Bible 101 • Summit View Church of Christ • Spring-Summer 2026

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

1701-1800 C.E.

August 12, 2026

SUMMARY OF THIS CENTURY

General Development: Religious thought pulls in opposite directions. In one direction, rationalism and romanticism draw people toward deism and other perspectives that diminish the authority of Scripture and the objectivity of the Christian faith. In the other direction, two great spiritual awakenings spawn deep faith, personal devotion, and a return to the Bible as God's authoritative word. Revolutions in the British American colonies and in France divide and transform the churches; they also spark a sense that everything is becoming new, which leads to hope for spiritual progress.

Key Dates:
1730s-1740s — the First Great Awakening in the British American colonies
1775-1782 — the American Revolution
1789-1799 — the French Revolution
1790-1830 — the Second Great Awakening in the U.S.

Key Questions: How does culture affect Christianity, and how does Christianity affect culture? How will the church function in the new, religiously pluralistic societies in the United States and elsewhere? Which is more important: correct doctrine or deep, personal devotion to God? How should Christians address the ills of society? To what new lands can Christians take the message of Christ?

Key Places: the 13 British colonies that become the new United States • France during its revolution • England as a source of Protestant reform, revival, and mission zeal

Key People: Immanuel Kant, philosopher • Jonathan Edwards, American preacher • John Wesley, English preacher • Napoleon Bonaparte, ruler of France

1) PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES THAT IMPACTED CHRISTIANITY

• DEISM, which first arose in the 1600s, holds that God created all things, then stepped back to allow nature and the universe to run as he created them to do. He does not involve himself much in human affairs. Supernatural events do not occur. Famous deists in the 1700s included Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Ethan Allen, and Thomas Paine.

• Philosopher IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804, from a part of Prussia now in Russia) argued for the infallibility of reason, demonstrating that the human mind understands the reality around it in categories and cannot fully comprehend anything except in categories. His philosophical work devastated easy arguments that reason proves the existence of God, the soul, or eternity. This did not mean God is not real, but that reason alone cannot prove his existence.

• BACKGROUNDS OF LIBERAL BIBLICAL CRITICISM — Immanuel Kant merged John Locke's focus on experience and sensation as the means to knowledge with René Descartes's emphasis on reason as the key to knowledge and argued that we can never really know God and the soul, which exist beyond our ability to observe them. He believed in God, but saw no place for God's self-revelation in history or for Christ as God in flesh. His ideas served as a catalyst for liberal biblical criticism in the 1800s, which questioned the historical value of Scripture and devalued the historical Jesus as the revealed Son of God in flesh.

• THE SPIRITUALIST MOVEMENT began with Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772, from Sweden), who claimed to have had visions of the spiritual world in which he was taken into the realm of spirits and angels. He wrote about his views extensively, proclaiming a mystical spirituality that saves believers from "the hells". After his death, his followers became the Church of the New Jerusalem, which is still around today.

2) THE EARLY 1700s — 1701-1725

IN THE AMERICAN COLONIES

• PURITANS/CONGREGATIONALISTS — Yale College was established by Puritans in Connecticut in 1701 to train church leaders.

• MISSIONS — In 1701, Thomas Bray (1656-1730), commissary of Maryland, founded the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, which sent out over 300 missionaries throughout the British colonies.

• THE ANGLICAN CHURCH was the official church of Maryland beginning in 1702, despite the objections of Roman Catholics who had settled there. Parts of New York had adopted Anglicanism in 1693. It became the official church of South Carolina in 1705, of North Carolina in 1715, and of Georgia in 1758.

• PRESBYTERIANS — In the 1600s, Scotland had been mostly Presbyterian, and many Scots had settled in North Ireland. From 1710 to 1760, some 200,000 Scottish Presbyterians migrated from North Ireland to England's American colonies, especially around New York, New Jersey, Virginia, and Pittsburgh. They became the foundation of American Presbyterianism.

IN EUROPE

• THE MORAVIANS were founded by Count Nicolas von Zinzendorf in the 1720s in Germany. They were descendants of the movement started in Bohemia and Moravia by John Huss (1369-1415) and emphasized personal devotion to Christ and adherence to the teaching of Scripture alone. They developed their own church system and became zealous in sending missionaries to places like India, Greenland, North America, Africa, and the Virgin Islands. The Moravians played an important role in maturing the faith of the great English preacher John Wesley. Many Moravians moved to the New World and settled in Pennsylvania, establishing the towns of Bethlehem and Nazareth there, and in South Carolina, where they established Salem.

• PROTESTANT MISSIONS — In 1707, the King of Denmark, who admired the Pietists (Lutherans who emphasized a personal relationship with Christ over mere doctrine and theology), sent two Pietist missionaries to India. They set up a mission base there that spawned Protestant interest in missions back in Europe as stories of their work circulated. With the support of the king, missionaries were also sent to Lapland (extreme northern Europe) and Greenland.

• IN FRANCE in the 1700s, Protestantism was still illegal, but the "Christians in the desert" of the late 1600s were still meeting anyway. Antoine Court (ca. 1695-1760) started the French Reformed Church. In 1729 he moved to Switzerland to train preachers who snuck back into France to minister there.

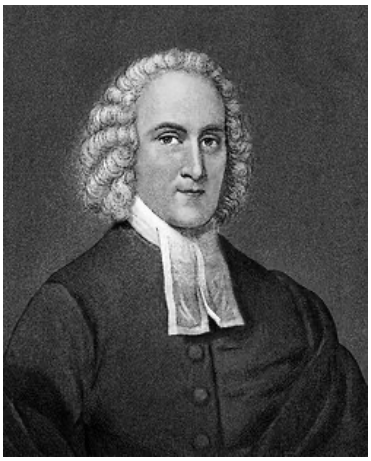
• THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH — In 1721, Russian czar Peter the Great abolished the patriarchate of Moscow and put the church under the direct control of the state. The church was essentially a department of the state until 1917, when the new Communist government separated them and the patriarchate was reestablished.

3) THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING — 1726-1749

• EDUCATION — Princeton University began as a "Log College" set up in 1726 by William Tennent, Sr., an Irish minister, near Philadelphia to train his sons and other boys for ministry. The school grew and later moved and became the College of New Jersey, then relocated to Princeton and took its current name.

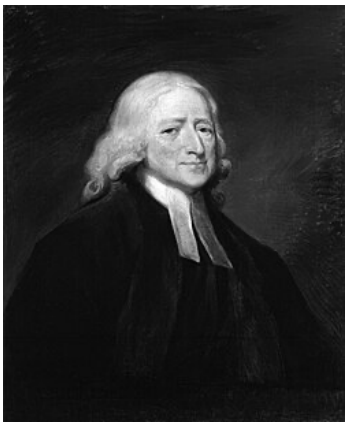
• CHRISTIANITY IN THE COLONIES — In VIRGINIA, those not adhering to the Church of England were persecuted, and many fled to MARYLAND for greater freedom, though Quakers, Methodists, and other groups settled in Virginia in spite of persecution. GEORGIA was established in 1732 as a colony for those imprisoned because of debts, largely through the work of Christians in England who were appalled at the conditions in debtors' prisons there and sought reform. The Church of England (the Anglican Church) was not successful in Georgia, but Methodists were, and later so were Baptists and others. In general, the Anglican Church attracted the upper classes while Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and other groups connected best with the middle and lower classes.

• THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING began in New Jersey in 1726 with the preaching of Dutch Reformed minister Theodore Frelinghuysen (1641-1748). It was marked by large, extended religious meetings that emphasized making one's religion more about one's personal relationship with Christ and less about ritual and ceremony. (Mainline Protestant groups at this time tended to focus on ritualistic worship and less on personal devotion to God.) The movement gained momentum around 1734-1737 in New England Congregationalist (Puritan) churches, especially through the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in the 1730s-1760s. He was a Calvinist preacher in Northampton, Massachusetts and is best known today for the famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God". People began to respond to his messages with strong outbursts of emotion, and more often with a powerful spiritual transformation in their lives. The fervor around Edwards calmed down, but new zeal spread everywhere, and many repented of sin and rejoiced in their salvation. The leaders of the movement were actually not particularly emotional, and in spite of the accusation of emotionalism, many people came to a deeper faith and a more faithful way of life. A number of people, having gone through a powerful experience of conversion, began to question the validity of their baptism as infants and became Baptists (who only baptized adults). Some entire congregations became Baptist. The Awakening was strongest around 1740. It spread throughout the colonies and produced some 150 new churches and 30,000-40,000 new believers in New England alone. New colleges were started to train ministers for the new churches. Missionary work increased. The movement began among the more Calvinistic churches (Dutch Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregationalist) and spread among Baptists, too. Politically, it helped unite the thirteen colonies through a sense of common purpose and identity.



• MORAVIAN MISSIONS — In 1731, Moravians based in Dresden (in southeast Germany) met Eskimos who had been converted by a Lutheran missionary, and the Moravians were inspired to send out missionaries. In 1732, they sent missionaries to the Caribbean, and over the next few decades they sent missionaries to Africa, India, South America, and North America.

4) MID-CENTURY & THE WESLEYS — 1750-1774



• THE WESLEYS AND THE METHODIST CHURCH — John Wesley (1703-1791) of England was born to an Anglican priest and the daughter of an Anglican priest. He was the fifteenth of nineteen children. In 1709, at age five, he miraculously escaped being killed in a fire that burned the parsonage where they lived. As an adult, he was trained as an Anglican priest and led the "Holy Club" at Lincoln College, which his younger brother Charles (1707-1788) and some friends had started. They covenanted together to live deeply spiritual lives. Others gave them the derogatory name "Methodists" because of their methodical style of Bible study and prayer. As a young

priest, John Wesley ministered briefly in Savannah, Georgia; but his ministry there did not go well, and he soon returned to England. He was deeply influenced by the faith of Moravians he had met while traveling to the New World and also after he returned to England. In England, he preached primarily in Bristol, and he encouraged groups to meet together to grow spiritually through Bible study, prayer, and discussion of religious matters. Such groups formed all over England and in the colonies. He began "field preaching" at the encouragement of George Whitefield (1714-1770), and he went on to preach about 42,000 sermons and travel over 200,000 miles on horseback in England, Scotland, and Ireland. He also wrote about 200 books. He believed in a person's free will to choose to follow Christ (as opposed to individual predestination) and justification by faith. He began a movement of Methodists, but he did not want them to separate from the Anglican Church. His followers gradually broke away from the Anglican Church, though, because of how they reached out to minister beyond parish boundaries, how they highlighted the shortcomings of the Anglican Church, and how, in the new United States, it was no longer possible to be part of the Anglican Church.

- His brother Charles Wesley became the hymn writer of the Methodist movement. He wrote over 7,000 hymns, including "Jesus, Lover of My Soul", "Love Divine", and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing".
- John Wesley's influence in England was such that it is thought that England avoided a revolution like that in France largely because so many Englishmen had come to Christ. Wesley supported the abolition of slavery.
- The Methodist Church spread to the British colonies in North America and was strong in the new United States when John Wesley died. In the U.S. it became the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1995, not long after Wesley's death, the Methodist Church in England separated from the Anglican Church and had about 70,000 members. The industrial revolution that brought masses of people into the cities in England and the spread of European descendants into the North American frontier led to the growth of the Methodists as they ministered to displaced people whom the more established Christian groups had trouble reaching. A system of circuit riders set up in the late 1700s spread Methodism rapidly along the American frontier.

- CATHOLICISM — Papal power in Europe diminished as the Jesuits came into disrepute for their involvement in the Thirty Years' War and other political issues and were dissolved by the pope under pressure from various rulers in 1773.
- SOCIAL CAUSES advanced by Christians in the British American colonies in the 1700s included the first anti-slavery efforts. These efforts were led by Congregationalists in Rhode Island in 1769 who tried to improve the condition of slaves. Quakers in the 1750s-1770s also tried to persuade others to free their slaves.
- RESTORATION MOVEMENT ORIGINS — John Glas (1695-1773) left the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland and started a new movement. He believed the church should practice weekly communion, have a plurality of elders, use only scriptural names, honor congregational autonomy, and restore New Testament Christianity. His son-in-law Robert Sandeman (1718-1771), who held the same values as Glas, moved to North America in 1764 and started the first Church of Christ in the U.S. on May 4, 1765, in New Hampshire.

RELIGIOUS EMPHASES IN THE THIRTEEN COLONIES BEFORE THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

- *Northern Colonies:* Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut — strong Puritan/Congregationalist presence
- *Middle Colonies:* Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, New York — ethnically and religiously diverse, with a strong Lutheran presence, some Catholics, and many Mennonites, Amish, Anabaptists, and Quakers, plus Methodists and Presbyterians; Pennsylvania in particular was very mixed

• *Southern Colonies:* Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, Georgia — the Anglican Church was strongest; there was also a strong Baptist presence, and there were many Methodists, Catholics, and Anglicans

• Overall, the largest churches in the colonies were the Anglicans, Congregationalists (Puritans), Baptists, and Presbyterians.

5) AROUND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION — 1775-1785

• ENGLAND — The SUNDAY SCHOOL movement started in England and became popular in 1780. It provided religious training and education in reading, writing, and math. Social activist and evangelical John H. Howard (1726-1790) brought about many prison reforms, including a new system by which jailers received salaries and food budgets so they did not have to extort money from prisoners to keep the prisons running. In 1779, John Newton of London, a repentant slave ship captain, wrote the hymn, "Amazing Grace".

• CHURCHES & THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION — The American Revolution began in 1775, though tensions between the thirteen colonies and far-away England with its remote government had been building for many years. The colonies declared their independence on July 4, 1776, and the war ended in 1782.

- The war divided some colonial churches. Anglicans in the south (including Virginia) generally supported the revolution; were split in the middle colonies (like Maryland); and tended to be loyal to England in the New England region. Methodists stayed mostly neutral, though John Wesley opposed the revolution. Quakers, Mennonites, and Moravians were pacifists and did not participate in the war, though they were generally supportive of the revolution. Congregationalists, Baptists, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Presbyterians generally supported the revolution and argued that any ruler who acted contrary to God's laws ought to expect their people to revolt.
- Some 30,000-40,000 Baptist, Congregational, and Anglican people loyal to England emigrated to Canada during the revolution and strengthened the English-supporting churches there.
- After the war, all the churches, especially the Anglican, had to decide how to relate to Britain now. More loyalists left for Canada or England. Most groups started their own American version of their churches: American Baptists, the Protestant Episcopal (no longer Anglican) Church (in 1789), the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, and a Presbyterians national church in 1788. The new U.S. Constitution officially separated church and the federal government, but some states still had official churches approved and supported by the state: Virginia was Anglican until 1786, and Congregationalists were the official church group in New Hampshire until 1817, Connecticut until 1818, and Massachusetts until 1833.
- The independent new nation sparked a sense among many of Providence providing progress, leaving behind the old, dogmatic ways (in both government and religion) and their old traditions, which were considered out of date and unnecessary. Unitarianism (focusing on human capacity and freedom instead of divine mystery and human sin; called "Unitarians" for their rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity) and Universalism (the belief that all will be saved) became popular, especially among the upper classes. So did Transcendentalism, which combined rationalism and romanticism and stressed self-knowledge as the way to understand reality and find meaning.

HOW AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY LED INTO THE AMERICAN RESTORATION MOVEMENT

The word… 'denomination'…points to one of the main characteristics of the Christianity resulting from the North American experience. The word itself indicates that the various 'churches' are seen as 'denominations,' that is, as different names given to Christians. In a religiously pluralistic society where tolerance was necessary for political survival, and in view of the bloodshed that dogmatism had caused

elsewhere, North American Protestants tended to think of the church as an invisible reality consisting of all true believers, and of the visible churches or 'denominations' as voluntary organizations that believers create and join according to their convictions and preferences.

A practical consequence of this view of the 'church' and the 'denominations' is that the great debates that have divided North American Protestantism have not been confined to a particular 'church,' but have crossed 'denominational' barriers. Thus, for instance, questions such as slavery, evolution, fundamentalism, liberalism, and racial policies have simultaneously divided several denominations, and the partisans of one position or another have joined across denominational lines.

The Disciples of Christ were born as a response to the denominationalism of American Christianity. The founders of this movement, Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) and his son Alexander (1788-1866), had no desire to found a new church or denomination. Their purpose was to call all Protestant Christians to unity through the proclamation of the gospel in its original purity. Alexander Campbell, who soon became the leader of the movement, combined some of the rationalism common to his age with a profound respect for the authority of the New Testament. Therefore, much of his interpretation of the New Testament was influenced by rationalist views, although his zeal in obeying what he took to be God's commands was unparalleled by the rationalists. With the firm conviction that Christian unity could be achieved by a common return to primitive Christianity as he understood it, Campbell launched a program of reformation… Justo L. González, The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day, pages 241-242

6) THE FRENCH REVOLUTION & THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING — 1786-1800

- RUSSIAN ORTHODOX MISSIONS — In 1794, ten monks traveled as missionaries from Russia to Alaska to bring the Christian faith to native peoples there. One monk, St. Herman (died in 1836), began the first Orthodox monastery in the New World and later became the first Orthodox saint in the Americas.
- THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING (1790s to 1840) in the United States is considered the beginning of evangelicalism, the religious emphasis on an individual's conversion experience and personal relationship with Jesus. *More about the Second Great Awakening when we cover the 1800s.*
  - Especially between 1790 and 1830 (the time of the Second Great Awakening), philanthropy and missions in the Anglican Church in England grew dramatically. Several British missionary societies were established in the 1790s to take the gospel everywhere. No longer was the goal to make nations Christian; now the emphasis was on bringing individuals to Christ. William Carey (1761-1834), a cobbler, inspired a burst of missionary zeal in England. His motto was, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God". He went to India and led the effort to translate the Bible for the people there.
- THE FRENCH REVOLUTION — Persecution of Protestants in France finally ended when new King Louis XVI decreed religious tolerance in 1787, four years before the First Amendment in the U.S. was ratified.
  - The Revolution was fought in 1789-1799. Louis XVI was a rather poor leader, and the middle class and the common people, suffering under terrible economic conditions, took control of France's national assembly. It declared the (Catholic) church in France free of papal control and under the state's control, confiscated all church lands (which it then sold to raise funds), and began enacting laws to reform the church. Monasteries were outlawed in 1790, and the same year the number of Catholic bishops was limited to 83 (one per French province). Bishops were to be appointed by the state, not the pope, and church leaders were to be paid by the state. Some 4,000 Catholic clergy left France. Pope Pius VI rejected the Assembly's decisions, and Louis XVI was unable to bring peace between the pope and the people.
  - The national Assembly eventually deposed the king and had him tried and executed for treason. Leaders of the revolution became more and more radical. Moderate leaders of the revolution were often suspected of disloyalty to the revolution and were executed as those more radical than them

gained power. These new leaders of the revolution thought of religion as mere ignorance and superstition outdated by science and reason. They opposed all religion and persecuted, arrested, imprisoned, or executed thousands who refused to swear allegiance before the altar of Freedom.
- In 1798, as an outgrowth of other wars France was fighting, the French military invaded the pope's lands and captured Pope Pius VI. He died as their prisoner in France in 1799. A few months later, Napoleon Bonaparte (lived 1769-1821, ruled 1799-1815), a powerful leader in the army, took control of the nation. Because most of France was Catholic, he worked with the new pope, Pius VII, to bring reconciliation between the French (Catholic) church and the papacy, giving the pope renewed authority over the Catholic Church in France. Napoleon did not, however, make Catholicism the official religion, and despite the authority returned to the pope, by the early 1800s the Catholic Church in France was completely controlled by the state.