

Revival Stories: Asahel Nettleton

by E.A. Johnston

The sermon highlights the life and ministry of Asahel Nettleton, a key figure in the Second Great Awakening, and encourages listeners to pray for revival in our day.

Duration: 18:26

Scripture: Genesis 6:3, Psalm 46:10, Proverbs 27:17, Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:37, 1 Peter 5:6, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Biography"

Description

In this sermon transcript, Asahel Nettleton describes a powerful revival of religion that took place in Nassau during the Second Great Awakening. He shares how his preaching pierced the hearts of the congregation, leading many to experience deep distress and seek relief in Christ. The revival spread rapidly, with hundreds of souls being born into the kingdom of Christ. Nettleton urges his listeners to pray for revival in their own time, emphasizing the need for a heaven-sent revival to save America.

Transcript

God has seemed pleased to send spiritual awakenings to America in past times. One such powerful outpouring of grace which occurred in our nation was known as the Second Great Awakening. Two men were the primary figureheads of that revival, Azahiel Nettleton and Charles Finney.

Our subject today in our series on revival stories is on the lesser known man, Azahiel Nettleton, who seems to be forgotten by history, but it was Azahiel Nettleton whom God mightily used to shake entire towns for his glory. Nettleton confronted the sinner with the sovereignty of God and salvation and the duty of the lost sinner for immediate repentance. Nettleton seemed to be well familiar with the wicked windings of the human heart and he was a master swordsman in cutting away the false foundations of false professions.

His awakening ministry could literally shake an entire town. In his day, the name Azahiel Nettleton literally made strongmen tremble at the news of his arrival in New England towns for they knew that soon a revival of religion would occur and many would be face to face with their eternity and the God of that eternity. Nettleton knew what true revival was and he was very careful not to grieve away the spirit of God when revival came.

He was also careful to guard against emotionalism in his revivals for he had seen the harm done by James Davenport in the previous awakening and he did not wish to repeat those same errors. When I was

conducting the research on my definitive biography on Nettleton, my travels took me to the very scenes where God used him in revival. I traveled throughout the Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut visiting the churches which are still standing where Nettleton preached and where God came in a powerful move of grace.

I estimated from my travels that God used Nettleton in over 60 revivals throughout those three states. I also spent a great deal of time handling Azahiel Nettleton's personal papers at the archives at Hartford Seminary, the institution which he helped found. As I pored over his diary and his journal and the sermons that he wrote, the very hair on the back of my neck rose as I read about those startling accounts written in his own hand where God had sent revival and shook whole communities with his awful presence.

It is important for us today to study these men whom God has used in former times in revival for we can learn much from those revivals and it can teach us how to pray more effectively in our day for God to visit us in a mighty outpouring of his grace. Well friends, I would now like to present you with some historical accounts of revival under the preaching of Nettleton as given by some of his peers whom he preached for. We will begin with an account taken from a minister by the name of Reverend Lee.

This favored servant of Christ came with no trumpet sounding before him but in the meekness of his master and the Lord was with him in varied deed. Meetings became crowded and deeply solemn and many obtained hope in Christ. He conversed individually with the anxious and met at certain times at his boarding place all who were disposed to be conversed with on the state of their heart and the salvation of their soul.

In addressing meetings he was wont to seize on some point of interest bearing directly upon the state of mind in which his hearers were and then press it with a rare degree of directness plainness and force. This revival was distinguished for its stillness and solemnity for deep conviction of conscience for discriminating views of divine truth for humility and subsequent stability of Christian character. The subjects were of different ages but generally the youth.

As fruits the revival about 200 were admitted into the congregational church many of these young professors intermarried and became heads of families and have lived to train up many children for Christ. Many still look back to that date with the deepest interest and liveliest gratitude as the blessed period of their espousal to Christ as the memorable year of the right hand of the Lord. The name of Azahiel Nettleton the humble skillful labor in this field at that season employed and directing so many to Christ is embalmed in many a heart.

Well another minister friends has recorded his thoughts of Nettleton under revival which occurred at his church. This man was Noah Porter the pastor of the Congregational Church in Farmington Connecticut. I have visited this remarkable church it still stands today as it did in Nettleton's time.

The high pulpit is still there from which Nettleton preached from. Here now are Dr. Porter's remarks about that revival which gripped the entire town of Farmington for several months. The year 1821 was eminently in Connecticut a year of revivals between 80 and 100 congregations were signally blessed.

In this state of things Reverend Mr. Nettleton made us his first visit. His preaching on the evening of the Lord's day from Acts 2 37 was set home by the power of the Spirit upon the hearts of many and his discourse on the Wednesday evening following from Genesis 6 3 was blessed to the conviction of still a greater number from this time so rapid was the progress of the work that at the next meeting 180 were

present of whom 50 supposed that since the commencement of the revival they had become reconciled to God and a week afterwards I had the names of more than 90 who had indulged the same persuasion concerning themselves the state of feelings which at this time pervaded the town was interesting beyond description there was no commotion but a stillness in our very streets a serenity in the aspect of the pious and a solemnity apparent in almost all which forcibly impressed us with the conviction that in very deed God was in this place from these meetings the people retired directly and with little communication with each other to their homes they were disposed to be much alone and to take the word of God for their guide the topics principally insisted on in this revival were the unchangeable obligations of the divine law the deceitful and entirely depraved character of the natural heart the free and discriminate offers of the gospel the reasonableness and necessity of immediate repentance the refuges and excuses to which the awakened sinners are accustomed to resort and the manner guilt and danger of sliding resisting and opposing the operations of the spirit well we will now turn friends to another minister who knew Nettleton and his name was Heman Humphreys I've been to Heman Humphreys church where the Nettleton revivals occurred and they were some of the more remarkable instances of God moving among his people Heman Humphreys was a man who knew true revival and he wrote about it wisely and his comments about Nettleton are worthy of study here now are his words and as he in a former age raised up George Whitfield to help pastors wherever he went and they received him so I must here record the grace of God in raising up and so eminently qualifying Azahel Nettleton to perform a similar service over a wide region where the revivals of which I now have to speak most remarkably prevailed if there were others who were equally devoted judicious and helpful to pastors I did not know them Mr.

Nettleton's labors were so widely extended so long continued and so remarkably blessed that it would be impossible for me and these sketches not to refer to him often as holding a high place among those whom God was pleased to honor in the conversion of souls President Dwight whose pupil he was is reported to have said Nettleton will make one of the most useful men this country has ever seen his judgment seemed to be almost intuitive and it seldom failed if there has been since the days of the mighty elders in the great awakening a preacher more successful in winning souls to Christ within the same number of years than Nettleton I have yet to learn this man or what he did well friends I would like now to present you some specimens of revival taken from Azahel Nettleton's own journal and

diary these accounts are written in his own longhand and are some excellent examples of how God used him during the second great awakening here now are his own words taken from this journal the year was 1820 and the power of God was gripping the whole of New England this revival occurred while Nettleton was laboring in the town of Nassau New York the church where this revival occurred is still there today here now are Azahel Nettleton's own comments taken from his journal this evening I met about 60 in a meeting for anxious inquirers among them were many in deep distress this is expected would be my last meeting in this place but I found so many in distress for their souls and the number increasing that I announced the appointment of one public meeting more in the meeting house on the

following evening we met in the meeting house it's more crowded than ever and solemn as eternity I preached on the nature and reasonableness of gospel repentance and urged the duty of immediate compliance and the danger of delay never more expecting to meet my anxious hearers in this world I urged them by all the solemnities of the judgment not to pass the threshold of the meeting house that night with impetuous hearts they seemed to hear as for their lives one from deep distress found relief in the midst of the discourse and lifted up a joyful countenance no sooner had I closed and stepped from the stage then she came near taking her husband by the hand urging him to come to Christ it was like a

two-edged sword it pierced him to the heart at this moment the anxious ones assembled around

me and took me some by the hand some by the arm and some by the coat exclaiming don't leave us don't leave us what shall I do what shall I do nearly the whole congregation tarried those who could not come near stood some on the seats and some on the sides of the pews to hear and see from the midst of the scene of distress I addressed the whole congregation for about five minutes among other things I said my hearers I now no longer hesitate to tell you what I have hitherto been afraid to speak that a revival of religion is begun in Nassau yes from what I've seen I can no longer doubt the fact I believe you are about to witness a solemn and trying time in this place and now you must prepare either to be taken or to be left I then told them I would meet them in the morning at sunrise in the

schoolhouse and pray with them before I left if they chose I advised them to depart as still as possible and to be retired through the night well I met them in the morning before sunrise two of those who went away in distress last night came to me rejoicing this morning and as I went from house to house I found others in distress the distress in one house led me to another and then to another until I visited nine families before I left the place it was truly affecting to witness these strangers crying for mercy well friends the last account of revival under Nettleton I'd like to share with you today is from the revival at Union College in Schenectady New York I've been to that campus and went to the very house where Nettleton lodged and much of the revival took place this revival began

when a college student suddenly died and other college students gathered around his coffin in this house to have a prayer meeting God just poured out his manifest present presence in that house and in that campus that year and the revival spread to the town here are Nettleton's own words that I have copied from his handwriting in his journal describing this powerful move of grace the revival is now very powerful in the city such a scene they have never before witnessed more than 100 had been brought to rejoice in hope besides these we had more than 200 in our meeting of inquiry anxious for their souls we met in a large upper room called the Masonic Hall the room was so crowded that we were obliged to request all who had recently found relief to retire below and spend their time in prayer

for those above this evening will never be forgotten the scene is beyond description did you ever witness 200 sinners with one accord in one place weeping for their sins until you have seen this you can have no adequate conceptions of the solemn scene I felt as though I was standing on the verge of the eternal world while the floor under my feet was shaken by the trembling of anxious souls in view of a judgment to come this solemnity was still heightened when every knee was bent at the throne of grace and the intervening silence of the voice of prayer was interrupted only by the sighs and sobs of anxious souls I have not time to relate interesting particulars I only add that some of the most stout hard-hearted heaven-daring rebels have been in the most awful distress within a circle whose

diameter would be 24 miles not less than 800 souls have been hopefully born into the kingdom of Christ the same glorious work is fast spreading into other towns and other congregations this is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel well friends I pray that these accounts of revival under the preaching of Azahel Nettleton during the second great awakening have stirred your heart to pray to God for revival in our day oh friends pray for God to send revival to our colleges today to our towns to our churches and to our nation for only a heaven-sent revival can save America at this critical and desperate hour

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