have been too expensive for their sermons and works to be propagated.

There are some exceptions. A little more than a century ago, a book called "The Key of Truth" was discovered. This book was produced by the Paulicians, a group often included in the line of Baptist heritage. It clearly teaches Baptist doctrine, and gives great insight to a movement that little is known about.

Now, this does not mean that all these groups would be in perfect harmony. Even inside these groups were differences of opinion on doctrine. For example, while many Anabaptists were truly Baptist in doctrine, often groups would be given that name that were heretical or fanatical.

It has only been in recent centuries that one of the key beliefs of Baptists has been realized: freedom to worship as men in please. Baptists have never ruled, seeing church and state as two separate entities. They have been sorely persecuted by almost every Christian denomination. They have been persecuted in practically every country in the world. Baptists have simply attempted to lead peaceable, God honoring lives.

Sources of Information

It is tragic that most of what we know about many early groups comes only through the accusations made by their enemies. Often they were accused of ridiculous beliefs since they did not conform to the prevailing or ruling sentiment. It is often difficult to discern which of these charges may have been true and which were a result of doctrinal disagreement.

Sometimes we have fragmentary or partial works of leaders of these movements. It is really amazing to think that some of these have still existed after so many centuries. It is also amazing they were not destroyed by enemies. However, these factors have led to us having just glimpses into the beliefs and practices of some groups.

We have been very fortunate that in the last few centuries that men have worked to chronicle the history of the Baptists. Many great works have been produced, especially in the 1800's, that are still in use today. We owe much to these historians and researchers, who have preserved much information for us today.

Lesson 2

Baptist Beliefs

What makes a Baptist a Baptist? Is there really a difference between a baptist and a (fill in the blank)? Smarter men than I have studied out these questions and have settled that there a few doctrines that separate Baptists from all other groups. We call the beliefs the **Baptist Distinctives**. These beliefs are not a comprehensive lost of things Baptists believe, but just what sets them apart from all other groups.

There are many different lists of Baptists Distinctives, many of which say just about the same thing. I have seen them with as little as four points. I like the list below for being detailed and easy to remember. It consists of eight points made into an acrostic of the word "BAPTISTS".

I. **B**iblical Authority

Example Verses: II Timothy 3:16-17; I Peter 1:23-25

Baptists hold to the belief that the Bible and its clear, literal teachings are the final authority for faith and practice. We at least attempt to back up everything they believe with "Chapter and Verse", and hold that anything that is contrary to the clear teaching of the Bible is not true. Such things as church councils, church leaders, tradition, and other books are often hold some authority for other Christian groups.

II. **A**utonomy of the Local Church

Example Verses: Revelation 1:11,20

Each individual, local congregation of believers is free to act for and govern themselves. Each congregation is free to operate inside the guidelines laid out in the Bible, elect their own pastor, and manage their own affairs. They do not have any type of ecclesiastical hierarchy of bishops, synods, councils, or any other authority that oversee groups of churches.

However, there are a large number of Baptist churches today that created alliances and conventions, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, that are willingly submitting themselves to a non-local church authority. This is not to say that all "fellowships" or "associations" bear rule over churches that participate in them, but many have centralized governing power that is not in harmony with the historic Baptist position of local church autonomy.

III. Priesthood of the Believer

Example Verses: I Timothy 2:5; I Peter 2:5,9

The Priesthood of the Believer basically means that we have no intermediate authority between us and God. Baptists believe that there is no man or church authority that one must go through to fellowship with God and likewise that God must go through to fellowship with us. We can go directly to God with our petitions and prayers, and He may make His will known directly to us.

IV. Two Ordinances – Baptism and Lord's Supper

Example Verses: Acts 8:36-37; I Corinthians 11:23-31

Baptists believe that the Bible only teaches us to observe two ordinances inside the authority of the local church: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are not called sacraments and are not necessary for salvation. They are commanded in the Bible to be observed, and we humbly do so.

Baptism is a symbolic act that represents the salvation of an individual. It is often called "Believer's Baptism" since a testimony of salvation is required before one can be baptized. This baptism is performed by immersion.

The Lord's Supper, sometimes called "communion", is the partaking of unleavened bread and grape juice. This is done in remembrance of Christ's broken body and shed blood.

V. Individual Soul Liberty

Example Verses: Matthew 16:27; 2 Peter 3:9

Baptists hold that each individual is free to determine their own eternal destiny. With this freedom of choice also comes responsibility as each man will answer to God for their choice. The salvation of an individual is ultimately a choice they must make for themselves.

VI. Separation of Church and State

Example Verses: Acts 5:29; Romans 13

Baptists have always held that the church and state are two separate entities and are not to mix their authorities. They believe that no government or authority should press for or require mandatory observance of a sponsored or endorsed religious

system. This even applies to Baptists and their beliefs, which they have never attempted to force on anyone through any form of government.

This belief does not mean that Baptists are anti-government. Baptists have been and continue to be model citizens and patriots. They simply believe that no governmental authority should govern churches and their practices.

VII. Two Officers – Pastor and Deacon

Example Verses: I Timothy 3:2-13

The only two offices that the Bible mentions for churches are these: Pastor and Deacon. The Pastor is the "under shepherd" of the church, and the care of its members is his responsibility. He is to be the leader of each congregation, whose responsibility it is to elect them. This office is also called by the names "Bishop" and "Elder" in the New Testament.

The Deacon is a servant of the church, and is to assist the Pastor in his duties. These men are elected by the congregation to this office. They are not given authority to rule over the church or pastor, but to aid in the work of the church.

VIII. Salvation by Grace through Faith

Example Verses: John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9

According to the Scriptures, a person's eternal destiny is based on whether or not they receive the gift of salvation offered by the Lord Jesus Christ. All men are sinners and are in need of salvation, else they will be under judgment in Hell for all eternity. However, Christ has purchased our salvation through His death and resurrection. He now offers this free gift of salvation and the promise of an eternity in Heaven to all men. We receive salvation by believing wholly on Him and trusting in His finished work and the veracity of His offer. There is nothing we can do to merit salvation nor any other means of entrance into Heaven except through accepting Christ's offer.

Lesson 3

Baptist Origins

There are many theories about how Baptist came to be. While I have already touched on my personal opinion in the introduction, I feel it would be beneficial to know these theories. This will enable you to see the ones various historians and authors take.

Normally, I do not like lists of various views on any particular subject. I personally wish writers would stick to the truth or their own opinion than listing and explaining others. I am only doing so here because I feel it is vital to understanding the subject and discerning the thoughts of various authors.

Most of the information below is based on information in the first chapter of Robert Torbet's *A History of the Baptists*. While I disagree with his conclusion in the matter, he includes a useful look at each of the various views and names historians who hold to each.

I. The Successionist View

This view maintains that there has been an unbroken line of Baptist churches and doctrine throughout the centuries. Essentially, this view proposes that there have always been Baptist churches since the first church at Jerusalem. There are many variations of this view, varying on how the methods of succession. Here are the most popular ones:

- Apostolic Succession – through ordination and laying on of hands
- Baptismal Succession – through proper and Scriptural Baptism
- Church Succession – through local churches
- Doctrinal Succession – through passing of principals and teachings

A few church historians who promote this view are:

- G.H. Orchard, author of *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists*
- J.M. Cramp, author of *Baptist History: From the Foundation of the Christian Church to the Close of the Eighteenth Century*
- William Cathcart, editor of *The Baptist Encyclopedia*
- John T. Christian, author of *A History of the Baptists*

II. The Spiritual Kinship View

This view holds that the Baptists were a group that started under the influence of many group, but especially the Anabaptists. Basically, the Baptists are the latest in a

long line of various independent movements including the Anabaptists and Waldensians.

A few church historians who promote this view are:

- David Benedict, author of *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World*
- Richard B. Cook, author of *The Story of the Baptists in All Ages and Countries*
- Thomas Armitage, author of *A History of the Baptists*
- Albert H. Newman, author of *A History of Anti-pedobaptism*

III. The Separatist View

This view holds that the Baptists did not exist in any form before the 1600's when they started as English Separatist movement. Usually the assigned date for the beginning of the Baptist movement is 1641, by which time it is argued that Baptists in Faith and Practice were essentially the same as they are now. Most that hold to this view trace Baptist beginnings to the work of John Smyth and the so called "Se-baptist Episode".

A few church historians who promote this view are:

- William Whitsett, author of *A Question in Baptist History: Whether the Anabaptists in England Practiced Immersion before the Year 1641?*
- Robert Torbet, author of *A History of the Baptists*
- H. Leon McBeth, author of *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*

Lesson 4

Was the Early Church Baptist?

So what about the first Christians at Jerusalem? Can we honestly consider them to be Baptists? Did they hold the doctrines that define Baptist belief?

Such questions have plagued Christianity for the last two thousand years. There has been much contentious debate about the Apostles and early Church leaders as to where they stand on key doctrinal issues. For example, Peter is cited as being the first Roman Catholic pope and a defender of baptismal regeneration. Both of these notions are completely false.

The earliest history of the church is quite remarkable. A handful of unlearned Jews turned the world upside down, shaking the mighty Roman Empire to its core. They were not without controversies and disputes, however. I personally think much of the confusion that took place is due to the written Word of God not being widely or evenly dispersed.

So where did the early church stand? Let's take a look:

I. They Stood for Salvation by Grace Through Faith

Without a doubt, the early Church did not preach a works or water salvation. They preached salvation by faith in Christ. Paul explicitly states this in Ephesians 2:8-9. Peter preached it in Acts 10:43. Philip preached it in Acts 8:37.

II. They Stood for the Authority of the Word of God

Even though much of the New Testament was still being written, great emphasis was put on the authority of God's Word. Paul reasoned out of the Scriptures in Acts 17:2. Paul, James, and Peter repeatedly say things like "and the Scripture saith..."

III. They Stood For the Continuance of Only Two Offices in the Church

Despite some variance in titles, there are only two offices set forth or mentioned in the New Testament church: Pastor and Deacon. A third office that was recognized, but is not spoken of as being perpetual, is that of Apostle.

I could go on, but I do not wish to simply repeat the previous lesson on the Baptist Distinctives. I think you get the idea, though.

I can hear the objection being made, "You are just making them look Baptist because you are a Baptist." Allow me to attempt to refute this silly notion:

- **Facts don't lie.**

You cannot twist the New Testament into stating that the early Church did not hold Baptist views. You can find some distorted historians who do the job for you. To disagree, you must ignore the plain wording of the Bible and trust the traditions and legends from less than reliable sources. Truth is not biased.

- **Most denominations formerly recognized that Baptist practices resembled the early Church.**

Baptist groups have gone by many names throughout the centuries, but two names that are constantly applied are “Ancient” and “Oriental”. These names were not just claimed they were given to describe the practices and doctrines of these groups. These names imply that they followed more closely the original pattern of the church.

- **Many greater men than I have studied it and came to the same conclusion.**

Many good and scholarly men have studied the Scriptures and became convinced about the validity of Baptist doctrine. Alexander Carson and Adoniram Judson are two examples. The Dutch monarch William of Orange is said to have commissioned a study in the seventeenth century that concluded of all the churches in Holland that the Baptists were the closest in faith and practice to the New Testament church.

- **If they were anything else, that's what I'd be**

I am not too ashamed to admit that I am wrong, but I have yet to see a convincing argument against my assertion. If there was a group that was closer to the New Testament standard than the Baptists, I would sign up with them as quick as I could. I don't picture them as being like me, I try to be more like their example.

Lesson 5

The Early Church (A.D. 30 to the Sixth Century)

The most exciting time in Church History, in my opinion is the first few centuries of its existence. It was a time of phenomenal growth as the message of the Gospel spread across the world. Just think how twelve men (the Eleven Disciples and Paul) literally turned the world upside down, changed the course of history, and brought the mightiest empire the world has ever seen to its knees.

It was truly the “fullness of time”. At no other time in history was the world in such a state that allowed for such mass propagation. First, there was the *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace. Second, there was a nearly universal language in Greek. Third, there was the great Roman infrastructure of roads. Fourth, there were millions of people desperately searching for something new.

Sadly, with all the great things that were accomplished there was also much evil. Isolated geographic regions and scarcity of Scriptures were primary causes. Many heretics propagated false and dangerous doctrines. False teachers tried to put Christianity under the Mosaic Law. Some would abuse the power of their ministries and attempt to add many unscriptural practices to the church.

We can divide this era into two periods. The first period can be called the **Age of the Apostles**, which lasted from Christ's Ascension to the death of John in A.D. 90. Christ had given his disciples a commission to go out and build His church. These men were given authority and gifts that no others have held since. They had a unique role as overseers of the beginnings of the Church.

The second period can be called the **Age of the Apostolic Fathers**. The church leaders of this period are usually called Apostolic Fathers. Many of these men were directly trained by Apostles or at least strongly influenced by them. Among them were such men as Ignatius, Clement, Tertullian, and Polycarp.

This was a time of intense persecution from religious and political leaders. Many Christians became martyrs for their faith. People were burned at the stake, beheaded, crucified, fed to wild beasts, slaughtered by gladiators, and so many other horrible methods of execution. Nevertheless, the Church continued to grow and prosper.

Many false doctrines also began at this time. Baptismal regeneration, ecclesiastical hierarchy, mysticism, and so many more. It was a very trying time because of the battles fought over key doctrines, such as the deity of Christ. Many false teachers developed great followings. Sadly, many of these heretics are counted as great leaders and visionaries today, such is the case with Marcion and Origen.

Of course, not everyone got along or agreed in these early days. We can call the next period the **Age of Division**, as battle and party lines were being drawn. Many “splits” and “isms” took place that separated various groups. Many objected to the growing control of various bishops over many churches. Also many leaders began to confront erroneous doctrines. Councils took place where many leaders met to address and settle these differences. They did not always decide in the right manner though. As early as 251, a distinct line of independent groups began to reject the validity of some baptisms.

In spite of a long history of persecuting true saints, the Roman Empire finally granted tolerations under Emperor Galerius in 311. Two years later, Emperor Constantine claimed a conversion to Christianity and established Christianity as empire's official religion. He attempted to use the church to enhance his own power by consolidating church authority. Essentially, he set up Christianity to be a pawn under his control. In doing so, he officially gave power to what would become the Roman Catholic church.

Perhaps it was the majority of professing Christians who united with Constantine's church, but that does not mean that they all did. There were still independent congregations who refused to unite with them. They rejected Rome's authority and the false doctrines associated with it.

The Montanists were one early independent group that began around 150. Their founder was Montanus, a preacher from Phrygia. They stressed study of the Scripture. Many held almost all the Baptist Distinctives, but others would be considered heretics. A latter leader of this movement was Tertullian, who preached in the fourth century. In 381, a Catholic council declared that they were to be considered pagans.

Another group were the Novatians. They began with the ministry of Novatian in the third century. They were quite influential in the western part of the empire at first, but after two centuries it all but died out in the west.

A group that was founded in the 400's was the Donatists. They were named after one of their early leaders, Donatus, who was a pastor in Carthage. These were found primarily in northern Africa, but they were known to send out missionaries throughout the empire.

These early groups were cooperative and accepted each other's baptisms. There are even records of mergers of congregations of different groups. They were also never, never part of the Catholic church.

As time progressed, Rome's power grew as did its many other false doctrines. Infant baptism was officially endorsed and made compulsory in 416. Church and State were officially merged into an unholy Union. The papacy was officially established in 426 with Leo II. Christians eventually persecuted Christians.

Lesson 6
The Dark Ages
(A Sixth Century to the Fourteenth Century)

The next span of time we will cover is a very dark period in the history of civilization - politically, morally, economically, religiously, and educationally. At this time the Roman Catholic church grew to its greatest power. Millions of people were enslaved under superstition and tyranny.

In spite of all this, there was still a faithful remnant of Believers who held and propagated the truth. In this time of spiritual darkness, their light shown brightly. Most often their reward was a martyr's crown.

The most influential and longest lasting group of was the Paulicians. They were so named because of either (1) an early leader names Paul or (2) their emphasis on the teaching of the Apostle Paul. The second seems to be the most likely. This group appears to have lasted around one thousand years.

We know quite a bit more about the Paulicians than we do other early groups. We have picked up many clues about them through the attacks on them by their enemies. Also, we have one of their books, *The Key of Truth*, which has been translated into English and reprinted.

The Bogomils were a group that branched off of the Paulicians. They were a very regional group focused around Bulgaria, with congregations as far away as Moscow, Russia. It is estimated that at their height they had over two and a half million followers. Their most famous leader was probably Basil, who was burned at the stake by the emperor Alexander Comnenus I.

There were also many groups that also took stand for truth during the latter part of the Dark Ages. Albigenses started in the town of Albi, France, where many independent congregations took a stand against the Roman Catholic church. They were nearly eradicated by one of the most violent times of persecution ever seen.

The Petrobrusians took their name from their leader, Peter of Bruys, around the year 1100. One of Peter's followers named Henry of Lausanne was also very influential and founded another movement known as Henricians. The Swiss Anabaptists many years later would claim that they had come out of the teachings of these groups.

The Arnoldists followed the teachings of Arnold of Bresica. He would move to Rome, run the pope out of town and be captured when the Catholics returned in force. He was hung and his body burned.

Other groups we know less about include the followers of Berengarius and Picards.

The strongest of all these groups was the Waldenses. They took their name from their early and very capable leader Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant from Lyons, France. He was converted through reading of the New Testament. This group translated and spread copies of the Bible in local languages. Though they attempted at very great length to live peaceably with local governments, they were often sought out and severely persecuted. In spite of this, they prospered and even sent out missionaries. Still today there are groups who use the name Waldense – in fact, there are even Waldensian churches in America!

As a side note, there is a very interesting episode during this beginning of this period involved a missionary preacher known as Patrick. Yes, that the famous St. Patrick who was a missionary to Ireland. While there is some mystery surrounding his exact beliefs, it is clear in two existing letters we have preserved for us that he was not a Catholic. It was many years later that his identity and image was hijacked by Roman Catholics who claimed him as one of their own.

The biggest story of this time was probably the inroads of false doctrines made into “mainstream” Christianity. Various false doctrines that were brought into the Catholic church during this time include:

- Infant baptism
- Infant communion
- Indulgences
- Purgatory
- Transubstantiation
- Celibacy of priesthood
- Inquisition
- Auricular confession

It was in the non-acceptance of doctrines such as these that led to vicious attacks on independent congregations and their leaders. Some estimate that as many as fifty million people died for their faith during this period.

Even in the Dark Ages, there was still the Light of the Gospel shining brightly. What a challenge it is for us today!

Lesson 7

The Reformation

(Fifteenth Century to the Seventeenth Century)

The time of the Reformation was a time of great upheaval all across Europe. The winds of change not only led to a restructuring of the religious powers, it also had a great political impact as well. There was a great independent voice during this period that it is often ignored in history.

Let us first set forth who exactly is a Protestant. Protestants have their start in the religious groups of this period that “protested” certain beliefs and practices of the Catholic church. These groups sought to do one of two things: reform the Catholic church or establish their own movements. Most Protestant movements at first tried to reform the Catholic church and only established their own movements after the Catholics kicked them out. To be true to the term, a Protestant movement must have at one point been a part of the Catholic church.

As a side note, let me say that Baptists are not Protestants. Baptists have never been part of the Catholic church. In fact, Catholics have long been the nemesis of Baptist groups. It has been said that if you take all the Baptist doctrine out of a Protestant church then you will only have Catholic doctrine left.

The “Morning Star of the Reformation” was John Wycliffe, who died in 1384. He was a powerful Separatist preacher most famous for translating the Bible in English. This was the very first time the entire Bible would be translated into the English language and was based on the Latin Vulgate. A Dutch Waldensian preacher named Walter Lollard came to England at this time. The followers of Wycliffe and Lollard became known as “Lollards” or “Bible Men”.

The next great leader was William Tyndale, who during the last part of the 15th Century. His parents belonged to an English Lollard church. He became a Greek scholar and translated the Bible into English directly from the Greek. Many phrases and wordings that he used were kept by the translators of the King James Bible.

John Huss was a Roman Catholic who was converted after reading Wycliffe's books. He adopted many Baptist views, so much that Luther would comment that Huss should be considered an Anabaptist. He was tricked into attending a Catholic council where he was captured and burned at the stake. Some of his followers would eventually united with Waldenses.

In the 1500's the Reformation fires were burning strong. Luther would begin his movement in Germany. Calvin and Zwingli would rise as leaders. John Knox soon would turn Scotland upside down.

During this time, many of the Independent groups became known as Anabaptists. The term Anabaptist is based on Greek and means “re-baptizer”. Often when accused of being an Anabaptist, the accused would reply, “Baptist, not Anabaptist”. That was their way of saying that they did not re-baptize because the people had not been truly baptized to start with. It was not a new term, but it was now used as a noun rather than just an adjective. You must also bear in mind that often all Independent groups would be lumped together under this name. This included many heretics and plain idiots.

Many of these groups acknowledged that they were not original in their beliefs, but that they had inherited their beliefs and practices from other groups. This has also been acknowledged by many non-Baptist sources, including Luther. It was admitted in Catholic councils discussing the Anabaptist “heresies” that their doctrines were not new but had been passed down from other groups.

There were many great men of God associated with the Anabaptists. Chief amongst them would have to be Balthasar Hubmaier. Leaders in Switzerland included Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock, and Michael Sattler. Leaders in Germany included Hans Denck, Ludwig Hatzer, and Hans Hut. One Baptist pastor by the name of Leonard Bouwens left record of baptizing over ten thousand converts.

Anabaptists were subjected to many cruel punishments. Many Anabaptists were executed by drowning. Their marriages were deemed invalid since not performed by the established church and their children often considered illegitimate because of this.

There was a Roman Catholic priest named Menno Simons who was converted around 1536 and adopted Baptist views. He was a great leader in the Anabaptist movement. His followers would take up pacifism as a distinctive belief and become known as Mennonites. By the eighteenth century they had quit baptizing by immersion.

A major turning point in history occurred in the late 1500's when William of Orange freed Holland from the clutches of Spain. He would go on to guarantee religious freedom. Under this freedom many Baptist groups prospered, just as they did under the religious freedom that would be found in America.

Lesson 8

Baptist Expansion and Division (Eighteenth Century to the Twentieth Century)

As religious freedom was furthered throughout Europe, Baptist groups began to flourish. Baptist teaching literally began to spread across the globe at this time. The prefix “ana” began disappearing the name Anabaptist, thus it became much more common to see the name Baptist. Sadly, during this time of great progress was also time of much strife and division.

It was during this time that new awareness of Baptist identity began to grow. Much progress was being made in unifying groups and on determining true Baptist doctrine. Some groups, such as the Mennonites, split from mainstream Baptists and became their own denomination.

At this time, associations and conventions began to become popular. At first, these gatherings were meant to focus Baptist forces in order to further the work of the Gospel. These rarely held any real authority because of the Baptist belief of the sovereignty of the local church. As time went on though, more and more authority and control became focused on the leadership of these assemblies.

The call of the mission field was heard by Baptists during this time, and they responded by sending some of the greatest missionary heroes of history. William Carey left England for India in 1793, and would translate the Bible into many local languages and dialects. His chief supporter was Andrew Fuller, a very influential pastor. Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice would leave America in 1812 as Congregationalists, but became a Baptist while studying the Scriptures en route to India. Judson would go in to Burma where he would translate the Bible into Burmese and do a great work among the Karen tribe, while Rice went back to America to rally support for Baptist missions.

Great church builders also rose up during this time. Johann Oncken became a Baptist around 1828 and through his ministry and influence hundreds of churches were started all across Germany. There were also many great Baptist churches in England during this time, such as Alexander Maclaren's church in Manchester. The best known English Baptist during this time however is definitely Charles Spurgeon. His Metropolitan Tabernacle in London boasted thousands of members when church rarely had even a hundred.

There was also much work in defining and defended Baptist beliefs and practices during this time. Alexander Carson was an Irish preacher who became convinced of Baptist principles. He wrote many books of which his best known is *Baptism: It's Mode and Subjects*, which is considered by many to be the definitive work on the subject.

But even as the Baptist message and mission was gaining so much ground, internal battles raged almost everywhere. Best known of these (at least in America)

revolved around the teaching of Alexander Campbell. Campbell was a Baptist preacher who became convinced that true salvation came through baptism. He was a very skilled debater and would lead many people astray. This movement would splint into two separate ones: The “Church of Christ” movement headed by Campbell and the “Disciples of Christ” or “Christian Church” movement headed by Barton Stone.

Other groups split away from Baptists in fairly peaceful fashion. During this time, the Mennonites and Amish were pretty much distinct from mainline Baptists.

Also there were great doctrinal debates during this time. The perfect case in point of this was the “Down Grade Controversy” in England. Spurgeon became alarmed at the growing modernism and apostasy in Baptist circles and began to combat it in his paper, *The Sword and the Trowel*. Many Baptists leaders dismissed his warnings and others openly attacked him. History would go to show that Spurgeon was right.

One doctrinal battle that was raged for centuries is the debate over Calvinism. Some have gone so far as to claim that to be a true Baptist you must be a Calvinist. Other rebelled so harshly against Calvinist teachings that they took heretical positions, such as denying eternal security. Some more moderate Calvinists, such as Spurgeon or Fuller, would come under much fire from both sides of this argument. This debate also split Baptists into different camps. In England, a Baptist would be known as a Particular or General Baptist on where they stood on the Atonement of Christ.

All in all, these were very productive and fruitful years for Baptists. Their number grew substantially and their message spread around the globe. Many great things were accomplished for Christ and many great missionary endeavors were undertaken.

Lesson 9

Baptists in America

Most of the original settlers in the “New World” were either Catholic or Episcopal. The Spanish empire known for its attempts to “Christianize” the heathen through Catholic missions. The settlements by England were by nature Episcopal because of the union of Britain and the Church of England.

Many did seek out a place in the New World in order to have religious freedom. Most famous of these were the Puritans who settled in Massachusetts. History would soon call them the “Pilgrims”, but they were people who were seeking to “purify” the Church of England. By settling an ocean away from England, they hoped to gain freedom enough to practice religion as they saw fit.

Many people believe that the first Baptist in America was Roger Williams. Roger Williams came to question many of the practices of the Church of England and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He would be forced to leave the colony, at which time he founded the colony of Rhode Island. This new colony promised religious freedom, and drew people with many different views on Christianity. Williams would embrace Baptist views for a short time after which he rejected them. Someone once jokingly said that at the end of his life Williams thought that only he and his wife were the true church, but that he secretly had doubts about her.

The New England Colonies had for the most part a government that was very much controlled by the established church. This church was the Puritan church, which was a staunchly Calvinist offshoot of the Episcopal church. Proponents of other groups met much resistance.

In the Southern colonies things were very much the same. Most notably, there was much persecution of the Baptists in Virginia. Here many Baptist pastors were jailed, fined, and even beaten for their faith. This was cause of great controversy, even bringing to the Baptists' aid the likes of Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson.

As religious freedoms were gained, the Baptists began to multiply. During the Great Awakening of the 1730's and 1740's, many converts of the revival joined Baptist churches. So much so, that Methodist evangelist George Whitefield quipped that his “chickens have turned to ducks”.

Baptists spread their influence westward with the advance of American settlements. In fact, many members of Daniel Boone's family were Baptists, including his brother Squire Boone who was a noted Baptist pastor. This is one reason why Baptists are so prevalent in the mid-south region of America. In fact, the only real efforts to reach these settlers were made by the Baptists and the Methodists.

Many states boast of a proud Baptist Heritage, such as Kentucky and Tennessee. However, probably the best known center of Baptist influence has been in Texas. Here Baptists have been strong and by far the largest Christian denomination.

Baptists in America started early in forming conventions and associations. Most famous of the early ones are the Triennial Convention and the Philadelphia Association. Much has been written on these efforts and struggles.

These conventions have not been without controversies and splits. Preceding the Civil War, Baptists split along between the North and the South. The Southern Baptist Convention was thus born, and is now the largest Baptist group in the world and the largest "protestant" denomination in America.

Lesson 10

Independent Fundamental Baptists

There is a real lack of information and research concerning the origins and early history of the Independent Fundamental Baptist movement. Most of the key points of doctrine driving this movement have roots and basis in the Early Church. Many other groups have strongly held similar positions over the years. In a sense, the IFB movement is a union of Baptist, Fundamentalist, and Independent Congregational movements.

This course has traced the history of Baptist groups for almost two thousand years so to retrace it is unnecessary here. However, let's look at the key doctrines that helped create the IFB movement. First, is the Baptist Distinctive of Biblical Authority. This "back to the source" mentality has led many to seek the Biblical example for the church. The second is the Autonomy of the Local Church, which really lends itself to a very independent outlook for each congregation.

Maybe the best explanation for the beginnings of the IFB movement is that many pastors and leaders became alarmed at the rising tide of criticism and modernism in Christianity and rose the cry for a return to Biblical example. In the last half of the nineteenth century especially the groups of "traditionalists" and "modernists" began to form. Biblical criticism had reached a fever pitch and many sought to conform Christianity to more worldly philosophies and human wisdom. Thankfully many Christians rebelled at this trend and defended true Christian doctrine.

These battles raged in practically every denomination of Christianity and the Baptists were not immune. For example, Spurgeon sensed the growing tide modernism in English Baptists, especially in the Baptist Union, and began to sound the warning to what would become known as the "Down-Grade Controversy". Spurgeon's stand led to his departure from the Baptist Union and to this day the issues are still debated.

One key group I believe in the formation of the IFB movement is the Landmark Baptists. Led by J.R. Graves, these men stood strongly for Baptist principles and doctrines. While in some cases they took their positions too far, these men helped defend Baptist doctrine and helped emphasize such things as local church autonomy.

The "Fundamentalist" movement began as more non-denominational defense of historic Christianity. The name was in part based on a series of books called "The Fundamentals", which such notables as R.A. Torrey and A.C. Dixon had a part in. This movement stood strongly against "higher criticism" of the Bible and evolution. This movement reached its zenith in the 1920's and 1930's and featured a renewed emphasis on evangelism.

It is not very clear as to how all these factors united, but if Independent Fundamental Baptists had a father it must be the colorful J. Frank Norris. Norris helped

to bring Fundamentalism to Baptist circles along with W.B. Riley and T.T. Shields. He led the way for many Baptists to leave the strong Southern Baptist Convention and other groups to form loosely knit "fellowships". To Norris can be traced many key features of the IFB movement, including premillennialism, door-to-door evangelism, tenacious defense of doctrine, disdain of "conventions" and "boards", practical training through Bible colleges, and strong pastoral authority in local churches.

Norris was far from perfect, but he was the trailblazer of the IFB movement. Practically every major IFB leader can in some way be traced back to Norris. John R. Rice worked with Norris for a few years even though they parted on less than ideal terms. Tom Malone was considered as a possible pastor of Norris' First Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX. G.B. Vick was a long time associate of Norris who led the founding of the Baptist Bible Fellowship. Many other IFB leaders took inspiration from Norris or copied his methods. At one time most of the largest Sunday Schools in America had direct ties to Norris.

The IFB movement has been a very influential one. Before the rise of the mega-church movement many of the largest church in America had ties to the IFB movement. Its influence has been felt in other groups in emphasizing soulwinning and defending the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Many of the mega-churches use a "small groups" system that can be traced in part to Norris' Sunday School system.

Appendix

Baptist History Books

It is often quite difficult to judge a book by its cover, especially with regards to Baptist History books. Let me give you a list one I recommend that you can use for further study. I will also include a short list of others and the problems they have.

Recommended Reading

The Faithful Baptist Witness by Phil Stringer. Landmark Baptist Press. 1998.

The easiest reading, and in many ways the most informative, work on Baptist History. There is quite a bit of information on history and doctrines crammed into 265 pages. In fact, there is much more time spent explaining Baptist doctrines than in just about any comparable work. I believe the material was originally put together for a high school course, so it is not the most scholarly presentation. Also, there is a lack of footnotes and documentation that is annoying if you really want to study some things out.

The Trail of Blood by J.M. Carroll. Ashland Avenue Baptist Church. 1931.

A classic work that numbers only 56 pages and a multi-fold chart (which really doesn't make any sense). It has been very influential in propagating the idea of Baptist succession. It is a transcription of a series of lectures that Carroll gave at Ashland Avenue Baptist Church in Lexington, KY. I think he spends too much time in discussing Catholic doctrines and history. However, he does a great job at systematically laying out his arguments and fact. It is a great quick reference tool.

A Short History of the Baptists by Henry Vedder.

This is another classic that is in the public domain now. It may be misnamed by today's standards: the 431 pages, including the index, that mine has is not exactly "short". He covers a lot of history, but does bog down in the latter part of the book while discussing more recent history. I honestly don't know exactly where he stands on the origin of the Baptists. My initial reaction was that he argued that Baptist principles have existed since the early church, but only recently have they been all been accepted by one group. Others have come away with other impressions. Nonetheless, it is a fairly easy read and does cover most points and groups involved in discussing Baptist History

UPDATE – *I found out after writing these notes and recording this lesson that Henry Vedder was a modernist. This explains many of the positions in the book. For more information, check out page 178 of David Beale's book "In Pursuit of Purity". According to Beale, Vedder "vigorously attacked Christ's substitutionary atonement" as well as attacking the Old Testament sacrificial system.*

Other Works

A History of the Baptists by Robert Torbet. Judson Press.

Came across this one recently at a used book store that I frequent. I wouldn't go out of my way to have it on my shelf, but it does have some good information on early English and American Baptists. He does not hold to Baptist succession and in the last chapter reveals some opinions that are a little too liberal for me. For instance, he holds Baptists to be Protestants and places high value on "unity". He only covers about the last four hundred years of history.

The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness by H. Leon McBeth. Broadman Press. 1987.

This is one you will most likely see in new book stores. As you can tell from the title, I don't agree with him on Baptist origins. He is a Southern Baptist historian on staff at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The one thing his volume has my praises on it for being well documented. In fact, there is a companion volume available called *A Sourcebook For Baptist Heritage* that has some interesting material. He is very thorough on what he covers, but I do not agree with many of his conclusions.

Online Works

You can also find many Baptist History works on the Internet that have become public domain, such as Vedder's book. You can find many of these on Google Books (<http://books.google.com>) or www.reformedreader.org (they are Calvinists, but have a huge selection of online Baptist History books). Here's a few that you can do a quick search for and read online that are supposed to be good:

- **Baptists Thorough Reformers** by John Q. Adams
- **A History of the Baptists** by Thomas Armitage
- **A History of the Baptists** by John T. Christian
- **Baptist History** by J.M. Cramp
- **Origin of the Baptists** by S.H. Ford
- **A Concise History of the Baptists** by G.H. Orchard