

## John Clarke (1609-76)



### Key Designation

- ◆ Father of Baptist churches in New England
- ◆ Most influential Baptist of colonial America

### Key Background Information:

- ◆ Born in England, he came to be known as the “Puritan of Puritans.”
- ◆ Obtained a medical degree by which he was known as Dr. John Clarke, the physician in England
- ◆ Arrived in Boston in 1637, after non-conformist such as Puritans were persecuted back in England.
- ◆ In America, he began to adopt baptistic views, especially in regard to church polity, adopting congregational church government.
- ◆ Though Roger Williams did found the First Baptist Church of Providence a few years before in 1638, it is fair to say that Clarke had a much longer and enduring effect for Baptists than did Williams, lasting over 40 years. However, Williams and Clarke were friends who worked together on common objectives.
- ◆ Was imprisoned along with Obadiah Holmes and John Randle for publically preaching Baptist views while seeking to establish another Baptist church in Lynn, Massachusetts.
- ◆ Remained as bi-vocational pastor of the Newport church, practicing medicine to support himself, until his death

### Key Events

- ◆ 1638-Clarke and William Coddington purchase the land from the Indians that later becomes known as Portsmouth, Rhode Island.
- ◆ 1639-Clarke, having lost control of Portsmouth, then started Newport
- ◆ 1644-Clarke, having come to Baptist views, separated from Coddington, who decided to remain a Separatist. He is credited with beginning the First Baptist Church in Newport

### Key Ideas:

- ◆ Believed in liberty of conscience: "It is not the will of the Lord than any one should have dominion over another man's conscience....[Conscience] is such a sparkling beam from the Father of lights and spirits that it cannot be lorded over, commanded, or forced, either by men, devils, or angels." On July 8, 1663 Clarke was able to obtain an agreement from Charles II of England that granted a Royal Charter to Rhode Island which Clarke wrote. Clarke stated in the charter "that no person within the said colony, at any time hereafter shall be any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any differences in opinion in matters of religion, and do not actually disturb the civil peace of our said colony; but that all and every person and persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments, throughout the tract of land hereafter mentioned, they behaving themselves peaceable and quietly..."
- ◆ Strongly opposed the doctrine of Anti-nominalism, which rejected the use of the Old Testament by New Testament believers. Antinominalism essentially cuts out the entire Old Testament from the Scriptures. Clarke argued that to do so would render prophecies of Christ irrelevant, as well as destroy the theological foundation of Christianity. However, he did not believe that Anne Hutchinson and others who espoused it should suffer legal ramifications as a result of a religious belief.

### Key Works

- ◆ *Ill News from New England (1655)* was published back in England to recount his imprisonment along with Obadiah Holmes and John Crandell by the Puritans for preaching Baptist doctrine in 1651. Being well-known back in England, it actually had the impact of accelerating the crown's policy on religious tolerance.