

## **Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 5, Jonathan Edwards and the First Great Awakening Resources from NotebookLM**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

### **1. Abstract of Green, American Christianity, Session 5, Jonathan Edwards and the First Great Awakening, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Green's lecture on American Christianity, specifically Session 5, focuses on Jonathan Edwards and the First Great Awakening.** The session begins by examining the decline of religious fervor in colonial immigrant churches due to internal dissent, Enlightenment ideals like deism, and increasing religious freedom leading to non-affiliation. **The lecture then shifts to the geographical distribution of various denominations across the colonies, such as Congregationalists in New England and Anglicans spread throughout.** Subsequently, the discussion centers on the biography of Jonathan Edwards, highlighting his intellectual gifts, conversion, and influential ministry in Northampton. **Edwards's role in the First Great Awakening and his theological disagreements, particularly concerning the Halfway Covenant, are explored, culminating in his dismissal and later presidency of Princeton.** The lecture concludes by assessing the lasting impact of Edwards's life and ministry, including a revival of Calvinism and the emergence of his theological followers, the Edwardsians.

**2. 26 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 5 – Double click icon  
to play in Windows media player or go to the  
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link  
there (Church History → American Christianity).**



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on05.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Green, American Christianity, Session 5, Jonathan Edwards and the First Great Awakening

#### Briefing Document: Jonathan Edwards and the First Great Awakening

**Overview:** This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Roger Green in Session 5 of his lecture series on American Christianity. The lecture focuses on the religious landscape of colonial America, the decline of early immigrant churches, the distribution of denominations, and the pivotal figure of Jonathan Edwards and the commencement of the First Great Awakening.

#### Main Themes and Important Ideas:

##### 1. Decline of Early Immigrant Churches in Colonial America:

Dr. Green posits that by the second, third, and fourth generations, many immigrant churches in colonial America were experiencing a decline in vitality. He identifies four key reasons for this:

- **Decline in the fervor of their own members:** The initial religious zeal of the original immigrants did not always persist in subsequent generations. As Dr. Green notes regarding the Puritans, it's a question of "what came first? Did they increase in wealth? Did that kind of cause them to lose their evangelical fervor? Or did they lose their evangelical fervor and that caused them to increase in... what came first, the chicken or the egg?"
- **The number of dissidents within the churches:** Disagreements arose concerning theology, church polity (how the church is established and governed), leading to internal conflict and weakening the unity of the congregations.
- **The impact of the 17th and 18th-century Age of Reason/Rationality:** The rise of rationalistic thought, exemplified by deism, challenged traditional religious beliefs. Dr. Green explains that deism presented a view where "God is up here, we're down here, and there's no connection between God and us... God made the world like a clockmaker makes a clock, and he wound it up, and it's ticking away down here, but there's no connection between God and us." This philosophical view had a "real impact on a lot of denominations, a lot of churches, and a lot of people here in the colonies."
- **Religious freedom leading to non-affiliation and antagonism:** Colonies like Rhode Island and Pennsylvania emphasized religious freedom, allowing

individuals to choose not to belong to any church. This led to a segment of the population becoming "atheists or agnostics" and, importantly, some developed an "external antagonism" towards the church and organized religion, a phenomenon relatively new in the American context.

## 2. Distribution of Churches in Colonial America:

Dr. Green provides a snapshot of the geographical distribution of various denominations in the colonial period:

- **Congregational Churches:** Primarily found in New England.
- **Anglican Church (later Episcopal):** Spread throughout the colonies, dominant in places like Virginia, and present even in Georgia.
- **Presbyterianism:** Small but spread throughout the colonies with no single dominant center.
- **Baptists:** Found everywhere in the colonies, with a significant presence in Rhode Island.
- **Roman Catholic Church:** Quite small and concentrated in the middle colonies (New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland). The later large Catholic immigration to places like Boston had not yet occurred.
- **Quakers (Friends):** Spread throughout the colonies, with significant numbers in New England and the middle colonies due to welcome in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania.
- **Lutheran Church:** Primarily located in the middle colonies, with some presence in Georgia as well, due to German immigration, particularly to Pennsylvania.
- **Dutch Reformed Church:** Concentrated in the middle colonies, especially New York, reflecting its origins as New Netherlands, and also significant in New Jersey. Dr. Green notes that "One of the beginnings of the First Great Awakening was among Dutch Reformed people in New Jersey and New York."

By the time of the First Great Awakening, "we've got a fair number of denominations now in the American colonies," all originating as immigrant churches.

## 3. Jonathan Edwards and the First Great Awakening:

Dr. Green introduces Jonathan Edwards as "one of the greatest of American-born theologians and philosophers." He highlights key biographical details:

- **Birth and Early Life (1703-1758):** Born in East Windsor, Connecticut, Edwards was a precocious child, fluent in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew by age 13. He also had a strong interest in natural sciences, demonstrating a "power of observation" that would serve him in theology and philosophy. He entered Yale before age 13.
- **Theology at Yale:** Edwards defended the theology of John Calvin and the Puritans, which he believed was the "best interpretation of the biblical word." He argued against the rising theology of Jacob Arminius (stressing free will) and deism (denying Jesus' divinity and a connection between God and humanity). Dr. Green emphasizes that by Edwards' time, Calvinist Puritan theology had "lost its kind of glory days," with Arminian theology becoming more prevalent. Edwards played a crucial role in bringing Calvinism back into American religious life through the First Great Awakening.
- **Conversion Experience:** Edwards described his conversion on January 12, 1723, as a "solemn dedication of myself to God and wrote it down, giving up myself and all that I had to God to be for the future, in no respect my own, to act as one that had no right to himself in any respect."
- **Ministry in Northampton:** In 1727, Edwards moved to Northampton, Massachusetts, to assist his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, a prominent pastor of the Congregational Church. He took over the pastoral ministry upon his grandfather's death in 1729.
- **Preaching Style:** Described as lawyer-like, focused, and primarily based on biblical text, aiming to let "God's truth com[e] through personality." Despite not using many illustrations or direct eye contact with the congregation, his preaching was instrumental in the start of the First Great Awakening.
- **The Beginning of the First Great Awakening (1734):** Dr. Green marks 1734 as the start of the First Great Awakening, largely due to Edwards' powerful preaching. His 1737 book, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, popularized the events and informed figures like John Wesley. The awakening saw the conversion of a "pretty broad range of people," including nominal church members and those antagonistic towards the church.
- **Conflict over the Halfway Covenant and Dismissal (1750):** Edwards held a stricter view of church membership, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, believing they should be reserved for those who could clearly profess their Christian faith. He opposed the Halfway Covenant, which had become dominant in New England

Congregationalism, including his own church in Northampton. This led to his dismissal in 1750.

- **Ministry in Stockbridge and Writing:** After his dismissal, Edwards moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a "wilderness" location where he ministered to a small community and Native Americans. This period, initially seen as a low point, became highly productive intellectually. He wrote extensively, including *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notion of Freedom of the Will*, defending predestination against Arminian free will.
- **Presidency of Princeton University and Death (1758):** In 1758, Edwards was invited to become the president of Princeton University. He moved there but tragically died from a smallpox vaccination after only three months in office.

#### 4. Results of Jonathan Edwards' Life and Ministry:

Dr. Green outlines the significant impact of Jonathan Edwards:

- **Revival of Calvinism:** Edwards brought Calvinistic theology back into prominence in American religious and cultural life.
- **Balance of the Life of the Mind and the Life of the Heart:** He exemplified a "beautiful balance" between intellectual rigor and genuine religious experience, demonstrating that faith and reason are not mutually exclusive. He appreciated "that all truth is God's truth," encompassing science, theology, philosophy, ethics, and economics.
- **Power of Preaching from the Scriptures:** He demonstrated the effectiveness of allowing "the word of God speak its own word to the hearts and minds of people."
- **Significant Succession:** His lineage produced numerous influential figures, including a vice president, many clergymen, thirteen presidents of higher learning, and sixty-five professors, showcasing a broad cultural impact.
- **The Edwardsians:** A group of followers, including his son Jonathan Edwards Jr., Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, and Nathaniel Emmons, who carried on his theological agenda to some extent. However, Dr. Green notes that the Edwardsians generally "emphasized more freedom of the will in terms of theology, and they de-emphasized Jonathan Edwards' predestination." Some even questioned the doctrine of original sin, diverging significantly from Edwards' own beliefs.

**Conclusion:**

Dr. Green's lecture establishes the context of a religiously diverse but also spiritually declining colonial America in the early 18th century. He then introduces Jonathan Edwards as a pivotal figure whose intellectual depth and powerful preaching ignited the First Great Awakening, leading to a revival of Calvinism and a profound impact on American religious and intellectual history. While his immediate followers, the Edwardsians, modified some of his theological tenets, his influence remained significant for generations to come.

## 4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 5, Jonathan Edwards and the First Great Awakening

### Jonathan Edwards and the First Great Awakening: A Study Guide

#### Key Concepts

- **Decline of Immigrant Churches:** The reasons for the weakening vitality of churches established by immigrants in the colonies, including decreased fervor, internal dissent, the influence of the Age of Reason, and the rise of religious freedom leading to non-affiliation and antagonism.
- **Denominational Distribution:** The geographic concentration of various Christian denominations in the American colonies during the pre-Awakening period (Congregationalists in New England, Anglicans throughout, Presbyterians spread out, Baptists everywhere, Roman Catholics in the middle colonies, Quakers in New England and the middle colonies, Lutherans in the middle colonies and Georgia, Dutch Reformed in the middle colonies, particularly New York and New Jersey).
- **Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758):** A significant American-born theologian and philosopher known for his intellectual brilliance, defense of Calvinistic theology, and role in the First Great Awakening. Key aspects of his life include his precocious intellect, education at Yale, pastoral ministry in Northampton, dismissal due to his stance on church membership, missionary work in Stockbridge, presidency of Princeton, and untimely death.
- **Theology of Jonathan Edwards:** His strong commitment to Calvinistic and Puritan theology, opposition to Arminianism and Deism, emphasis on God's sovereignty and predestination, and understanding of conversion as a complete surrender to God.
- **The First Great Awakening (c. 1734-1760s):** A period of significant religious revival in the American colonies, often considered to have begun with Jonathan Edwards' preaching in Northampton. Characterized by increased religious fervor, conversions across denominations, and the emergence of new preaching styles and leaders.
- **Halfway Covenant:** A practice within Congregational churches in New England allowing the children of baptized but unconverted parents to be baptized, though

not allowed to partake in communion or full church membership. Edwards strongly opposed this practice.

- **Edwards' Preaching Style:** Described as intellectual and text-focused, seemingly dispassionate in delivery but profoundly impactful in its theological and biblical substance.
- *"A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God..."* Edwards' influential book documenting the early stages of the revival in Northampton, which informed others, including John Wesley, about the events.
- **Results of Edwards' Life and Ministry:** Revival of Calvinism, a balanced emphasis on intellect and piety ("life of the mind and the life of the heart"), an understanding that all truth is God's truth, the power of scriptural preaching, a significant intellectual and religious lineage, and the emergence of the "Edwardsians."
- **The Edwardsians:** A group of second-generation followers of Jonathan Edwards (including Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, Jonathan Edwards Jr., and Nathaniel Emmons) who, while influenced by Edwards, often modified his theology, particularly by emphasizing greater freedom of the will and sometimes questioning the doctrine of original sin.

### Short Answer Quiz

1. According to the lecture, what were two primary reasons for the decline in vitality among second, third, and fourth-generation immigrant churches in the American colonies?
2. Describe the philosophical view of Deism as it is presented in the lecture, and explain its impact on the churches in the 18th century.
3. In what geographical region of the colonies was Congregationalism almost exclusively found, and where was the Roman Catholic Church primarily concentrated during the colonial period discussed?
4. What theological figures did Jonathan Edwards strongly support and which theological perspectives did he actively argue against during his time as a student and beyond?
5. How did Jonathan Edwards describe his personal conversion experience in his "Personal Narrative," and what did this experience signify for him?



6. What significant event led to Jonathan Edwards leaving his pastoral position in Northampton in 1750, and what was the underlying theological issue?
7. Explain the historical significance of Jonathan Edwards' book, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God...", in relation to the First Great Awakening.
8. Describe Jonathan Edwards' preaching style as it is presented in the lecture, and contrast it briefly with that of George Whitefield, who is mentioned as his opposite.
9. Name at least two significant outcomes or results of Jonathan Edwards' life and ministry that are highlighted in the lecture.
10. Briefly describe who the "Edwardsians" were and mention one way in which their theological views sometimes differed from those of Jonathan Edwards.

### **Answer Key**

1. Two primary reasons for the decline of immigrant churches were a decrease in the fervor of their own members over generations and the presence of dissidents within the congregations who had disagreements over theology or church governance.
2. Deism is described as a philosophical/religious view where God is seen as a creator who is distant and uninvolved in the world, much like a clockmaker who winds up a clock and leaves it to run on its own without further intervention or connection. This rationalistic view challenged the more personal and interventionist God of traditional Christian denominations.
3. Congregationalism was found almost exclusively in New England, while the Roman Catholic Church was primarily concentrated in the middle colonies during the colonial period discussed in the lecture.
4. Jonathan Edwards strongly supported the theology of John Calvin and the early Puritans, believing their interpretation best represented the Bible. He actively argued against the growing theology of Jacob Arminius (due to its emphasis on free will) and Deism (due to its rationalistic view of God and denial of Jesus' divinity).
5. Edwards described his conversion as a "solemn dedication" where he gave himself and all he had to God, no longer considering himself his own. This signified a complete surrender and acknowledgment of God's ownership over his life.

6. Jonathan Edwards was dismissed from his church in Northampton in 1750 due to his strong opposition to the Halfway Covenant. He believed that only those who could clearly profess their Christian faith should be baptized and partake in the Lord's Supper, a stricter view than the prevailing acceptance under the Halfway Covenant.
7. "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God..." was significant because it documented the early revivals in Northampton under Edwards' ministry, providing an account of the First Great Awakening that reached others, including influential figures like John Wesley, and helped to popularize the movement.
8. Jonathan Edwards' preaching style was described as intellectual, text-focused, and delivered without much overt emotion or illustration, resembling a lawyer presenting a case. This contrasted with George Whitefield, who is mentioned as having an opposite style, suggesting a more emotional and perhaps illustrative approach.
9. Significant outcomes of Edwards' life and ministry include the revival of Calvinism in the colonies and a renewed appreciation for a balance between intellectual understanding and heartfelt experience in faith ("the life of the mind and the life of the heart").
10. The Edwardsians were second-generation followers of Jonathan Edwards who carried on his theological legacy. However, they often differed by emphasizing greater freedom of the will in their theology and sometimes de-emphasizing Edwards' strong doctrine of predestination.

## Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the multiple factors that contributed to the decline in religious fervor and institutional strength among immigrant churches in the American colonies prior to the First Great Awakening, as outlined in Dr. Green's lecture.
2. Discuss the key theological convictions of Jonathan Edwards and explain why his perspective was considered a revival of Calvinistic and Puritan thought in the context of 18th-century colonial America.
3. Evaluate the significance of the First Great Awakening, particularly as it began under the ministry of Jonathan Edwards, in shaping the religious landscape and potentially the social dynamics of the American colonies.
4. Compare and contrast Jonathan Edwards' understanding of church membership and the sacraments with the principles embodied in the Halfway Covenant, and analyze the consequences of his stance on this issue for his ministry in Northampton.
5. Examine the lasting impact of Jonathan Edwards' life and thought on American religious and intellectual history, considering both his direct influence and the subsequent developments within the "Edwardsian" movement.

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Fervor:** Intense and passionate feeling; zeal.
- **Dissidents:** People who oppose official policy.
- **Church Polity:** The organizational structure and governance of a church.
- **Age of Reason (Age of Rationality):** An intellectual and philosophical movement of the 18th century that emphasized reason and individualism rather than tradition and religious authority.
- **Deism:** A religious and philosophical belief that posits a creator God who does not intervene in the universe after its creation.
- **Religious Toleration:** Allowing people to practice different religions without persecution, but not necessarily endorsing or granting equal status to all religions.
- **Religious Freedom:** The right to practice any religion or no religion without government interference or coercion.

- **Denominationalism:** The existence of various distinct religious groups or denominations within Christianity.
- **Precocious:** Having developed certain abilities or proclivities at an earlier age than usual.
- **Philosopher:** A person engaged in philosophy (the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline).
- **Calvinism:** A major branch of Protestantism following the theological tradition and forms of Christian practice set down by John Calvin and other Reformation-era theologians. Key tenets include the sovereignty of God, predestination, and the authority of scripture.
- **Puritans:** English Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries who sought to purify the Church of England of what they considered to be Roman Catholic practices, emphasizing a strict adherence to scripture and personal piety.
- **Arminianism:** A theological movement within Protestantism that modifies or rejects some tenets of Calvinism, particularly emphasizing free will and conditional election.
- **Conversion Experience:** A personal event or process in which an individual comes to a new understanding of their relationship with God or a significant change in their religious beliefs and commitment.
- **Congregational Church:** A Protestant church governed by its local congregation, with each church being autonomous.
- **Pastoral Ministry:** The work and responsibilities of a pastor or minister in leading and caring for a church congregation.
- **Revival:** A period of heightened spiritual interest or renewal within a church or community.
- **Halfway Covenant:** A 17th-century agreement within Congregational churches in New England that allowed baptized but unconverted members and their children to receive baptism.
- **Predestination:** The theological doctrine that all events have been willed by God, often with the understanding that God has eternally chosen who will be saved.

## 5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 5, Jonathan Edwards and the First Great Awakening, [Biblicalelearning.org](http://Biblicalelearning.org) (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions: Colonial American Religion and the First Great Awakening

**1. Why did many immigrant churches in colonial America experience a decline in vitality by the second, third, and fourth generations?** Several key factors contributed to this decline. Firstly, there was a natural decrease in the initial religious fervor of the members themselves over time, as subsequent generations did not necessarily share the same intense personal experiences that motivated the original immigrants. Secondly, internal dissent arose within these denominations, with members disagreeing on theological matters, church governance (polity), and the overall direction of their churches. Thirdly, the intellectual climate of the 17th and 18th centuries, known as the Age of Reason or Rationality, had a significant impact, with movements like Deism presenting a rationalistic challenge to traditional Christian doctrines. Finally, the increased religious freedom in colonies like Rhode Island and Pennsylvania allowed individuals to exist outside of established churches, leading to indifference and even outright antagonism towards organized religion and Christianity.

**2. Can you describe the geographical distribution of the major religious denominations in colonial America?** Congregational churches were primarily concentrated in New England. The Anglican Church (later the Episcopal Church) was more widespread, with significant presence in Virginia and extending down to Georgia. Presbyterianism, though small, was also scattered throughout the colonies without a single dominant center. Baptists were widespread as well, with notable strength in Rhode Island. The Roman Catholic Church was relatively small and mainly located in the middle colonies (New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland). Quakers (or Friends) had a strong presence in both New England and the middle colonies, benefiting from the religious tolerance in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. Lutherans were primarily found in the middle colonies, particularly Pennsylvania, which welcomed German immigrants, with some presence also in Georgia. Lastly, the Dutch Reformed Church was concentrated in the middle colonies, especially New York, reflecting its origins as New Netherlands.

**3. What was the significance of Jonathan Edwards in colonial American religious history?** Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was a pivotal figure, considered one of the greatest American-born theologians and philosophers. He played a crucial role in reviving Calvinistic Puritan theology in America, which had waned by his time, in the face of growing Arminian theology (emphasizing free will) and Deism (a rationalistic view of God). He is best known for his leadership in the First Great Awakening, a significant religious revival that began in the 1730s. Edwards' intellectual depth, his powerful preaching, and his extensive writings profoundly shaped American religious and intellectual life.

**4. Could you elaborate on the beginning of the First Great Awakening and Jonathan Edwards's role in it?** The First Great Awakening is generally considered to have begun around 1734 with the powerful preaching of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts. His sermons led to a remarkable spiritual awakening and numerous conversions in his congregation and beyond. Edwards documented this early phase of the revival in his book, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God," published in 1737, which brought news of the awakening to a wider audience, including figures like John Wesley in England. Edwards's emphasis on the necessity of personal conversion and a deep emotional experience of God was central to the movement.

**5. What was the Halfway Covenant, and why did Jonathan Edwards oppose it so strongly?** The Halfway Covenant was a practice that developed in the Congregational churches of New England starting in the mid-17th century. It allowed children of baptized but unconverted parents to be baptized themselves and granted them a form of partial church membership, though they could not partake in communion or vote in church affairs until they had a personal conversion experience. Edwards opposed the Halfway Covenant because he believed it diluted the requirements for full church membership and participation in the Lord's Supper. He argued that only those who could profess a clear and credible faith in Christ should be baptized and admitted to communion, believing that the Lord's Supper was exclusively for believers and not a potential means of conversion for non-believers.

**6. What happened to Jonathan Edwards after his dismissal from the Northampton church, and how did this period impact his work?**

In 1750, Jonathan Edwards was dismissed from his pastoral position at the Northampton Congregational Church due to his strong stance against the Halfway Covenant. This was a difficult period in his life, leading him to move to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a more remote frontier settlement. However, this time in Stockbridge proved to be incredibly productive intellectually. Free from the daily demands of a large pastorate, Edwards had ample time to write and develop his theological ideas. During this period, he penned some of his most important works, including "A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notion of Freedom of the Will," which defended predestination against Arminianism. What seemed like a low point became a time of significant intellectual contribution.

**7. What were some of the lasting results and influences of Jonathan Edwards's life and ministry?**

The impact of Jonathan Edwards was far-reaching. His work led to a revival of Calvinistic theology in America. He exemplified a valuable balance between intellectual rigor ("the life of the mind") and heartfelt religious experience ("the life of the heart"), demonstrating that faith and reason could coexist. He championed the power of preaching directly from the Scriptures. His legacy also extended through his descendants, many of whom became influential figures in academia and the clergy. Furthermore, he had a significant following of theologians and thinkers known as the "Edwardsians," who, while influenced by him, also developed their own theological perspectives, particularly regarding free will and original sin.

**8. Who were the "Edwardsians," and what were some of their key theological**

**tendencies in relation to Jonathan Edwards's thought?** The "Edwardsians" were a group of second-generation theologians and thinkers who were heavily influenced by Jonathan Edwards. Key figures among them included Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, Jonathan Edwards Jr. (his son), and Nathaniel Emmons. While they carried on some aspects of Edwards's theological agenda, they also diverged in significant ways. Notably, the Edwardsians tended to emphasize greater freedom of the human will and de-emphasize Edwards's strong doctrine of predestination. Some even questioned or modified the traditional understanding of original sin, arguing that individuals are culpable for their own choices to sin rather than inheriting Adam's guilt directly. Despite these differences, they remained an important force in American theological and intellectual life for several decades after Edwards's death.