

Introduction to the Course



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As we begin our study of American history, I'd like to look over the materials that you received in your packet. What is important is that you have a list of pictures that deal with prominent ideas that we'll be studying in American history together and that should be sitting at your desk beside your notes, your blank outline notes that you'll be taking for the study. Notice that those pictures all have a small "t" and a number beside them. They are keyed to the outline notes that you will need to fill in, so please be aware each time as we study together that you have your outline notes—those blank notes that will need to be filled in—and I will follow the outline precisely as you see it.

Secondly, because we are not together and I cannot use other audio/visual equipment, you will need to have with you that packet of visual notes that are provided; that way you can see the ideas that I am trying to speak to. Thirdly, the major textbook, though not the only one, is a book entitled *The Eerdman's Handbook to Christianity in America*. You will need, via the syllabus which you have received, to carefully read that fundamental, basic text as we work our way through American history.

Now what is important about that text is that you use that text as background material to fill in our lecture notes. So what I'd like you to do is if the material that I give you is not complete just because of time limitation, I would expect you to add the additional material that is in the required text into your notes and that will help you when we come to times of testing.

So as we begin, what I would like to be sure that you understand is this: that you have before you the class outline that you will methodically work your way through as you listen to me. Secondly, that you have those pictures, those graphs that I have prepared that try to capsule the major ideas of American history. And third, that you use the textbook as you carefully read through it to add additional material to the bare outline that I will try to give

you in our study.

What I would like to do now as we begin our study of American history is to do several somewhat preliminary things. First, I'd like to talk about general approaches to American history—how scholars have looked at American history. Secondly, I would like to say a brief word about the context of the beginning of American religious history; and third, I would like to plunge into the first of our major subjects.

As we begin, it seems to me that all scholars of American history divide American history roughly in the same way, whether we're studying religious history or political history or economic history. It would seem to me that generally, as you can see by the second transparency picture, that we divide American history into a colonial period, a national period, and a modern period. The dates of the divisions are generally arbitrary, though it could be said that the colonial period ends about 1760 at the birth of the nation. Now that is very, very important for our study because you must understand that the United States did not begin in 1620; it began in the era of the American Revolution within our great documents of state in 1776 and 1787. So we talk about an era of British Colonialism, an era of national birth, and what is called the national period.

As scholars have looked upon American history, it is helpful perhaps to reflect upon the approaches of at least several of them. I want to begin by looking at the approach of the great Baptist historian Winthrop Hudson. Winthrop Hudson divides American history into four parts. Now these are instructive because it will give you a background as to my approach, and it's only fair to alert every student to the particular assumptions of the one who's doing the teaching. What I would like you to see in these few moments of describing these basic approaches to American history is what is in common in all of these.

Winthrop Hudson, the great Baptist scholar, divides American history into four parts. He says that from the beginning of America to 1830 is what he calls the era of Puritan Evangelicalism. That Puritan doctrine and world and life view were dominant in America until 1830. This he calls the Methodist Age. Second, what he calls from 1730 to 1880, is the era of Popular Evangelicalism. What he calls the Methodist Age. And by the time our study is over, I hope that you will have some sense as to why these scholars have seen history in this way. From 1880 to 1940, the

brink of the Great War, he divides history into what he calls the era of Classical Liberalism, and then after 1940 he calls it the era of Neo-Liberalism. Now those are very instructive divisions, though we will not follow them.

He says in the first period, the era of Puritan Evangelicalism, it was an era in which piety—or the Christian life and doctrine—were in balance. In the era of Popular Evangelicalism, piety, he says, “would dominate over doctrine.” The Methodist Age. In Classical Liberalism he would say that piety has taken over doctrine and doctrine has become sociology. Then he would argue in the current era that piety and doctrine are again in perfect balance. Though I may disagree with his scheme and his interpretation of American history, that is a very standard way of looking at it.

Another view is taken by the great neo-orthodox historian H. Richard Niebuhr; and he finds that the theme of American history is the growth of the kingdom of God, and he divides American history into three parts as we would divide it into three parts. He says that prior to 1726 was an era of the Kingdom of Divine Sovereignty. Now that is very instructive. And then from 1726 to 1865 was an era in which the kingdom of Christ was upon the earth, not characterized by a theocracy or an emphasis upon the Bible as basic truth, but the coming of an era of emphasis on revivalism and reason. And then he said since 1865 the kingdom has come to the earth, and the major motif is the social gospel.

Now Winthrop Hudson’s approach divides history into four basic parts and really is a function of his own interpretation of American history. H. Richard Niebuhr is both a historian and a theologian, and he looks at American history through the grid of religion. I think it is very instructive.

A more recent approach has been followed by Sydney Ahlstrom, the famed and famous teacher at Yale University. His book which came out in the early 1970s suggests to us, or he suggests to us, that American history is really the story of two tensions that were present in the warp and woof of the American experience from its very beginning. He says that “American history can be interpreted as a tension between Puritanism” by which he would mean Christianity “and the seeds of Pluralism” which, I take it, that he would mean more of a humanistic and anti-Christian orientation. He would say, for instance, that when the nation began, Puritanism or evangelical Christianity was in dominance. When the nation began in 1776, he would argue that while

Puritanism was still dominant, evangelical Christianity was still dominant, the seeds of Pluralism are apparent—for instance, in a man such as Thomas Jefferson or Ben Franklin or James Madison. And then he would say that as the nation has spun out its story, its history that this tension between Christianity and Pluralism has mounted and has mounted to such a point that by the turn into the nineteenth century, Pluralism has come to dominate as a world and life view, Christianity.

Now he will go on to say that in the 60s, 1960s, the Puritan era ended. Now we would perhaps want to debate that point, but his basic point, I think, is valid and one that we will use as something of a grid through which we will look at history together. In American history, in this story of God's mercy in this social context, there is a basic tension, and there has been—from the beginning between evangelical Christianity and its world and life view and assumptions about God—and other things and a Pluralistic worldview that is in conflict with Christianity. And that Pluralistic worldview dominated the Christian worldview or dominated over the Christian worldview since the beginning of the twentieth century.

So there is the basic approach of Winthrop Hudson. There is the approach of H. Richard Niebuhr, and the approach of Sydney Ahlstrom. It seems to me that the theme of American history, borrowing perhaps from Sydney Ahlstrom, is the notion of the kingdom of enlightened man. I would divide American history into three basic parts: an age of divine sovereignty, which would be from the beginning until about the 1760s; an age of biblicistic rationalism, which would proceed from the beginning of the nation until the end of the reconstruction era (the 1870s); and today we are dominated by a worldview that could be described as Subjectivism and Rationalism or Existentialism. We have passed from a period of migration to a period of national birth to a period of maturation. Now that basic outline of a colonial and a national and a modern period is the outline that we will proceed upon as we go through our study together.

It seems to me that to understand American history is to understand that American religious life has been informed at different times by at least three impulses, so now I move from general approaches to American religious history—to what I would call the general context of American religious history. It seems to me that there are three fundamental roots of American history. One is the Great Reformation. It seems to me that all

scholars would agree that at least in the colonial period, in the era of British colonialism, that the most dominant life-shaping force in that era was the impact and enduring presence of the Great Reformation. And if you want to be quite particular about it, it's that tradition of the Great Reformation that we would call Calvin and Calvinism. Fundamentally in the colonial period the ideas of a world and life view associated with that tradition of Calvinism was dominant.

There are also two post-Reformation roots that are important in understanding American religious history. One is called the Enlightenment, or that movement that emerged in continental Europe about the middle of the eighteenth century. It was a movement that questioned the necessity of external revelation and deposited the necessary insight for ordering a well-run society—not so much in the revelation of God outside of man, but the revelation of God implanted in man in his rational and cognitive processes. That is what the Enlightenment is really about. Now at the era of the Revolution, the coming of philosophical ideas—enlightened ideas—shape very deeply the very beginnings or birth of our nation.

The other influence that has shaped our nation is what I might call not so much Reformation insights, not so much the Enlightenment, but what I would call Revivalism, or Pietism. Pietism is a movement that puts a great emphasis upon the subjective religious experience. It might be associated with the term Revivalism. As I take these three great movements—the Reformation, the sixteenth-century movement; the Enlightenment, which began in the middle of the eighteenth century for our purposes; and the emergence of Pietism or Revivalism, which can be seen in the great German pietists and the great Wesleyan revivals to spill over into the great awakenings of the American history, I would say this: In the colonial period, the most dominant root of ideas is related to the Reformation. In the national period, the period of our birth to after the great American Civil War, it is not so much the Reformation as the ideas of Pietism and Revivalism. You can see a dynamic shift of ideas, of interests, of approaches to people in terms of gospel preaching in the nineteenth century that were not present in the eighteenth century; and since the era of reconstruction, the seeds of the Enlightenment—augmented by the discoveries and insights of Darwin and a host that followed in his set of assumptions—become more dominant in America and the Reformation roots are all but extinguished in the modern period.

Now what have I said? If all of that was long and tedious and circumlocutious, I apologize. What I have tried to say is this: One, you need to be aware of how scholars have generally approached American history, and it seems like every single scholar has a different approach to his study. You need to look at those approaches and as we go through our study, you may discover a better way of organizing the material. Secondly, I have tried to say something about the general context for the study of American religious history. I have said that we have been influenced at various times by the Great Reformation, which seems to have waned by the beginning of the nineteenth century; by the Great Pietistic and Revivalistic Movements, that seem to be more dominant in America in the nineteenth century; and by the Enlightenment, which somewhat tatters and shreds but becomes far more influential in the 10th century.

Now with that as a background, what I would like to do is to begin our study of American religion. What I am saying is this; that period from the beginning of British colonialism—say 1620 to the end of the American Revolution—is what we generally call the Colonial Period. I'm calling it the era of British colonialism because the American nation was not born when the Pilgrims and the Puritans and the Anglicans immigrated to this new world. They came in varying degrees as British subjects under contracts, proprietorships, free enterprise, but they were British subjects.

Now before we take up our first subject, as you can see by the ninth transparency the list of subjects we will study, let me say just some preparatory remarks again, but this time about the context of beginnings in British America. I think it's very important to understand that when Britain began her colonial empire in British North America, this was a new phenomenon for her. Britain did not have a defined policy of colonization. Now that is terribly important for our studies as we approach the American Revolution: that Britain did not have a well-thought through relationship of parent of the colony, so that for a hundred years and more that relationship is not defined until certain social and economic exigencies require England to think through those policies. Secondly, you must understand that the British Empire (or England) was only one of many claimants to what we would call British North America. To the north and to the west were the French, who had settled in Canada and down the Mississippi to the very Gulf of Mexico. To the south were the Spanish, who had settled in the Spanish Floridas as we would later call them; and beyond the French claims, the great empire in Mexico, and the

empire that was bred to what we would call the Californias. Even within the confines of the 13 colonies, the Dutch had made a claim in Northern New Jersey and what we would call New Amsterdam. The Swedes had a claim to the rich Delaware River Valley. So Britain was only one of the claimants, the dominant claimant, as it became a force to be reckoned with without peers in the world.

You must understand also that the colonies, these British colonies in North America, were not the most prosperous of the colonies. The most prosperous colonies are more related to their Caribbean colonies than the 13 colonies. Many American religious history books seem to have prejudiced the case of importance. I think it's fundamental to remember as we study that up until the Revolutionary era, the colonies were a British possession. People viewed themselves as British subjects. The other thing I think is perhaps a tidbit, but do you know why we call America *America*? That, of course, is because a Florentine mapmaker, a cartographer by the name of Amerigo Vespucci, made a crude map in the early sixteenth century of the southern portion of what we would call today the Continental United States, and he had signed his name to it. He called it Amerigo Vespucci from which it later became known as America.

Now with all of these preliminary things behind us, let me talk about our first subject today and that is the planting of the major denominations in America. What I would like to do is plant the major denominations here—tell you how the Baptists came and the Presbyterians came and the Congregationalists came and a few others—so that if we can firmly understand where these denominations have their origin, then we can simply trace their history down to the present day. So what I'd like to do in the few moments that we have together is to take up the first of those denominations (and perhaps the most influential of the denominations certainly through the entire nineteenth century because of their tremendous emphasis upon education, upon publications, and things of that nature), and that is the planting of the Congregationalists, which today that mainline historic group or entity is known as the United Church of Christ; so first, the origin of Congregationalism.

If you look at your list of transparencies and refer to number 11, what I am saying is this, that the origin of Congregationalists are to English Pilgrims and English Puritans—Pilgrims and Puritans make up that group of people that we all Congregationalists. Congregationalism refers to the form of church government that

they believed was most clearly expressed in Holy Scripture.

Now I'd like to define what Pilgrims are and what Puritans are and get them in America. To understand Pilgrims and Puritans is to understand a little bit about English history, and the story of it is something like this. Puritanism emerged in the latter half of the sixteenth century during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England. Queen Elizabeth was an interesting monarch. The real context for understanding why many in her empire, in her kingdom, were not satisfied with her is actually to understand the coming of the monarchs that preceded her. And the essence was that while Henry VIII of England separated England from the papacy—making himself the virtual head of the church because of some fundamental marital difficulties that he was trying to absolve—he allowed for the opening of the door for Reformation ideas in England. He was succeeded by his son (a boy king, Edward VI), who was deeply Protestant in his understanding; and during his reign—though England was actually reigned by regents who were Protestant—Protestantism flowered in England. However, Edward VI, dying at the age of sixteen, was succeeded by his oldest sister, Mary Tudor. Mary Tudor, the child of Catherine of Aragon and Henry's first wife, was staunchly Roman Catholic, and during her reign is that great era of the burnings of Puritan bishops and pastors in England. Mary is often called "Bloody Mary" because of her dislike for Protestantism. Many under Mary's reign fled to Europe; and when they fled to Europe, they fled to places like Frankfurt on the Main, Zurich, and Geneva in Switzerland. There they imbibed what they felt was the purity of the gospel, both in its theological understanding and in its practice.

When Mary died, Elizabeth succeeded her. Many of those who had fled to Europe thought that since Elizabeth was not a Catholic, her right to the throne being questioned if she were, that Elizabeth would institute the purity of the gospel in the ecclesiastical structures of the state Church of England. When they returned to that pure church, they discovered that Elizabeth was not of that persuasion, but created a church that they found somewhat obnoxious. While it tolerated Protestant theology, it had accretions upon it of what they perceived to be Romish ritual. It had kneelings, it had candles, it had surpluses that reminded them of the past darkness of what they perceived to be Roman Catholicism.

Now those who came back as exiles from Mary had a choice to make, and some of those returning Protestants became known

as Puritans because they wanted to purify the Church of England of its Romish ritual. These people had a choice: Some joined the church willingly to become Episcopalian Puritans and hoped to work inside to affect change. Others joined the church reluctantly and tried by their silence, their neglect, to change the Church of England from an Episcopalian form ruled by bishops to either Congregationalism (if you followed Henry Jacobs) or Presbyterianism (if you followed Thomas Cartwright). These were all known as Puritans because they wanted to purify the church of the remnants of popery.

Others did not feel they could join that church at all, so they separated from it. They became known as Separatist Puritans, and Separatist Puritans flowered in England, as you can see at the bottom of your class outline. Brownists (followers of Robert Brown), Borrowists (followers of Henry Borrow), a group in Gainsborough in the north of England called Gainsboroughlites, and a group called the Scroobiets. The Scroobiets were led by John Smith. Now what is important to our story is that group of Puritans—people who wanted to purify the Church of England, separated from the church, and would not join it, so they are Separatists. They, in 1609 (if you'll look at transparency 12), decided to leave England for Holland. They are pilgrims, they are travelers, they are sojourners, and they wanted to get away from the corrupting influence of the Church of England.

After ten years in Holland, they tired of the permissive Dutch environment. They were concerned that their children were losing their language. They were concerned that they were burying Englishmen on foreign soil. They longed again to be back under the English crown, but far enough away from that crown that that crown could not influence them; and all of these motivations encouraged them to think about leaving Holland and making their way back under the English crown. The Puritans (or the Pilgrim Puritan) thought long and hard about the decision that he was to make. Often times we get the impression from the common books that they sort of stumbled along their way. That is not true. They had invitations to go to Portugal. They had read the available material. They had an invitation to come to the Anglican colony, which had been founded in 1607 in Jamestown, as we'll say later. They had an invitation to come to the New York area, but they turned them all down. Portugal was Roman Catholic, Virginia was Anglican, and they had trouble with the Church of England (or Anglicanism), so they would not want to be back under that; and the Dutch in New Amsterdam, they had problems with the

Dutch in Amsterdam, so after thinking it through—and certainly being very serious and thoughtful people—they determined that they would seek a charter from the king to settle in what we would call land north of New York. They, of course, embarked on a boat that was called the *Speedwell*. They were not seamen. They had troubles with that boat. They eventually sold the boat in Plymouth, England, and they rented a boat with an Anglican ship captain by the name of Christopher Jones, and that boat was the *Mayflower*. One hundred two people came across in that first voyage. About half of them were Pilgrims who had come from Holland. The other half were not Pilgrims but likely Christians that came on this ship.

They landed on Cape Cod in November of 1620. They searched for an appropriate place, and about six weeks later, near Christmas time of 1620, they built their first town, which is called New Plymouth. The Puritan colony was always small. As far as we know, its total size did not reach above 359. They did not seem to come from the higher social class that would mark out Puritans, but they will start the first great colony. We read in our books that their winter was harsh and many of them died, but they planted the first colony.

Now the other source of Congregationalism is what is called the Puritan. I am saying that the origin of Congregationalism, this deeply influential denomination, finds its origin in two places. Pilgrims, who are those Puritans who did not want to join the Church of England in the time of Elizabeth, but fled to Holland, and from Holland, where they became dissatisfied. They came into the new world and settled in what we call Plymouth.

The other origin of Congregationalism is what is called Puritans. The Puritans, like the Pilgrims, were dissatisfied with Elizabeth's compromised church called the Anglican or the Church of the Middle Way, the *via media*, or the Church of England. Instead of being super-separatists, they reluctantly joined the Church of England and hoped by their presence in it to bring about change. The long and the short of the story is that though they tried to bring about change, they found themselves enormously frustrated by both political and religious affairs, and because of that frustration were willing to abandon England and make their way into the wilderness.

Now a Pilgrim is one who separated from the Church of England, would not join it. He was a Pilgrim Puritan. He wanted to purify

that church from afar. A Puritan, as we are using the term now, is one who joined the Church of England and hoped [to change it] by working inside of it, for many of these Puritans were of the merchant class, the rising new wealthy middle class of England. Now they changed the Church of England through a variety of things: the Admonition Controversy, by neglecting the lighting of candles and the surpluses, by the benevolent Archbishop Grindal. But when Elizabeth died (Elizabeth I), the Tudor dynasty of England came to a conclusion. There were no heirs to ascend the throne, so British parliament went to Scotland for the near heir, and that near heir was James VI of the House of Stuart. James VI became James I of England. He was king of England and Scotland. His name is James Stuart.

The Puritans in the church found it difficult to deal with James Stuart. For instance, they thought he would impose Presbyterianism in the state church of England, for Scotland was Presbyterian in the tradition of John Knox, but he did not do that. He imposed an even harsher form of Anglicanism upon the Church of England saying, “No bishop; no king.” In addition to that, the Puritans were aghast at his immoral behavior, accusing him of openly flaunting his homosexual lifestyle. Beyond that, he published *The Book of Sport*, a book that affronted the Puritans because it told them what they could do on the Sabbath Day—promiscuous things in their judgment. They could not deal with James Stuart, and it made them restless to leave him.

He was succeeded, as our notes say, by his son, James Stuart, (James I of England) the only monarch in English history to . . . have his head removed. In addition to other things that Charles Stuart did, Charles Stuart republished *The Book of Sport* that had irritated the Puritans. He followed the same divine right rule of England. He appointed Archbishop Laud, who in the judgment of the Puritans was an Arminian, a rationalist Arminian. And what I am saying is that the Puritan in England increasingly had difficulty in handling the monarch. The last straw was that in 1629 he [Charles I] closed parliament and ran England not as a limited monarch, but as an absolute monarch; and the Puritans rebelled against that. Not a physical rebellion as would occur later where William Laud and Charles would lose their heads for high treason against the English people, but they were separated.

The Puritans made their way in large fashion, numerous of them, into the new world. They settled in towns like Salem, which means peace, and Charlestown Harbor, the city of Boston. Numerous

cities emerged. Unlike the Pilgrims who came in a trickle, the Puritans came in what scholars have called the swarming of the Puritans, settling first in Massachusetts Bay and later in what is called the Connecticut River Valley, led there by Thomas Hooker, whose views of church government enfranchised the right to vote in the colony were broader than those in Massachusetts Bay Colony.

James Davenport settled in New Haven. New Haven and the Hartford Colony of Thomas Hooker will later merge together to become the colony of Connecticut. The Puritans came in mighty numbers, thousands of them. The Pilgrims were few. The Puritans were of an upper middle class merchant strata of society. They will be more progressive than the Pilgrim community.

This concludes our initial lesson on American history. We will pick up our story with a brief review as we begin again.