

RUSSELL SANDERS

6-26-2021

HISTORICAL PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS

LESSON 16

QUAKERS PART 1

George Fox, born in 1624 in England, grew up a devout young man in the formal and liturgical Church of England. It was a Protestant government-controlled church that more closely resembled the Roman Catholic church (RCC).

At the age of twenty-two he left that church and started walking through England fasting, praying, and sharing the gospel of the new birth in Christ. It was the true gospel which was not preached in the state church. Many people got saved with this “new gospel” that they had never heard.

Fox followed the example of the twelve and the seventy sent out by Jesus, taking very little with him. It was essentially a vow of poverty to be free from the attachments of the world.

In 1652 Fox had a visitation of God. The Holy Spirit was upon him. It set the tone for a movement of believers who flowed with the Holy Spirit in worship, prayer, and testimony. When the Holy Spirit fell upon them in their meetings, physical manifestations would overwhelm them. Often, they would visibly “shake” and speak with stammering lips. That is why outsiders called them “Quakers” or shakers.” It was not a complimentary term. It was used in derision, much like the Pentecostals of the early 1900’s were called “holy rollers” who might swing from rafters or jump pews.

These people called themselves “Friends.” The formal name was Religious Society of Friends. In their meetings they often would all sit silently meditating upon the Lord until the Holy Spirit moved upon them. They were never eager to press an agenda for the sake of having a “meeting.” Because they were different, they quickly became despised by many people, hated by the state church and by the government that felt all religion was under its sole authority.

There were other matters that irritated the government, church, and the populace. They refused to pay tithes to the Church of England. They held meetings often in public rather than in a church building as required by the government. They took seriously the scripture not to swear by anything; therefore, they would not take an oath (swear) to the government, court, or swear allegiance to any entity or person. Their zeal for the gospel appeared to others as extreme emotionalism; quite the opposite of the stoic solemnity expected in a liturgical church.

These differences, plus others, led eventually to persecution. The movement had grown rapidly. The “anti-church” and “anti-government” view of them resulted in many imprisonments and executions.

A new window was about to open for them in the New World. The King of England owed a huge debt to politician and Navy Admiral Sir William Penn, now deceased. To settle the debt, King Charles II gave a very large piece of his North American land holdings to the Admiral's son, William Penn. It happened that Penn was a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

Tomorrow we shall see what this did for Penn's fellow Friends (Quakers).