

RUSSELL SANDERS

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HISTORICAL PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS

LESSON 21

JOHN WESLEY

John Wesley (1703-1791) of England was the 15<sup>th</sup> of 19 children of his father, Rev. Charles Wesley, and his very devout and intelligent mother Suzanna. Young John was always attentive to learning theology and scripture and entered Oxford University which was founded as a seminary. His brother Charles founded the "Holy Club" at Oxford for the most serious of the devout ones. John and fellow preacher George Whitefield were part of it.

Wesley was ordained as an Anglican Priest (Church of England) in 1728. Later he responded to a call to America to serve a church in Savannah, Georgia. He also felt a strong calling to preach the gospel to the Native Americans. He preached many sermons while traveling around on horseback. This American experience had allowed him the opportunity to escape the persecution that was prevalent in England to those who departed from the strict liturgy of the State Church.

His preaching in the open air of the fields went contrary to the church. His teaching of grace and faith caused the Anglican Churches in England to close their doors to him. Yet, he commenced to preaching outside of church buildings (considered as heresy) even to the point of going to the graveyard and preaching on his father's tombstone. This outdoor preaching came as a direct result of George Whitefield's influence as he was one of the greatest of all outdoor evangelist preachers.

During John Wesley's voyages to and from America he was greatly influenced by the Moravian believers from Germany. They had an inner peace and radiance not found in other Christians. They believed in the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer. Wesley wanted what they had so he spent time in Germany among them. It ultimately led him to his assurance of forgiveness of sin and salvation of his soul. Some historians have written that they believe the Moravians even spoke in other tongues. Their influence had a powerful influence on John's preaching.

Many people in England who had followed Wesley were called Wesleyans. Later came the term "Methodist" due to Wesley's highly refined organizational skills and church structure. These "Methodists" were not well accepted by the people. Mobs would throw stones and pelt them with other objects attempting to wound or even kill them when they met together. The civil authorities did nothing to stop it. The most irritating thing to John and Charles Wesley was the slander and abuse from the writers of the day. Newspapers and books were written against Methodism.

However, it was at this time of the 1740's and 1750's that the first Great Awakening occurred which greatly influenced the historical course of America. Great numbers of religious and non-religious people got saved under the preaching of John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan

Edwards, and many others. It revolutionized the influence of the Christian faith from which we still today benefit.

John Wesley was a “preacher’s preacher” as he usually preached three or four sermons every day of the week. It has been estimated that in a fifty-year period he preached over 40,000 sermons. Many of the best ones were published along with his books.

His brother Charles was a hymn writer. He published hymnals which revolutionized singing in churches. We still sing some of Charles’ hymns today.