

Introduction to the Great Awakening

What Is Revival?

A. Scriptural use

1. Not specifically a biblical term as we use it, although the concept is in accordance with scriptural teaching.
2. *Revive* and its variants do occur in the Bible, usually referring to bringing back to life (II Kings 13:21) or restoration to fullness of health, vigor, etc. of a person or nation (Habakkuk 3:2).

B. Biblical Pattern

1. The revivals during the kingdom period of the Old Testament, as in Hezekiah's time (II Chronicles 29-31), present a pattern of revival similar to that which we understand.
2. The Book of Acts is probably the best source for establishing a New Testament pattern, as seen in the accounts of Pentecost (Acts 2) and the Samaritan revival (Acts 8).
3. We need to understand, however, that *revival* is a human term for describing a certain manner that God works; therefore we must let His activity determine the meaning rather than allowing our definition to dictate the meaning (cf. the terms "Trinity" or "Rapture" which must be based on biblical teaching if they are to have any validity).

C. Meaning

1. Basically a revival is a time of a special work of God in a noticeable fashion, generally its effect is threefold –
 - a. It involves "reviving" Christians, that is, restoring believers to zeal for God's kingdom, to greater attention to the Word of God, and to pursuing holiness of life; this usually comes first.
 - b. It involves the conversion of the unregenerate; this is the characteristic we normally associate with revival.
 - c. It involves an effect on the community; this is often the aspect that outside observers note the most.
2. It is an *intensification* of the normal work of God in reviving saints and saving sinners. It is that work either compressed into a specific time, or occurring among a large number of people, or both.
3. It is a blessing that God bestows. Because revival is an extension of God's work of salvation, it is as much God's work as salvation is. Our

use of the term “revivals” for special services sometimes obscures this fact. We no more “schedule a revival” than we decide who will be converted in a church service.

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A. Nature of the Revival

1. A loss of spiritual fervor, particularly among the Puritans, preceded the awakening.
 - a. The Half-Way Covenant (allowing a partial church membership to people who could not testify of salvation) is sometimes cited as a cause; actually it's more a symptom of the underlying decline.
 - b. The Salem Witch Trials were the nadir of spiritual decline.
 - c. Just before the awakening and throughout its course, there was a separation of Puritan political aspirations (building “a city on a hill”) to a focus on the heart of Puritan spirituality (“to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever”).
2. It was the first great American revival and first great national movement.
3. The Great Awakening was a parallel movement to Evangelical Awakening in Great Britain (Wesleys, Whitefield, and others).
4. Two Approaches
 - a. The narrow approach focuses on Whitefield's campaign of 1739-40 as the real Great Awakening.
 - b. The broad approach (which I prefer) starts with the earlier, more localized stirrings; proceeds through the Whitefield campaigns; and includes its later manifestations (in the South, in Canada, among blacks).

B. Divisions: Geographical

1. Middle Colonies (where it started)
2. New England (where it is most famous)
3. Southern Colonies
4. Canada (only in recent years being appreciated)