

JOHN WINTHROP OR ROGER WILLIAMS? (Part-five of a six-part study)

As the area surrounding the town of Providence grew, it gradually blossomed into a colony of its own: Rhode Island. This in turn provided everyone in early America with two distinctly different “models” from which individuals could choose; resulting in Rhode Island acquiring a reputation for welcoming a variety of “misfits” who were expelled from the other colonies for their contrarian beliefs.

Fast forwarding to the current divisive debate raging within American Evangelical Christianity as a whole, how can we determine who was on the right side of history back then, and who is right now? The basis for any such verdict must rest upon two sources of truth: The Word of God and the United States Constitution. So, first and foremost, does the Bible lend any validating support to the contemporary notion that the earliest Christian settlers in North America had the authority to create a covenant with God; justifying the belief that America was founded as a theocratic nation under God, equivalent to Israel under the Mosaic Covenant? The only text which proponents of this viewpoint offer as confirmation is Psalm 33:12 –

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.”

Is this an open invitation, or even a mandate, to any and all national entities for establishing a theocratic covenant with God, similar to that of Israel? Or, is this simply a point of praise, offered by the psalmist, for the fact that Israel ALONE was ever such a nation? The answer is provided in Psalm 147:19-20, where we read –

“He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the Lord.”

As far as the New Testament is concerned, we can find no warrant for theocratic nation building of any kind. God’s chosen instrument for reaching the world with the gospel is the Church, the body of Christ. No one nation, anywhere in the world, is ever designated to be the headquarters of the Christian faith. Throughout Church history, various nations have played a lead role in planting churches and sending missionaries. Yet the Great Commission, given in Matthew 28:18-20, is not a theocratic mandate, but an imperative from the Lord Himself for evangelism and discipleship. Has there ever been a nation, over the course of its many generations, that has done more to obey that imperative than the United States of America? I can’t think of one. And every follower of Christ in America should be thankful for being a part of such a great spiritual heritage. But that does not mean that we have ever been or should ever become, a New Testament theocracy.

Don’t forget! Part six of this study will be posted on Saturday, September 24