

A MINIATURE HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS

By Daniel Merrill-1805

DANIEL MERRILL'S THESIS IN THIS HISTORY ONLY THE BAPTISTS CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE APOSTLES. ALL THE PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS HAVE THEIR ORIGINS AFTER THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS COMPLETED

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1. THE USE OF NON-BAPTIST SOURCES TO VERIFY THE ABOVE ASSERTION

It may be pleasing to some of my readers to be presented with a brief account of the Baptists. I shall extract this account from the writings of those who were not of the Baptist denomination, but rather prejudiced against them.

Here it may be observed that the religious sect, called Baptists, have caused the learned world more perplexity and research to decipher their origin, than any other sect of Christians, or, perhaps more than all others. Yes, this research hath baffled all their tradition in ancient story.

2. SOME EARLIER NAMES FOR THE BAPTISTS

It is not difficult to fix the period when one sect of this denomination was first called **Petrobrusians**, when another was known by the name of **Waterlandians**, when a third was denominated **Mennonites**, & c. But the difficulty is this, to ascertain the time, place and medium, by which Christ's disciples were led to adopt the peculiar sentiments which is now held by those called Baptists, and which distinguishes them from all other denominations.

3. THE DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE OF BAPTISTS IS TRACEABLE BACK TO THE APOSTLES AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

It may be further observed, that if no one, however learned and wise, be able to trace this sect to any beginning short of the days of the apostles, or of Christ, it is possible that it then arose. Besides, if all other religious denominations, or the Pedobaptists, who include all which are **not** Baptists, can be traced to a probable origin short of the Apostles and the Baptists cannot be, it affords still more probability, that they might have arisen

4. A PLEA TO REJECT PREJUDICE AND TO HONESTLY EXAMINE THE TRUTH

I wish my readers to indulge in one question, and to give me an explicit answer. Are you willing to have the origin of the Baptists fairly explored, and to open your eyes to light, should light be afforded it?

You cannot, my Christian readers, unless your minds be unduly swayed by prejudice, do otherwise than say, yes. For, though you be not very friendly to the Baptists, you will not deny them what you grant to your worst enemy, liberty to speak the truth, and that truth in weight, as least in measure.

5. THE OBJECT OF THIS RESEARCH AND STUDY: THE TRACING OF A PRINCIPLE IN HISTORY, NOT A NAME.

It ought to be particularly noted, that my object is not to give the history of a name, but of a principle. I shall not contend who were first called Baptists, Anabaptist, Mennonites, or the like; but who have held the particular sentiment which is adopted by those called Baptists. **Wherever we find the principle, there we find the men, the Christians, who had they lived in our day, would be styled Baptists.**

Nor is the present controversy this, whence came that mode of baptism, which is practiced by all, who are know by the name Baptist? For this mode is granted, generally, if not universally, by all learned and honest men, to be as ancient as John the Baptist and the apostles. The peculiar characteristic of the Baptists is this: They hold that the ordinance of baptism is to be administered to adults or to visible believers only.

6. ANABAPTISTS IS ANOTHER NAME GIVEN TO THOSE WHO REBAPTIZE BY IMMERSION INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE BAPTIZED OR SPRINKLED IN INFANCY.

One natural consequence of this principle is, when anyone who was baptized, or sprinkled, in his infancy, comes over to the Baptist sentiments, they require him to be baptized. Hence they are called Anabaptists. Another very natural consequence is, this sentiment constrains the Baptists to oppose the baptism of infants. Hence they are distinguished by the name Anti-pedobaptists.

THE AUTHOR'S PLAN OF APPROACH IN THIS HISTORICAL STUDY

I shall add one observation more, and then proceed to give a succinct history of the Baptists. The observation is this: Whenever and wherever I find persons who hold the peculiar characteristic sentiment of the Baptists, I shall call them by that name. Their history now follows.

THE TESTIMONIES OF THREE PEDOBAPTIST HISTORIANS/SCHOLARS CONCERNING THE ORIGINS OF BAPTISTS

I

DR. MOSHEIM'S TESTIMONY

THE ORIGIN OF BAPTISTS CANNOT BE TRACED, EXCEPT IT BE BACK TO THE APOSTLES

[Mosheim's words in quotes; remainder by D.M]

A.

BAPTISTS EXISTED PRIOR TO THE REFORMATION BUT CAME OUT OF HIDING DURING THAT PERIOD

The origin of the Baptist can be found no where, unless it be conceded that it was at Jordan, or Enon.

Dr. Mosheim, in his history of the Baptists, says, "The *true origin* of that sect, which acquired the denomination of the Anabaptists by their administering anew the rite of baptism to those who come over to their communion, and derived that of Mennonites from the famous man to whom they owe the greatest part of their present felicity, is *hid* in the *remote depths of antiquity*, and is of consequence extremely difficult to be ascertained."

Here Dr. Mosheim, as learned an historian, though not so candid a one, as the science of letters can boast, bears positive testimony, that the origin of the Baptists is hidden in the *remote depths of antiquity*. Nothing is more evident than this; the Doctor either knew not their origin, or was not candid enough to confess it. At least, we have this conclusion, that he could find their origin no where short of the apostles.

A large number of Baptists were scattered, oppressed, and persecuted through many, if not through all, the nations of Europe, before the dawn of the reformation under Luther and Calvin. When Luther, seconded by several princes of the petty states of Germany, arose in opposition to the overgrown usurpations of the church of Rome, the Baptists also arose from their hiding places.

They hoped that what they had been long expecting and praying for was now at the door; the time in which the sufferings of God's people should be greatly terminated: but God had not raised Luther's views of reformation to nigh the height the Baptists were expecting.

Their detestation of the Mother of Harlots, owing to their bitter experience of her cruelties, and the clear gospel light with which they had been favoured above Luther, and their ardent desire to be utterly delivered from her cruel oppressions, made them wish to carry the reformation farther than God had appointed Luther to accomplish.

They were soon disappointed in Luther, and probably did not duly appreciate the reformation which he was instrumentally effecting. It was as might have been expected; the Lutherans and the Baptists fell out by the way; and Calvin, if not Luther, warmly opposed them. (See Mosheim. Cent. XVI. Chap. 3, Sect. 3. Part 2.)

Mosheim, Vol. IV. Page 427, speaking of the Baptists, says, "This sect started up all of a sudden, in several countries, at the same point of time, and at the very period where the first contestants of the reformers with the Roman Pontiffs drew the attention of the world."

From this we have one plain and fair deduction; that the Baptists were before the reformation under Luther and Calvin, and therefore did not take their rise from the enthusiasts under Munzer and Storck, or at that time; or at Munster.

B.

THE BAPTISTS EXISTED IN EARLIER CENTURIES UNDER MANY NAMES, AS A PERSECUTED MINORITY

The **Hussites**, in the fifteenth century, the **Wickliffites**, in the fourteenth, and the **Petrobrusians**, in the twelfth, and the **Waldenses**, were all Baptists.* (Not all, everyone; but all generally) To this fact Dr. Mosheim bears the following testimony. (Vol. IV, pp. 428-428 [following quote])

"It may be observed that the Mennonites (i.e. the Baptists of East and West Friesland, Holland, Gelderland, Brabant, Westphalia, and other places in the North of Europe) are *not entirely mistaken*, when they boast their descent from the Waldenses, Petrobrusians, and other *ancient sects*, who are usually considered as *witnesses* of the *truth* in times of universal darkness and superstition.

Before the rise of Luther and Calvin, there lay *concealed* in *almost all* the countries of Europe, particularly in Bohemia, Moravia, Switzerland and Germany, many persons, who adhered tenaciously to the following doctrine, which the Waldenses, Wickliffites and Hussites had maintained; some in a more disguised and others in a more open and public manner, viz. *that the kingdom of Christ, or the visible church he had established upon earth, was an assembly of true and real saints, and ought therefore to be inaccessible to the wicked and unrighteous, and also exempt from all those institutions which human prudence suggest to oppose the progress of iniquity, or to correct and reform transgressors.*

This maxim is the true source of all the peculiarities, that are to be found in the religious doctrine and discipline of the Mennonites, (or Baptists of the North of Europe) and it is most certain that the *greatest part* of these *peculiarities* were approved of by many of those who, before the dawn of the reformation, entertained the notion already mentioned relating to the visible church of Christ." From this testimony of Dr. Mosheim we may remark—

GROUPS, MOVEMENTS THAT POSSESSED THE SAME DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE AS MODERN DAY BAPTISTS

1. That the **Mennonites** were Baptist, or Anabaptist, for these different names he uses to express one and the same thing.

2. That the **Petrobrusians** were Baptists; for the Baptists assert, that Mosheim allows it, that they were their progenitors in principle and practice. Besides, in his history of the twelfth century, part II. Chap. V. sect. 7, he expressly tell us, that one of their tenets was, *that no persons whatsoever were to be baptized before they were come to the full use of their reason.*

3. That the **Waldenses, Wickliffites and Hussites** were Baptists; for, as Mosheim says, they all held to the great and leading maxim, which is the true source of all the peculiarities that are to be found in the religious doctrine and discipline of the Mennonites. These several denominations of Christians were not known by the ancient, modern and appropriate name, Baptists. But their doctrine and discipline were the same with our Baptists, and were they now living, they would be thus called. In other words; just so far as they were consistent with their great and leading *maxim*, and just so far as the modern Baptists are alike the one to the other.

4. That in the sixteenth century the Waldenses, Petrobrusians and other ancient sects (i.e. of the Baptists) were usually considered as having been witnesses of the truth, in the times of

darkness and universal superstition. How differently from this would and do many consider them in our day!

5. That before the rise of Luther and Calvin there lay concealed in almost all the countries of Europe, particularly in Bohemia, Moravia, Switzerland and Germany, many persons who held the same doctrine and discipline with the Baptists in our day, and were, of necessary and fair consequence, of the same denomination.

II

DR. MACLAINE'S TESTIMONY THE WALDENSES WERE THE BAPTISTS OF PRE- REFORMATION TIMES WHOSE HISTORY CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE APOSTLES

[Maclaine's words in quotes, remainder by D.M.]

We have already traced the Baptists down to the twelfth century. We have also found that they were scattered over almost all the countries of Europe, and were, in the dark ages of popery, the witnesses of the truth; or have been usually thus considered. Besides, we have found that the Waldenses were, in principle and practice, Baptists; or in other words, we have found that the Waldenses were Baptists. We will now see to what origin we can trace the Waldenses.

A.

THE NINTH CENTURY EXISTENCE OF THE WALDENSES IN THE PIEDMONT VALLEYS UNDER VARIOUS NAMES

Dr. Maclaine, who translated Mosheim's church history from the original Latin, gives us, vol. III. Pages 118, 119, under the note G, the following history of the Waldenses. His words are,

"We may venture to affirm the contrary (i.e. from what Mosheim had just said of the Waldenses taking their name from Peter **Waldus**) with Beza and other writers of note; for it seems evident, from the best records, that **Valdus** derived his name from the true **Waldenses** of Piedmont, whose doctrine he adopted, and who were known by the name of **Vaudois** and **Waldenses**, before he or his immediate followers existed."

"If the **Waldenses**, or **Waldenses**, had derived their name from any eminent teacher, it would probably have been from Valdo, who was remarkable for the purity of his doctrine, in the ninth century, and was the cotemporary and chief counselor of Berengarius. But the truth is, that they derive their name from their vallies in Piedmont, which in their language are called **Vaux**. Hence **Vaudois**, their true name;"

"Hence Peter, (or, as others call him, John) of Lyons, was called in Latin **Valdus**, because he had adopted their doctrine; and hence the term **Waldenses** and **Waldenses**, used by those who write in English, or Latin, in the place of **Vaudois**."

B.

A ROMAN INQUISITOR CITES 9TH-4TH CENTURY EXISTENCE FOR WALDENSES AND QUOTES AUTHORS WHO DATE THEIR EXISTENCE BACK TO THE APOSTOLIC AGE

The bloody Inquisitor Reinerus Sacco, who exerted such a furious zeal for the destruction of the Waldenses, lived about eighty years after Valdus of Lyons, and must therefore be supposed to know whether of not he was the real founder of the **Waldenses**, or **Leonists**; and yet it is remarkable, that he speaks of the **Leonists** as a sect that had flourished about five hundred years; nay, mentions authors of note, who make their antiquity remount to the apostolic age. See the account of Sacco's book by the Jesuit Gretser in the Bibliotheca Patrum.

I know not upon what principle Dr. Mosheim maintains that the inhabitants of the vallies of Piedmont are to be carefully distinguished from the Waldenses; and I am persuaded that whoever will be at the pains to read attentively the 2nd, 25th, 26th, and 27th chapters of the first book of Leger's *Historie des Eglises Vaudoises*, will find this distinction entirely groundless.

When the Papists asks us where our religion was before Luther, we generally answer, in the Bible, and we answer well. But to gratify their taste for tradition, and human authority, we may add to this answer — in the valleys of Piedmont.

C.

A "POPISH WRITER" CONFIRMS THE ANCIENT EXISTENCE OF THE WALDENSES

To the above we may add, on of the Popish writers, speaking of the Waldenses, says, "*The heresy of the Waldenses is the oldest heresy in the world.*" (President Edward's *History of Redemption*, p. 267)

It is here worthy to be particularly noticed—

1. That Reinerus Sacco speaks of the Waldenses, or Baptists, of his day, as a sect that had, at that time, flourished for about five hundred years; which brings the history of the Baptists, as a religious sect. down to the fifth century.

2. That this same Reinerus Sacco mentions authors of note, who make the antiquity of the Waldensean Baptists to remount to the apostolic age.

3. That the Baptists are the most ancient of all the religious sects, who have set themselves to oppose the ghostly powers of the Romanists.

D.

MERRILL'S OBSERVATIONS THE APOSTOLIC ORIGIN OF THE BAPTISTS VERSUS THE POST- APOSTOLIC ORIGINS OF THE PEDOBAPTISTS

That if there be any body Christians, who have existed during the reign of antichrist, or of the man of sin, the Baptists have been this living church of Jesus Christ. The consequence of the whole is this: The Baptists have no origin short of the Apostles. They arose in the days of John the Baptist, and increased largely in the days of our blessed Saviour, when he showed himself unto Israel, and in the days of his Apostles, and have existed, under the severest oppressions, with intervals of prosperity, ever since.

But as to the Pedobaptists, their origin is at once traced to about the middle of the second century; when the mystery of iniquity not only began to work, but, by its fermentation, had produced this error of fruitful evils, namely, that baptism was essential to salvation: yes, that it was regeneration. Hence arose the necessity of baptizing children.

Now comes forward Irenaeus, and informs that the church had a *tradition* from the Apostles to give baptism to infants. We are told in the Appendix of Mosheim's Church History, that one of the remarkable things which took place in the second century was the baptizing of infants, it being never known before, as a Christian ordinance for them.

What a pity it is, that good men, who have renounced the error, which was, as church history informs us, the progenitor of infant baptism, should still retain its practical and erroneous offspring, to the prejudice and marring of the church of God!

Not a single sect of the Pedobaptists can find its origin nearer to the Apostles than the second century. We hence conclude, that their origin was there, and that they then and there arose in the mystery which was then working. May the Father of lights open the eyes of my brethren, that they may come out of this, perhaps, the last thicket of gross error and darkness.

III DR. EDWARDS TESTIMONY

EDUCATOR VERIFIES EARLY EXISTENCE OF WALDENSES

I will now add the testimony which President Edwards bears in favour of the Waldenses and other faithful ones, who were scattered through all parts of Europe in the dark ages popery. It is the following:

A.

PRE-REFORMATION ANTI-ROMANISTS IN EUROPE

"In every age of this dark time, there appeared particular persons in all parts of Christendom, who bore a testimony against the corruptions and tyranny of the church of Rome. There is no one age of antichrist, even in the darkest time of all, but ecclesiastical historians mention a great many by name, who manifested an abhorrence of the Pope and his idolatrous worship, and plead for the ancient purity of doctrine and worship."

"God was pleased to maintain an uninterrupted succession of witnesses, through the whole time, in Germany, France, Britain, and other countries, as historians demonstrate, and mention them by name, and give an account of the testimony which they held. Many of them were private persons, and many of them ministers, and some magistrates and persons of great distinction. And there were numbers in every age, who were persecuted and put to death for this testimony."

B.

THE WALDENSES FROM THE VAUDOIS-PIEDMONT VALLEYS WHO RESISTED ROME DURING THE MEDIEVAL AGES

"Besides these particular persons, dispersed here and there, there was a certain people, called the Waldenses, who lived separate from all the rest of the world, who kept themselves pure, and constantly bore a testimony against the church of Rome, through all this dark time. The place where they dwelt was the Vaudois, or the five vallies of Piedmont, a very mountainous country, between Italy and France.

"The place where they lived was compassed with those exceeding high mountains, call the Alps, which were almost impassable. The passage over these mountainous, desert countries, was so difficult, that the vallies where this people dwelt were almost inaccessible. There this people lived for many ages, as it were alone, where, in a state of separation from all the world, having very little to do with any other people, they served God in the ancient purity of his worship, and never submitted to the church of Rome."

"This place, in this desert, mountainous country, probably was the place, especially meant in the 12th chap. Of Rev. 6th verse, as the place prepared of God for the woman, that they should feed her there during the reign of Antichrist. [Editor: President Edwards was mistaken here and in the second paragraph below This is a reference to Israel during the future tribulation period.]"

"Some of the Popish writers themselves own that that people never submitted to the church of Rome. One of the Popish writers, speaking of the Waldenses, says, the heresy of the Waldenses is the oldest heresy in the world. It is supposed, that this people first betook themselves to this desert, secret place among the mountains, to hide themselves from the severity of the heathen persecutions, which were before Constantine the Great;"

"And thus the woman fled into the wilderness from the face of the serpent, *Rev. 12:6*, and so verse 14: 'And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness into her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time from the face of the serpent.' [Editor: See 2nd paragraph above for comment] And the people being settled

there, their posterity continued there from age to age afterwards, and being as it were by natural walls, as well as by God's grace, separated from the rest of the world, never partook of the overflowing corruption."

IV

DANIEL MERRILL'S EVALUATION OF EVIDENCE PRESENTED

A.

THREE NON-BAPTISTS HISTORIANS/SCHOLARS CONCUR THAT THE WALDENSES WERE THE SAME AS THE BAPTISTS IN PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE AND MAY HAVE EXISTED BACK TO THE APOSTOLIC AGE

It is hoped that the reader will very carefully and candidly compare what is testified to us by three very learned men, Dr. Mosheim, Dr. Maclaine, and President Edwards.

1. SUMMATION OF DR. MOSHEIM'S TESTIMONY

The testimony of the first is, that the Waldenses and many others who are *usually considered as witnesses of the truth* in the times of *universal darkness and superstition*, were essentially agreed with the Baptists of modern date, as to *principle and practice*, or as to the great maxim, whence flow all the peculiarities of that denomination.

His testimony, in short, is this; the Hussites, the Wickliffites, the Petrobrusians, and the Waldenses, with other witnesses of the truth, scattered over Europe, in the dark ages of Popery, were essentially the same with the Baptists of later times; or that they all were what we call Baptists.

2. SUMMATION OF DR. MACLAINE'S TESTIMONY

Dr. Maclaine testifies that the Waldenses flourished as early as the fifth century; yes, he informs us that some authors of note carry their antiquity up to the apostolic age.

3. SUMMATION OF DR. EDWARD'S TESTIMONY

President Edwards informs us that these Waldenses were the main body of the church in the dark ages, and have been, together with their scattered brethren, the pure church of Jesus Christ, during the reign of antichrist, and, of certain consequence, were successor of the pure church, from the days of Christ and his apostles.

B.

DANIEL MERRILL'S CONCLUSIONS

1. BAPTISTS ARE THE UNTERRUPED CHURCH OF CHRIST FROM THE APOSTLES DAY TO THE PRESENT TIME

The fair consequence of all is this, that the Baptists have been the uninterrupted church of our Lord from the apostles' day to ours. I may, indeed, exclaim, What have I been believing, what have I been doing, with respect to the Baptists, all my days?

2. THE PEDOBAPTIST DENOMINATIONS CAN BE TRACED BACK TO ROMAN CATHOLISM FROM WHICH THEY LATER SEPARATED

I know, and I confess, that the history of the church assures me, that the denomination of Christians to which I have belonged, and to which I do still visibly belong, came through the church of Rome, and was broken off from the mother of harlots, and it is not greatly to be wondered at, if all her filth should not be yet wiped away. At the same time, the same history assures me, that the Baptists never have submitted to her superstitions and filthy abominations.

I am somewhat surprised at my own long continued ignorance, and at the yet remaining darkness of my brethren, as to this matter. But above all, what shall I say, at the hard opposition which some good men yet maintain against their brethren, the Baptists?

Surely they might with great propriety be addressed in the words of Gamaliel; "Take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do, as touching these men." If ye will not favour them, "refrain from them, and let them alone; for if their counsel or work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

All the power, craft, and cruelty of the wicked, though practiced for nighly one thousand eight hundred years, have not been able to prevail against them. Surely the misguided zeal of good men will not.

3. THE BAPTISTS ARE THE ONLY RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT OVER WHICH SATAN HAS NOT PREVAILED IN HUMAN HISTORY

[Editor's Note: Daniel Merrill lived **before** the advent of apostate unbelief among Baptists in the USA. In Merrill's day, **all** Baptists were fervent believers in the verbally inspired Scriptures.]

In this short History of the Baptists, we see the continued accomplishment of one of Christ's promissory predictions, which is, *Matt. 16:18*, the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church. That denomination of Christians which are called Baptists, are the only known society of professing Christians, against which Satan hath not prevailed, either in point of doctrine, or discipline, or both.

This church, or old and inveterate heresy, as Satan would call it, he acknowledges, by the mouth of his servants, the Romanists, that he could never subdue. It is true, Satan hath joined many of his legions to it, as he did many false brethren to the disciples in the days of the apostles. But he hath never, no, not for an hour, prevailed upon this ancient and primitive church to give up the doctrine of grace, or the administrations of the ordinances as Christ delivered them his people.

That which she first received, she still holds fast, and will. In all the history of the church, we read of no other body of professing Christians, after which Satan hath cast such a continual flood of waters; but hitherto the earth hath helped the woman, and the flood of persecution hath not prevailed. Satan's future efforts will be equally without effect.

C.

DANIEL MERRILL'S CLOSING EXHORTATION DON'T OPPOSE THE BAPTISTS: THEY ARE RIGHT

My Fathers and Brethren in the ministry, and my brethren among the professed disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, suffer a word of exhortation.

If you will not take up the cross, and so increase the number of Christ's continually preserved, yet always suffering, little flock, be ye careful how ye set yourselves in array against them; for more are they who are for them, than are those who are against them. With you is an arm of the flesh, in all your oppositions, but with them is the Lord their God to help them, and he will help them; and by and by he will help them right early.

THE DEFENSE OF NEW TESTAMENT TRUTH THE ONLY MOTIVE FOR HIS STAND

I shall be very pleasingly disappointed should I not be, by many of you who are rulers in Israel, set at nought for coming over to the help of the Lord against the mighty. But, if I may but know the truth, and please the Lord, it is, with me, but a comparatively small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment. I do, indeed, wish for the continuance of your good opinion and friendship, but I cannot possess them at the expense of truth.

That I might testify unto you these things, I have risked every thing which the world calls valuable. I am now determined, and through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ I hope to that to

the end of my life I shall be determined, to venture every thing in defense of the doctrines and ordinances and church of the Son of God.

I beseech all of you, who know the grace of our Lord Jesus, that ye do not as did many of the chief rulers in Israel. They believed on Christ, but did not confess him, because of the Pharisees, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for "they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God." *John* 12:42, 43.

You have now heard me, and know what I do. You will therefore now make up your judgment. But I pray you, remember one thing: With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.

I am, Reader,

Thy Servant, for the Gospel's sake,

Daniel Merrill.