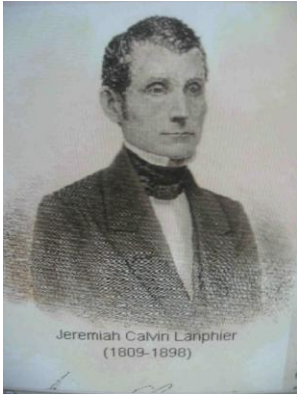


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Jeremiah Lanphier and the 1857 Prayer Revival



Born in 1809, Jeremiah Lanphier grew up in rising tensions over slavery within the North and South of the United States. In 1842, at the age of 33, he was converted in a tabernacle built by Charles Finney. He radically surrendered to Christ and became an instant evangelist handing out tracts and sharing the gospel in New York City. He was in the mercantile business within New York City, one of the first commuting cities in America. The downtown churches dwindled – few people stayed in the city at night or on the weekends. The Old North Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street in New York hired Jeremiah as a lay evangelist on July 1st, 1857. Jeremiah called on every individual not attending church by sharing the gospel and inviting them back with little results.

“One day as I was walking along the streets, the idea was suggested to my mind that an hour of prayer, from twelve to one o’clock, would be beneficial to businessmen, who usually, in great numbers, take that hour for rest and refreshment... the idea was to have singing, prayer, exhortation, relation of religious experience, as the case might be; that none should be required to stay the whole hour; that all should come and go as their engagements should allow or require, or their inclinations dictate.”

On September 23, 1857, at Noon, the first prayer meeting was called on the third floor of the North Dutch Reformed Church. The meeting was announced in a flyer which said that its purpose was to “give merchants, mechanics, clerks, strangers and businessmen generally an opportunity to stop and call on God amid the perplexities incident to their respective avocations.” For the first half hour, from 12 Noon to 12:30 PM, Jeremiah Lanphier sat alone in prayer, wondering if he had heard God. Then one came and knelt down. Then another, and by 1 PM there were six that had come to pray. The next week there were 20 and the next week 40. Then those who came suggested they meet weekly. Three weeks later the stock market crashed and the panic of 1857 caused some to commit suicide, but others knew where to go to pray!



The panic brought hundreds to pray! Soon men and women filled all three floors of the Dutch Church as well as the John Street Methodist Church next door! The “Fulton Street Meetings” as they came to be called had a strict order for their hour of prayer. First, it was led by lay people, not pastors, though clergy could participate. Thus, the leader would open up for no more than 10 minutes at exactly Noon. Second, one hymn, from three to five verses would be sung. Third, prayer and a Scripture reading would open the meeting. Fourth, the “five minute rule” would apply – no one could testify or pray for longer so all could share. Fifth, no controversial issues could be brought up, and no one could promote their church or personal agenda. A bell would sound if a rule was violated!

Spontaneous and simultaneous prayer meetings sprung up everywhere, unorganized and not coordinated by anyone but God. This is always the key mark of a true revival – it is a Sovereign move of God! The Unitarians opposed the prayer meeting as well as others, but it was impossible to stop! The newspapers like the *Herald* and *Tribune* picked up the stories, and it spread like wildfire! The unity among believers was simply amazing. Pastors wept as they watched, for they were not the leaders but their job was now to oversee what God had done!

By 1858 hundreds were getting baptized! One traveler reported that he had come from Omaha, Nebraska and encountered prayer meetings continuously for two thousand miles to the East Coast! An entire ship's crew of 29 came into New York Harbor all converted sovereignly on the ocean by the power of God! The mission churches for seamen were now filled to overflowing. Over 50,000 a week were getting converted, and in three years one million out of a population of 28 million (4%) were saved in America alone!



God moved in the midst of tragedy. Pastor Dudley Tyng of the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in Philadelphia inherited the pulpit from his father. He was forced to resign in 1856 due to his preaching that slavery was a sin. He then started the Church of the Covenant. He began noon time prayer meetings at the newly formed Young Men's Christian Association (which had been birthed out of the prayer meetings taking place in Chicago). He organized a rally on March 30, 1858 at Jayne's Hall. Five thousand came and he began his message on the text of Exodus 10:11 "*Ye that are men, go and serve the Lord.*" During his message the 29 year old said, "*I would rather this right arm were amputated at the trunk than that I should come short of my duty to you in delivering God's message.*" Two weeks later he had his hand caught in a corn-thresher and his arm had to be amputated. As he lay dying, he told his father and his friend George Duffield to tell the men who had been touched by God to, "*Stand up for Jesus.*" That famous hymn is a result of this Prayer Revival!

In Louisville, several thousand came to the Masonic Temple for prayer each morning. Two thousand assembled daily in Cleveland, and St. Louis reported that their churches were filled for months at a time. Tents were set up for prayer, and the newly formed YMCA held revival meetings throughout the country. Secular newspapers reported 50,000 converts in New York City alone, and one paper reported that in New England in some towns there could not be found one adult that did not profess Christ! No wonder some have called this prayer revival the Third Great Awakening in American history. But it didn't end here, for revival prayer meetings were noted to be occurring in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Europe, South Africa, India, Australia and the Pacific.



Out of this prayer meeting came the ministries of Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey as well as movements to end slavery and bring justice to the oppressed. Though it did not prevent the Civil War, many believe the revivals during the war were inspired by it. At the 150th anniversary of the revival, a statue of Jeremiah Lanphier was constructed. There he sits with an open Bible calling people to pray! May we invite people to pray today that another Great Awakening would come to America!