

AMERICAN FAITH

“American history overflows with rip-roaring, chestthumping, and tear-jerking adventure stories. It is a romantic moral drama. Thus, it most assuredly should be told with a measure of passion, unction, and verve. It is, after all, the story of remarkable heroes—heroes of faith, courage, and vision. This wonderful new survey of the American story is everything an historical narrative ought to be: in it you’ll encounter all the blood and thunder, faith and chivalry, pluck and fury, mystery and intrigue of God’s good providence as it is worked out in the lives of more than two dozen heroes. Kudos!”

— **George Grant**, Pastor, Parish Presbyterian Church

“As educational elites strive to deconstruct American history—calling good evil and evil good—Kevin and Generations produces the superlatively excellent volume, American Faith. While our “beautiful inheritance” is being perverted by the fake-history spin of the prophets of falsehood, Generations tells us the truth, and in such an engaging and winsome volume!”

— **Douglas Bond**, author of numerous books and director of the
Oxford Creative Writing Master Class

AMERICAN FAITH

27 SKETCHES FROM WINTHROP TO WILKERSON

Kevin Swanson
with Joshua Schwisow
Daniel Noor, and Peter Bringe



Generations
PASSING ON THE FAITH

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Introduction

We will not hide them from their children,
telling to the generation to come the
praises of the LORD, and His strength and
His wonderful works that He has done.
For He established a testimony in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel, which He
commanded our fathers, that they should
make them known to their children; that the
generation to come might know them, the
children who would be born, that they may
arise and declare them to their children,
that they may set their hope in God, and
not forget the works of God, but keep His
commandments.

—Psalm 78:4-7

*F*or far too many students, history turns out to be the most boring of subjects. Squeezing a 500-year history into 500 pages usually results in a long series of seemingly random dates, names, and places devoid of any true application to the student's life. With an emphasis on abstract facts, the knowledge of history often becomes superficial and meaningless, if any information is retained at all. The goal of most studies is to ensure that the student retains key names and dates at least until the examination is over.

Afterward, the student often walks away and forgets almost everything learned in class.

American Faith aspires to a different goal. This “unusual” introduction to American history strives to provide a survey of important events while delving deeply into the real lives of the people who lived them. It strives to offer meaning and purpose as well as names and dates. The editing and writing team have endeavored to offer both breadth and depth in this brief study of American history. It is our hope that these twenty-seven vignettes of great American lives, all portraits of American faith, will provide a better overall understanding of American history.

After all, history should never be boring because it is “His Story.” Truly, when we examine what is happening and what has happened in the world, we are seeing the very works of God. Though evil works are evident and God’s judgment revisits the American nation over and over again throughout the centuries, yet glimpses of repentance and redemption are visible as well. Even in the midst of man’s depravity and disobedience, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ emerges, and it is our duty and joy to take note of it and record these amazing events.

In God’s good providence, He uses men and women of faith to accomplish remarkable things. Thanks to this godly heritage, America carved out liberties unlike many other nations. While colonialism and imperialism often mishandled indigenous peoples in many nations around the world, it was faith-filled American missionaries that took the gospel to Native Americans and to others in the far off reaches of the earth.

Where true faith exists in history, it is for us to recognize it and point it out to our children. The Lord God includes a list of the great men and women of faith in Hebrews chapter 11, “of whom the world was not worthy.” These were true heroes of the faith. Since the writing of the Book of Hebrews, this heritage of faith, this cloud of witnesses, continues to grow as it extends its march through history. Others are added to the number, and it is for us to recognize them. They are examples for us, and we will do well to learn from them (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6).

Finally, history will become most relevant to our children only when they realize that they play a part in it. History is not merely an exercise in learning

about the past. Our children must also learn *from* the past and must apply that knowledge to their own role in extending Christ's Kingdom through the ages. They must grasp the baton and continue the race. They must take their turn as they fight "the good fight of faith." Future history books will be written concerning the life of faith they lived as they follow in this procession of faith—looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

**Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
(Hebrews 12:1-2)**

UNIT 1

UNIT 1

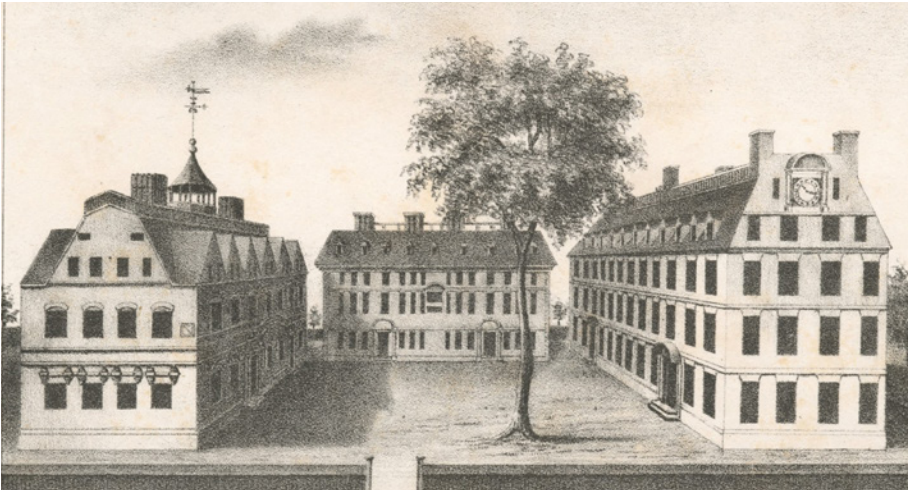


Spiritual Roots (1620-1760)

Blessed is the nation whose God is the
LORD, the people He has chosen as His own
inheritance.

—Psalm 33:12

The first American colonies were largely founded by godly Christian men and women. They wanted to bring the gospel to the New World. The first seals and charters indicated a commitment to this task of extending Christ's kingdom around the world. Churches were built in the colonies before the colonial governments built their own meeting halls. Regularly, colonial pastors would preach entire sermons in the presence of the governors and legislatures. Though not all colonists were Christians, many of the first roots of this nation sprang from persecuted Reformed Christians in Britain. The devil and his minions always desire to persecute true Christians wherever they may be found. During the reigns of James I, Charles I, James II, and Charles II in England, persecutions broke out against many godly families. Pastors were often the first victims of persecution and so many of these men fled to America between 1620 and 1688. During periods of British apostasy and persecution, America received Britain's best.



Harvard College

Naturally, some colonies received a stronger Christian foundation than others. By far, Massachusetts and Virginia were the largest colonies by the time of the War for Independence. Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut were mainly settled by Puritans of Congregational background. Pennsylvania had a strong Quaker influence and New York was settled by the Dutch Reformed. Virginia and other colonies were mostly settled by members of the Anglican Church.

During these early years a tug-a-war was played out over the heart of America. Of course the evil one would not sit back and watch an experiment in godly leadership continue without interference. Spiritual forces were active during the time of the Salem Witch Trials in the 1690s. While the leaders in Massachusetts Bay did not handle the problem rightly or justly, some pastors (like Increase Mather) possessed better sense in these spiritual conflicts. It was the pastors who saw through the deceptions of the evil one and brought an end to the trials.

The American colonies functioned well under the charters they received from the kings of England. They governed themselves with a surprising level of independence from the Mother Country. However, as with all powerful men, it wasn't long before the king and parliament attempted to exercise undue power over the colonies. This created tension between nations that would eventually lead to war.



Dartmouth College

Bad teaching was also creeping into Harvard College from Europe during the formative years of the colonies. Men like Increase Mather tried to fight it off but eventually failed. By 1710 Harvard was controlled by liberal thinkers, but that was not the end of the American Christian heritage. In the merciful providence of God, He stirred up a Great Spiritual Awakening during the 1730s and 1740s, which served to fortify the foundations of a nation soon to form.

The Great Awakening also produced more missionary fervor to reach the Native Americans with the Gospel. David Brainerd was one of the more well-known missionaries who gave his life for the Indians whom he loved. Soon after his death, Dartmouth College was established as a training school for missionaries to the Indians.

Several motives worked in the hearts of the first colonials. Some came to America for religious freedom. Some came to protect their families from the evil influences arising in Europe. Some came to preach the gospel to the settlers and the Indians. Others came to enrich themselves. Though America was not a perfect nation, the Christian influence was strong in the foundations and this would serve as a blessing for the nation in the centuries that followed.

**Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners,
Whose mouth speaks lying words,**

And whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood—
 That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth;
 That our daughters may be as pillars,
 Sculptured in palace style;
 That our barns may be full,
 Supplying all kinds of produce;
 That our sheep may bring forth thousands
 And ten thousands in our fields;
 That our oxen may be well laden;
 That there be no breaking in or going out;
 That there be no outcry in our streets.
 Happy are the people who are in such a state;
 Happy are the people whose God is the LORD! (Psalm 144:11-15)

Timeline of Important Events

1620	The Pilgrim expedition lands on Cape Cod.
1621	The first Thanksgiving celebration held by the Pilgrims.
1626	Peter Minuit buys Manhattan Island for \$24 in trinkets, the start of the New York Colony.
1630	The first vessels of John Winthrop's fleet depart from England for Massachusetts Bay.
1636	Harvard College founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
1636	Providence, Rhode Island founded by Roger Williams.
1640	The <i>Bay Psalm Book</i> becomes the first book printed in North America.
1675	King Philip's War begins in New England. Twelve towns are destroyed.
1692	The Salem Witch Trials begin.
1702	The Royal Colony of New Jersey is formed by Queen Anne.
1702-1713	Queen Anne's War
1718	Pirate Blackbeard is killed off the coast of North Carolina.
1738	George Whitefield begins preaching for the first time in North America.
1754	The French and Indian War begins.



John Winthrop (1587-1649)

CHAPTER 1



John Winthrop: America's Founding Father

Praise the Lord!

**Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,
who delights greatly in His commandments.**

His descendants will be mighty on the earth.

The generation of the upright will be blessed.

—Psalm 112:1-2

If historians were to choose five men as the earliest Founding Fathers of America, no doubt they would include John Smith (Virginia Colony), William Bradford (Plymouth Colony), William Brewster (Plymouth Colony), John Endecott (Salem Colony), and John Winthrop (Massachusetts Bay Colony). But if we were pressed to reduce the list to a single person, America's Founding Father would have to be John Winthrop. No other leader made more of a personal sacrifice, contributed as much to the governance of the colonies, or exerted as much influence upon the developing nation in the early years. Part Separatist and part Puritan but rejecting the immoderate extremes of both parties, he was all Christian all the way. John Winthrop exemplified genuine

Christian faith better than many if not most of the early settlers in America. He was a great leader and a humble Christian. The first roots of this country are found in the Puritans, and John Winthrop was the true Puritan exemplar.

The English Reformation and the Roots of the British Empire

On October 6, 1536, William Tyndale was burned at the stake in Vilvoorde, Belgium. His crime was translating and printing of the Bible in the English language. Tyndale's last prayer was for the King: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!" Three years earlier King Henry VIII had appointed Thomas Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury in hopes that Cranmer would annul the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Reformation was on its way to England.

During this time Lutheran ideas from Europe were seeping into England's colleges and churches. The Reformation in England solidified under the reign of Henry's son, Edward VI, who ruled from 1547 to 1553. But, tragically, this young king did not survive his 16th year. Following Edward came Queen Mary (daughter

of Henry VIII), a zealous Roman Catholic. During her reign from 1553 to 1558 "Bloody" Mary had her own cousin Lady Jane Grey executed, along with almost 300 other Protestants. In 1558 Mary's sister Elizabeth I assumed the throne and reigned for forty-five years. These were glory years for England, in which the roots of the British Empire formed. As God's providence played out, England would defeat the Spanish Armada in 1588 and put an end to the threat of a Roman Catholic army conquering Protestant England.



William Tyndale

Colonization was in the winds by the mid-1500s, as a means of gaining political control over a geographical area by moving folks there from the mother country. Queens Mary and Elizabeth were pushing for the colonization of Ireland. An English explorer, Sir Humphrey Gilbert spearheaded the first colonization of Newfoundland in 1578. The English also attempted a colony on Roanoke island, off the coast of present-day North Carolina in 1585. That venture failed — the entire settlement disappeared mysteriously, probably due to disease or Indian attack. Finally, the English managed to pull off a successful colony in Virginia in 1607 under Captain John Smith's leadership at Jamestown. These were the rustic beginnings of the British Empire.



Portrait of Henry VIII

The Puritan Conflict

An ill-formed relation of church to state had crippled the English Reformation from the outset. Seeking an escape from his marriage with Catherine, King Henry VIII supported the Reformation or at least the severing of the English church from the pope. The political finagling ended with the church put entirely

Annulment: A legal act which cancels a marriage. An annulment voids a marriage and declares it to have been invalid from its beginning. Annulled marriages are treated as though they had never legally existed.

under the control of the state.

Henry VIII was a tyrannical king, and his progeny did not improve much. Estimates vary, but historians generally agree that he killed thousands of his political and religious opponents. With power over the church shifting to the king, archbishops and pastors were now appointees of the king — which were not very often the paragon of religious virtue. State control of the church is not allowed biblically, and the results of such arrangements are always unhealthy for both institutions. During and after Henry's reign, the British universities and seminaries were also corrupted by humanist thinking and state control. The English monarchs following Edward VI were not enthusiastic about the life-transforming teachings of men like Martin Luther and John Calvin. With such authorities exercising control over the Church of England, it was only natural that the church would slouch into moral and theological corruption.

Despite the inevitable spiritual decline enforced by power centers, God mercifully raised up a reforming remnant within the English churches. Puritanism formed among the young students attending Cambridge University as early as 1570, under the tutelage of men like Laurence Chaderton and William Perkins. The life and teachings of William Perkins formed the seedbed for the Puritan movement. Hundreds of pastors trained in Emmanuel College (Cambridge) contributed to a red hot movement of God — extending the influence of the Reformation faith for 100 years in England, and giving shape to the faith in the American colonies. William Perkins' works contributed to the conversion of the New England pastor, Richard Mather. Also, William Brewster, Thomas Hooker, and John Winthrop were discipled under the tutelage of the old Puritan. The typical library in Plymouth colony, at a minimum included "a large and a small bible, Ainsworth's translation of the Psalms, and the works of William Perkins, a

Puritans and Separatists: Puritans sought to reform and purify the Church of England from within. Separatists shared many beliefs with the Puritans but decided to separate from the Church of England and form their own churches. This was illegal, and many Separatists were arrested or fled England to the Netherlands.

favorite theologian,” according to historian Samuel Morison.

Puritan leaders in parliament attempted to make a change in the form of English church government to Presbyterianism (in 1584). The move backfired, creating more animosity between the Queen and the Puritan movement. Seeing these reforming pastors as a threat, Elizabeth commenced persecution primarily targeting the English Separatists. The infamous Star Chamber sentenced three men to death by hanging for advocating a congregational view of church government. John Penry, Henry Barrow, and John Greenwood were executed on April 6, 1593.

John Winthrop's Uncle William

John Winthrop's Uncle William was the first among the Winthrops to join the reforming movement. Upon moving his residence at the beginning of “Bloody” Mary's reign (in 1553), William began meeting secretly with other like-minded believers. He joined with other Christians worshipping in private houses or sometimes in ships at port; and he may have assigned some of his own merchant vessels to this use. Uncle William was personally acquainted with some of the martyrs who lost their lives under Queen Mary. He kept in close contact with John Foxe and provided important first-hand information about some of the martyrdoms recorded in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

Later in the 1560s William served as a lay elder in a church called St. Michael's in Cornhill, London. The church purchased copies of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* for members of the congregation. Clearly, these people were serious about reformation. Incorporating the psalms put to music in Calvin's Geneva, these assemblies set about to recover congregational singing as well.

Uncle William also sponsored and funded several foreign Protestant churches in London. Two of his sons migrated to Ireland and helped lead the Irish Reformation (which in some respects was stronger than England's). Although operating somewhat in the background, William Winthrop was a major player in the English Reformation. His devout commitment to the reformation of the Christian church profoundly influenced his brother Adam (John Winthrop's

father) — nineteen years his younger. While Adam was inspired by his older brother's courage and faith, little did he realize his own son, John, would take the reformation vision to more radical conclusions.

Early Years

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:1-4)

John Winthrop was born in 1588 to Adam and Anne Winthrop in Edwardstone (located about sixty miles northeast of London). John's father did not start out rich, but he worked his way into England's upper middle class. In a day when books were considered a luxury, Adam Winthrop managed to collect a library of eighty-seven volumes. He was both a lawyer and a farmer at a time



Edwardstone/Suffolk Countryside, UK

when a single source of income was insufficient to provide for a large family. John was the second child born to Adam and Anne. His sisters, Anne, Jane, and Lucy were born in 1586, 1592, and 1601, respectively.

John grew up in the Stour Valley in Essex, England. Beginning in 1563 the valley received two godly, Calvinist pastors: Henry Browne and William Bird. It was the preaching of these men that lit a fire under the families in the valley. And Stour Valley became known as the godliest commonwealth in any part of England.¹ Largely through the influence of a godly bishop (pastor) named Edmund Grindal, reformation swept through Essex. Two important elements came to characterize these Puritan churches:

1. Evangelical preaching.
2. “Prophesying” or Scripture-based, Spirit-filled encouragements and exhortations from ordinary men in the congregations or pastors gathered in small groups.

Puritan preachers preferred the powerful proclamation of God’s Word to empty rituals and outward ceremonies. Typically people favored outward ceremonies when they did not want to be convicted of their sin or be subjected to the powerful truths of Christ’s redeeming gospel. The devil does not like unfettered Gospel preaching and this was certainly the case in 16th century England.

John Winthrop’s mother, Anne Browne Winthrop, was the daughter of Pastor Henry Browne. As a child she had been well disciplined in the reformation faith in her father’s home. Pastor Browne taught her, “A minister must tell the people of their sins,” and “we must remember the law of God continually.”²

In his youthful days John played football (soccer) with his friends and hunted rabbits with his musket and bow, although he was never a good shot. His father taught him to fish in the manor pond and streams. Each Sunday his parents took

Calvinism: Calvinism is the term used for those who generally accept the doctrines of the Swiss Reformer, John Calvin. Usually, Calvinists emphasize the doctrine of predestination — that God determines who will be saved and who will not be saved.

him to hear two sermons at the church in Groton or Boxford. Often his parents invited the pastors to their home for more fellowship in Christ.

John's father taught him a basic Christian catechism called "Principles of the Christian Religion." When his dad asked him, "What sure ground do we have to build our religion upon?" John would answer, "The Word of God contained in the Scripture."³ The catechism taught him that God really does "ordain whatsoever comes to pass."⁴

Young John Winthrop was a sinner, and he came to be sharply aware of this truth about himself early on. When still a lad he stole two little books he found left in the house. Later in his life he wrote that, "ever since, when they have come to my mind, I have grieved at it, and would have gladly made restitution."⁵ As early as twelve years of age John began struggling with sexual temptation. He admitted to having "attempted all kinds of wickedness."⁶ He was, in his own words, "very wild and dissolute."⁷

At fourteen, John went off to Trinity College, Cambridge. At this time Cambridge was a seedbed of a robust, reforming faith. The young men rose early and assembled at chapel by 5:00 a.m. for early morning prayers and a sermon. Each student was assigned a tutor who held him to spiritual accountability



Trinity College, where Winthrop attended from fourteen years of age

and disciplined him in the faith. Tutoring was a vibrant college ministry in the 1590s. During these years young John sat under the evangelical preaching of the most famous Puritan of the day, William Perkins. John Cotton was one of his classmates, a young man who would become the most famous pastor in the early days of America.

The college scene at Christian Cambridge was still not without sin. Tales of drunkenness and fornication occurring within the student body were common. John Winthrop's days at college were marked by strong temptations to sexual sin. After barely two years at Trinity College John quit school never to return. Immediately afterward, at only seventeen years of age, he married Mary Forth.

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Corinthians 7:8-9)

Adult Life

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord . . . (Acts 3:19)

With: By his own admission, the early years of John's first marriage were marked by impatience, self-centeredness, and quarrels with his wife. John gave himself over to "negligence and idleness."⁸ He hunted birds along the creeks, and at times dallied with illegal poaching. Around this time, young Winthrop began to pray that God would give him "a new heart, joy in His Spirit; that He would dwell with me, that He would strengthen me against the world, the flesh and the Devil, and that He would forgive my sins and increase my faith."⁹ John committed himself to fighting against the sins of "pride, covetousness, love of this world, vanity of mind, unthankfulness, sloth (both in my service and in my calling), and not preparing myself with reverence and uprightness to come to His Word."¹⁰ John's faith now had a seriousness about it. He was assured of God's love at this time, even to the point that he "dreamed that I was with Christ."¹¹

He fell on his face and wept for a very long time, sensing the love of Christ like never before.

Six children were born to the couple—John Jr., Henry, Forth, Mary, and two daughters who died at birth. John’s relationship with Mary was marred by his pride but improved as he grew closer to God. He committed himself to family worship both morning and evening. He wanted to “have a special care for the education of my children and to banish profaneness from my family.” He committed every morning to “private prayer, meditation, and reading,” and to “pray and confer privately with my wife.”¹² These commitments turned out to be life-transforming for John Winthrop.

John made the entry in his journal at this time: “I will always walk humbly before my God, and meekly, mildly and gently towards all men . . . to give myself, my life, my wits, my health, my wealth to the service of my God and Saviour.”¹³ His commitment to the Lord solidified during his marriage with Mary.

Between 1605 and 1613 John and Mary lived in Southeast Essex with Mary’s family. This part of the country was less committed to the reformation faith. Upon returning to the Stour Valley in 1613, John began meeting with a “covenanted group”—an accountability group of pastors and committed Christian men and women. They met every Friday for prayer and to discuss sermons. This provided a pattern for John Winthrop’s spiritual walk in the years that followed.

On the birth of their seventh child, Anne, John’s wife Mary died. A year later John married again. His second wife Thomasine died in childbirth in November 1616.

John Winthrop’s third wife Margaret was a true jewel. Never was a relationship so sweet and so tender as that of John and Margaret. One historian described Margaret as “one of the most appealing women in American history.”¹⁴ Her husband called her “a very gracious woman,”¹⁵ probably an underestimation of her character. Margaret’s letters to John were filled with kindness, tenderness, concern, and love, as were his to her. He referred to her as his “sweet spouse,” “most sweet heart,” or “most loving and dear wife,” and ended his letters with phrases like “the sweetest kisses and pure embracings of my kindest affection.”¹⁶ In her letters Margaret wrote him, “I have no way to manifest my love to you but by these unworthy lines, which I would entreat you to accept from her that

loveth you with an unfeigned heart.”¹⁷ When she heard that he had injured his hand, Margaret wrote in the most tender, affecting language, “I will not look for any long letters this term because I pity your poor hand if I had it here I would make more of it than ever I did, and bind it up very softly for fear of hurting it.”¹⁸ In response John affirmed his appreciation for her and her letters as “the true image of thy most loving heart, breathing out the faithful desires of thy sweet soul towards him that prizeth thee above all things in the world.”¹⁹ Such records utterly dispel the myth that Puritans were a cold, emotionless, and hard-hearted people.

For his life's calling John Winthrop pursued the legal field. At 21 years of age his father appointed him as magistrate in a local court at Groton Manor. He continued to work as a local county judge from 1617 onward. Each day before he entered the court he prepared his heart “by earnest prayer.”²⁰ Few men had a clearer view of the decline of English society in the 1620s than John Winthrop from his seat as judge. Crimes of murder, theft, witchcraft, and infanticide were



King James I

The King's Book of Sports: King James I issued his “Book of Sports” for national distribution in 1618. It was intended to encourage Englishmen to participate in certain sports on Sundays, including archery, dancing, “leaping, vaulting, or any other such harmless recreation” as permissible sports, together with “May-games, Whitsun-ales and Morris-dances, and the setting up of May-poles.”

not unusual in that part of the country. Local preachers called attention to the moral slipping, especially on the part of the civil leaders. Pastor Bezaleel Carter in particular preached against the extortion and bribery that was increasingly common in the Stour Valley.

Beginning in 1615, King James I began installing men to positions of authority in the church who were fairly opposed to reformation. Anglican bishops like William Laud discouraged the preaching of the Word from any reforming, Holy Spirit-filled men of God. Under this new church authority, the Winthrops had less access to good preaching — something they had enjoyed for some forty years prior. Then in 1622, the king moved to halt all preaching of what he deemed controversial, which included any teaching that placed God in control of man's salvation. Humanist kings insisted upon the sovereignty of man over the sovereignty of God. When King Charles I took the throne in 1625, matters got even worse. Pastors who did not conform to the new rules enforcing certain ceremonies in the church were dragged into court. When Charles canceled all Sunday afternoon sermons in 1629, the Puritans took the policy as nothing less than spiritually destructive and devastating for the churches. To add insult to injury then, Charles I insisted that pastors read *The King's Book of Sports* from the pulpit on the Lord's Day. Such regulations imposed on the churches were taken as outright encouragements to disobey God's laws by the Puritan pastors and congregants.

About this time, certain of the faithful pastors pulled up and left the Stour Valley for Ireland. John Winthrop considered for a while following suit, especially given Charles' inclination towards Roman Catholicism. He wondered if God's judgment might descent upon England, noting in his journals:

"We have humbled ourselves not, to turn from our evil ways, but have provoked [God] more than all the nations round about us; therefore he is turning the cup towards us. I am verily persuaded that God will bring some heavy affliction upon this land, and that speedily."²¹

The cultural situation continued to degenerate in the Stour Valley where the Winthrops had lived and prospered for generations. Violent crime was on the rise. Roman Catholicism gained popularity in the valley. During the

election cycle of 1626, John Winthrop was rejected for the position of Member of Parliament representing the borough of Sudbury. The Puritans had committed themselves to laws prohibiting adultery and fornication, and these positions were unpopular at the time.

As tensions grew between the king and parliament, John Winthrop and other local magistrates were forced by law to collect illegitimate taxes for the king. John resisted, along with several of his Puritan friends. Some were sent to jail, although in God's good providence Winthrop escaped this treatment. John presented a bill to his friends in Parliament that would have prevented "the loathsome vice of drunkenness and other disorders in Alehouses [bars],"²² but this effort failed.

A heavily Puritan-influenced Parliament floated two bills in early 1629; one of which proscribed a return to the papal church, and the other disallowing any increase in taxes for the benefit of the monarchy. Predictably, Charles was not happy with these developments. He proceeded to dissolve Parliament, imprisoned nine members, and shut down the people's government for eleven years. MP John Eliot, friend of the Winthrops, was confined in London Tower prison (where he languished and died in 1632). This was the last straw for John Winthrop. It was clear to these Puritans that the tyrant in London was determined to create a tyrannical state, destroy representative government, and put an end to the Protestant Reformation in England. Seeing where his nation was headed, John Winthrop had very little hope for the future of his mother country. Its colleges were corrupt, its churches were compromised, and its civil government had become tyrannical. As far as he could see, the judgment of God was closing in on England. It was time to begin seeking a haven elsewhere. In his own words:

All other churches in Europe are brought to desolation . . . and who knows but that God hath provided this place [America] to be a refuge for many whom He means to save out of the general calamity, and seeing the Church has no place left to flee into but the wilderness . . . The fountains of learning and religion are so corrupted as most children are perverted, corrupted, and utterly overthrown by the multitude of evil examples and the licentious governments of those seminaries.²³



Massachusetts Bay where John Winthrop helped found a colony

Moving to America

Seek you the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have kept his commands; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be you shall be hidden in the day of the LORD'S anger. (Zephaniah 2:3)

By this time, three small colonies had been established in Massachusetts Bay on the American continent—Plymouth (1620), Cape Ann (1623), and Salem (1626). Cape Ann had failed, but the other two were still surviving, as John Winthrop made plans for a larger settlement in the Bay. All three of his oldest sons — John (24), Henry (22), and Forth (20) signed up to join their father on the venture into the wilderness. Two years earlier, Henry had tried and failed with his own plantation on Barbados island. But now, the adventurous (and somewhat rebellious) young man would join his father in Massachusetts.

John Winthrop was now recognized as the primary visionary among the Puritans for settling New England, by the summer of 1629. Summarizing his reasons for leaving England in a published document called “General Observations,” this became something of a rallying call for the great Puritan migration into America. His observations are briefly summarized as follows:

1. Protestants have a commission to carry the Christian gospel to America and to “raise a bulwark against the Kingdom of Antichrist which the Jesuits labor to raise in all parts of the world.”²⁴ Despite Scripture’s clear injunction, Protestants in the 17th century were still slower to engage in mission work than their Roman Catholic contemporaries.
2. The judgment of God was hanging over Europe. America was a land that God had prepared “for a refuge for many whom he meaneth to save.”²⁵
3. England was overpopulated, in Winthrop’s view. Moreover the European population had grown “vile and base.”²⁶

Jesuits: Called “The Society of Jesus,” formed by Ignatius Loyola in 1540 who intended a Counter-Reformation (within the Roman Catholic Church) to the Protestants. This was a movement committed to high discipline, contemplative mysticism, and foreign missions work.

4. Economically, England was facing a terrible inflation which made it difficult for the middle class to succeed in business.
5. Oxford and Cambridge universities had become corrupt.
6. Opportunities were available in America to take dominion over lands which had never yet been cultivated.
7. The Reformation church was still in its infancy, and Winthrop felt that a fresh start would help the Protestant church develop in this new land.
8. If wealthy Christians were willing to give up their comforts to build the church in New England, they would follow through on Christ's exhortation to take up the cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Sacrifice is part of the Christian life, and this sort of strenuous application of faith played strongly in Winthrop's mind.

The risks of Winthrop's venture were enormous—far beyond what most modern Christians would ever consider. The death toll of the endeavor was staggering. Of the new arrivals added to the Virginia Colony between 1605 and 1625, 80% had died within fifteen years of their arrival. Still these harsh facts did not deter the staunch Puritans on the mission.²⁷ On March 4, 1629, the king issued a charter to the Massachusetts Bay Company which permitted them to begin a settlement. John Endecott, already leading the Salem Colony, was made the first governor. On July 28, 1629, John Winthrop called a meeting with pastors John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, and Roger Williams to discuss the objective of planting a “godly commonwealth” in New England. Then, on October 29, 1629, John Winthrop was elected governor by the court or board of the Massachusetts Bay Company.

Preparations were made for the first voyage set for late fall, 1629. Another was planned for 1630. Provisions included eighty muskets, six long fowling pieces, one hundred swords, and sixty pikes. Food supplies included forty-five large casks of beer, six casks of water, twenty-two hogsheads of beef, forty bushels of peas, twenty bushels of oatmeal, candles, beer vinegar, mustard seed, oil, soap, butter, and cheese. Over seventy of John's Puritan neighbors in Groton accompanied him on the first voyage. Because of the many dangers inherent in the new venture, John left his wife and young children at home until he was

well settled in the new land. John's two younger sons, Stephen (11 years old) and Adam (10 years old) went with their father aboard the *Arbella*. He reported to his wife that the boys slept well on the ship, wrapped in a rug, "for we have no sheets here."²⁸

As he prepared to leave England, John Winthrop preached his famous sermon called "A Model of Christian Charity," in which he outlined his vision for America. He wanted this new commonwealth "to improve our lives, to do more service to the Lord," and "to increase the body of Christ whereof we are members, [so] that ourselves and our posterity may be the better preserved from the common corruptions of this world" and might "serve the Lord and work out our salvation under the power and purity of his holy ordinances."²⁹ Ultimately Winthrop desired more obedience to God among the people of God.

John described the form of government of the new commonwealth as a "Covenant with God for this work."³⁰ The covenant was a "near bond of marriage" between God and the colony.³¹ John hoped this would be the highest example and the very citadel of Christian virtue and influence in the world. Foremost, he wanted the members of the community to love one another. He desired a society knit together in love.

John Winthrop hoped that God would make this new settlement "a praise and a glory."³² He envisioned that future colonies planted around the world would say, "The Lord make us like that of New England."³³ In an otherwise dark world of sin, the Puritan hoped this would be an ideal representation of what Jesus called a "city upon a hill"³⁴ in Matthew 5:13-16.

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)

Suffering and Tragedy

Following several lengthy delays, the company of Puritans finally departed England on March 29, 1630; four ships set out for America — the *Arbella*, the *Talbot*, the *Ambrose*, and the *Jewel*. Church services were held on deck each Sunday, and the children were catechized by Pastor George Phillips. The *Arbella* dropped anchor near Salem on June 12.

The first church meetings in the Massachusetts Bay Colony were held outdoors under a tree. Nearly one hundred members formed the first church, including key colonial leaders, John Winthrop, Thomas Dudley, Isaac Johnson, and Pastor John Wilson. They swore to a covenant, “solemnly and religiously promising and binding ourselves to walk in all our ways according to the rule of the Gospel and in all sincere conformity to [God’s] holy ordinances, and in mutual love and respect each to other, so near as God shall give us grace.”³⁵



Portrait of Cotton Mather

Tragedy marked the first months in the new land for John Winthrop. In July 1630 one of the colonists noticed a canoe on the far side of the river and John’s son Henry volunteered to swim over to fetch it. The boy never made it across the river, probably because the water was colder than he had anticipated. Of the first 1,000 members of the first settlement, some 200 had died by the first winter. Winthrop himself lost twelve members of his household, including a number of hired

servants. That first cold winter was particularly hard on those who were living in tents or carved-out caves in the hillsides. Wolves picked off the livestock. The situation was so dangerous that John dared not venture away from his home without a gun in hand. One evening he lost his way in the wilderness and spent all night by a fire, singing psalms. By God’s grace he found his way back home the following morning.

During the first difficult year, Winthrop exhibited the highest caliber of

leadership which can only be demonstrated under the most severe circumstances. Despite the numerous hardships, John wrote to Margaret, "I like so well to be here . . . and if I were to come again, I would not have altered my course, though I had foreseen all these afflictions."³⁶ He wrote to his friend Sir William Spring that "these afflictions we have met with need discourage none, for the country is exceeding good."³⁷

Few political leaders are willing to give up their own power or possessions for the sake of others. John Winthrop exhibited the best of Christian leadership in hard times. Using his own resources, he traded with the natives for corn to feed the colony. He funded more shipments of goods out of England. He dipped into his own supplies to keep the other members of the colony alive during that first winter. Cotton Mather reports in his history of early America that Winthrop was in the act of reaching into a barrel for the last handful of grain for a poor starving man when a ship "arrived at the harbor's mouth, laden with provisions for them all."³⁸

In the spring of 1631, John Winthrop wasted no time in setting his household and hired servants to work. The team, himself included, set out to cultivate 600 acres of land. Right away John built a large house for Margaret (who joined him later that year). It was a two-story house with a kitchen, pantry, buttery, a large meeting hall, and bedrooms upstairs for the children. The meeting hall was used for the gathering of the local government as well as for the first church in Boston.

The first judicial cases taken up by Winthrop and his small court included fining Nicholas Knopp for selling plain water as a "cure" for scurvy. They forbade the use of dice and cards and instituted punishment for those who went hunting on the Sabbath (Sunday). For serious crimes like adultery, the first government required the death penalty.³⁹ A man named John Dawe was punished for seducing a Native American woman into sexual sin. The trading of guns and alcohol with the natives was also prohibited. The first court of New England protected the rights of the Native Americans as well as the British colonists, and an important leader in the colony was fined for burning down two Indian wigwams.

The colonial government held its first election on American soil in May of 1631. Voting was allowed for heads of households who were church members in good standing. Counted as freemen, these property owners were also required to take an oath to support the colonial government before voting. John Winthrop

was reelected in an election of 116 freemen.

Meanwhile back in England things weren't getting any better for Winthrop's Puritan friends. As the decade progressed, more pastors were imprisoned. King Charles I and Archbishop Laud were at work to systematically dismantle biblical theology in the churches and reintroduce Roman Catholic practices. Between 1630 and 1642 at least 13,000 immigrants moved into the Massachusetts Bay area. The population of New England reached 22,800 by 1650.

In-Fighting Within the Colony

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil. (2 Timothy 2:24)

John Winthrop and the colonial court ran into a little trouble when Watertown (one of the towns over which John governed) resisted an imposed tax. The colony was collecting the tax to construct fortifications to provide a defense for the towns against attacks from the surrounding native tribes. Eventually the town agreed to pay the tax.

The first major political quarrel in the new colony occurred between Winthrop and his deputy governor, Thomas Dudley. This fight would continue for over a decade. Basically, John Winthrop was hoping to maintain unity with those Christians who disagreed on minor doctrinal issues. On the other hand, Thomas Dudley was a hard man and best known for his hatred of "heresy." While Winthrop would freely give away his goods to help the poor and starving, Dudley would lend food to the poor and require a large repayment at harvest time. Although Dudley would raise a number of false charges against Winthrop, none of them stuck. By the grace of God the two were eventually reconciled and Winthrop's daughter Mary married Dudley's son Samuel.

Conflict erupted once again when another leader, Roger Williams, called for a more absolute form of separation. Unhappy with the Puritan arrangement, Roger made his way down to the Plymouth settlement where he stirred up more contention. Whereas the Plymouth colonists called themselves Separatists, some still visited Anglican churches when visiting England — something Roger considered completely unacceptable. What Roger was looking for was an

absolutely-regenerate church membership. The hyper-separatist would strive to know the condition of every person's heart in the congregation. The position was taken to such an extreme that nobody could be baptized (or be member of a church) until every other member of the church was satisfied that the person was a bonafide believe and had experienced the new birth. It was a high bar. This was not the pattern of the early church, where Peter would baptize 3,000 men in one day, and the Apostles would provide the whole household same-day baptisms. How can anybody determine with any degree of accuracy the condition of another person's heart? Indeed, Scripture speaks of regeneration as a secret, mysterious work produced by the Holy Spirit in the heart. The true effects of this mysterious work may take a long time to reveal itself in an outwardly, visible way.

Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. (John 3:7-8)

Setting out to infallibly judge the hearts of others is a futile mission, a role only God can fill. Besides, an immaculately pure church membership is an impossibility. For Christ himself received Judas into the membership of the group of His disciples, fully aware that he was "a devil" (John 6:70).

As time went on Roger Williams became even more rebellious against the whole social order and began to call the colonists to reject the king's patent, dissolve the colony, and send everyone back to England. A generally unstable man, Roger invented increasingly wild ideas. He moved into Salem and caused more trouble there. Almost every leader in the colony vehemently opposed Williams, except John Winthrop. By this time Winthrop had proved himself to be a remarkably patient and tolerant leader in the colony. Hoping to avoid a clash between Roger and the town leaders, John advised Williams in a letter to quietly "steer his course" to the more remote Narragansett Bay. Roger Williams later wrote, "I took his prudent notion as a hint and a voice from God."⁴⁰ Their friendship continued to be affectionate and respectful as the years progressed, though John expressed a deep concern for Roger's spiritual condition in his

letters. Roger accepted the letters as truly loving and caring, but in the end he rejected John's advice.

The colony was not without serious sin. But, Governor John Winthrop's careful (and somewhat moderate) biblical leadership helped immensely when it came to adjudicating egregious crimes, including witchcraft. He stopped short of applying the death penalty for sexual assault, but when a certain Dorothy Talby became "so possessed by Satan" that she committed infanticide,⁴¹ she was sentenced to death. There were no actual witchcraft trials in the colony until 1648, largely due to the influence of Winthrop and high regard for standards of evidence. The first recorded execution for the crime of witchcraft occurred in Charlestown (in 1648), after which Winthrop's son, John Jr. was instrumental in putting a halt to any further trials of this nature.

The colony set out to produce a body of laws "in resemblance of the Magna Carta" in 1635. The initiative failed, mostly because Governor Winthrop insisted on more flexibility for future legislatures and judges to determine application of law to specific cases. A year later, a committee produced another code based largely on John Cotton's *Moses His Judicials*. It was almost a word-for-word copy of God's law contained in the Mosaic code. On the one hand, Winthrop resisted the control of the magistrate by the church — that the government must "give account of his judicial proceedings in any court of civil justice." Yet, he would still employ biblical references to positions he would take in the court, and he admonished his New England magistrates to "search the Scriptures for the proper rule in each case." While wholeheartedly accepting God's revealed law as the perfect standard for justice, the application of that law to each particular case was not always cut and dried. He would accept the "general equity" of the Old Testament civil law, but allow flexibility in the application of it.⁴²

Moreover, Winthrop was not about to dismiss English Common Law and thereby produce a revolutionary or utopian society. Common Law as the traditional outworking of a social morality must also be brought into play when drawing up wise applications to God's law in specific cases. In short, John Winthrop maintained a balanced, realistic, view of human nature and society. None could live up perfectly to the standards of God's holy law; and the civil magistrate is seen as only a last ditch restraint on the evil that men can do. God's

law provides the standard of right and wrong, but the civil government is incapable of perfecting society by law.

Finally, in 1648, John Winthrop supported the Massachusetts Laws and Liberties document issued with a full preface authored by his pastor, John Cotton. A portion of this historical document is included at the end of this chapter. In all, John Winthrop served as governor of Massachusetts for about fifteen years over four terms: 1629-1634, 1637-1640, 1642-1644, and 1646-1649.

A Great Godly Example in Leadership



Map of the 1680s
Massachusetts Bay Colony

The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, 'The Rock of Israel spoke to me: He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.' (2 Samuel 23:2-3)

In many ways John Winthrop was an ideal Christian leader for a flawed and sinful world. He understood the limitations of sinful human nature. He realized the limitation of political government. His willingness to sacrifice his own resources will forever stand as a remarkable example for those who serve in civil government. Most political leaders reach into other people's pockets for government resources. They want to take other people's money and use it for their projects, but John Winthrop did just the opposite at the founding of this nation. As governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, his actions encapsulated the truth of Paul's words: "I seek not [what is] yours, but you" (2 Cor. 12:14).

John Winthrop was a humble man, sensitive to his own failings and sins. He gave glory to God for his successes and took full responsibility for his own failures. This enabled him to maintain a good balance and wise judgment in governance over Massachusetts during those first critical years. Other Puritan leaders often seemed to give way to a hypocritical ideal by attempting to hold the political system to a higher standard than the standards they would apply to themselves.

Governor Winthrop feared God. As Scripture dictates, this is the first requirement for any decent government leader (Exod. 18:21, 2 Sam. 23:3). He was a man of deep piety and personal integrity.

It would be hard to find anyone in history who communicated more love for his wife and children in his diary and letters than John Winthrop. His only published sermon was a call for Christian charity and taught that we must “love one another, with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22). This is the only way for a happy community to exist. Such a thing rarely happens in churches and civil communities, yet John was a good example of this. He loved his enemies, almost never held a grudge, and constantly forgave those who ruthlessly maligned and attacked him.

Last but not least, John Winthrop was a man of courage. He did not give way to discouragement in the face of unspeakable tragedy. He inspired courage and steadfastness in others, characteristics upon which nations are built. It was the Puritan ethic and attitude that built the nation, and John Winthrop was the prime example of Puritanism in the first generation.

America’s first native historian, Cotton Mather, called Winthrop the “American Nehemiah.” John Winthrop was a visionary but not a man who sought a utopia. He was a reformer but not a revolutionary. He was a humble man, a godly man, and a repentant sinner. God chose to use this Puritan leader in a most remarkable way to build a remarkable nation.



Massachusetts Laws and Liberties, 1648

It is ordered by this Court and authoritie thereof, that there shall never be any bond-slavery, villenage or captivitie amongst us; unless it be lawfull captives, taken in just warrs, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves, or are solde to us: and such shall have the libertyes and christian usages which the law of God established in Israell concerning such persons doth morally require, provided, this exempts none from servitude who shall be judged thereto by Authoritie. [1641] ...

Capital Lawes.

1. If any man after legal conviction shall have or worship any other God, but the lord god: he shall be put to death. Exod. 22. 20. Deut. 13.6. & 10. Deut. 17. 2. 6.
2. If any man or woman be a witch, that is, hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit, they shall be put to death. Exod. 22. 18. Levit. 20. 27. Deut. 18. 10. 11.
3. If any person within this Jurisdiction whether Christian or Pagan shall wittingly and willingly presume to blaspheme the holy Name of God, Father, Son or Holy-Ghost, with direct, expresse, presumptuous, or highhanded blasphemy, either by wilfull or obstinate denying the true God, or his Creation, or Government of the world: or shall curse God in like manner, or reproach the holy religion of God as if it were but a politick device to keep ignorant men in awe; or shal utter any other kinde of Blasphemy of the like nature & degree they shall be put to death. Levit. 24. 15. 16.
4. If any person shall commit any wilfull murther, which is Man slaughter, committed upon premeditate malice, hatred, or crueltie not in a mans necessary and just defence, nor by meer casualty against his will, he shall be put to death. Exod. 21. 12. 13. Numb. 35. 31.