

History Around the World

By Rebecca Wilson

Lesson 1: The Great Awakening in America

Day 1: Introduction

You may read the title of this lesson and wonder what exactly America was “awakening” from. When I hear the word, I automatically think of its opposite—sleeping. And a quick check with a thesaurus tells me that other antonyms for “awaken” are “lull,” “hypnotize,” and “deadened.”

To fully understand the Great Awakening and its impact on America even today, we first need to think about what happened before it.

A quick review:

- 1492 – Christopher Columbus sailed to the Western Hemisphere and ushered in an age of exploration in the land that eventually became the United States.
- 1500s – The Protestant Reformation spread across Europe, including England where King Henry VIII broke from the Catholic Church and formed the Church of England; a century of religious fighting and persecution between Catholics and Protestants ensued.
- 1620 – A group who had broken off, or separated, from the Church of England set out for the New World to escape persecution and to practice their religion freely; we know them today as the “Separatists” or “Pilgrims” who settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts; they were considered “radical” Puritans because they wanted to separate from the Church of England.
- 1630 – A less radical group of Puritans settled Massachusetts Bay Colony; they did not want to separate from the Church of England but rather reform, or “purify” it (thus their name).
- Sadly, the religious environment of Puritan New England proved to be as intolerant as the Church of England, and their doctrines of predestination and strict and literal adherence to the Bible sometimes stifled God’s ability to work in the hearts of people.
- 1700s – Both England and America were “*awakened*” from their *spiritual slumber* when a wave of evangelists rose up to spread a message of personal, experiential faith.

Now that you have a bit of background information about the Great Awakening, go to the “Great Awakening” entry in the World Book area of SchoolhouseTeachers.com to access this link and answer the following questions.

<https://www.worldbookonline.com/student/article?id=ar233880&st=great+awakening#tab=home>
[page](#)

SAMPLE

Great Awakening Questions

1. The Great Awakening in America began in which colonies?
 - a. the New England Colonies
 - b. the Middle Colonies
 - c. the Southern Colonies

2. Which of the following was NOT an effect of the Great Awakening?
 - a. a new, excited form of preaching
 - b. decreased participation by the laity (lay people, i.e., not clergy)
 - c. individual religious experience was widely accepted

Fill in the chart below to list the four leaders of the Great Awakening the entry mentions and the denominations they represented.

Leader	Denomination
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____

For thought: What do the denominations of the leaders listed above tell you about the Great Awakening?

Great Awakening Questions
Answer Key

1. The Great Awakening in America began in which colonies?
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 - b. **the Middle Colonies**
 - c. the Southern Colonies

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Fill in the chart below to list the four leaders of the Great Awakening the entry mentions and the denominations they represented.

	Leader	Denomination
1.	Jonathan Edwards	Congregational
2.	Theodore J. Frelinghuysen	Dutch Reformed
3.	Gilbert Tennent	Presbyterian
4.	George Whitefield	Methodist

For thought: What do the denominations of the leaders listed above tell you about the Great Awakening? **It wasn't specific to any one denomination.**

Day 2: Theodore J. Frelinghuysen

Of the four leaders of the Great Awakening in America who were listed in the entry you read yesterday, Theodore J. Frelinghuysen is the hardest to find information about. In fact, he hasn't even earned an entry in World Book Online. Therefore, we will turn to other sources to gain information about him.

Knowing he was a preacher in the Dutch Reformed denomination, we can deduce that he was probably Dutch, but the exact location of his birth is disputed (it may have been Germany) if we trust the information provided by the New Netherland Institute (see https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/dutch_americans/theodorusjacobus-frelinghuysen/). What we do know is that he emigrated to America in 1720 and became a part of the Great Awakening.

According to christianchronicler.com,

Frelinghuysen . . . settled in New Jersey's Raritan Valley in 1720. Rough folk with little interest in anything save outward religious conformity populated the region. They simply sought to preserve their Dutch church as a landmark to their national heritage. These colonists did not want a religion which challenged their commitment or emotions. Frelinghuysen preached an inner religion which he contrasted with their satisfaction with externals. Older members soon became offended with his preaching. Younger members found themselves attracted to him. Controversy hit nearly every Dutch Reformed congregation in the colonies. It even influenced churches back in Holland in time. Frelinghuysen continued his efforts until he even reached his detractors.

From another site, biography.yourdictionary.com, we learn that "in a guest sermon in New York (1720) he immediately offended influential clerics by deviating from established rubric and by advocating revivalism."

Also . . .

Eloquent and vigorous, Frelinghuysen stimulated community intellectual life and trained several ministers. His presentation of the Gospel had a reforming effect, and significant revivals followed. The movement spread to other denominations, and Frelinghuysen (with the aid of Gilbert Tennent and later George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards) led in generating the series of revivals called the Great Awakening.

Innovative and individualistic, Frelinghuysen . . . introduced private prayer meetings and lay preaching and advocated founding a college and theological seminary.

For thought: The son of a minister, Frelinghuysen and his wife had seven children. All five of his sons became ministers, and his two daughters married ministers. He was the first of his family to

come to America, and his family is the longest-lasting political dynasty in America, lasting from the early days of the country to the present (including four United States senators, one of whom was Secretary of State under President Arthur).

How important is a legacy? A legacy can be positive, but can it also be negative? You may be too young to have started thinking about what kind of legacy you want to leave behind someday, but you aren't too young to appreciate the legacy that has been left for you. Who in your life, whether blood-related or not, has left you a positive legacy?

Also, what does the Bible say about "legacy"? I encourage you to look up the verses in the list below and choose one or more or another verse or verses about Godly legacy to memorize.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7

Joshua 24:15

Psalms 37:18

Psalms 78:4

Proverbs 13:22

Proverbs 20:7

Proverbs 22:6

Isaiah 38:19

Isaiah 54:17

3 John 1:4

To learn more about Frelinghuysen's life and to read some of his sermons, do an Internet search (with a parent's permission). One site that I found, for example, has Frelinghuysen's *Sermons, Translated from the Dutch* (1856) which William Demarest edited and added a sketch of the pastor's life.

Day 3: Jonathan Edwards

Probably the most well-known of the leaders of the Great Awakening was Jonathan Edwards, a Congregational minister from Connecticut.

Like Frelinghuysen, Edwards' heritage included ministers, so it isn't surprising that he followed their footsteps.

Edwards' appealed to both sides of the religious coin—those who were more traditional and those who were more progressive—and so was also attacked by both sides.

His sermon titled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” is used in many textbooks as the prime example of the religious fervor that swept the country during the Great Awakening. It is readily available on the Internet.

Your assignment today is to find and read a copy (or at least portions) of that sermon. At the very least, find and read a summary of the sermon.

After Reading

1. Who do you think the intended audience was for this sermon—Christians or non-Christians? Why do you think that?
2. Edwards is known as a “fire and brimstone” preacher. What does that mean? What specific examples from the reading support this description of his preaching style?

Day 4: Gilbert Tennent and George Whitefield

Our story of Great Awakening leaders who came from a family of ministers continues with Gilbert Tennent.

And we will return today to World Book Online to learn a bit about him.

Here is the link:

<https://www.worldbookonline.com/student/article?id=ar550881&st=gilbert+tennent#tab=homepage>

Gilbert Tennent Questions

1. What was *revivalism*?
2. What was the name of Tennent's sermon that contributed to a split in the Presbyterian Church?
3. What did he do in 1758 with regard to the Presbyterian Church?

Today's reading #2:

<https://www.worldbookonline.com/student/article?id=ar601980&st=george+whitefield#tab=homepage>

George Whitefield Questions

1. Who founded Methodism?
2. What did George Whitefield contribute to that denomination?
3. How many times did he visit America to preach?

Gilbert Tennent Questions

Answer Key

1. What was *revivalism*? **an emotional approach to religion that emphasized individual religious experience rather than church doctrines**
2. What was the name of Tennent's sermon that contributed to a split in the Presbyterian Church?
"The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry"
3. What did he do in 1758 with regard to the Presbyterian Church?
helped reunite it

George Whitefield Questions

Answer Key

1. Who founded Methodism?
Charles and John Wesley
2. What did George Whitefield contribute to that denomination?
His success as an outdoor preacher influenced John Wesley to preach outdoors, and outdoor preaching became typical of Methodists.
3. How many times did he visit America to preach?
seven

Day 5: Francis Asbury

Another leader of the Great Awakening was Francis Asbury. An article at christianitytoday.com yielded this information about him:

- He was born in England.
- He became a full-time Methodist preacher by the time he was twenty-one.
- In 1771, at a gathering of Methodist ministers, John Wesley asked, “Our brethren in America call aloud for help. Who are willing to go over and help them?” Asbury volunteered.
- In October 1771, Asbury landed in Philadelphia; there were only six hundred Methodists in America.
- His ministry in America lasted for forty-five years.
- He delivered 16,500 sermons.
- He was so well-known in America that letters addressed to “Bishop Asbury, United States of America” were delivered to him.
- By the end of his ministry, American Methodism had grown under his leadership to 200,000 strong.
- He had ordained 4,000 Methodist preachers.
- By the Civil War, American Methodists numbered 1.5 million.
- He put American Methodism on the denominational map.

On Day 2, we looked at the concept of leaving a legacy. Francis Asbury’s legacy is outlined in the bullet points above. Create a bullet point outline of the legacy you hope to someday leave, or create one about someone else.