

## Concise church biographies

### Asahel Nettleton [1783-1844]

Asahel was a significant Connecticut Reformed pastor and theologian during the Second Great Awakening [1792-1842]. Some have estimated that he brought 30,000 people to Christ.

He was born in a farming family and came under a deep conviction of sin in 1800. He read Jonathan Edwards' sermons but remained unconverted. However, he was regenerated in 1801 in a local revival, which added 32 converts to the church in North Killingworth, and many more in 1802. He quickly decided that he wanted to be a missionary.

He studied at Yale between 1805 to 1809 and was ordained in 1811. His method was to move into a community and study it for weeks before attempting any evangelism. He then preached in a doctrinal but practical manner. He filled churches where there was no pastor and cared for the people afterwards. He also refused to preach unless he had been invited. He rejected the idea that he was the cause of revival and pointed to God not himself.

In 1827 he strongly opposed Charles Finney and Lyman Beecher in the New Lebanon Conference. In opposing Finney's psychological revivalism Asahel emphasised the sovereignty of God in salvation, and thus attacked the altar calls (introduced by Finney), which Asahel believed denied total depravity.

Asahel mentored many young ministers including James Brainerd Taylor [1801–1829], another Second Great Awakening evangelist.

In his revival evangelism Asahel: re-established Calvinism in his preaching; established good moral behaviour in society (unlike Methodist revivals); and the fruits of his ministry lasted (unlike Finney). It was said that he helped to make Christian liberty, Christian equality and Christian fraternity the passion of the land.

God graciously used Asahel to bring more people to Christ than any man since George Whitefield 50 years earlier.

In 1844, *The New York Observer* said that Nettleton was 'one of the most extraordinary preachers of the gospel with whom God has ever blessed this country'. *The New York Evangelist* stated, 'Few men, since the apostolic days, have been honoured with such a signal success in preaching the word, and in the conversion of sinners as he'. Despite this, modern Christians know little or nothing about him but instead know much about Arminians like CG Finney and DL Moody.