

Theodore Frelinghuysen

A. Background

1. The Great Awakening began in the context of a pastoral – not an evangelistic – ministry with the work of Frelinghuysen.
2. Born in what is now Germany, Frelinghuysen became connected to the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands.
3. It was twenty-seven years until he came to America; he was twenty-seven years in the ministry in America.
4. His first pastorate in the Netherlands prepared him for hardship. Christmas Eve 1717 saw a terrible storm which unleashed floods that destroyed the dykes and caused suffering for months as the salt water inundated the land. Frelinghuysen labored long and hard to help and comfort his flock.
5. Frelinghuysen was influenced in Europe by Pietism, a movement that stressed the importance of conversion (or “felt conversion”) and evidences of sanctification; Pietists stressed a *heartfelt* faith expressed in holy living and were important contributors to the Great Awakening.

B. Labor in America

1. He was sent to minister to four small Dutch-speaking churches in the Raritan Valley in New Jersey.
2. His first sermon in Raritan Valley was on II Corinthians 5:20, “Now then as we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” These notes of *beseeking* and *reconciliation* characterized his ministry.
3. A strong believer in and practitioner of church discipline, he aroused opposition by condemning worldliness and closing the Lord’s Supper to those whose lives showed no sign of true conversion. He had the courage to tell long-time church members that they were not truly Christians.
4. Sample quotation from his sermons: “If you remain ignorant, resting in your sins, unconverted and unholy, in the Lord’s name I tell you that you shall die the death, God’s anger will remain upon you and you shall see yourself thrust out.”
5. He was both opposed and supported.
 - a. Some members of his congregations complained to church authorities; others founded rival churches.

- b. Others were touched by his preaching, found salvation, and warmly supported him. It was revival, but it proceeded in the face of opposition. The Dutch Reformed Church in North America actually split over the revival.

C. Awakening

1. We don't know many details about Frelinghuysen's work. We know only later testimonies of how he saw great fruit (both in numbers and in spiritual growth) among his people.
2. He hosted George Whitefield in April 1740. The crowd was too large for church, so Whitefield stood in a wagon in front of Frelinghuysen's church and preached to 2,000.
3. When he died, his work had grown so much that two men had to take over his work.
4. Throughout his ministry, Frelinghuysen stressed the importance of the eternal matters. When Frelinghuysen's son, who was also a minister, died, the son's wife accompanied the coffin by boat for burial; when the boat could not get close enough to the shore for people to embark, she told the crew to use the coffin as a bridge, saying, "Tis only a shell, his spirit is gone, cast it across." A biographer rightly commented that the elder Frelinghuysen likely would have approved of the sentiment.
5. In brief, Theodore Frelinghuysen stressed a faith that could be felt (not emotionalism, but not dead and formal) and that resulted in a sanctified life that was consistent with a Christian profession. He "reproved" and "rebuked" and he faithfully "exhorted" (II Timothy 4:2).