

# The Baptists' Rise Through Persecution

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. So we've looked at the beginning of Baptist history from the turn of the 17th century to roughly 1640. We've seen the beginning of the first general Arminian Baptist church in England with Thomas Helwys.

! And we've seen the first particular or Calvinist Baptist church under the leadership of John Spilsbury. And soon after Spilsbury's church was planted, breaking away from that so-called JLJ church, the Baptists finally recovered the practice of baptism by immersion.

So for the first time, and so for the first 40 years I should say, they practiced believer's baptism as opposed to infant baptism, but it wasn't until 1640 that they finally realized that the New Testament actually shows a particular mode for baptism, which is immersion.

In fact, the word itself means to immerse. Now, after the last lesson, I had a couple of people ask me about the Anabaptists.

Why aren't they considered the beginning of Baptist history? Weren't they already practicing believer's baptism? And these are good questions, so let me briefly address them.

[ 1 : 22 ] As we'll see in a moment, English Baptists, that is the earliest Baptists, were very careful to distinguish themselves from the Anabaptists for several important reasons.

First of all, there was really no continuity between them. In other words, it's not as though the Baptists emerged from the Anabaptists. Despite any similarities, they were completely separate movements.

Yes, they crossed paths every now and then. We saw that with John Smith and his group in Amsterdam. We saw that again with Richard Blunt traveling to Holland to witness a group of Mennonites, an Anabaptist group, baptizing people by immersion.

He wanted to see what that was like. But other than these brief connections, they were completely distinct movements. In fact, I don't know whether you caught it last time, but I have yet to find any historical evidence that the particular Baptist movement had any initial connection to the general Baptist movement.

It certainly seems that these two groups popped up independently from one another, and both of these groups developed independently from the Anabaptists. So just because both the Baptists and the Anabaptists practiced Believer's Baptism, that doesn't mean one sprang from the other.

[ 2 : 45 ] These were completely separate movements, despite the claims of J.M. Carroll and others who have tried to make the Anabaptists a part of the Baptist lineage. But more than that, the English Baptists, especially the particular Baptists, wanted to make it abundantly clear that they were not Anabaptists because Anabaptists had developed a bad reputation as fanatical, violent anarchists.

Anabaptists had been seen as dangerous revolutionaries since the 1530s because of what happened in the German city of Munster.

If you're not familiar with that story, wow. In short, they took over the city, and they established a kind of socialist theocracy.

They instituted polygamy. There were some really strange things happening there. I mean, the whole thing became a giant, violent mess, especially after a Catholic army came in about a year later and took the city back over.

To this day, there is a cathedral there with three cages hanging on the outside of the building, which once held the bones, the bodies, then the bones, of three Anabaptist leaders who were put up there on display as a warning to all the people.

[ 4 : 09 ] Well, that particular Anabaptist group was now infamous, right? Everyone knew about them. And even though most of the Anabaptists by the 17th century had become really pacifists, they were not insurrectionists, when someone heard Baptist, they immediately thought of those radical Anabaptists.

Oh, you're a Baptist. That means you re-baptize people. By the way, that's what Anabaptist means. You re-baptize. You're a re-baptizer. If you're a Baptist who re-baptizes, you must be a revolutionary.

That's the connection they made in their minds. Now, in some ways, the Baptists were revolutionaries, but not in violent political ways.

But they were fundamentally uprooting the entire civil system. And I think this is a forgotten element in church history. As we've talked about, most of Europe operated according to a parish model, where a person's citizenship was tied directly to a specific church or parish.

And then come the Baptists. And they say, no, that's not the way it should be. Of course, they're not interested in how society or government is functioning in this way.

[ 5 : 29 ] Their only concern is the church. They say, we shouldn't baptize infants because the Bible doesn't permit it. Only born-again believers should be baptized.

That was the Baptists, really, their only concern. But if you stop baptizing infants and you stop joining them to the local parish, you kind of disrupt all of society.

Your very identity as a citizen of whatever town or even nation was tied to your membership to a local parish. So if you're not a member of the local parish, what does that mean for your citizenship?

How do you keep track of the people? It's very confusing for them at the time. Now, all of that might seem very foreign to us, of course, but that's what life looked like in the 17th century.

That's how the country of England operated. And that's just one more reason why so many people opposed the Baptists and saw them as radicals. But they weren't radicals in the Anabaptist sense.

[ 6 : 33 ] They had no desire to take over the country. They weren't looking to become the next state-sponsored church. They only wanted to worship according to their understanding of Scripture. So when the particular Baptists crafted the first London Confession of Faith, here's what they wrote in the preface.

This is a modern English version, anyhow. They said, Clearly, the particular Baptists wanted to distance themselves.

And even though they didn't say it there, it wasn't just because a few of the Anabaptists had been radical at one time. I've mentioned this briefly, but the Anabaptists held some very unorthodox views.

Many of them denied original sin. They denied that Christ had a human body. So the Baptists had really good reasons for not wanting to be associated with them.

Plus, again, there was no connection between them. These were completely independent movements. So that's why we don't begin Baptist history with the Anabaptists.

[ 8:19 ] Some church historians have argued, and I won't push back too hard on this, that Baptist history really doesn't begin until you have the recovery of baptism by immersion.

In other words, they don't think of John Smith as the beginning of Baptist history. They think of Richard Blunt and John Spilsbury and the particular Baptists in the 1640s as constituting the true beginning of the Baptist church.

Maybe so. And I'd much rather claim John Spilsbury than John Smith. But I suppose Smith still has his place in the story. The thing is, precisely identifying the beginning of Baptist history is kind of a moot point.

And I say this because the Baptists, as they themselves said in the preface to the First London Confession, aren't really the beginning of anything. They said they were not a new and novel movement.

And you may have noticed that I use the word recover or recovery when I talk about adopting believer's baptism or baptism by immersion. These were practices of the first century apostolic church.

[ 9:40 ] These were practices and teachings that the First Baptists didn't need to learn from the Anabaptists or any other group for that matter. And we saw this with Smith.

We saw this with Blunt. We saw this with Spilsbury and others. Where did these men get these ideas? They saw them in Scripture. As they studied the Bible, they said, wait a minute.

Our current church practices don't align with what Scripture reveals. And since Scripture is our authority, not human traditions, we have to change our traditions.

We have to bring our traditions into submission to the Word of God. As radical as it may seem to the world around us, that's what we must do. So the Baptists really weren't the beginning of anything.

They were not creating something new. They were merely recovering and restoring biblical practices that had been lost over the years. As I said, they were picking up where the Reformation had left off.

[ 10:44 ] The Anglican Church of England broke away from the Catholic Church. The Puritans, they pushed the reforms a bit further. The Separatists wanted to go a bit further than the Puritans.

And here come the Baptists. They push even further in a couple of areas. And all of it was an attempt to restore biblical teachings that had been lost through the doctrines of men and human traditions.

Now, as we pick up the Baptist story in 1640, we are moving beyond the beginning to what I'll call an era of maturation and refinement for the Baptists.

For the next 50 years or so, the Baptists would grow both in numbers and, more importantly, in maturity, you might say. Mostly under the crucible of persecution.

They would essentially be forced to define themselves, to establish who they are, what they believe, and learn to articulate it to a world that holds many misconceptions and many misunderstandings about them.

[ 11:55 ] And as we continue, I want you to consider a couple of passages from the Bible. It's amazing to me, as we look back through church history, to see how much good God brings out of the trials of His people.

This is very counterintuitive, but it's not in times of prosperity that we really see the church growing and maturing nearly as much as when we see the church suffering.

And the Baptists are about to enter into a terrible stretch of suffering. But here's what we read in 1 Peter 1. Peter writes, In this, that is, your salvation, you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Then in James 1, we read, Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Actually, let me read one more. This is from Romans 5.

[13:28] Through Him, Jesus Christ, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

So those are just a few places in the Bible where we are taught that suffering can have a positive effect for believers. Again, this is very counterintuitive, but it's true nonetheless, and history bears that out very frequently.

It's pretty interesting. I don't know whether we'll get this far today, but when the Baptists were persecuted throughout the 17th century, they produced some of the greatest defenses of the doctrines of grace, of believers' baptism, of liberty of conscience, and so on.

They produced what I consider to be the greatest creed or confession in church history. Men like John Bunyan wrote some incredibly influential works, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, The Pilgrim's Progress, and so on, and he's writing from prison cells.

But once the persecution comes to a halt in 1689, what happens? Well, on the general Baptist side, we start to see these groups wandering off into very anti-Trinitarian ideas.

[15:02] And the particular Baptists, well, they start fighting over whether we should sing hymns in the church, you know. Now, I'm not suggesting we should want to be persecuted, but this is a relatively common theme throughout church history.

When the church suffers, it tends to get stronger. It grows. Believers are refined through the trials, and when the church experiences peace and prosperity, often you see the people, you might say, lose sight of the most important things.

I mean, no one's really debating whether it's proper to sing hymns in the church when the government is throwing believers into prison, you know what I mean? Of course, a debate like that has its place, but I hope you see what I mean.

Through persecution, we see the Baptists grow and mature just as the Bible suggests would happen. So, for example, when the Baptists started baptizing by immersion, they were heavily, and I would say unfairly, criticized.

Even Richard Baxter, the great Puritan minister, accused the practice of being socially indecent and spiritually reckless. Daniel Featley wrote something he titled The Dippers Dipped, wherein he claimed the Baptists would strip stark naked both men and women together.

[16:32] I don't believe that happened, but that's what he said. he said the practice was unseemly and not to be named amongst Christians. So, the Baptists, in turn, had to be careful, and they added a little footnote in the first London Confession to address this.

They said, the word baptized means to immerse, but this is to be done with appropriate clothing worn by both the one administering the baptism and the person being baptized and always with proper modesty.

So, you see, because of the criticism that's leveled against them, they're forced to very carefully articulate how baptism should be done with proper modesty, and because they had been forced to articulate this point, future Baptists would then be encouraged to follow that rule.

So, the criticism led to further refinement, if you will, of the Baptists for the good of the church. Now, of course, that's a very small example, but that's what persecution against the Baptists accomplished.

They were forced to defend themselves, which meant they really had to study the Bible, they had to learn how to articulate their positions very well. In fact, I read one story of the particular Baptist pastor, Benjamin Keech.

[17:54] He becomes pretty significant throughout the Baptist story, but he's on a boat traveling to a formal debate that he'll have with another minister who opposes believers' baptism.

So, he has to defend believers' baptism. And on the boat ride, he runs into this man. But this man doesn't realize Keech is the one that he'll be debating. So, he starts talking about how he's on his way to debate this ignorant Baptist.

Well, Keech asks him, what are your arguments against this man? And so, this man tells him. So, Keech asks, what do you think this man's arguments will be against you?

And he tells him. And then Keech says, well, if I were that man, here's what I would say. And he lays out his biblical case for believer's baptism. And when they finally arrive and they get off the boat, Keech heads to the venue where the debate will be held.

The other man takes off in another direction and never shows up for the debate. Now, that anecdote doesn't really prove anything. It doesn't prove that Keech was right necessarily, but it is an example of how sharp the Baptists were forced to become because practically everyone was against them, especially on certain issues.

[19:15] If iron sharpens iron, the Baptists had plenty of reason, plenty of opportunities to grow sharper. So, in the early 1640s, there were just a handful of general Baptist churches and there were a handful of particular Baptist churches, but the political climate in England actually allowed for a relative measure of freedom.

You see, throughout the 1640s, England was engulfed in a civil war. It was basically a conflict between King Charles I, who supported the state, sponsored Anglican church and members of parliament, who were mostly Puritans.

Of course, the Puritans wanted to further reform the church, so they opposed King Charles, and that's what led to the conflict. Now, the way England's government was supposed to work was that the king or the monarch would govern while parliament consented.

In other words, any law that was passed was supposed to go through both before it could be enacted. However, and to no one's surprise, kings generally felt that they should have absolute power, and they essentially did.

There was no constitution. There was no formal system in place to restrain the monarch, so he usually got what he wanted. In fact, he could dissolve the parliament if he wanted. They just didn't have the checks and balances like we have here in the United States.

[20:48] So as King Charles and parliament are at war with one another, no one's really paying attention to these small dissenting groups like the Baptists.

They're just running around kind of doing their own thing, and nobody's paying much attention to them. And so this created a measure of freedom. They weren't free. Their congregations were still illegal, but everyone's too distracted to bother them, right?

So you have guys like Hansard Nullis running around the country on missionary tours, and he's establishing new churches, and you have the first seven particular Baptist churches coming together to draft the first London Baptist Confession of Faith.

Now, you'll often see two dates attached to the first London Confession. You'll see either 1644 or 1646, and sometimes both, and that's because they completed the first draft in 1644.

they made a few revisions, and then they republished it in 1946. And the purpose of this confession was for a few reasons. Namely, they wanted to solidify and articulate their identity as Baptists.

[ 21:59 ] That was the primary goal. They wanted to be clear to the watching world who they were and what they believed. And they also wanted to show their solidarity with other Orthodox evangelical churches.

They wanted to be clear that they were not a radical fringe group like the Anabaptists. In fact, they wanted to be clear that they were not only Orthodox, like their Puritan and Separatist brothers, but they were even thoroughly Calvinists in their soteriology, in their understanding of salvation.

Yes, they had distinctives, but they had far more in common than differences. Now, that's not to say they were trying to capitulate or minimize their differences.

The Baptists were very clear and very bold during this time about those differences. In fact, they may have been a little too bold at times.

This past week, I was reading from John Spillsbury, who was the pastor of the first particular Baptist church, and his rhetoric is quite strong at times. When he argues against infant baptism, he says, Protestants, therefore, that retain infant baptism keep themselves in the company of Antichrist.

[ 23:17 ] He goes on to say that they have a choice to make. There's only two roads they can go down. They should either return to Rome or go forward to the true constitution of the church.

When he argues against Arminianism, he calls it a doctrine from beneath. And he says the teachers of Arminianism are from Satan and not from God.

And we saw similar language from some of the early general Baptists. Frankly, if you read enough from this time period, you'll see that people from really every group wrote like this, which is not to say that it was always right or appropriate in its tone, in its verbiage.

We as Christians, we have to learn how to balance two equally important principles in Scripture. On the one hand, the Bible warns against destructive speech, right?

Speak the truth in love, Paul says. He also says our speech should be always gracious, seasoned with salt. So, if these Baptists in the 17th century erred, it was probably in speaking too brashly at times, without graciousness.

[ 24:33 ] But, we don't want to swing the pendulum too far in the other direction, as we see Baptist groups later on tend to do, because the Bible also tells us to speak the truth clearly and firmly.

In Galatians 1, Paul pronounces a curse on anyone who distorts the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jude says, contend for or fight for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

So, we need the appropriate balance. Well, as the Baptists, especially the particular Baptists, were getting their feet firmly planted throughout the 1640s, the English Civil War finally came to an end in 1649.

Parliament won, King Charles was beheaded, and the Commonwealth of England was declared. And this would open up a season of unprecedented growth for the Baptists.

Essentially, there would be no monarch for a while, and the man in charge, Oliver Cromwell, who held Puritan convictions, wanted to move the nation into a kind of a Republican-style government.

[ 25 : 50 ] So, he wasn't a separatist, he wasn't, certainly wasn't a Baptist, but he did want to move the nation toward religious freedom. In fact, some of his close friends were Baptists, such as Roger Williams.

So, in 1644, there were only seven particular Baptist churches, only seven, and a handful of general Baptist churches. But by 1660, there were roughly 130 particular Baptist churches and 115 general Baptist churches.

I mean, Baptist churches exploded during this time, and they were multiplying everywhere. And more than that, they began to organize, and they formed associations for mutual help in ministry.

And these associations or networks, if you will, only helped them to grow, not to mention, bring them into greater unity with one another. Unfortunately, what does freedom do?

It also allows some fringe groups to pop up among the Baptists. Cromwell, you know, he's even appointing Baptists to his administration, so everyone felt a little emboldened throughout the 1650s.

[ 27 : 05 ] And we see groups like the Fifth Monarchists. They emerge from the general Baptists. In short, they believed they were responsible for preparing for Christ's return and rule on this earth, so they essentially, they wanted to take over the government and establish a theocracy, pave the way for Christ's return.

And then there were other groups like the Seekers, who really didn't believe any church could be a true church anymore because they had, they didn't have unbroken succession from the time of the apostles, so they were waiting for or seeking the Lord to return and or somehow reestablish apostolic gifts so that the true church could be reestablished.

In fact, Roger Williams, who planted the first Baptist church in America, left that church after only a few months because he became a seeker. He suddenly said, hey, I can't be a part of this church.

I can't be a part of any church because we don't have a true church anymore. So let's just sit back and wait for the Lord to give us some new apostles. Again, that's what often happens when the church enjoys some freedom.

Persecution has its own obvious problems, right? But religious freedom is not without its issues as well. And this was a problem for Oliver Cromwell and his vision for England.

[ 28 : 34 ] If you completely disrupt the state sponsored church in this parish model that had existed for so long and in some sense had held society together, how do you make it work?

Of course, his critics said it doesn't work. You need the stability of a unified church and religion. You just let everybody do whatever they want. Well, that's chaos.

Well, by 1660, the whole thing fell apart. Oliver Cromwell died. His son attempted to take his place for a little while, but he couldn't hold the whole thing together, in part because lots of different groups are now competing for one another.

They all want control, including some of those fringe Baptist groups. So King Charles II, son of the beheaded King Charles I, he returns from exile and he restores the monarchy.

And he, along with those members of parliament who were loyal to the crown, they quickly began rebuilding the Church of England as the exclusive state church.

[ 29 : 42 ] So all of the non-conformists, such as the Baptist, were suddenly public enemies again. And Charles began passing law after law that would punish anyone who did not fall in line with the Church of England.

And that's why the 1660s in England became known as the Great Persecution. By the way, groups like the Fifth Monarchists, they really did not do the Baptist any favors at all, or any non-conformist group for that matter.

As much time and effort as the particular Baptist had spent trying to distance themselves from the radical Anabaptist reputation, their opponents now had even more ammunition against them.

Look at these Baptists. They opposed the king. They want to take over the government. It didn't matter that the Fifth Monarchists were a very small minority.

I mean, and it only got much worse when they actually attempted to overthrow the government. In January 1661, all Baptists at this point are now considered enemies of the state.

[ 30 : 50 ] They're troublemakers. They're no good. So within months, Parliament began passing a series of laws known as the Clarendon Code. First, non-conformists were barred from holding public office.

Next, 2,000 Puritan ministers were ejected from the Church of England. Then it became illegal for five or more people to gather for worship apart from the Church of England.

And finally, non-conformist pastors were barred from coming within five miles of any town or church where they had previously preached.

The idea here was to cut off the shepherds from the sheep so that the sheep would then scatter and basically you'd bring an end to these non-sanctioned churches.

So the Baptists now had a really tough choice to make. They could either stop meeting, they could stop preaching, or they would run the risk of being imprisoned.

[ 31 : 56 ] Most of them chose the latter. This is when John Bunyan, for instance, was imprisoned for 12 years.

Others, such as William Kiffin, Hansard Nullis, these guys managed to avoid prison, but it was primarily because they had money and they had powerful friends.

But even they had to meet in secret and sometimes stop meeting for a while, sometimes months, sometimes years, to avoid detection. During this time, churches would usually post lookouts outside of their meeting houses or homes or barns or wherever they happened to meet so that the congregation could be warned if the authorities were coming.

They could scatter, they could get out of there. In 1664, Benjamin Keech, who I've mentioned, he was only 24 years old, but he was arrested for publishing a children's book that taught young people Baptist doctrines.

And he was made to pay a really hefty fine. He was in prison for two weeks, and then he was forced to stand on the public pillory for two days straight. So this was a platform, very visible to everyone who walked by.

[ 33 : 12 ] So you can just imagine him standing there. There was a post in front of him with a stock, and his hands and head would be through it, and people would come by, throw tomatoes, ridicule him.

You know, whoever was up there certainly deserved it, right? So that was the idea, just public humiliation. So what did Keech do with his time in the stocks? He preached.

People kept coming by to gawk at the prisoner who was supposed to feel shame in that position, but Keech used the opportunity to preach to anyone who showed up.

When the sheriff tried to warn him to stop, he just kept right on going. He figured, what more can you do to me? And when an Anglican minister came along and began to heckle him, the crowd, who was supposed to be heckling him as well and throwing tomatoes and whatever else, they turned to the Anglican minister, and they said, why don't you go home and examine yourself before you come here and ridicule this man?

They actually listened to Keech preach. And there's a lot of stories just like that from this time period. It is always incredible to see how God strengthens his people through trials like this.

[ 34 : 31 ] Frankly, if you understand what the Bible teaches on the matter and you see this throughout church history, you realize trials are not the worst thing that could happen to us. Well, in 1672, King Charles did something rather surprising.

He issued a Declaration of Indulgence, which essentially suspended all of those laws against the Baptist and other nonconformists. And I'll be honest with you, I'm not entirely sure why.

I don't know that anyone is entirely sure. Some think it was done out of spite because Parliament had grown antagonistic toward him. Some think he was secretly a Catholic sympathizer.

But whatever the reason, suddenly Baptists were free again. Sort of. The only stipulation was that every pastor had to obtain a license to preach, and every congregation had to officially register its church.

Would you like to guess where this leads? Well, one year later, when that declaration was suddenly withdrawn, and it once again became illegal to be a Baptist, the government now had a list of ministers and churches to go after.

[ 35 : 55 ] John Bunyan was one of them. Not everyone had registered. Some were wise enough to think, I don't think this is a good idea. But John Bunyan did, and he did so because he wanted to get out of prison after 12 years.

So he registered, and as soon as the Declaration of Indulgence was withdrawn, he was arrested and put back in prison. And through the remainder of Charles' reign until 1685, there was just a lot of this back and forth between persecution and partial relief.

But remarkably, the Baptists had the foresight to realize that freedom could very well come any day now. They didn't necessarily think this was permanent.

And it was during this time that the particular Baptists came together. This included men such as William Collins, Nehemiah Cox, William Kiffin, Hansard Nullis, some of these names you've probably read before.

And they draw up the Second London Baptist Confession. This was in 1677, which might surprise some people because this confession is typically referred to as the 1689 Baptist Confession.

[ 37 : 13 ] But the hostility is still ongoing in 1677, so they didn't publish it just yet. They were just making preparation. And I don't know whether you caught this, but William Kiffin, he played a role in both the First and Second London Confessions.

He was the only man to sign both of these. And it's very interesting to read his story because his story really spans the entire period of the particular Baptist from the beginning through the publication of the Second London Confession.

In fact, he served as pastor of one church from 1642 until his death in 1701. And I'd love to share more of his story. It's quite insightful, but we'll keep moving on.

Well, the particular Baptist, as you probably know, used the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of 1646 and the Congregationalist Savoy Declaration of 1658, which itself was based on the Westminster, to develop this Baptist Confession, this Second London Confession.

They modified these other confessions only as much as necessary to express their Baptist distinctions and maybe refute a few of these sort of fringe doctrines that have crept up.

[ 38 : 36 ] And a large part of their decision to use these confessions was to express their unity with these other Reformed Orthodox groups.

You know, think about it this way. They're all in this trial together. They're all being persecuted to some degree. Some more than others, but they're all being persecuted and they wanted to show their unity.

They also correctly realized how well-written and theologically precise these confessions were. Why reinvent the wheel when they had already been so masterfully articulated before with all of these fundamental doctrines?

And I think a strong argument could be made that the Baptist would not have given us the Second London Confession if not for the persecution against them.

again, a large part of their motivation was to show their solidarity with other nonconformist groups, namely the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists.

[ 39 : 43 ] I mean, we can only speculate, but I do wonder what would have happened if the, let's say, the relative freedom of the 1640s had continued. would the Baptist have continued to refine and learn how to defend and learn how to articulate their positions without the persecution, without the criticism against them?

only God knows, but I have thought about that. Well, jumping ahead just a few years after some political turmoil with James II and William of Orange and the glorious Revolution of 1688, a parliament passed the Act of Toleration in 1689.

Now, this didn't grant full religious freedom to everyone, but if you were a Trinitarian Protestant, you now had the right to worship freely. And that's when the particular Baptists convened a general assembly in London with delegates from over 100 churches, which is amazing because throughout that persecution, they really didn't lose that many congregations.

And they formally adopted the second London confession of faith. Obviously, they were ready for this moment. They had prepared for it. Despite all the persecution, not being able to really see a light at the end of the tunnel, though they hoped for one, they had prepared for it.

And they immediately jumped into action as soon as the opportunity presented itself. And I don't think that I have to tell anyone how influential this confession would become.

[ 41 : 26 ] 53 years later, the first Baptist association in America would formally adopt it. more than 300 years later, this is our confession as a church.

And the Lord provided this momentous, incredibly helpful confession through a very imperfect people whom He helped to remain faithful through decades of hardship.

Praise God for that. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank You for the testimony of those who have gone before us for their courage, their conviction, despite any imperfections.

And we praise You that the same Lord who sustained them is the one who shepherds us today. Keep our church faithful in our own generation.

Give us humility under Your Word. give us love for one another, steadfastness in the truth. Would You grant us Your blessing, Lord? Let the light of Your face shine upon us and guard our steps and use us for Your glory.

[ 42 : 40 ] And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.