

EXCERPTS
from the
Leader's Guide and Student Handouts
for
the video documentary

Saints & Strangers

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Table of Contents

<i>Sections</i>	<i>Page numbers</i>
Alexis de Tocqueville on early American Christianity	4
Introduction to Saints & Strangers	5
How to Use This Series	6
Part 1: Christianity & Commerce: Jamestown	
Review & Discussion	7
Firsthand Witnesses	
Document 1: Description of Church & Sunday Worship in Jamestown	9
Document 2: Good News from Virginia	11
Document 3: The Wedding of the Decade	13
Document 4: The First Representative Assembly	15
Part 2: Evangelism & Enlightenment: Pilgrims & Puritans	
Review & Discussion	17
Firsthand Witnesses	
Document 5: Of Plimouth Plantation	19
Document 6: A City on a Hill	20
Document 7: The "Old Deluder" Law, 1647	22
Document 8: Harvard Rules	23
Document 9: What Did Puritans Believe?	24
Abiding Principles from the Puritans	26
Part 3: Liberty of Conscience	
Review & Discussion - Rhode Island Colony	27
Firsthand Witness	
Document 10: Roger Williams: Separation of Church & State	28
Review & Discussion - Pennsylvania Colony	30
Firsthand Witness	
Document 11: William Penn's Holy Experiment	31
Part 4: Revival & Revolution	
Review & Discussion	33
Firsthand Witnesses	
Document 12: Jonathan Edwards & the Great Awakening	36
Document 13: Edwards' Resolutions	37
Document 14: George Whitefield	38
Document 15: Providence at Yorktown	41
Reproducible Student Worksheets	43
Stones of Remembrance - Helpful Websites	47
Other Programs on Early American Christianity	48

Introduction

SAINTS & STRANGERS

In the 1830s, the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville traveled throughout the United States and wrote a marvelous book insightfully describing the young country. His observations on the religious nature of American culture, though seen by some as antiquated, largely have been confirmed in regard to the early history of the United States. (See sample of de Tocqueville's writing to this effect on the facing page.)

Admittedly, the various perspectives on this issue range between two well-defined extremes. There are those who are convinced that most, if not all, this country's founders were "born-again, Bible believers"; others scoff and assert that early America was influenced as much by Deists and humanists as by devout Christians. However, the truth, as with many issues, falls somewhere in between. And the title of this video, *Saints & Strangers*, appropriately points to that fact. Who were these saints and strangers?

Of course, not all early Americans were devout Christians. Even on the Pilgrims' *Mayflower* there was a mixture of "saints and strangers," godfearing Christians and dismissive skeptics. It has been said that the primary reasons for fleeing the Old World and landing in America were God, refuge, and gold. And throughout early American history, the "mettle" of this statement has been tested and verified.

The fact remains, however, that among competing interests and motives, Christianity has left the deepest imprint of all on America from the earliest English settlements. As you examine the primary sources in this study guide and watch the *Saints & Strangers* video, the general Christian tenor of early American society and its penetration of that community will astound you. And you will realize that this fact has not been discovered only recently but was known from the outset, later attested to even by de Tocqueville and others.

Sample Questions

PART 1:

- Though the settlement of the Jamestown colony is usually viewed as a commercial venture, Christianity was important to the early settlement. What evidence was there of Christianity's influence?
- How was the Church of England affected by the American Revolution?
- Why is Christ Church in Philadelphia sometimes known as the Nation's Church?

PART 2:

- In what sense can the Pilgrims be said to be "Puritans who had lost their patience"?
- In what ways were the Pilgrims and Puritans alike? In what ways were they different?
- If the Puritans came to America for religious freedom, why were they so intolerant?

PART 3:

- What were some accepted ideas of his day that Roger Williams disagreed with?
- In what way did Roger Williams question the Christian nature of the English and Massachusetts government?
- The Quakers who settled in Pennsylvania under William Penn were known as the most radical of religious groups. Why?

PART 4:

- In what way did the Great Awakening influence the American Revolution?
- Religion gave the early Americans a view of the world in which they were advancing God's kingdom in the fight of Good vs. Evil, Liberty vs. Tyranny, and Christ vs. Satan. Many saw the United States as a Redeemer Nation which would change the world for the kingdom of God. How valid is that understanding of the United States' role in the world today?

Sample Documents



The Wedding of the Decade

John Rolfe was one of the men in Jamestown who was strongly interested in advancing the honor of God and propagating the Gospel in the new colony. Rolfe had formed an attachment to the Indian princess Pocahontas, daughter of the Indian chief Powhatan, but he was at first unsure whether marriage with her would be God's will. He wrestled with himself, wondering if marrying a heathen woman would be like the Israelites of old marrying the Canaanites, something the Lord had definitely forbidden. Some of his soul-searching he revealed in a letter to Sir Thomas Dale, an officer of the colony back in England:

When your leisure shall best serve you to peruse these lines, I trust in God the beginning will not strike you into a greater admiration, then the end will give you good Content. It is a matter of no small moment, concerning myself in particular, which here I impart unto you, and which touches me so nearly as the tenderness of my Salvation. Howbeit I freely subject myself to your grave and mature Judgment, deliberation, approbation, and determination, assuring myself of your zealous admonitions and godly Comforts; either persuading me to desist or encouraging me to persist herein with a religious fear, and godly Care. ... my Case standing as it does, what better worldly refuge can I here seek, than to shelter myself under the safety of your favorable protection? And did not my Cause proceed from an unspotted and undefiled Conscience, I should not dare to offer to your view & approved Judgment these passions of my troubled Soul.... But knowing my own innocency, and godly fervor in the whole prosecution hereof, I doubt not of your benign acceptance and Clement construction....

Let therefore this my well advised testimony, which here I make between God and my own Conscience be a sufficient witness, at the dreadful day of Judgment (when the secrets of men's hearts shall be open) to condemn me herein if my chief intent & purpose be not to strive with all my power of body and mind in the undertakings of so weighty a matter ... for the good of the Plantation, the honor of our Country, for the glory of God, for my own salvation, and for the converting to the true knowledge of God and Jesus Christ an unbelieving Creature, namely Pohahuntas [sic], to whom my heart and best thoughts are and have been a long time so entangled and enthralled in so intricate a Labyrinth, that I was even aweared to unwind myself thereout. But Almighty God who never fails his that truly invoke his holy name, has opened the Gate and led me by the hand that I might plainly see and discern the safest paths wherein to tread....

Pocahontas did become a Christian; with her conversion, she took the name of Rebecca. Rev. Alexander Whittaker instructed her in the Bible, including the 10 commandments and Lord's Prayer, as well as the Apostles Creed. The marriage of Rebecca and John Rolfe brought a temporary peace between the English colonists and the Indians. Descendants of the Rolfes' one child, Thomas, continue to live in the United States. Mr. and Mrs. Rolfe later went to England where the queen graciously received the Indian princess. King James, however, was angry that John Rolfe would marry a princess without asking his permission and refused to receive the couple. Rebecca was in England only a short time, however, before she became ill and died.

Consider: What does Rolfe's letter reveal about his Christian perspective on life and marriage?

Harvard Rules

In 1636, only six years after they landed in Massachusetts, the Puritans established Harvard University. Their purpose was primarily to train ministers of the gospel:

After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God's worship, and settled civil government: one of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity, dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our ministers shall lie in the dust....

The early rules of the college emphasized the Christian focus of the school. The "Rules and Precepts" adopted in 1646 included the following:

2. Let every Student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the maine end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3) and therefore to lay Christ in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and Learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, Let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seeke it of him (Prov. 2:3).

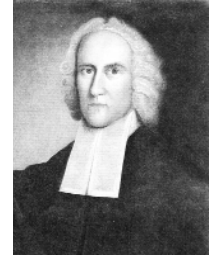
3. Every one shall so exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice a day, that he shall be ready to give such an account of his proficiency therein, both in Theoreticall observations of Longuage and Logick, and in practical and spiritual truths, as his Tutor shall require, according to his ability; seeing the entrance of the word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple (Psalm 119:130).

In 1692 the University adopted the Latin motto *Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae*, meaning "Truth for Christ and the Church."

Consider: What did the Puritans consider most important in a student's education? How does this compare with current concepts of education ?

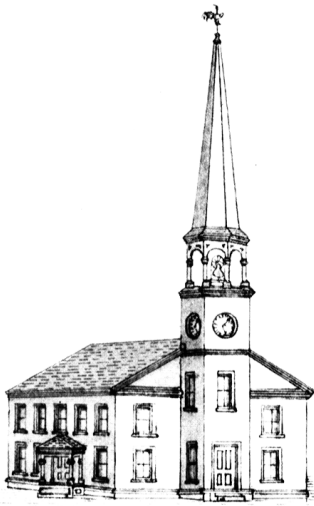
Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening

Many consider Jonathan Edwards the greatest American theologian ever. His sermons and writings on the revival that swept the American colonies in the mid-1700's were read in England as well as the colonies and continue to be studied today. In 1741 Edwards published "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," in which he laid out the signs of a true revival by the Spirit of God. The positive evidences that a work was wrought by the Spirit of God he took from I John 4:



Jonathan Edwards

CHI Archives



Edwards' church

CHI Archives

1. When that spirit that is at work amongst a people is observed to operate after such a manner, as to raise their esteem of that Jesus that was born of the Virgin, and was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem; and seems more to confirm and establish their minds in the truth of what the Gospel declares to us of his being the Son of God, and the Saviour of men; 'tis a sure sign that that spirit is the Spirit of God.

2. When the spirit that is at work operates against the interest of Satan's kingdom, which lies in encouraging and establishing sin, and cherishing men's worldly lusts; this is a sure sign that 'tis a true, and not a false spirit....

3. That spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God....

4. Another rule to judge of spirits may be drawn from those opposite compellations given to the two opposite spirits, in the last words of the 6th verse, "The spirit of truth" and "the spirit of error."

These words do exhibit the two opposite characters of the Spirit of God, and other spirits that counterfeit his operations. And therefore, if by observing the manner of the operation of a spirit that is at work among a people, we see that it operates as a spirit of truth, leading persons to truth, convincing them of those things that are true, we may safely determine that 'tis a right and true spirit....

5. If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man, 'tis a sure sign that 'tis the Spirit of God. This sign the Apostle insists upon from the 7th verse to the end of the chapter: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love, etc."...

Consider: Read I John 4 and notice the verses upon which Edwards based each of his five points. How well are these principles used today when spiritual movements are evaluated?

The previous questions and document excerpts are a sample of what can be found in the 48-page study guide available for this program. To obtain a copy of the complete study guide for \$9.99 plus shipping, contact Vision Video:

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