THE BAPTISTS IN AMERICA BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

Prayer
Scripture: Mark 1:1-8
Hymn: 127 "Jesus, Lover of My Soul"

Both General and Particular Baptists were among the early English emigrants to America. Baptists were scattered among the early settlers in all the colonies. Usually they were looked down upon as either fanatical and heretical or poor and uneducated. The Baptists were one of the most despised and persecuted groups among the colonists.

BAPTIST BEGINNINGS IN RHODE ISLAND

The General Court of Massachusetts in July, 1635, sentenced Roger Williams to "depart out of our jurisdiction within six weeks." Because of his poor health the Court relented and gave him until spring to leave the colony. However, when he learned that in the spring the Court intended to ship him back to England, Roger Williams fled into the wilderness. For fourteen weeks he wandered until he found hospitality among the Narragansett Indians. After spending the winter among the Indians, in the summer of 1636, Williams and four other exiles purchased land from the Indians and founded Seekonk. When they learned that they were trespassing on land that belonged to Plymouth, they moved to the shore of the Narragansett Bay, where they again purchased land from the Indians, and founded Providence. Williams gave it that name in remembrance of "God's merciful providence unto me in my distress." From its beginning Providence was "a shelter for those distressed in conscience." Within two years the settlement had grown so that Williams conveyed the land to twelve associates and they formed themselves into a township promising complete religious freedom to all and promising to render active or passive obedience in civil matters to such orders and agreements as should be made for the public good. Williams believed the government had no right to make laws about religion.

When Williams settled in Providence he began holding religious services in his home. When some Baptists arrived in the colony Williams became convinced that the New Testament taught believers' baptism. In March, 1639, Ezekiel Holliman, one of the first settlers, baptized Roger Williams and then Roger Williams baptized Holliman and ten others, constituting what is considered the first Baptist church in America. At the time there were about sixty residents in Providence. There has been considerable debate whether the twelve considered themselves a Baptist church and whether the baptisms were by affusion or immersion—some contend that immersion in Rhode Island did not begin until 1649.

When the General Court of Massachusetts in November, 1636, banished Anne Hutchinson and her brother-in-law, John Wheelwright, they fled to Rhode Island. Dr. John Clarke, an English physician and minister, arrived in Boston when the excitement over Anne Hutchinson was at its height. He was shocked at the intolerance of the Boston authorities. Accompanying or following Anne Hutchinson to Rhode Island were a number of followers and sympathizers. Among them was Dr. John Clarke, William Hubbard and a group from Charlestown and Boston, John Coggeshall and William Aspinwall and followers, and William
Coddington. Wheelwright and Coddington, before coming to Rhode Island, tried to plant a colony in New Hampshire but found the winter too severe. When these exiles called on Roger Williams for help he guided them in securing land from the Indians on Aquidneck Island, where they settled Portsmouth. The next spring Coddington and Clarke led a company to the other end of the island and founded Newport. A church was established with Clarke as teaching elder (1638). It may have been a Baptist church from the beginning. It may have become a Baptist church in 1644. By 1648 it was known as a Baptist church and had fifteen members. It was a Particular Baptist Church. The Newport church prospered from the start. A meeting house was built at common expense. It was more attractive than Providence to those holding antipedobaptist views.

In 1640 Samuel Gorton, a mystic and extreme individualist of antinomian tendencies came to Rhode Island and tried to unseat the leaders in Portsmouth and Providence. Being expelled from both he founded a settlement at Warwick.

In 1643 the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Connecticut Colony, and the New Haven Colony formed the New England Confederation to meet the Indian threat. The four Rhode Island settlements (Providence, Portsmouth, Newport, and Warwick) united out of fear that the Puritans would try to extend their authority over them. Coddington had made attempts to secure a separate patent from England for Aquidneck Island. In March 1643 Roger Williams sailed from New Amsterdam for England to secure a patent for Rhode Island. Some of his former friends on the Committee on Foreign Plantations (Oliver Cromwell, Sir William Masham, the Earl of Warwick, and Sir Henry Vane) helped him secure the patent for Rhode Island.

While in England Roger Williams published his Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for the cause of conscience discussed (1644), in which he denounced the persecution for conscience and pled for freedom of religion and tolerance. John Cotton, the Boston antagonist of Williams, published his reply in 1647, Bloudy Tenent washed and made white in the Bloud of the Lamb. He argued for the necessity of uniformity in religion in a colony. Williams published his reply in 1652, Bloudy Tenent yet more Bloudy.

Quite early the Salem Church was plagued by Baptists. In 1642 the elders had to admonish Lady Deborah Moody for Baptist convictions. Winthrop described her as "a wise and ancienly religious woman, who being taken with the error of denying baptism of infants was dealt with by the elders and admonished by the Salem Church." When she was expelled from the church she moved to New Netherland with a large number of Lynn settlers who had been "infected with Anabaptism." She established a settlement at Gravesend, Long Island, and formed a Baptist Church a little later.

In February, 1644, William Witter, a resident of Lynn, was arraigned before the Salem Court as a Baptist heretic for calling infant baptism "a badge of the whore." In 1645 he was again brought before the court and charged with saying "that they who stayed while a child is baptized do worship the devil."

In Massachusetts cases of parents refusing to present their newborn infants for baptism became increasingly common. In November, 1644, the Massachusetts Court enacted a law making it a crime punishable by banishment for any one to deny the validity of infant baptism, or for holding any other views peculiar to the Anabaptists. Any hint of Anabaptist views or practices raised in the minds of the colonists visions of the Muenster revolt in Germany.
with all its abominable extravagances such as anarchy and polygamy.

In 1649 an effort was made to form a Baptist Church at Rehoboth where several withdrew from the Congregational Church and were immersed by John Clarke—one of the earliest explicit mentions of immersion. When the group received a citation from the court in Plymouth the next year, they moved to Newport.

The Plymouth Colony was plagued by incipient Baptists. At Seekonk a group of Baptist converts led by Obadiah Holmes met for worship in private homes. Threats of arrest and punishment led Holmes and his followers to move to Newport where they joined Clarke's church.

In 1751, John Clarke, John Crandall and Obadiah Holmes received an invitation from the aged William Witter, to come to Swampscott, near Lynn, in Massachusetts, to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper and to encourage a group who had adopted Baptist views who were meeting in his home. Two constables with a warrant to arrest "certain erronious persons being strangers" interrupted the worship on the Sabbath in Witter's house. The constables took the prisoners to the Congregational Church to force them to attend worship in spite of Clarke's warning that if they were forced to attend the meeting they would "be constrained to declare that they could not hold communion with them." When the prisoners kept their hats on in the meeting house the constables forcibly removed the hats. At the end of the worship service Clarke arose to explain how the Baptists differed from the Congregationalists. The minister soon had him silenced. The prisoners were taken to Boston where a few days later they were brought before the Court. Clarke later reported that the Court sentenced them "without producing either accuser, witness, jury, law of God, or man." Governor Endicott accused them of being Anabaptists. Clarke replied, "I disown the name, I am neither an Anabaptist, nor a Pedobaptist, nor a Catabaptist." He admitted that he had baptized many but had never rebaptized any. The Governor replied, "You deny the former baptism and make all our worship a nullity." Clarke admitted this was true. He warned the Governor, "If the testimony which I hold forth be true, and according to the mind of God, which I undoubtedly affirm it is, then it concerns you to look to your standing." The vindictive Governor levied heavy sentences: Clarke was fined twenty pounds to be paid before the next meeting of the Court or be whipped; Holmes was fined thirty pounds or be whipped; Crandall was fined five pounds or a whipping. Clarke remonstrated the severity of the sentences but the Governor exclaimed, "You have denied 'Infants Baptism,' and deserve death." He declared that he would not have such trash in his jurisdiction. He accused them of insinuating their teachings into the weak but of being afraid of maintaining their teaching before the Congregational ministers. Clarke took the governor's words as a challenge to a public debate and accepted the challenge but the Governor denied he had any such intention. Unknown friends paid the fines of Clarke and Crandall. Holmes refused to allow his fine to be paid and was publicly whipped with a three-corded whip. When the whipping was over Holmes said to the Magistrates, "You have struck me as with roses." The persecution aroused sympathy for and interest in the Baptists. Before the Baptists returned to Newport a number were emboldened to be baptized and others were put on the way to inquiry.

Soon after Clarke and his associates returned to Newport, Clarke and Roger Williams were sent to England to secure a charter for Rhode Island (1651).
In England in 1652 Clarke published his *Ill Newes from New England* which gave a detailed account of the persecution of the Baptists in New England and made a strong plea for tolerance and liberty of conscience. He ended with the plea, "Let him that readeth it consider which church is most like the Church of Christ (that Prince of Peace, that meek and gentle Lamb, that came into this world to save Men's lives, not to destroy them), the Persecuted, or Persecuting." Clarke's book raised a storm of protest in various quarters of England. Sir Richard Saltonstall, who had been one of the first Magistrates of Massachusetts and who had returned to England, sent a strong rebuke to John Cotton and John Wilson in which he declared that he had "hoped that the Lord would have given you so much light and love there, that you might have been eyes to God's people here, and not to practice those courses in a wilderness, which you went so far to prevent." He added that he had hoped that the Lord would give them "meek and humble spirits, not to strive so much for uniformity, as to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

Roger Williams soon returned from England but Clarke remained there for twelve years watching after the interests of the colony and trying in vain to secure a charter from the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. Roger Williams did not long remain in the Baptist Church of Providence. He fell into doubts about the validity of baptism unless the baptizer stood in apostolic succession. He became a Seeker, doubting that a true church could be found on earth. He came to believe that only by direct intervention by God could a true church be restored on earth. Williams did continue to work for the cause of tolerance and religious freedom. Williams did believe that the Baptist Church was more in harmony with early Christianity than any other.

Thomas Olney replaced Williams as the leader in the Providence church. He, like Williams, was a Calvinist. Some of the leading members were Arminians who believed in free will and that Christ had died for all. Controversy broke out in the Providence church over the laying on of hands as an apostolic practice necessary for the reception of the Holy Spirit and church fellowship. The Arminians held that the laying on of hands after baptism as a symbol of the receiving of the Holy Spirit was commanded in Scripture. The church split over the laying on of hands in 1652 with the Arminians forming what became known as the "Six Principle Baptists." They insisted that the laying on of hands was one of the six "foundation principles" of Hebrews 6:1-2: repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. Olney ministered to the Five Principle Calvinistic Baptist Church in Providence until his death in 1682. It was the minority party. It failed to grow, not replenishing itself by new converts, nor did it grow by immigration. It passed out of existence about 1720. The Six Principle Baptist Church of Providence continued as the original church but accomplished little. It did not erect a meeting house until 1700. Missionaries from Providence did carry the six principle views to Newport which brought controversy and a split in the Newport church.

The story of the Newport Church is filled with controversy and trouble. William Coddington, John Coggeshall and Nicholas Easton held antinomian views that were very close to those held by Quakers. They finally left the Baptist Church and joined the Quakers who were taking advantage of the freedom of religion offered in Rhode Island. John Clarke, a Calvinist, was leader of the Newport Church until he went to England to secure a charter for the
colony. It was during his absence that the six principle missionaries came
to Newport from Providence. The resulting controversy brought a split in
the Newport church in 1656 with the forming of a Six Principle Baptist Church
that was Arminian.

For twelve years John Clarke failed in his efforts to secure a charter
from Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate. In 1662 he petitioned Charles II for
a charter and in spite of the strong opposition from the representatives
of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1663 he finally received a charter for
Rhode Island that granted full liberty in religion. Clarke returned to the
colony in 1664 and was chosen Deputy Governor three times. He resumed the
ministry of the Calvinistic church in Newport, continuing as its minister
until his death in 1676.

In 1665 Stephen Mumford, an English Seventy-Day Baptist, united with
the Newport Church. He so assiduously propagated his view that he con-
verted Samuel Hubbard and a man named Hiscox to his views. Samuel Hubbard
was a well-educated man who had moved from Connecticut to Newport. While
living at Fairfield, Connecticut, he and his wife had adopted Baptist views.
After two public rebukes they were threatened with imprisonment in the
Hartford Gaol. Remembering the Scripture, "If they persecute you in one
place, flee to another," they fled to Newport. In 1671 Mumford, Hubbard,
and Hiscox withdrew from the Newport Baptist Church and formed a Seventh-
Day Baptist Church.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony was deeply shaken when Henry Dunster,
the first president of Harvard, turned Baptist. Theophilus Eaton, the first
master of Harvard College in its first year proved a most disappointing
failure and the school was closed during the school year of 1639-40. When
it reopened in the fall of 1640, Henry Dunster, a thirty year old graduate
of Cambridge University had been made president. For fourteen years he
proved a most effective president. His money raising and building programs
were gratifying to the Overseers. At a time when the college was in great
financial need he contributed one hundred acres of his own land to keep the
college going. He was highly respected as an able scholar, proficient in
Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and as "an Orthodox Preacher of the truths of
Christ." Dunster loved his work and gave himself unselfishly in building
the college. He established a curriculum based on the best English traditions
of Oxford and Cambridge and quickly both Oxford and Cambridge granted
recognition to the work of Harvard. President Dunster was highly respected.

Between 1648 and 1653 Dunster began to have doubts about infant baptism.
In 1653 he withheld his fourth child from baptism which caused a great stir.
In several sermons and public addresses he spoke out against infant baptism.
Massachusetts still had the law of 1644 against criticizing infant baptism.
Dunster had been so successful in administering the college that the Overseers
were reluctant to move against him. In 1654 nine of the leading ministers
held a conference with Dunster, urging him to keep his opinions to himself.
The General Court issued an order commanding the Overseers not to permit
any to teach "that have manifested themselves unsound in the faith." In
June, 1654, Dunster offered his resignation but expressed a willingness to
continue until a successor was chosen. Both the Overseers and the Court
wanted him to keep his views to himself. If he had been willing to do so
he could have continued in office as long as he lived. On July 30, 1654,
Mitchell, the pastor of the Cambridge Church preached a six-point sermon defending infant baptism before beginning the ceremony of baptizing the infants. President Dunster interrupted the ceremony of infant baptism with an attack on infant baptism under six headings, answering the arguments of the pastor's sermon and urging that infant baptism had not been established by Christ. The Overseers had no choice but to demand his resignation. In April, 1655 he was tried before the General Court for disturbing public worship. He was sentenced to be publicly rebuked.

Before moving away Dunster associated himself with Thomas Gould who soon became the recognized leader of Boston Baptists. Harvard chose as the successor of Dunster, the minister of the church in Scituate in the Plymouth Colony, who a little earlier had created quite a commotion in his church by a sermon defending the immersion of infants. The church in Scituate called Dunster to become its minister and there he spent the last five years of his life.

The first Baptist Church in Massachusetts was established at Rehoboth in the Plymouth Colony in 1663 by John Myles, a Welsh Baptist, who led his congregation to America because of the persecution resulting from the Act of Uniformity of 1662. In 1667 the Congregational minister of Rehoboth complained to the town government about the existence of this Baptist Church and Myles and some of his leading members were arraigned before the Court (July, 1667) for setting up a public meeting without knowledge or permission and for disturbing the peace. They were convicted and fined five pounds. The Court advised that if they would move their meeting to a place where it would not interfere with any Congregational church and if they gave reasonable satisfaction as to their principles, the Court might give them approval. A little later the court set aside for them a tract of land on the Rhode Island border where they set up their Welsh Baptist Church. They named the place Swansea after their home in Wales. The church prospered.

The first Baptist Church in Boston was established in 1665 in the home of Thomas Gould. It was made up of several who had been excommunicated from the State Church. Gould had been excommunicated from the Congregational Church in 1655 when he withheld one of his children from infant baptism. Excommunication meant that he also was deprived of citizenship. When the Court learned of the church meeting in Gould's home the church was charged with admitting to its membership persons who had been excommunicated from the Churches of the Standing Order. The Massachusetts Bay Colony defranchised all Baptists who were freemen. When the church continued to meet, in 1666 Gould and two other members, Turner and Forman, were fined by the County Court of Cambridge and required to give bond to appear before the General Court. When they refused they were thrown into prison where they remained for nearly a year. They were tried, convicted, and sentenced to leave the colony. If they were still in the colony after a certain time they were to be imprisoned without bail. The church was forbidden to assemble again on pain of imprisonment and banishment. The little group withdrew to Noddle's Island for a time. They returned to Boston where the church grew in spite of continuing persecution. In 1668 they boldly began erecting a meeting house in the middle of Boston. The General Court ordered the marshall to nail up the doors. The doors remained closed but one Sunday.

The Massachusetts government received strong protests against religious intolerance and persecution from both English Congregationalists and English
Baptists. Robert Mascall, an English Congregationalist, in a letter dated March 25, 1669, protested:

Oh, how it grieves and affects us that New England should persecute! ...must we force our interpretation upon others, Pope-like? ...are we infallible....Oh, wicked and monstrous principle!...And what! is that horrid principle crept into precious New England, who have felt what persecution is...? Have not those Baptists run equal hazards with you for the enjoyment of their liberties: and how do you cast a reproach upon us, that are Congregational in England, and furnish our adversaries with weapons upon us? We blush and are filled with shame and confusion of face when we hear of such things.

Mascall went on to say that in England Congregationalists loved and held fellowship with Baptists. He denied that Baptists were a threat to the government or the liberties of others.

To the protests of a group of English Baptist ministers, Samuel Willard of South Church in Boston replied that conditions were different in England and New England. The Baptists of New England by their denial of infant baptism would undermine the foundations of all churches but their own. They could not be handled tenderly for that which was needful ballast to the great ship of England would sink the small boat of New England.

King Charles II ordered an end to the persecutions in New England. Already some of the Massachusetts officials had begun to oppose persecution and intolerance. With England's Act of Toleration in 1689 open persecution began to come to an end. The new Massachusetts charter of 1691 granted religious freedom to all Christians except Roman Catholics.

By 1680 two Indian Baptist churches were being gathered in Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. A cluster of Baptist churches were springing up along the Plymouth-Rhode Island border.

At Kittery, in the province of Maine, a Baptist congregation was organized in 1682, made up of English Baptist immigrants, under the leadership of William Scriven, who had received ordination from the Baptist Church in Boston. He was called before the Council, fined and forbidden to hold meetings. When he continued services, he was harried by fines and imprisonments. About 1696 he and part of his flock moved to South Carolina.

Twenty-seven years after the new Massachusetts charter ended religious persecution, in 1718, Increase and Cotton Mather accepted an invitation to take part in the ordination and installation of Elisha Callender as minister of the Baptist Church in Boston. Cotton Mather preached the ordination sermon, entitled "Good Men United," in which he made a plea for unity as far as conscience permitted and for toleration when agreements could not be reached.

The following year, 1719, Thomas Hollis, a wealthy English Baptist who had learned of the good will the Mathers had shown the Boston Baptist Church, made the largest gift to Harvard College that it received during the entire colonial period. Hollis' interest in Harvard went back to 1690 when he became a trustee of the estate of an uncle who had made Harvard College the object
of a bequest. Also he had met Increase Mather, during Mather’s stay in England. A little later he made Harvard the recipient of a legacy in his own will. Before beginning his gifts in 1719 he assured himself that Harvard was "catholic and liberal." He was well aware of how Baptists had been despised and persecuted in Massachusetts. In the professorships he endowed in Theology and Mathematics and in the scholarships he established, the only requirements he specified were that Baptists should not be disqualified from holding either the scholarships or the professorships. The only subscription for the professorships was a "belief that the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments are the only perfect rule of faith and manners." Hollis took seriously what Baptists held to be their first and greatest of principles—freedom of conscience.

In 1728 an act was passed in Massachusetts exempting Baptists and Quakers from being taxed to support Congregational ministers. Baptists, in order to secure the exemption, had to present to the town officials, certificates signed by "two principal members of that persuasion."

In 1660 there were only four Baptist Churches in all New England—all four in Rhode Island. By 1700 there were ten Baptist Churches in New England with some three hundred members. Four of the churches were in Rhode Island and six were in Massachusetts. There were scattered Baptists who did not organize congregations and scattered groups who did not organize. The growth of the Baptists was slow.

BAPTISTS IN CONNECTICUT

There were no organized Baptist Churches in Connecticut before 1700. There were scattered Baptists in the colony. Four Baptist churches were organized in Connecticut before the Great Awakening of 1740, all under the influence of the Six Principles General Baptists of Rhode Island. The First Baptist Church in Connecticut was organized in Groton in 1705 by Valentine Wightman of North Kingston, Rhode Island. He became the pastor of this church. Before 1705 Rhode Island itinerants had made preaching missions into Connecticut. It was twenty years before another Baptist Church was organized in the colony. Stephen Gorton from Rhode Island established the second church in New London in 1726. Members of the New London church established a third congregation in Wallingford in 1735. A fourth congregation was organized in Farmington (now Southington). Small bands of Baptists without organization were scattered throughout the colony. The Wightmans were the patriarchs of Connecticut Baptists. Valentine Wightman was followed as pastor of the Groton church at his death in 1741 by his son and then by his grandson who served until 1841.

Baptists were granted the right to worship in their own meeting houses in 1708 but had to pay a special tax for the meeting house and also had to pay taxes to support the ministry of the established Congregational Church. In 1729 Baptists were granted exemptions from paying the tax on their buildings and from taxation for the support of the Congregational ministry.

By 1740 there were twenty-three Baptist churches in New England: eleven were in Rhode Island, eight in Massachusetts, and four in Connecticut.

Sometime before 1700 the General or Six Principle Baptists of Providence,
Newport and North Kingston began holding the Rhode Island Yearly Meeting. It disclaimed any authority over the internal affairs of the churches and functioned in a purely advisory capacity. Attendance at the yearly meeting grew slowly because Baptist growth in New England was very slow before the Great Awakening and the churches were poor and feeble and travel was difficult. In 1729 the Association held what the young minister, John Comer, called "ye largest Convention yt ever hath been." It was attended by thirty-two delegates or messengers: eight ministers, three deacons, and twenty-one laymen. They came from thirteen churches: eight in Rhode Island, two in Massachusetts, two in Connecticut, and one in New York City. It met on June 21, 1729. The Rhode Island Yearly Meeting grew until it included nearly all of the Baptist churches of New England except the Calvinistic churches of Newport, Swansea, and Boston.

**BAPTISTS IN THE MIDDLE COLONIES**

Philadelphia became the most important Baptist center during the colonial period on account of the larger degree of religious freedom offered by the Quakers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Baptist beginnings in the Middle Colonies came just as the persecution of the Baptists in New England was ending. Baptists began settling in Pennsylvania in 1684 when a Mr. Dongan from Rhode Island gathered a church of Baptists at Cold Spring, above Bristol, in the county of Bucks. Two years later in 1686 Baptist immigrants from Radnorshire in Wales and Killarney in Ireland, settled northeast of Philadelphia on Pennypack Creek. They organized a Baptist church in 1686 under the leadership of Elias Keach. This Pennypack Church drew members from numerous scattered communities, some as far away as Burlington, New Jersey, and from Chester and Philadelphia. Soon the people from these different communities organized Baptist Churches of their own so that the Pennypack Church became known as the mother of many daughters. Before the end of the century congregations were organized in Middletown, Piscataway, and Cohansay in New Jersey. In 1698 an English convert from the Pennypack Church became the pastor of a Baptist Church organized in Philadelphia with nine members who were English Baptists. The Philadelphia church was the eighth Baptist church organized in Pennsylvania.

Many of the early Baptists in Pennsylvania were Welsh Baptists. The Welsh Tract Church was established in 1701. It was made up of Welsh immigrants who formed a church before leaving Wales. This church remained predominantly Welsh and until 1732 its records were kept in the Welsh language. Another Welsh church, the Great Valley Church, was formed northwest of Philadelphia in 1711. The Montgomery Church that was formed in 1719 was also a Welsh church.

The Baptists in Pennsylvania gained a number of converts from the Quakers when George Keith was disowned by the Quakers in 1662 and joined the Anglicans. Some of Keith's followers joined the Anglicans, some returned to the Penn Quakers, and some were converted by the Baptists. An early historian remarked, "These by resigning themselves to the guidance of Scripture began to find water in the commission; bread and wine in the command." They moved from the no baptism of Quakers to immersion, and also accepted the Lord's Supper, foot washing, and other Baptist practices in imitation of the early church.

By the opening of the eighteenth century Philadelphia had become the strongest Baptist center in the colonies. With a number of Baptist churches
in the vicinity of Philadelphia they began holding "general meetings" made up of all who could attend. In 1707 the Baptists from five churches organized into the Philadelphia Association. It quickly became the most important agency among American Baptists. For almost half a century the Philadelphia Association and the Rhode Island Yearly Meeting were the only organizations of this type among the Baptists. The Philadelphia Association had no power as a judiciary over the member churches. It was purely an advisory body but it quickly acquired great prestige and influence. The churches brought all kinds of problems to the Association for advice and help. Among the problems were the requirements for church membership, the role of women in the congregation, the use of instrumental music in the worship, and the question of slavery. At the time of the organization of the Association there were only three Baptist churches in Pennsylvania, six in New Jersey and none in New York. Up to the time of the Philadelphia Association American Baptists had been chiefly Arminian in doctrine. The Philadelphia group of churches were largely Calvinistic. The Philadelphia Association became a major influence in shift of American Baptists from the Arminian to the Calvinistic position. The Calvinism of the Philadelphia Association was in line with the Calvinism of the Great Awakening. In 1742 the Philadelphia Association adopted the London Confession of the Baptists which was based on the Westminster Confession. The influence of the Philadelphia Association spread throughout the colonies, both north and south.

There were several futile attempts to establish Baptist churches in New York in addition to Lady Deborah Moody's attempt at Gravesend, Long Island, which did not last. Francis Doughty, an English antipedobaptist who had been persecuted in Lynn and Taunton, Massachusetts, was the first Baptist to preach in Flushing but in 1656 he moved on to Virginia. The Dutch of New Netherlands and the Anglicans of New York were both quite hostile to the planting of other churches.

In November, 1656 William Hallett, sheriff of Flushing, was arraigned before the authorities for permitting the cobbler, William Wickendam, pastor of the Providence church, to hold a preaching service in his home, a violation of the law against conventicles. Hallett was deprived of his office and fined fifty pounds. Wickendam was fined one hundred pounds and banished. A more stringent ordinance was passed in 1662 providing a fine of fifty guilders for being present at an unauthorized religious meeting, doubling the fine for the second offense, quadrupling it for the third with other punishment.

In 1711 Nicholas Eyres, a well-educated brewer of New York, invited Valentine Wightman of Groton, Connecticut, to preach in his house. Wightman continued to visit from time to time. In 1714 Eyres and a number of others were baptized by Wightman. Eyres insisted that the baptismal service be public and asked Governor Burnet for police protection. The governor granted the request and even attended the service himself. After the service he remarked, "This was the ancient manner of baptizing, and is, in my opinion, much preferable to the practice of modern times." In 1715 Eyres' house was licensed as a Baptist meeting-house. In 1720 the Baptists hired a separate meeting-house. In 1721 Eyres was granted a permit to preach. In 1724 he was ordained by Valentine Wightman of Groton and David Wightman of Newport. In 1728 a lot was purchased and a building erected. The debt almost wrecked the church and it dwindled after 1731 when Eyres became joint pastor with
Wightman of the Six Principle Church in Newport.

In 1663 sixteen Baptist families settled on Block Island and held services but did not organize as a church until 1772. In 1700 William Rhodes, a Baptist minister baptized a number at Oyster Bay, Long Island, but a church was not organized until later with Robert Peeks becoming pastor in 1724.

In the Middle Colonies the Baptists would reap the greatest harvest from the Great Awakening.