

Study Guide Questions for
Through Fire and Water

by Elwood Yoder

Chapters 6 - 10

Chapter 6, Radical reform comes in South Germany and Moravia

1. You are a religious reporter for the South German Times in Nürnberg, Germany, in 1527. Your boss tells you to cover the new preacher in town, Hans Hut, and his Anabaptist followers. You consider yourself an impartial observer of religious events. Why are some people in the city accusing Hans Hut of carrying a little flask with a magic potion? Why are people attracted to Hut's preaching?
2. A year later, you are asked to write a paragraph for the Times supporting the Augsburg decision to persecute the Anabaptists. Though you argue with your boss that you try to be impartial in your writing, he will hear none of it. What will you write?
3. State at least three central beliefs of Hans Denck such that some Mennonites today consider him a model Anabaptist.
4. Evaluate the Hutterite practice of holding all material possessions in common. Is there a Biblical basis for their belief, or did their communalism grow out of a desperate situation in 1528, and later become a tradition? Why do you think other Anabaptists never practiced communal living like the Hutterites?
5. Read the story of Jakob Hutter's martyrdom. Are acts of barbarity such as happened to Hutter still taking place in our world today? Have governments and civil authorities "progressed" since the 16th century? Is human violence about the same today as it was in the 16th century or have things improved?
6. Read the sections on the Anabaptist Concept of the Church and church and state and religious liberty. Do you think American Protestants today generally accept the concept of corpus christianum? Explain.
7. How did the Anabaptist understanding of salvation differ from Luther's views?
8. Read the last 2 paragraphs of chapter 6 and the last section of chapter 4 (Reformation or restoration?). In what way was the Anabaptist Movement an attempt at "restoration"

rather than a "reformation"?

Chapter 7, Seeking Peace and Finding Division, 1600-1750

1. Why did some Mennonites choose to leave Switzerland in the early 1600s?
2. Early 17th century life for the Mennonites in the Palatinate and Alsace was difficult. List two threats to the Mennonites in the 1600s in this region:
3. By the late 1600s the Mennonites in Switzerland and South Germany were caught on "the horns of a dilemma." In a sentence, what was this dilemma?
4. What were at least three differences between the Amish and the Swiss-South German Mennonites?
5. What may have been some of Benedikt Brechbuhl's reasons for refusing to leave Switzerland?
6. How did the Dutch Mennonites practice mutual aid towards the Swiss Mennonites?
7. For what reasons did Mennonites emigrate to America?
8. The Church of the Brethren has origins in Anabaptism and Pietism. What were some of the beliefs and practices of the early Brethren?

Chapter 8, Mennonites Settle in North America, 1683-1860

1. Why did most of the early Mennonite and Amish immigrants go to Pennsylvania?
2. Only a few decades after the establishment of the first permanent Mennonite settlement at Germantown, Mennonites had migrated into the Shenandoah Valley (1730s). Why do you think Mennonites arrived in Page County Virginia so soon after their arrival in the New World?
3. Why did Mennonite leaders make arrangements to have the Martyrs Mirror translated for their congregations? What language was the Mirror originally written in? And what language were the Mennonites speaking during the Colonial era? (see also the sidebar at

chapter's end)

4. It has been estimated that about 1/3 of the American colonists were patriots, about 1/3 were loyalists, and about 1/3 didn't care about the Revolutionary War. Why would you suspect that "neither the patriots nor the loyalists ever fully accepted the Mennonites' peace stance"? (See also the section "Death in Germantown.")
5. Why were Mennonites somewhat reluctant to accept the pietistic emphases of the Second Great Awakening of the 1780s-1820s?
6. What were the reasons for the "push and pull" of Mennonite immigration between 1815 and 1860?
7. What sort of character strengths did Verena Sprunger Lehman seem to possess (see the sidebar also)?

Chapter 9, War and Renewal, 1860-1940

1. If you had lived during the Civil War and been drafted, how do you think you would have responded (with the beliefs you now hold)?
2. In what way was the General Conference Mennonite Church an "integrated" conference, especially after 1874.
3. What were the reasons why the Old Order Mennonites and Old Order Amish rejected modern technology, materialism, and individualism?
4. How did John F. Funk and John S. Coffman help revitalize the "old Mennonites," those neither GC nor Old Order?
5. Why did Mennonites feel "enormous public pressure to join in the war spirit" of World War I (you may want to reread the story of John Yoder in the introduction of the book)?
6. What Scripture do you think Rowena Lark may have been referring to when she talked about the "literal interpretation of Scripture"?
7. What do you think Steven Nolt meant when he wrote that Mennonites in the 1940s "were increasingly aware of that same movement in the lives of others?" (see also the sidebars on Brubaker and the Benders)

Chapter 10: Mennonites move to Prussia and Russia (1750-1850)

1. On a map, identify Marienburg, Danzig, and Ebling. Draw a migration line from the Netherlands to the Vistula Delta and these primary Mennonite cities. Why did the Dutch Mennonites migrate to northern Poland in the sixteenth century?
2. Harry Loewen argues that the Prussian/Russian Mennonites developed into a people, or an ethnic group. List 4-5 characteristics that define the ethnicity of these Mennonites.
3. As Loewen describes the term, do you think Mennonites in your home community are an ethnic group? Explain your answer.
4. Why did some Mennonites in Prussia take up arms against Napoleon?
5. Whom do you side with in debate between David von Riesen and the Elbing Mennonite congregation elders? Why?
6. From what Harry Loewen has written, what seem to be the main reasons why the Mennonites of Prussia had given up their nonresistant position by World War I in the early 20th century?
7. What did Catherine the Great promise the Mennonites if they would move to Russia?
8. Describe 4-5 difficulties encountered by the first wave of Prussian Mennonites that migrated to Russia.
9. Highlight the Russian Mennonite "mother" colonies on your map of southern Russia. Draw lines of migration to the mother colonies and indicate the years of those migrations.
10. Why did the Molotschna colony become more prosperous than the other colonies?
11. Summarize 3-5 of the primary reasons why the Prussian Mennonites migrated to Russia.