

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## 10 Things You Should Know about James Arminius and Arminianism

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Today we turn our attention to James Arminius and a few brief observations about the theological system that bears his name.

(1) Jacob Harmenszoon, better known to history as James Arminius, was born in Holland in 1559. His father died within a year of his birth and his mother, his brothers and sisters, and virtually all his relatives, were massacred in a raid on his home town of Oudewater in 1575. Arminius enrolled as a student of liberal arts at the University of Leyden in 1576 and concluded his studies in 1581. He went to study in John Calvin's Geneva and enrolled at the Academy on January 1, 1582 (Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor and Arminius's primary instructor, was now 62). In 1583 he went to Basel, but returned to Geneva in 1584 and remained there until 1586.

(2) Arminius became pastor of a church in Amsterdam in 1587 and remained such until 1603. In 1588 he began preaching through Malachi and Romans. In 1591, when Arminius reached Romans 7, controversy erupted. During this period Arminius defended his view of Romans 7, contending that Paul spoke there as an unregenerate man. He believed that otherwise Christians would be encouraged to sin and would lack an incentive to holiness. When Arminius reached Romans 9 the controversy broke out in full force. He interpreted Jacob and Esau as types of classes of people, the former of those who seek righteousness by faith and the latter of those who seek it by works. Individual salvation through divine election is not in view.

(3) During the years 1598-1602 Arminius engaged in controversy with the English Puritan theologian, William Perkins (1558-1602), publishing a response to Perkins' treatise on predestination. He also taught at the University of Leyden for six years (1603-1609), during which he waged theological war with Francis Gomarus (1563-1641).

(4) Arminius argued for the notion of preventing, exciting, or prevenient grace, by which is meant a work of the Holy Spirit in all men (and not just the elect) by which faith is made possible (but not necessary). Thus the question becomes, "Is grace irresistible?" Arminius says no.

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(5) Arminius did not, as some contend, embrace the Pelagian doctrine of perfection from sin in this life. However, he never wholly repudiated the possibility either: “But while I never asserted that a believer could perfectly keep the precepts of Christ in this life, I never denied it, but always left it as a matter which has still to be decided” (I:256).

(6) As for the assurance of salvation, he affirmed that one may have *present assurance of present salvation* (I:255, 384-85). However, *he denied that one can have present assurance of final salvation*. If there is no present assurance of final salvation, it is because there is the possibility of falling from grace. In his work against Perkins he seems to say a believer could fall, but later spoke with more reserve. He argues that a person remains a living member of Christ unless he grows slothful and gives place to sin and little by little becomes half-dead. This, if not checked, results in spiritual death in which the individual ceases to be a member of Christ (III:282-525).

Yet in his Declaration of Sentiments he says that he never taught “that a true believer can either totally or finally fall away from the faith, and perish” (I:254). He tries to evade the issue by distinguishing between the elect and believers. One may be among the latter but not the former, since the elect always persevere.

(7) Arminius’s doctrine of divine election is somewhat complex. He divides the elective decree of God into four categories or kinds. There is first the election of Christ, in the sense that he is appointed to be the Savior of sinners. Second, there is the decree to save those who repent and believe and to leave the unrepentant and unbelieving in their sin. The third decree is that by which God determines to provide the sufficient means through which all are enabled to believe, if they will. The fourth decree is the most crucial one:

*“To these succeeds the fourth decree, by which God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who would, through his preventing [i.e., prevenient] grace, believe, and, through his subsequent grace would persevere, according to the before described administration of those means which are suitable and proper for conversion and faith; and, by which foreknowledge he likewise knew those who would not believe and persevere” (I:248).*

Therefore, according to Arminius, election is *conditional*, being based on God's foresight of faith, a faith which all are enabled to exercise through the bestowal of prevenient grace.

(8) On January 14, 1610 (Arminius died in 1609), more than forty of Arminius’s followers met in the city of Gouda under the leadership of Uytenbogaert. They subscribed to the

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Remonstrance, a petition to be sent to the political authorities setting forth their case. Aside from various political issues, the document articulated five points of theological conviction. In response to the declarations of the Arminians a group of Reformed men issued the Counter-Remonstrance in 1611, a point-by-point refutation of the Remonstrance of 1610 (actually, there were seven doctrinal points in the Counter-Remonstrance).

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(9) In the years that followed, there was a great deal of political activity. At one point the Arminians held power, but under the leadership of Maurice (son of William of Orange), the Calvinists gained the upper hand. They finally called a national synod which convened on November 13, 1618, and lasted until May 9, 1619. For each of the five points of the Remonstrance the Calvinists affirmed five counter points. They comprise what we now know as the Canons of Dort which, along with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, became the basis for Dutch Calvinism.

(10) The Arminians were banished and persecuted until about 1625. They continued to have a major influence under the leadership of such men as Episcopius, Limborch, and Hugo Grotius (articulate advocate of the Governmental theory of the atonement). The theological assertions of Arminius and the Remonstrance have been adopted in part or in whole by such as John and Charles Wesley (and Methodism in general), Charles Finney, classical Pentecostal denominations (such as the Assemblies of God), the Nazarenes, and Free-Will Baptists among others.

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