

About the Author

E. A. Johnston, Ph.D., D.B.S. is a fellow of the Stephen Olford Center for Biblical Preaching and an evangelist and conference speaker with Ambassadors For Christ Intl.-USA.

Dr. Johnston has been a student of revival for several decades and his ministry passion is toward revival in the Church and spiritual awakening in the world.

Dr. Johnston is the author of sixteen books. Recently, Revival Literature published Dr. Johnston's *George Whitefield: A Definitive Biography* in two volumes, clothbound with dust jacket, containing 1172 pages and 48 photos. The foreword and preface were written by Dr. J. I. Packer and Richard Owen Roberts.

Revival Literature has also published *God's Hitchhike Evangelist: The Biography of Rolfe Barnard* by Dr. Johnston. This new look at one of the nation's unique evangelists in the 20th Century will prove to be captivating reading for those interested in revival.

The momentous ministry of the Edwardsean evangelist Asahel Nettleton, a key figure in the Second Great Awakening, has been effectively forgotten during the past century and a half of less-than-Reformed revivalism. Dr. Johnston's masterful and thorough biography is a long-overdue tribute to this outstanding servant of God, and is priority reading for all who care about evangelism today.

J. I. PACKER

All Christians who long for revival and relish the study of it should feel greatly indebted to Dr. Johnston for his painstaking labor of love in amassing the most thorough biography ever written on Asahel Nettleton, whose ministry God greatly owned during the Second Great Awakening. This book's sections on revivals and Nettleton's personal letters are themselves more than worth its price. Oh, that the Spirit of God would stir us up in prayer for revival and would again thrust forth into the white, ready harvest men of such preachers who burn with passion for the salvation of the hell-bound!

JOEL R. BEEKE

*President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary,
Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Dr. Johnston has produced a biography in which he embeds large elements of primary sources and pertinent secondary sources immediately within the text. This gives a haunting "You Were There" atmosphere to the text and heightens the importance of the theological underpinnings to revival that made Asahel Nettleton one of the bright gifts to the American church.

DR. THOMAS J. NETTLES

*Professor of Historical Theology, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,
Louisville, Kentucky*

Revival Literature

P. O. Box 6068 • Asheville, NC 28816

1-800-252-8896

revivallit@bellsouth.net

www.revivallit.org

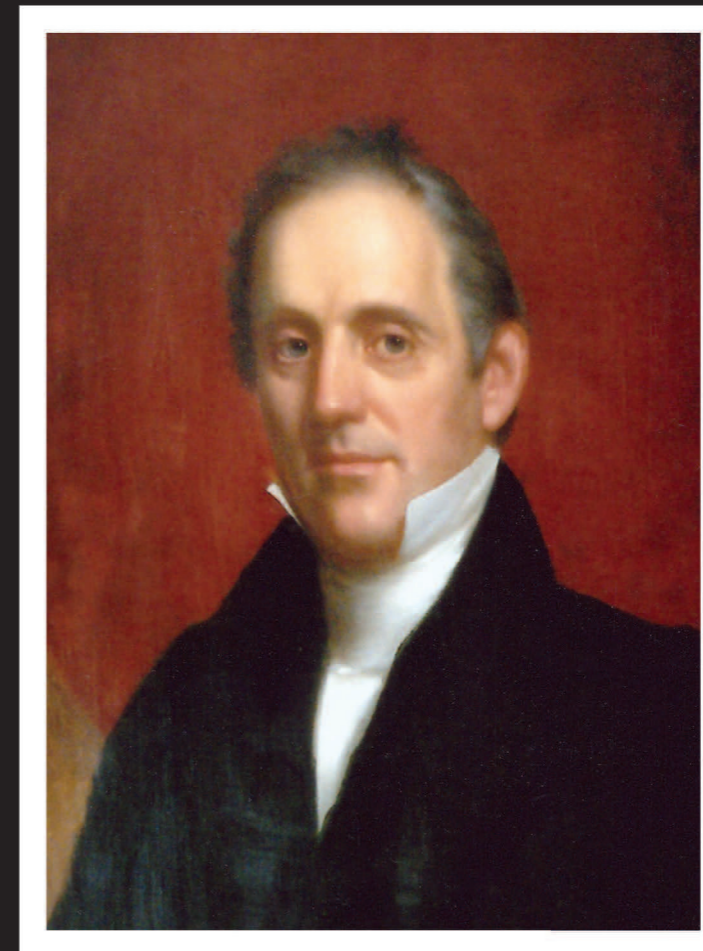
ISBN 978-0-9860225-0-0



9 780986 022500

Asahel Nettleton: REVIVAL PREACHER • E. A. Johnston

RL
Revival
Literature



Asahel Nettleton

REVIVAL PREACHER

E. A. Johnston

The cover picture is taken from an oil portrait of Asahel Nettleton which hangs in the Hartford Seminary Library in Hartford, Connecticut. (Asahel Nettleton was the co-founder of the seminary.)

**ASAHEL NETTLETON:
REVIVAL PREACHER**

A BIOGRAPHY

BY

E. A. JOHNSTON

REVIVAL LITERATURE
PO BOX 6068
ASHEVILLE, NC 28816
828-681-0370
WWW.REVIVALLIT.ORG

Text © E. A. Johnston 2012

First published 2012 by Revival Literature, www.revivalit.org

All rights reserved

ISBN: 978-1-56632-154-9 Revival Literature

Typeset in Bembo Standard 11 on 13 point by Quinta Press,
www.quintapress.com

ISBN: 978-0-9860225-0-0 The Old Paths Publications, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America



DEDICATION

With warm esteem the following chapters on the life and ministry of
Asahel Nettleton are dedicated to

Dr. J. I. Packer
Pauline in theology,
Whitefieldian in unity,
Christ-like in manner.

SAMPLE PAGES





COMMENDATIONS

The momentous ministry of the Edwardsean evangelist Asahel Nettleton, a key figure in the Second Great Awakening, has been effectively forgotten during the past century and a half of less-than-Reformed revivalism. Dr. Johnston's masterful and thorough biography is a long-overdue tribute to this outstanding servant of God, and is priority reading for all who care about evangelism today.

J. I. PACKER

All Christians who long for revival and relish the study of it should feel greatly indebted to Dr. Johnston for his painstaking labor of love in amassing the most thorough biography ever written on Asahel Nettleton, whose ministry God greatly owned during the Second Great Awakening. This book's sections on revivals and Nettleton's personal letters are themselves more than worth its price. Oh, that the Spirit of God would stir us up in prayer for revival and would again thrust forth into the white, ready harvest men of such preachers who burn with passion for the salvation of the hell-bound!

JOEL R. BEEKE

President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

The current situation facing 21st century American evangelicals more closely resembles the situation in the Second Great Awakening than many realize. We are not in revival (oh that the Lord would grant us revival!). But evangelicals in general more closely resemble the doctrines and methods of Charles Finney than those of the more biblical Asahel Nettleton. We cannot guarantee a revival, but we should work for reformation along the lines of Nettleton. May the Lord bless this worthy study to many who cry for revival, so we may learn from the truths of the past and not repeat the errors of the past.

CURT DANIEL, PH.D.

Pastor, Faith Bible Church, Springfield, Il.

Asahel Nettleton lived in a time of transition between the old order of evangelism of the Puritans and Jonathan Edwards and the new evangelism and theology of Charles Finney and Nathaniel Taylor. Nettleton was a stalwart, standing firm in the line of Edwards and the Puritans, and against the New Measures introduced by Finney, warning of the consequences of adopting those New Measures. His warnings sadly went unheeded and we have reaped the consequences—a whirlwind of corrupt theology and false converts.

This biography brings to light anew the God-centered evangelism and methodology of Asahel Nettleton and details the decline of American theology which had already begun at the height of Nettleton's ministry. I highly recommend this new biography of Asahel Nettleton to all who desire to recapture the spirit and message of true biblical evangelism.

WILLIAM C. NICHOLS

International Outreach, Inc.

The life of the 19th century preacher, Asahel Nettleton, has never been appreciated or even known as it ought to have been. As Dr. E. A. Johnston has rightly said, "Nettleton is one of the most neglected figures in church history." There have really been only two works written about his life and ministry, the first being the 1844 *Memoir of the Life and Character of Asahel Nettleton*, by Bennet Tyler, and then a later biography, published in 1977, entitled *God Sent Revival* by John Thornbury. Other than these two published biographies, there remain only unpublished doctoral dissertations written on Nettleton.

As a result, the church in the 20th and 21st centuries has missed out on benefiting from this eminent servant of Christ, who labored as an evangelist, indeed, a true revivalist, in the eastern United States during the 19th century. It is, therefore, a special blessing for the church of Christ to once again have Nettleton's life brought before them in this new definitive biography, so well researched and written by Dr. E. A. Johnston.

Dr. Johnston has already written a number of books, including the authorized biography of J. Sidlow Baxter and a definitive two-volume biography on George Whitefield, the great British evangelist of the 18th century. But this large biography may well be his most important of all, from the standpoint of its bearing on the important ecclesiastical and doctrinal issues of the evangelical church today.

Dr. Johnston has made the evangelical church a debtor to him in providing a fresh and thorough look at the personal life, ministry,

preaching, and theology of Nettleton, who was the leading evangelical itinerant evangelist in America during the years of the Second Great Awakening in the early 1800s. As a contemporary of Charles G. Finney, who was instrumental in bringing permanent damage upon American evangelicalism through his bad theology and humanistic methodology, Nettleton was the leading opponent of Finney's errors in his day. This volume will give fresh and clear understanding to the Second Great Awakening and its issues at a time when both Nettleton and Finney preached for so many years.

Every pastor, preacher, evangelist, missionary, as well as anyone truly interested in revival and church history ought to read these two volumes closely. The issues clarified here are of the utmost importance for our present day need within American evangelicalism. Reading Nettleton's life from this newly researched and accurate perspective will be most beneficial.

MACK TOMLINSON

Elder and Itinerant Minister, Providence Baptist Chapel, Denton, Texas

George Whitefield we know, but who is Asahel Nettleton (1783–1844), the man with the unusual Bible name (Asahel meaning “made by God”)? Read this new biography and you will discover that he was an outstanding American evangelist greatly used in revival. All burdened for revival in our time can learn from this God-made man—his personality, his preaching, and, above all, his passion for God. Nettleton's story will instruct, inspire and indeed impact you to be a servant of God, on fire for your Master's cause.

TED S. RENDALL

*Minister & Lecturer, Olford Center for Biblical Preaching
Chancellor Emeritus of Prairie Bible Institute*

Once again, author, biographer, Dr. E. A. Johnston, has given the Church a gift to be treasured. His scholarly work on the life and ministry of Asahel Nettleton is a must read for all who have an interest in the historical accounts of God's sovereign work in revival and the human instruments He used. I read the manuscript from a pastoral perspective and I was profoundly moved by the method and manner of Asahel Nettleton's ministry. Two specific areas of Nettleton's ministry especially captured my attention. First, unlike George Whitefield, who preached to thousands in the open air and who enjoyed great notoriety, Nettleton preached in the rural churches and only at the invitation of a

pastor or of the church if there was no pastor. He saw himself as the pastor's assistant and worked with him, never against him. Secondly, Nettleton believed that revival was a sovereign act of God. He avoided emotionalism and focused on preaching sound biblical doctrine. His confidence was in the word of God and the Spirit of God. Yet, as you will see, Asahel Nettleton was one of God's key instruments during the Second Great Awakening.

My stroll through the pages of *Asahel Nettleton: Revival Preacher* gave me renewed appreciation for a man whom God used mightily in the Second Great Awakening. Nettleton was humble in his service to God, serious about the things of God, unwavering in his belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and devoted to the word of God. Herein is a much-needed message to the 21st century church.

DR. ROGER D. WILLMORE

Past President, Alabama Baptist State Convention

Dr. Johnston has produced a biography in which he embeds large elements of primary sources and pertinent secondary sources immediately within the text. This gives a haunting "You Were There" atmosphere to the text and heightens the importance of the theological underpinnings to revival that made Asahel Nettleton one of the bright gifts to the American church.

DR. THOMAS J. NETTLES

*Professor of Historical Theology, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Louisville,
Kentucky*

CONTENTS

	11
INTRODUCTION	11
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	15
FOREWORD BY JOHN THORNBURY	17
PREFACE BY RICHARD OWN ROBERTS	21
PART 1: REVIVAL PREACHER	25
1 THE LEGEND OF THE KING'S SWORD	27
2 THE LAND IN REVIVAL	33
3 ASAHEL NETTLETON'S BIRTH	43
4 HIS COLLEGE LIFE	55
5 CALL TO MINISTRY	61
6 NETTLETON'S PREACHING	67
7 NEW ENGLAND THEOLOGY	87
8 EARLY LABORS	113
9 THE DOCTRINES THAT HE PREACHED	125
10 IN THE MIDST OF REVIVAL	133
11 REVIVAL SCENES	143
12 THE LONG ISLAND REVIVAL	153
13 HIS JOURNAL ON REVIVAL	159
14 NETTLETON'S REVIVAL METHODS	169
15 AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS POWERS 1820–1822	175
16 1822: REVIVAL FIRES AND TYPHUS FEVER	191
17 VILLAGE HYMNS FOR SOCIAL WORSHIP	201
18 RETURN TO SERVICE	209
19 DEALING WITH SINNERS	219
PART 2: CONTROVERSY WITH NEW MEASURES AND NEW DIVINITY	227
20 OMINOUS CLOUDS OF CHANGE	229
21 MEETING AT ALBANY, NEW YORK	237
22 FIRST SHOT OVER THE BOW, THE "CIVIL WAR IN ZION" LETTER	243
23 FINNEY'S REBUTTAL: "CAN TWO WALK TOGETHER?"	253
24 THE NEW LEBANON CONVENTION	269

10	ASAHEL NETTLETON: REVIVAL PREACHER	
25	PILGRIM'S PROGRESS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	277
26	FINAL REVIVALS	287
27	ATTACK ON HIS CHARACTER	301
28	TRIP ABROAD AND FOUNDING OF THE THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE	311
29	DEATH OF NETTLETON	319
30	HIS LETTERS	329
	APPENDIX 1: REVIVAL OF 1820	419
	APPENDIX 2: FRANCIS WAYLAND'S OBSERVATIONS OF ASAHEL NETTLETON	465
	APPENDIX 3: RECOLLECTIONS OF NETTLETON	471
	APPENDIX 4: A NARRATIVE OF THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION, WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF ALBANY, IN THE YEAR 1820	477
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	509
	INDEX OF NAMES	513
	INDEX OF PLACES	516
	INDEX OF SUBJECTS	518

INTRODUCTION

In the library of Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut hangs an oil portrait of a man forgotten by historians, his present obscurity standing in stark contrast to the times in which he lived. In nineteenth century America the name Asahel Nettleton, was a household word. In fact, a study of historical documents of 1810–1844 (the years of his public ministry) will reveal that Asahel Nettleton was the leading figure of the revival of religion known as The Second Great Awakening. He was friends with the leading religious figures of his day and he was one of the original founders of what is now Hartford Seminary; yet today he is practically unknown. Looking at his oil portrait one can see the haggard look in his blue eyes, a result of typhus fever and a life spent at full stretch for his Lord. In his day the name Asahel Nettleton, literally made strong men 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. It was said of Nettleton, “that he knew human nature so thoroughly he could read a man’s heart”. He was the leading human instrument of God in over fifty revivals during the period known as The Second Great Awakening and his biographer Bennet Tyler stated that he was the means of bringing 30,000 souls into God’s kingdom. His grave lies in a remote cemetery in East Windsor, Connecticut. The inscription on the brown mossy tombstone simply reads, “Rev. Asahel Nettleton D.D. Died May 16. 1844”, yet he is among God’s choicest servants.

A study of the life and ministry of the nineteenth century evangelist, Asahel Nettleton, is vastly important if we are to comprehend the reasons and circumstances of *why* the majority of our churches, in not only America but the world, hold to the theological views they have and conduct evangelism in the way they do. The preponderance of evangelism that is conducted today can trace its roots directly back to the “New Measures” movement of the nineteenth century and the personages of Charles Grandison Finney and Nathaniel William Taylor.

Concerning theology and the preaching of the Gospel, what is considered by the majority of the church today to be “orthodoxy” was considered by the orthodox New England ministers of the early nineteenth century to be “heresy” in their day. Why the grand shift in theological views? Did society play a part? Who were the primary religious leaders of America in the nineteenth century? What roles did they play in this giant theological seismic shift in American theology? These questions will be answered in this new biography on Asahel Nettleton.

Part of the reason why the name Asahel Nettleton is so obscure is that there has been scant biographical material published on his life. The first published memoir of his life was done by his good friend and colleague, Bennet Tyler, this work, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Asahel Nettleton* first appeared shortly after Nettleton’s death in 1844. The second published biography of his life was a British edition of Tyler’s work that was edited by the Scotsman Andrew Bonar (1854) and this book was identical to Tyler’s except for some minor editorial changes by Bonar so not to offend British readers. It would be a century later, in 1977, that the only other published biography on Nettleton appeared—this was *God Sent Revival* by J. F. Thornbury. Also, two scholarly dissertations on Nettleton remain unpublished. These are: *Life and Letters of Asahel Nettleton, 1783–1844* by George Hugh Birney, Jr., 1943, Hartford Theological Seminary; and the more thorough *Asahel Nettleton: Nineteenth Century American Revivalist*, by Sherry Pierpont May, 1969, Drew University. The lack of existing material on Nettleton accounts for his relative obscurity today. Yet he is a man whose life needs to be studied! Especially if we are to impact our generation for Christ today.

No other man in history was so mightily used of God in revival as Asahel Nettleton. He labored amidst more revivals of religion than Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield! One can learn much about how God moves in revival by studying Nettleton’s life, therefore this book will be a useful tool for any serious student of revival. Secondly, the role that Nettleton played as a defender of the faith against the “New Measures” and the “New Haven Theology” reveals how theology in America shifted from its Puritan roots of Calvinism to a more Federalized man-centered theology. The roots of this Pelagian theology stemmed from Yale College, and specifically the teachings of N. W. Taylor, professor of theology at Yale. Asahel Nettleton fought almost the same battle as C. H. Spurgeon; Spurgeon had his “Downgrade