

Concise church biographies

Ezekiel Rogers

Ezekiel was the son of Richard Rogers of Wethersfield, a cousin of John Rogers - a famous preacher in Dedham, Essex. He was educated at Cambridge from the age of 13, graduating at 19. He then acted as chaplain to a noble's family. He was soon noted for his preaching and public prayer.

He began his ministry at Rowley in Yorkshire in 1616 aged 26. The town was full of superstition and was ignorant of God. Rogers urged contrition for sin and heart conversion but soon realised that he had not been soundly converted himself. As his anxiety deepened, he decided to travel 200 miles to his cousin described as '*one of the most awakening preachers of the age*'. He travelled on horseback over dangerous roads to resolve his spiritual crisis. He arrived as John was preaching. As he listened, the Holy Spirit applied the words and Ezekiel was saved.

Returning to Rowley, he now preached with power and many were converted. News of the awakening spread and people streamed to the village to hear the Gospel. This continued for 20 years. The sympathetic Archbishop of York allowed him to preach in different parts of the county every month. This brought the Gospel to isolated rural areas but also stirred up opposition. Soon, the influence of evil Archbishop Laud led to victimisation of those refusing to follow his new prayer book. In 1636 Rogers was ordered to conform or lose his living. Rogers left the ministry. Unable to preach, he decided to emigrate to New England to find freedom of worship. Hearing this, the entire village decided to follow him rather than lose sound teaching! So in 1638 they made their way to Hull and boarded a ship bound for Massachusetts bay.

The three-month voyage was dangerous and the conditions cramped. Upon arrival, they travelled north and were given land to form a settlement, which they called Rowley. They encountered all sorts of problems - hardships, disease, Indian attacks, failed crops etc. Throughout it all, Rogers served his people and encouraged them on. God honoured his sound ministry and soon many flocked to hear him preach. His words were so perceptive that people thought that informers had told him their secret sins and inner thoughts.

Rogers was frequently ill and preaching often exhausted him. He learned medicine because he did not trust doctors and was able to give good medical advice to his people. Due to his reputation as a peacemaker, he was often sought to reconcile differences in New England. Rogers continued to minister for another 22 years, but life was very hard for him. First his faithful wife, Joan, died, followed by all his children. Feeling lonely, he remarried, but his new wife also died shortly afterwards as well as his newborn child. Marrying a third time, the night after the wedding his house caught fire totally destroying all his furniture, clothes and books brought from England. To top it all, he fell from a horse dislocating his right arm, paralysing it. From then on he had to write with his left hand. In all this he knew the consolation of God and could even be cheerful. Asthmatic and approaching 70, he wrote to a friend:

I am hastening home, and grow very asthmatical and short-breathed. O, good brother, I thank God I am near home, and you too are not far. O the weight of glory that is ready waiting for us, God's poor exiles! We will sit next to the martyrs and confessors. O, the embraces wherewith Christ will embrace us! Cheer up your spirits in the thoughts thereof, and let us be zealous for our God and for Christ and make a conclusion. Now the Lord bring us well through our poor pilgrimage.

He died in 1660 at the age of 70.