

SAMUEL HOPKINS

A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Americans Showing it to be the Duty and Interest of the American States to Emancipate all their Slaves.

— Book by Samuel Hopkins-1776

Theologian Samuel Hopkins' life was mired in tragedy and hardship, but his dedication to God and his philosophical beliefs launched him into prominence among religious leaders during America's Revolutionary War era.

Born in Waterbury on September 21, 1721, he graduated from Yale and received licensure as a Congregational minister. Hopkins' early practical training in religious philosophy was guided by his mentor, Jonathan Edwards. This lasted until Hopkins assumed the pastoral care of Congregationalists in Great Barrington, Mass., where his civic responsibilities included scouting for Indians. His continued contact with Edwards in the years following honed his philosophical talents.

His career took him to Newport, RI, where he augmented his pastoral duties by writing sermons and pamphlets that pricked the conscience of the American public. He remained there from 1770 until his death on December 20, 1803.

His early condemnation of slavery and his personal crusade to buy the freedom of Newport slaves was in direct opposition to the slaveholding nature of his congregation. These indefatigable efforts led to New England's early move toward freeing the slaves and earned him the "Father of Abolition" moniker.

Despite his heroic endeavors on behalf of slavery, Hopkins is best known for his clear understanding of the principles of the New Divinity espoused by Edwards. His method for teaching this philosophy led to the term "Hopkinsianism."

His was a belief that a sovereign God acts according to His own glory and that everyone should gladly take a place in the divine plan. He received offers of more lucrative positions, but Hopkins remained with his congregation throughout his career despite the financial impoverishment he suffered in Newport, the burden of raising his children and siblings, and the unexpected insanity of his wife. He served in an unstinting manner to try to create a society harmonious with God's divine will.

Hopkins is a main character and the examination of his system of philosophic theology is the central theme in the Harriet Beecher Stowe novel, *The Minister's Wooing*.

