

The First Great Awakening

Student Name _____ Date _____

Activity #1: Jonathan Edwards

Directions: As you read the excerpt from Jonathan Edwards’ sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” list the images that he uses, and the underlying religious beliefs that he is expressing through those images.

Image	Religious Belief

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Activity #1: Jonathan Edwards

Directions: Read the following paragraphs as an introduction to the First Great Awakening and the role of Jonathan Edwards in that religious movement.

Excerpts from "Religion in 18th Century America": <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel02.html>

Evangelicalism is difficult to date and to define. In 1531, at the beginning of the Reformation, Sir Thomas More referred to religious adversaries as "Evaungelicalles." Scholars have argued that, as a self-conscious movement, evangelicalism did not arise until the mid-seventeenth century, perhaps not until the Great Awakening itself. The fundamental premise of evangelicalism is the conversion of individuals from a state of sin to a "new birth" through preaching of the Word.

The first generation of New England Puritans required that church members undergo a conversion experience that they could describe publicly. Their successors were not as successful in reaping harvests of redeemed souls. During the first decades of the eighteenth century in the Connecticut River Valley a series of local "awakenings" began. By the 1730s they had spread into what was interpreted as a general outpouring of the Spirit that bathed the American colonies, England, Wales, and Scotland. In mass open-air revivals powerful preachers like George Whitefield brought thousands of souls to the new birth. The Great Awakening, which had spent its force in New England by the mid-1740s, split the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches into supporters--called "New Lights" and "New Side"--and opponents--the "Old Lights" and "Old Side." Many New England New Lights became Separate Baptists. Together with New Side Presbyterians (eventually reunited on their own terms with the Old Side) they carried the Great Awakening into the southern colonies, igniting a series of the revivals that lasted well into the nineteenth century....

Jonathan Edwards (1703-17) was the most important American preacher during the Great Awakening. A revival in his church in Northampton, Massachusetts, 1734-1735, was considered a harbinger of the Awakening which unfolded a few years later. Edwards was more than an effective evangelical preacher, however. He was the principal intellectual interpreter of, and apologist for, the Awakening. He wrote analytical descriptions of the revival, placing it in a larger theological context. Edwards was a world-class theologian, writing some of the most original and important treatises ever produced by an American. He died of smallpox in 1758, shortly after becoming president of Princeton.

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From Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”:

<http://edwards.yale.edu/images/pdf/sinners.pdf>

The use may be of *awakening* to unconverted persons in this congregation. This that you have heard is the case of every one of you that are out of Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone is extended abroad under you. *There* is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell’s wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor anything to take hold of: there is nothing between you and hell but the air; ‘tis only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.

You probably are not sensible of this; you find you are kept out of hell, but don’t see the hand of God in it, but look at other things, as the good state of your bodily constitution, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing; if God should withdraw his hand, they would avail no more to keep you from falling, than the thin air to hold up a person that is suspended in it.

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider’s web would have to stop a falling rock. Were it not that so is the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it; the creation groans with you; the creature is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly; the sun don’t willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan; the earth don’t willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts; nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon; the air don’t willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God’s enemies. God’s creatures are good, and were made for men to serve God with, and don’t willingly subserve to any other purpose, and groan when they are abused to purposes so directly contrary to their nature and end. And the world would spew you out, were it not for the sovereign hand of him who hath subjected it in hope. There are the black clouds of God’s wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God it would immediately burst forth upon you. The sovereign pleasure of God for the present stays his rough wind; otherwise it would come with fury, and your destruction would come like a whirlwind, and you would be like the chaff of the summer threshing floor.

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given, and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose. ‘Tis true, that judgment against your evil works has not

been executed hitherto; the floods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters are continually rising and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God that holds the waters back that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward; if God should only withdraw his hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, yea ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it.

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.

Thus are all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin, to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced light and life (however you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious affections, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets, and in the house of God, and may be strict in it), you are thus in the hands of an angry God; 'tis nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction.

However unconvinced you may now be of the truth of what you hear, by and by you will be fully convinced of it. Those that are gone from being in the like circumstances with you, see that it was so with them; for destruction came suddenly upon most of them, when they expected nothing of it, and while they were saying, "Peace and safety": now they see, that those things that they depended on for peace and safety, were nothing but thin air and empty shadows.

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince: and yet 'tis nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment: 'tis to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you was suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep: and there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up: there is no other reason to be given why you ha[ve]n't gone to hell since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship: yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you don't this very moment drop down into hell.

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: 'tis a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell: you hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.

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Activity #2: George Whitefield

Directions: Using the documents below, answer the following questions:

Question	Answer
<p>Why do you think average farmers such as Nathaniel Cole halted their livelihood and traveled a great distance to witness George Whitefield speak?</p>	
<p>What message does Cole's statement, "I saw that my righteousness would not save me; then I was convinced of the doctrine of Election and went right to quarrelling with God about it, because all that I could do would not save me" reveal about Whitefield's teachings?</p>	
<p>After reading this passage, what conclusion can you draw about the religious practices and beliefs of the Great Awakening?</p>	

The Great Awakening Comes to Weathersfield, Connecticut: Nathan Cole's Spiritual Travels:
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5711>

Excerpt from "Religion in 18th Century America": <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel02.html>

One of the great evangelists of all time, George Whitefield (1714-1770) was ordained in the Church of England, with which he was constantly at odds. Whitefield became a sensation throughout England,

preaching to huge audiences. In 1738 he made the first of seven visits to the America, where he gained such popular stature that he was compared to George Washington. Whitefield's preaching tour of the colonies, from 1739 to 1741, was the high-water mark of the Great Awakening there. A sermon in Boston attracted as many as 30,000 people. Whitefield's success has been attributed to his resonant voice, theatrical presentation, emotional stimulation, message simplification and clever exploitation of emerging advertising techniques. Some have compared him to modern televangelists.

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Activity #3: Samsom Occom, Indian Minister

Directions: Categorize the information found in Samsom Occom’s autobiography, “I believe It Is Because I Am a Poor Indian,” according to the major events, the religious practices or influences, and the personal reflections that he emphasizes in each section.

Use the information at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5788> to complete the chart.

Part 1: Document Section	Major Events	Religious Practices or Influences	Occam's Personal Reflections
"From my Birth till I received the Christian Religion"			
"From the Time of our Reformation till I left Mr. Wheelocks"			
"From the Time I left Mr. Wheelock till I went to Europe"			

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Activity #3: Samsom Occom, Indian Minister

Directions: Write down the three questions that your teacher reads aloud. You will have three to five minutes to write your response to each one. You will then be asked to discuss your answer first with a partner and later in a large group. Use <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5788> as a reference.

Question	Response
#1.	
#2.	
#3.	

#4.	
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