

1st Great Awakening

Many of the early puritans and pilgrims arrived in America with a fervent faith and vision for establishing a godly nation. Within a century the ardor had cooled. The children of the original immigrants were more concerned with increasing wealth and comfortable living than furthering the Kingdom of God. The same spiritual malaise could be found throughout the American colonies. The philosophical rationalism of the Enlightenment was spreading its influence among the educated classes; others were preoccupied with the things of this world.

When Theodore Frelinghuysen, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, came to begin his pastoral world in New Jersey during the 1720's, he was shocked by the deadness of the churches in America. He preached the need for conversion, a profound, life-changing commitment to Christ, not simply perfunctory participation in religious duties. Presbyterian Gilbert Tennent was heavily influenced by Frelinghuysen and brought revival to his denomination. Tennent believed the deadness of the churches was in part due to so many pastors never having been converted themselves. His book *On the Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry* caused quite a stir!

Looking for special seasons

In 1727, about the time that Frelinghuysen and Tennent were seeing revival in New Jersey, Jonathan Edwards went to Northampton, Massachusetts to become assistant minister to his grandfather Solomon Stoddard. Stoddard had ministered at Northampton almost sixty years and during that time had seen five periods of revivals or "harvests," as he called them. Stoddard recognized that a church goes through periods of spiritual refreshing and depression: There are some special Seasons wherein God doth in a remarkable Manner revive Religion among his People. God doth not always carry on his work in the church in the same proportion...there be times wherein there is a plentiful Effusion of the Spirit of God, and Religion is in a more flourishing Condition.

Enter Jonathan Edwards

In the 1730's, when Jonathan Edwards became minister at Northampton, he found only spiritual deadness in the church. He was concerned about the immorality of the young people and began visiting them in their homes. In 1734 he preached a series of sermons on justification by faith alone. "By December," wrote Edwards, "the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in. Revival grew, and souls did as it were come by floods to Christ." Over a six month period, Edwards recorded three hundred conversions. He wrote a book, *Narratives of Surprising Conversions*, describing the revival and its effects on the life of the town.

By their fruits

In his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Edwards emphasized that true religion must affect the heart. In *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Edwards taught from I John 4 what the evidences of a true revival and work of the Spirit would be. The individual would be confirmed in the truth of the gospel, that Jesus was the Son of God and the Savior of people (vs. 2-3). The convert would avoid sin and

worldly lust (vs. 4-5). He would have a greater regard for the Holy Scriptures, accepting their truth and divine origins (v. 6). Finally, his life would evidence a love to God and his fellow man (vs. 6ff.) Edwards' printed works describing and analyzing the revival in Northampton were read throughout the American colonies and Britain. They stimulated ministers on both sides of the Atlantic to begin praying and looking for revival.

The people came *en mass*

George Whitefield, an Anglican evangelist and friend of John and Charles Wesley, not only traveled throughout Britain bringing the gospel of Christ, but he also made seven trips to America between 1738 and 1770. He was probably the most well-traveled man in the colonies and drew large crowds wherever he spoke. Widespread revival was most clearly seen during his second journey (1739-1741). As he toured the colonies, he would daily preach to large crowds in the open air; the crowds were too large for the churches.

Ben on George

Benjamin Franklin was fascinated with Whitefield's speaking ability and the effects his teaching had on the people. Though Franklin never openly became a Christian himself, he did become a friend of Whitefield's and his publisher in America. He was impressed with the change Whitefield's gospel preaching brought on society. Franklin wrote that it was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.

America reinvigorated

The Great Awakening in America in the 1730's and 1740's had tremendous results. The number of people in the church multiplied, and the lives of the converted manifested a true Christian piety. Denominational barriers broke down as [Christians](#) of all persuasions worked together in the cause of the gospel. There was a renewed concern with missions, and work among the Indians increased. As more young men prepared for service as Christian ministers, a concern for higher education grew. Princeton, Rutgers, Brown, and Dartmouth universities were all established as a direct result of the Great Awakening. Some have even seen a connection between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution --Christians enjoying spiritual liberty in Christ would come to crave political liberty. The Great Awakening not only revived the American church, but reinvigorated American society as well.