

Baptist History

Lesson 8

Baptists in Early America

Rogers Williams



Roger Williams

- Born in 1599
- Educated at Cambridge
- Founded Rhode Island
- Came to Plymouth in 1631
- Went back and forth between Plymouth and Salem before being banished.
- Went to Providence, a haven for people of dissenting beliefs.

Roger Williams

- Baptized by Ezekiel Holliman
- “Contemporary testimony is unanimous in favor of the view that immersion was practiced by Williams. As the fact is generally conceded, it does not seem worthwhile to quote evidence.” -- Newman, in “A History of Baptist Churches in the United States” Pg. 80

Roger Williams

- Williams baptized 12-13 others after Holliman baptized him. There were no Baptist preachers or churches in America yet.
- This group organized First Baptist Church at Providence in 1638-1639. (Now called FBC in America)
- Williams didn't pastor there very long.

Roger Williams

- Started questioning the administration of his own baptism and the baptism of the church.
- Decided only an apostle could baptize, so he waited on God to call one or to call him to be an apostle. He left the church at Providence and became a Seeker.

Roger Williams

- Governor Winthrop in June/July 1639, wrote, “Mr. Williams and many of his company, a few months since, were in all haste rebaptized and denied communion with all others, and now he has come to question his second baptism, not being able to derive the authority of it from the apostles, otherwise than by the ministers of England (whom he judged to be ill authority) so as he conceived God would raise up some apostolic power. Therefore he bent himself that way, expecting (as was supposed) to become an apostle.”

First Baptist Church at Providence

- Met in houses for 60 years until Pardon Tillinghast built a 20x20 church building.
- Current sanctuary was erected in 1774-75.
- It seated 1,200 people and was built quickly thanks to out-of-work carpenters and ship builders.



First Baptist Church in Providence





Baptists in America

- With the exception of Rhode Island, all the people who came to America searching for religious freedom denied it to others.
- Many people with Baptist principles were banished, imprisoned or fined.
- In 1639, there was a great debate on the topic of immersion vs. sprinkling.
- After a while, many Baptists came from Wales and settled in America.

Baptists in America

- Rhode Island had religious freedom. Arnold (History of Rhode Island, pg. 200): “The use of word civil is everywhere prefixed to the terms government or laws wherever they occur to restrict the operation of the charter to purely political concerns. In this apparent restriction there lay concealed a boon of freedom such as men had never known before. The Rhode Islanders held themselves accountable to God alone for their religious creed, and no earthly power could bestow on them a right which they held from heaven. At their request, their powers were limited to civil matters.”

Persecutions in America

- John Clarke was the pastor of Newport Baptist Church in Rhode Island.
- He, Obadiah Holmes and John Crandall went to visit a friend in Lynn, MA. While they were discussing Scripture, they were arrested.
- Friends paid fines and they were released, but Holmes refused to go.

Persecution in America

- “The man striking with all his strength with a three-corded whip, giving me therewith 30 strokes. When he had loosed me from the post, having joyfulness in my heart, and cheerfulness in my countenance, as the spectators observed, I told the magistrates, ‘You have struck me as with roses.’” (Backus, History of Baptists in New England, I, Pg. 192.)
- “Mr. Holmes was whipt 30 stripes, and in such an unmerciful manner, that in many days, if not some weeks, he could take no rest, but as he lay on his knees and elbows, not being able to suffer any part of his body to touch the bed whereon he lay. (Summer Visit of Three Rhode Islanders, Henry M. King)

First Baptist Church in Boston

- Established in early summer 1665
- Thomas Gould was first pastor
- Fifth Baptist church in America



Virginia Baptists

- Colony was founded by Church of England and no others were tolerated
- People had to give accounts of their faith to parish minister. If they didn't meet the minister's standards, they were required to meet with him frequently. If they refused, they were whipped.

Virginia Baptists

- By 1643, a law was put into place “to preserve purity of doctrine,” and it forbade anyone to teach, preach publicly or privately who was not a minister of the Episcopal Church, and did not conform to its mode of worship. Banishment and imprisonment were the penalties for not conforming.
- Baptists eventually came to Virginia from three different places.