

## Essential Church History

# 8

## Waves of Awakenings

As the seventeenth century opens, we enter what may be called the modern era of Church history. During this era, world culture changed dramatically. Western nations left behind the last vestiges of feudalism and embraced nationalism, capitalism and colonialism. The foundations of twenty-first century science and technology were also laid in this period, sometimes called “The Age of Reason.”

### The Age of Reason (1648-1789)

The Reformation of the sixteenth century had been a time of great turmoil, with many losing their lives for their faith. The first half of the seventeenth century erupted in a prolonged feud between the Catholics and Protestants in Europe, culminating in the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648). Wearing by these conflicts, men settled into a religious status quo in the eighteenth century, but this quickly bred stagnation in the Church. Into the spiritual vacuum of this time came “The Enlightenment.”

#### *The Enlightenment*

The Age of Reason is also known as “The Enlightenment” – an intellectual revolution which denied the supernatural and proclaimed reason as the sole rule of wisdom. Renwick and Harman describe the thinking of “The Enlightenment”:

“Men like Lord Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Kepler, Galileo, and Isaac Newton, based their scientific conclusions on reason and the inductive method. Observation and experiment suggested that the universe was ruled by natural law. The belief then became common that this law was immutable. Hence, God began to be regarded by some thinkers as an absentee deity who had set the

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universe in motion and then had left it to itself under inflexible natural laws. Thus there was no place for the supernatural in this world. The incarnation, miracles, prophecy and the divine inspiration of the Scriptures were ruled out as being doctrines no longer worthy of belief.”<sup>1</sup>

Bruce Shelley defines the Enlightenment in this way:

“Respect for science and human reason replaced the Christian faith as the cornerstone of Western culture... [It was] a whole new way of looking at God, the world, and one’s self. It was the birth of secularism...the Age of Reason sprang from the soil of a new faith in law and order. Modern science arose in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and filled men with visions of a new day of peace and harmony.”<sup>2</sup>

The atheistic French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778) is often called “father of the Enlightenment.” Marquis de Condorcet, one of Voltaire’s circle, wrote:

“We have witnessed the development of a new doctrine which is to deliver the final blow to the already tottering structure of prejudice. It is the idea of the limitless perfectibility of the human species...”<sup>3</sup>

This was the foundation of Secular Humanism, a philosophy we will see raise its head strongly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## ***Deism***

The “religion” of the Age of Reason was Deism. In this new form of thinking, God (if there was a God) had created the world, but that was it. He had no contact or involvement with it now. He was silent in human affairs, and it was now up to mankind to better itself in any way that it could.

The Church fell under the spell of this philosophy and spiritual decay began to set in. Faith was turned into a mental exercise, with just formal assent to doctrinal truths. But all this prepared the way for the next stage in God’s plan of restoration in his Church.

## **The Age of Awakenings**

In this climate of rationalism in the world, and deadening formality in the Church, a fresh wind of the Spirit was about to blow. In the same way that God challenged Judah through the prophet Isaiah to return to what she had been in days of old (**Isaiah 61:51:9,17; 52:1-2**), the call to “awake” now came to the Church:

“Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old...Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem...Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor...Shake off your dust, rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem...”

The Church was about to experience a wonderful awakening of truth and power. The Age of Reason was about to become the Age of Revival.

The first stirrings of revival began with individual hearts hungry for personal relationship with a living God. It is wonderful and most encouraging for us today to be able to look back in history. From our vantage point we can see the snowballing effects of individuals who sought after and found God and, as a result, whole nations were “turned upside down.”

## ***Pietism***

In 1666, Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705), accepted an invitation to ministry in the Lutheran city of Frankfurt. He was shocked by the conditions of the city and began to call for repentance, preaching the importance of a personal experience and relationship with God, rather than just the emphasis of correct doctrine. There was no apparent effect until one day, three years later, while preaching on the Sermon on the Mount, people suddenly responded, resulting in a flood of conversions.

Spener began to hold meetings in his house twice a week. People gathered for prayer, Bible study, and to share their personal experience in Christ. These meetings quickly multiplied and were scornfully called “gatherings of the pious” by outsiders. Thus “Pietism” was born.

In 1675, in his desire to remedy the spiritual decay within the Church, Spener published the sermons of Johann Arndt, calling it *Pious Desires*. He wrote the introduction to this book and encouraged Bible study groups to develop, based on its material. The influence of Pietism spread through the universities, especially the University of Halle when, in 1691, Spener moved to Berlin. Under August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), a professor at Halle, who rose to leadership in the Pietist movement, the university became the hub of Pietist activities and ministries. The first missionaries of one of the earliest Protestant missions to India came from the Halle Pietists.

Bruce Shelley describes the aims of Pietism and its importance in history:

“The aims of the Pietists were twofold: First, they stressed the importance of personal faith. They left behind all dreams of Catholic Christendom and Puritan commonwealths. They believed that Christianity started with the individual...The essence of faith, said the Pietist, is a personal experience of God’s grace in the believer’s heart.

“Second, the Pietists wanted to shift the center of the Christian life from the state churches, in which a person was born and brought up, to intimate fellowships of those who had a living faith in God. Revitalized laymen from these centers were expected to spread the Word of God through all classes of men...”<sup>4</sup>

Pietism became the fountainhead of all modern revivals and made a deep impact upon the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. “It set the experience of new life in Christ as the center of the Christian message and the Christian ministry. For this reason it is impossible to think of evangelical Christianity today without the imprint of Pietism.”<sup>5</sup>

## ***The Moravians***

Among those affected by the Pietists was Nikolas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf, the godson of Spener. Zinzendorf had a desire to see the message and experience of salvation by faith go out to the whole world. It was through him that Pietism made its impact on the Moravian community, which, in turn, would ultimately have dramatic effect upon the English-speaking world.

*The History of Christianity* describes the events as they began to unfold:

“The Moravians were the spiritual descendants of Jan Hus. Driven from their homeland during the Thirty Years’ War, they were scattered throughout Europe and lost many members. But a few remained, to hold services in secret and pray for the rebirth of their church of the United Brethren. In 1722 a little company of Moravians settled in Saxony, on Zinzendorf’s estate.

“The party was led by Christian David, a convert from Roman Catholicism, who is said to have ‘burned with zeal like an oven’...Melchior Schafer prophesied that ‘God will place a light on these hills which will illumine the whole land’...Since the plot of land lay on the *Hutberg* or Watch Hill, it was called Herrnhut (“The Lord’s Watch’). It became a haven for Protestant refugees from all parts of Germany as well as from Moravia and Bohemia...United Brethren, Lutherans, Reformed, Separatists, Anabaptists and Schwenkfelders were all represented.”<sup>6</sup>

With such an assortment of traditions coming together, division and arguments eventually broke out. They were led by a malicious fanatic named Kruger. In 1727, Schafer wrote: “It looks as if the devil will turn everything upside down.” A prayer meeting was called and the Spirit of God began to move in their midst, resulting in much repentance and forgiveness. Even children wept as they prayed. In May, an apostolic rule of forty-two statutes was drawn up and the whole community agreed to accept it. It was also agreed that Herrnhut would no longer be a mixture of many sectarian groups but a single living fellowship in Christ. *The History of Christianity* describes what happened next:

“At a communion service on 13 August the Holy Spirit himself made them one. According to Arvid Gradin, who was present, they ‘were so convinced and affected that their hearts were set on fire with new faith and love towards the Savior, and likewise with burning love towards one another; which moved them so far that of their own accord they embraced one another in tears, and grew together into a holy union among themselves, so raising again as it were out of its ashes that ancient Unity of Moravian Brethren.’ In this way the Moravians became ‘the vital leaven of European Protestantism’.”<sup>7</sup>

The term “leaven,” as applied to the Moravians, was a reference to Jesus’ words in **Matthew 13:33**. And indeed, the effect of the Moravians was like yeast kneaded into a batch of dough, slowly permeating the whole of the Protestant Church and impacting the spiritual climate of the centuries to come.

### ***An unsaved English missionary is reached***

The Moravians sent out their first missionaries in 1732. Within 60 years, over three hundred teams had been mobilized. It was on board *Simmonds*, a ship bound for the American colonies with the aim of ministering to the American Indians, that an unsaved Anglican missionary was to encounter one of these teams.

On January 18, 1736, the passengers were gathered on deck of the *Simmonds* for a Sunday evening service. A storm was raging and suddenly a wave broke over the deck. The main sail split in pieces and was scattered over the decks. The young English missionary describes what happened in his *Journals*: “A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sang on.” He asked one of them afterwards, “Were you not afraid?” The German replied, “I thank God no.” “But were not your women and children afraid?” “Our women and children are not afraid to die” was the answer.<sup>9</sup>

This so affected the Englishman that when they had landed in America he approached August Spangenberg, one of the Moravians, and asked him why they had not been frozen in fear as he was. He recalls Spangenberg’s reply in his *Journals*:

“He said ‘Do you know Jesus Christ?’ I paused, and said ‘I know He is the Savior of the world.’ ‘True,’ he replied, ‘but do you know He has saved *you*?’ I answered ‘I hope He has died to save me.’ He only added – ‘Do you know yourself?’ I said ‘I do.’ But I fear they were vain words.”<sup>10</sup>

The young missionary returned to England two years later, a failure and totally discouraged. During the homeward voyage, he wrote in his *Journals*:

“I went to America to convert the Indians; but oh, who shall convert me?”<sup>11</sup>

On arriving home, he sought out the Moravians and continued in much prayer and study of the Word. His searching came to its end on the 24th May, 1738, in a little Aldersgate prayer meeting. He records what happened as he was listening to Luther’s *Preface to Romans*:

“About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”<sup>12</sup>

That English missionary, who had been on board the ship bound for America and whose heart later was “strangely warmed” by the message of the Gospel, was to be the man who would lead a spiritual awakening that would soon to shake the whole of England. The man was John Wesley.

## **The Awakening in England**

What we now call the First Great Awakening began in England on New Year’s Day, 1739. John Wesley and his original band of Methodists were praying, calling on God for power to live lives of holiness and effective service. In his own words he describes what happened:

“Mr Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchins, and my brother Charles were present...with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, inasmuch that many cried out for exceeding joy and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty, we broke out with one voice, ‘We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.’”<sup>13</sup>

From that moment, what we now call “The Great Awakening” had begun – a revival that would sweep across England and America, sparking waves of evangelization throughout the English-speaking world. Benjamin Ingham was to become an outstanding evangelist among the Moravians and multitudes throughout Britain and America were going to be transformed through the ministries of the Wesleys and George Whitefield. And the “Wesleyan Revival” (as Methodism was then known) would later save England from a bloody revolution similar to the one that occurred in France at the end of the seventeenth century.

*The History of Christianity* describes the development of this revival:

“The eighteenth-century Revival in England was a work of the Holy Spirit. It is important to realize, too, that it developed through various channels. There was the Moravian mission led by men such as Ingham and Cennick. There was the Calvinistic mission, in which Whitefield was the key figure. There was the Wesleyan mission, which produced the societies which were eventually to evolve into the Methodist church.”<sup>14</sup>

But the effect of this great Awakening also was felt within the Church of England itself, and gave rise to a movement that is now known as Anglican Evangelicalism.

Let’s now take a moment to look at the ministries of two of the key figures in the First Great Awakening:

### ***John Wesley***

After the New Year’s Day meeting of 1739, John and his brother, Charles, set out to preach the message of the Gospel to the people of Britain. Where pulpits were open to him, he would preach in churches, but opposition soon grew, and so he went out to where the crowds could hear – to the marketplace and the common.\* He would rise daily at 4:00 am and would be preaching at 5:00 am so that working men could hear. Over the next fifty two years, he preached over 40,000 messages and travelled 250,000 miles, mostly on horseback. Renwick and Harman describe what happened during his ministry:

“Remarkable scenes were constantly witnessed as he preached the gospel. Hardened sinners could be seen at open-air meetings with tears of penitence rolling down their cheeks. The roughest in the land came humbly to the foot of the cross.”<sup>15</sup>

\* The “common” was an area of land available for public use, for example, as a public recreation area.

## ***George Whitefield***

Just one month after the Lord had visited them that New Year's Day in 1739, George Whitefield stood on a hill and began to speak to large groups of coal miners in the English countryside. He later said of them:

“Having no righteousness of their own to renounce they were glad to hear of Jesus who was a friend to publicans and came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of their being affected was the sight of the white gutters made by their tears which fell plentifully down their black cheeks as they came out of the coal-pits...”<sup>16</sup>

Whitefield describes with a sense of awe what he saw God doing:

“Sometimes when twenty thousand people were before me I had not in my own apprehension a word to say either to God or them. But I was never totally deserted... The open heavens above me, the prospect of the adjacent fields with the sight of thousands, some in coaches, some on horseback, and some in the trees and at all times affected and in tears was almost too much for me, and quite overcame me.”<sup>17</sup>

Whitefield, who had once planned to be an actor, was ordained as an Anglican clergyman. He was not, however, satisfied with preaching in the pulpits of churches. His heart yearned to reach the masses of people. Thus, February 1739 found him preaching to the coal miners – men who seldom entered a church – in the open fields near Bristol. From 1739 until his death in 1770, thousands flocked to hear Whitefield – the man with the golden voice who spoke with an authority from heaven – up to 30,000 at one time.

It was Whitefield who persuaded John Wesley to go out into the open fields. Wesley was reluctant at first, considering it improper. He was an Oxford scholar and a gentleman. But when he preached, at Whitefield's invitation, to over 3,000 in the open air in Bristol and saw people on every hand repenting and receiving the salvation of the Lord, he was launched into his true mission in life.

## **The Awakening in Wales**

Griffith Jones has been called “the morning star of the Methodist Revival.” He had been preaching the evangelical message in Llandowror for twenty years prior to the beginning of the revival in Wales in 1738, and greatly influenced two men who were to be used in the awakening of Wales:

- **Howell Harris** came to personal faith in Christ at a communion service in 1735. As he testified how his heart was filled with “the fire of the love of God,” fellow believers soon began gathering together with him. He started preaching in homes. Transformation took place in people's lives until the whole district was transformed. The Welsh Revival had begun.
- **Daniel Rowland** of Llangeitho was “spiritually awakened” after hearing Griffith Jones preach. Preaching out of this new life he had found, he in turn brought about an awakening in his own church and community.

When Harris and Roland met, they then worked together in the revival that Wales was experiencing.

## The Awakening in Scotland

The revival being experienced in England and Wales also spilled over into Scotland, radically impacting the Church there. *The History of Christianity* describes the condition of the Scottish Church prior to its awakening:

“The [early] eighteenth century was once described as ‘the dark age of the Scottish Church’...Ministers were more concerned about culture than conversions, and dismissed their heritage, which included the persecuted Covenanters, with derision...”<sup>18</sup>

Stirrings of revival, however, had already begun in the north of Scotland and reached their peak in the northern Highlands under John Balfour in 1739. In 1740, William McCulloch was instrumental in the great Revival of Cambuslang, near Glasgow. He describes “the spiritual glory of the solemnity...the gracious and sensible presence of God” in the open-air communion services.

George Whitefield visited the Scots and one Sunday preached in the open air to 40,000 people. The effects were widespread. Another outbreak happened at Kilsyth, where James Robe had been ministering for over thirty years without any seeming effect. In 1740, he began to preach on the new birth. In 1742, he reported “while pressing all the unregenerate to seek to have Christ formed within them, an extraordinary power of the divine Spirit accompanied the word preached.”<sup>19</sup> This continued for over eighteen months.

*The History of Christianity* comments on the effect of the Scottish Revival:

“Cambuslang and Kilsyth were the highlights of the Scottish Revival. The excitement subsided but the benefits remained. The Evangelical party, mocked as ‘Zealots’ or ‘High-flyers’ by their opponents, took over from the moderates and shaped the outlook of the church.”<sup>20</sup>

## The Awakening in America

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the condition of the Church in America was not good. The enthusiastic faith of the early colonists had faded under the materialism gendered by the development of commerce and its increase of wealth. The children had lost the fervor of their fathers. *The History of Christianity* records the emerging nation’s spiritual condition:

“...zealous ministers bemoaned the worsening situation and called on their congregations to repent. In 1727 an earthquake which disturbed much of New England and neighboring provinces was interpreted as a sign of God’s judgment. There was a temporary rush to the churches but little lasting improvement. A few years later, a Boston preacher could report, sadly: ‘Alas, as though nothing but the most amazing thunders and lightnings, and the most terrible earthquakes could awaken us, we are at this time fallen into as dead a sleep as ever.’”<sup>21</sup>



Although there had, at times, been scattered occurrences of God's blessing before this, the Great Awakening in America officially began in Northampton in 1735 with a young man by the name of Jonathan Edwards.

### ***Jonathan Edwards***

When Jonathan Edwards took over as pastor of the Congregational church at Northampton, he found the people "very insensible of the things of religion."<sup>22</sup> In 1734, he preached a series of messages on justification by faith. By the end of December, "the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in" and "souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ."<sup>23</sup> The American Awakening had begun.

Edwards himself describes the wonder of what God was doing:

"In the spring and summer following 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God as it never was so full of love, nor so full of joy, and yet so full of distress as it was then...our public assemblies were then beautiful; the congregation was alive in God's service, every one earnestly intent on the public worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister...the assembly...from time to time in tears while the Word was preached; some weeping with joy and distress, others with joy and love – still others in pit and concern for the souls of their neighbors."<sup>24</sup>

The eighteenth-century American Church was about to experience its most far-reaching and transforming event. It was an awakening wave of the Spirit that spread through over a hundred communities and towns.

Jonathan Edwards wrote much to describe this Great Awakening:

"The highest transports I have been acquainted with, where the affections of admiration, love and joy, so far as another could judge, have been raised to the highest pitch, the following things have been united:

"A very frequent dwelling for some considerable time together in view of the glories of the Divine perfections and Christ's excellencies...the soul has been, as it were, perfectly overwhelmed and swallowed up with light and love, a sweet solace, and a rest and joy of soul altogether unspeakable. The person has more than once continued for five or six hours together without interruption in a clear and lively sense of the infinite beauty and amiableness of Christ's Person and the heavenly sweetness of His transcendent love...The heart was swallowed up in a kind of glow of Christ's love coming down as a constant stream of sweet light, at the same time the soul all flowing out in love to Him: so that there seemed to be a constant flowing and reflowing from heart to heart. The soul dwelt on high, was lost in God and seemed almost to lose the body.

"Extraordinary views of Divine things and the religious affections were frequently attended with very great effect on the body...The person was deprived of all ability to speak. Sometimes the hands were clenched and the flesh cold but the sense remaining. Animal nature was often in a great emotion and agitation, and the soul so overcome with admiration and a kind of

omnipotent joy, as to cause the person unavoidably to leap with all their might and joy and mighty exaltation...The great rejoicing has been with trembling, i.e. attended with a deep and lively sense of the greatness and majesty of God and the persons own exceeding littleness and vileness. Spiritual joys...were never attended with the least appearance of laughter or lightness either of the countenance or the manner of speaking; but with a peculiar abhorrence of such appearance in spiritual rejoicing. These high transports, when past, have had abiding effects in the increase of sweetness, rest and humility which they have left upon the soul; and a new engagedness of heart to live to God's honor and watch and fight against sin."<sup>25</sup>

### ***George Whitefield***

The Awakening reached its peak in 1740. Although Jonathan Edwards was a key figure in this revival, the major influence upon the Awakening was George Whitefield. Benjamin Franklin described the effect of Whitefield's second visit to Philadelphia:

"The multitudes of all sects and denominations that attended his sermons were enormous...it was wonderful to see the change so soon made in the manners of the inhabitants. From being thoughtless and indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world was growing religious; one could not walk through town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families in every street."<sup>26</sup>

### ***David Brainerd***

A few years later, revival began spreading amongst the American Indians. David Brainerd, the nephew of Jonathan Edwards, wrote:

"The power of God seemed to descend on the assembly like a rushing mighty wind and with an astonishing energy bore all down before it. I stood amazed at the influence that seized the audience almost universally and could compare it to nothing more aptly than the irresistible force of a mighty torrent... Almost all persons of all ages were bowed down with concern together and scarce one was able to withstand the shock of the astonishing operation."<sup>27</sup>

## **The Second Great Awakening**

The early awakenings in the English-speaking world occurred in two distinct waves. And as with natural waves, there was a spiritual trough between the two crests. This trough occurred at a time when, in the natural, American hopes were highest. She had won her independence and 1776 and established her constitution in 1789. But at this time, rationalistic literature began flooding into America from France and Great Britain. It had a disastrous effect in the colleges – the seats of American higher education. Winkie Pratney describes the effect:

"Bible Colleges like Harvard, Princeton and Yale became centers of skepticism, atheism, and anarchy. Christian students were snubbed, sneered at, and openly ridiculed. They became such a minority that on some campuses they had to meet secretly."<sup>28</sup>

Young Christian men and women began to gather together to pray. Ministers at the colleges began to preach powerfully to counteract what was happening. Conviction began to spread. Soon half the student body of Yale was converted.

Powerful revivals also sprung up along the early frontier, as America expanded its territories westward. Methodist circuit-riding preachers, like Peter Cartwright, covered the Wild West on horseback. The Second Great Awakening had begun.

### ***The first campmeeting***

In June, 1800, people came from a hundred-mile radius of the Red River in Kentucky to a four-day observance of the Lord's Supper, called by James McGready. They came with an expectancy and their faith was answered. As the Word was preached powerfully, the Holy Spirit ministered. Conviction of sin and repentance brought many tears, which then resulted in times of great rejoicing. The people had come in unprecedented numbers and, knowing the accommodation would be insufficient, they had brought tents and bedrolls with them. This was the beginning of the revival campmeetings that would be a characteristic of this awakening.

### ***The Cane Ridge Revival***

After seeing what God had done at Red River, Barton Stone called for a similar meeting in Cane Ridge in May 1801. The Lord blessed those who attended and another six-day camp meeting was called for August. Over twenty thousand people came. Among the thousands converted was James Finley, who recorded the atmosphere of the occasion:

“The noise was like the roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm. I counted seven ministers, all preaching at one time, some on stumps, others in wagons and one standing on a tree which had, in falling, lodged against another...Some of the people were singing, others praying, some crying for mercy in the most piteous accents, while others were shouting most vociferously. While witnessing these scenes, a peculiarly-strange sensation such as I had never felt before came over me. My heart beat tumultuously, my knees trembled, my lips quivered, and I felt as though I must fall to the ground. A strange supernatural power seemed to pervade the entire mass of mind there collected...I stepped up on a log where I could have a better view of the surging sea of humanity. The scene that then presented itself to my mind was indescribable. At one time I saw at least five hundred swept down in a moment as if a battery of a thousand guns had been opened upon them, and then immediately followed shrieks and shouts that rent the very heavens.”<sup>29</sup>

As a result of this “campmeeting,” the Spirit of God swept through the frontier settlements and the American frontier was transformed. Winkie Pratney describes the effect of this awesome event:

“The American frontier was set ablaze. The Presbyterians and Methodists caught fire, and then the flame broke out among the Baptists in Carroll County on the Ohio River....The frontier was radically transformed. Instead of gam-

bling, cursing and vice, spirituality and genuine Christianity characterized the early Westward movement. It was God's great hour. It stopped skepticism in its tracks and returned the helm of the country to the godly."<sup>30</sup>

Such was the impact of the Second Great Awakening, that it transformed the early American frontier and created what is known today as "the Bible Belt" of the American Midwest. And in the midst of this awakening, one particular man experienced the transforming power of God's Spirit, setting the pace for not only for the Second Great Awakening, but for the revivals that were to come. His name was Charles Finney.

### ***Charles Finney***

Finney was born in 1792, the year after Wesley died. His conversion was dramatic. Under deep conviction of the Holy Spirit he went to a nearby forest to seek God. He was so overwhelmed by the revelation of his sin he cried out to God at the top of his voice. Winkie Pratney describes what happened next:

"Just then a Scripture verse seemed to 'drop into his mind with a flood of light': 'Then shall you go and pray to Me and I will hearken to you. Then shall you seek Me and find Me when you search for me with all your heart' (**Jeremiah 29:13**). It came to Finney with a flood of revelation, though he did not recall ever having read it. It shifted faith for him from the intellect to the choice. He knew that a God who could not lie had spoken to him and that his vow would be heard. Quietly, walking back towards the village, he was filled with such a sense of peace that it 'seemed all nature listened.'"<sup>31</sup>

That afternoon, in his room, Finney had an encounter with the glory of the Lord:

"There was no fire, no light in the room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some time afterward, that it was a wholly mental state. On the contrary, it seemed to me that I saw Him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me down right at His feet...it seemed to me a reality that He stood before me and I fell down at His feet and poured out my soul to Him. I wept aloud like a child, and made such confessions as I could with a choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed His feet with my tears, and yet I had no distinct impression that I touched Him."<sup>32</sup>

That evening, Finney received, in his own words, "a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost." He wrote:

"Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended on me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed, I could not express it any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recall distinctly that it seemed to fan me like immense wings."<sup>33</sup>

He went on to describe this life-changing experience:

“No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say, I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me and over me and over me, one after the other until I recollect I cried out ‘I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me.’ I said, ‘Lord I cannot bear any more’; yet I had no fear of death.”<sup>34</sup>

From that day on, Finney turned his back on his legal career and launched a powerful ministry which was to see over half a million people converted and would spearhead a wave of God’s Spirit that would change the course of Church history.

## The Third Great Awakening

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a third wave of awakenings would sweep across America, starting in New England.

### *The Prayer-Meeting Revival*

Jeremiah Lamphier was a New York businessmen who, seeing the terrible need in his city, gave up his business in 1857. He walked the streets handing out invitations to a prayer meeting in downtown New York. The first week six men came; the next week there were twenty. They decided to meet daily instead of weekly. Within six months, over 10,000 businessmen were meeting for prayer every day in shops, offices and churches. Repentance and salvation was a daily occurrence. Within two years, over a million converts were added to churches of all denominations. The social effects of this revival was to last for nearly fifty years.

Great Britain was also blessed by this Awakening with more than 500,000 converts in Ireland, Wales and Scotland by 1865 and over a million converts added to the churches in England.

## Learning from History

Today, in the face of adverse circumstances in the world and the “deadness” of some parts of the Church, four things stand out as we look back at these spiritual “awakenings” in past generations. These four ingredients, which resulted in multitudes coming to Christ and a surge of evangelistic zeal in the Church, are:

- The personal hunger of an individual for God
- An overwhelming desire to see the lost saved
- The desperate cry of the heart to God
- A willingness to go against the “status quo” in obedience to the Lord

As we look into the twentieth century in the next study, we will find more waves of “awakenings,” and will see the outcome of these revivals as the Church begins to fulfill the Great Commission and reach out “to the ends of the earth.”

**Read 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8**

- <sup>1</sup> A M Renwick and A M Harman, *The Story of the Church* (Leister, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), p.163.
- <sup>2</sup> Bruce L Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), pp.312-313.
- <sup>3</sup> Francis A Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company), p.121.
- <sup>4</sup> Bruce L Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), pp.325-326.
- <sup>5</sup> Bruce L Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), p.445.
- <sup>6</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.372.
- <sup>7</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.446.
- <sup>8</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.446.
- <sup>9</sup> John Wesley, *Journals: Vol.1, Bicentenary Edition* (London, 1938), p.143.
- <sup>10</sup> John Wesley, *Journals: Vol.1, Bicentenary Edition* (London, 1938), p.151.
- <sup>11</sup> John Wesley, *Journals: Vol.1, Bicentenary Edition* (London, 1938), p.148.
- <sup>12</sup> John Wesley, *Journals: Vol.1, Bicentenary Edition* (London, 1938), pp.475-476.
- <sup>13</sup> John Wesley, *Journals: Vol.2, Bicentenary Edition* (London, 1938), p.125.
- <sup>14</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.449.
- <sup>15</sup> A M Renwick and A M Harman, *The Story of the Church* (Leister, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), p.168.
- <sup>16</sup> George Whitefield, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p.82.
- <sup>17</sup> George Whitefield, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p.82.
- <sup>18</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.450.
- <sup>19</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.450.
- <sup>20</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.450.
- <sup>21</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.439.
- <sup>22</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.441.
- <sup>23</sup> *The History of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1994), p.441.
- <sup>24</sup> Fischer, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p.88.
- <sup>25</sup> Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p.301, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), pp.90-91.
- <sup>26</sup> Benjamin Franklin, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p.89.
- <sup>27</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd*, pp.142-143, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p.89.
- <sup>28</sup> Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), pp.101-102.
- <sup>29</sup> Mendell Taylor, *Exploring Evangelism*, p.142, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p.104.
- <sup>30</sup> Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), pp.104-105.
- <sup>31</sup> Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p.96.
- <sup>32</sup> Finney, *Autobiography*, p.21, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), pp.96-97.
- <sup>33</sup> Finney, *Autobiography*, p.21, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p.97.
- <sup>34</sup> Finney, *Autobiography*, p.21, quoted by Winkie Pratney, *Revival. Its Principles & Personalities* (Lasfayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers), p.97.

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