

Roger Williams (ca. 1603-1683)



NARRAGANSETT INDIANS RECEIVING ROGER WILLIAMS

Key Designations:

- ◆ Father of Baptists in America
- ◆ Father of the Disestablishment of Denominations
- ◆ Father of Indian Missions in America

Key Background Information:

- ◆ Raised in a solid Anglican home in London
- ◆ Served as a clerk for the best known judge in England: In this position, he saw the constant harassment of religious dissenters and non-conformists.
- ◆ Received a Bachelors of Arts degree from Cambridge in 1627
- ◆ Ordained after graduation and served as a estate chaplain.
- ◆ Broken-hearted over an unrequited love, he became ill. The nurse became his wife.
- ◆ Moved from Anglican to Puritan to Separatist then finally to Baptist doctrine: typical of many of the early Baptists.

Key Events:

- ◆ 1630- Realizing that persecution was headed their way, he brought his wife to the new world.
- ◆ 1631- Rejecting an opportunity at Boston, he accepted a more thorough-going separatist church at Salem, but ended up in Plymouth.
- ◆ 1633- Returned to Salem until he was brought before a Boston court for teaching
- ◆ 1639- Establishes the First Baptist Church of Providence, Rhode Island.

Key Ideas:

- ◆ Williams was forever seeking more insight and truth. As a result, he never had any settled convictions in most things. The only conviction that consistently follows him throughout his life is that of the disestablishment of religion.
- ◆ Williams also had a very good relationship with the native Indians, going so far as to not only advocate that England should buy land from them, but also learned their language. The Indians in fact saved his life from possible execution because of his perceived radical and baptistic views.
- ◆ Questioned if he had the authority to re-baptize those who were converted later in life, which will cause him to leave the Baptist church that he founded.

Key Works:

- ◆ 1644- *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*: Argues from the Scriptures and from history that whenever government is directly involved in regulated religion, especially on the first four articles of the Ten Commandments, it produces not only intolerance but also persecution. He gave examples not only of nonconformists but also of Roman Catholics, Jews, and atheists. Williams is the first to use the phrase "wall of separation" to describe the relationship of the church and state. He called for a high wall of separation between the "Garden of Christ" and the "Wilderness of the World."
- ◆ 1652-*The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody*: In response to John Cotton's criticism of his earlier work, Williams cites still more examples of persecution in America.
- ◆ 1652-*The Hireling Ministry None of Christ's*: Exhibits his suspicion of the motives within Anglican priests who accept such a large sum for the ministry.
- ◆ 1683-*Experiments of Spiritual Life and Health, and their Preservatives*: Teaches that the Christian is three-fold in nature (the outward, then inward, and the spiritual) and believers must learn to bring health and happiness to all dimensions.
- ◆ 1676-*George Fox Digged out of his Burrowes*: A refutation of the founder of the Quakers

Conclusions: Roger Williams was a pioneer and visionary, who became a shining model of religious liberty in the new world. Although he questioned his authority to initiate believer's baptism by immersion, Williams is generally considered the Father of Baptists in America. Williams also was a pioneer in relations with the native Indians, who exhibited the same tolerance and patience with them as he did with others who disagreed with him.

