



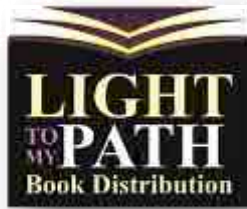
Revivals of the Bible

*An Examination of
Times of Corporate Revival
in the Bible*

F. Wayne MacLeod

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Corporate Revival in the Bible*



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LIGHT TO MY PATH BOOK DISTRIBUTION
Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia CANADA

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Preface

The Oxford English Dictionary defines revival in the following terms:

An improvement in the condition, strength, or fortunes of someone or something. A reawakening of religious fervour, especially by means of evangelistic meetings.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/revival>)

The word, revival does not occur in the Bible in this sense, although there are instances of a reawakening of religious fervour. The concept of revival in Scripture, however, is very real. Scripture calls us to wake from our spiritual slumber (Ps. 108:1,2; Isa. 51:17, 52:1; Mk. 14:37; Rom. 13:11; Eph. 5:14; Rev. 3:2). It urges us to turn from evil ways (1 Kings 8:47; Ps. 34:14; Jer. 18:11; Zech. 1:4; Lk. 13:3; Ac. 8:22; 1 Pet. 3:11). The Bible describes great times of refreshing for those who turn to God with all their heart (2 Sam. 23:4; Hos. 14:5; Ps. 68:9; Isa. 32:2; Isa 57:15).

Revival may come to a large group of people, or it may come to individuals. In Acts 18, for example, we have an account of a man by the name of Apollos who was an eloquent speaker. He knew the Scriptures and preached with accuracy and enthusiasm concerning Jesus (Acts 18:25). Priscilla and Aquila heard him preach and took him aside to explain the way of God more accurately. (Acts 18:26). The result was that Apollos proved to be more useful to the work of Christ and refuted the Jews with persuasive arguments.

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[24] Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. [25] He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. [26] He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. [27] And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, [28] for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. (Acts 18)

Apollos experienced a personal revival. His encounter with Priscilla and Aquilla opened his heart and mind to the purposes of the Lord God in a new way. He was empowered to serve as he had never served before.

What is true of the life of Apollos is also true for some of the Old Testament kings. 2 Chronicles 15:1-19 describes how the prophecy of Azariah changed the life of King Asa. The Babylonians bound and exiled King Manasseh. While he was in captivity, he repented of his sin and turned his life over to the Lord God (2 Chronicles 33:10-16). That encounter with Babylon changed the life of Manasseh. He also experienced a personal revival of religious zeal and went on to have a significant impact on his community.

While there is much to be said about revival in all its forms, the focus of this study is times of corporate revival—times

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when spiritual passion was renewed in whole communities.

There are many written records of revivals around the world in modern and historical times. Not everyone has accepted these events as being from the Lord. The facts of these awakenings are sometimes exaggerated so that it is hard to distinguish truth from error. It is my goal, in this study to examine these moves of God as recorded for us in both the Old and New Testaments. By studying the revivals recorded in inspired Scripture, we can be confident that the facts are accurate. By exploring these revivals, we will discover how God works in times of renewal. This will provide us with an understanding of how to pray and what to expect when the Spirit of God moves in power in our midst.

There are times when men and women of God have backed away from genuine works of God because they were unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Revival by its very nature is not comfortable. In these times God rebukes us for our sin. We see ourselves as we are before Him. Hypocrisy and pretence are stripped away and exposed. We stand naked before a holy God, casting ourselves upon His mercy. We are stretched and rebuked but more than anything else, we are renewed in our understanding of God and His purpose for our lives. As we step into that purpose and approach this awesome God, we are revived in our hearts and drawn closer to Him.

I trust that this study will open the heart of the reader to the need of God's reviving of the church of our day. I also hope it will keep us from resisting the work that God wants to do in His church. May this simple study be a means to bring greater openness to the work of God in the past and what He is willing to do today. -- F. Wayne MacLeod

CHAPTER 1 –

REVIVAL UNDER ASA

AND JEHOSEPHAT

2 Chronicles 10-20

Conditions Before the Revival

King Solomon had just died. Under his reign, Israel and Judah had reached their greatest height. They lived in the lap of luxury. Things were not going well spiritually, however. Solomon had married many foreign wives. These wives diverted his heart from the Lord. To please them, the king had to compromise his faith. By the end of his reign, with all his compromises, Solomon's heart was not right with God. He introduced days of religious decline. While Israel still worshipped God, her faith was a watered-down version of what it had been. God's people had a growing attraction to the world and the religion of their neighbours.

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam took the throne. Rehoboam was not blessed with the wisdom of his father. When asked by the people to lighten the burden under which they had lived during the reign of his father, Solomon, Rehoboam disregarded the wise counsel of the elders and took the advice of his friends instead. He told his people that he would make their burden more substantial. He did this to prove his unquestioned authority. The result was division in the country. Ten out of twelve tribes rejected Rehoboam as king and sided with Jeroboam, Solomon's enemy. They formed the nation of Israel, leaving

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Rehoboam to rule the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. These days were days of political unrest.

2 Chronicles 12.1 tells us that after Rehoboam's position as king was established; he abandoned the Law of God.

[12:1] When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him. (2 Chronicles 12)

God sent Shishak, king of Egypt, to fight His people. Shishak carried off the treasures of the temple and the royal palace. Rehoboam was now forced to replace the gold shields used under Solomon's reign with shields made from bronze. These were days of spiritual and economic decline. God's people had lost their former glory, strength, and influence.

When Rehoboam died, his son Abijah succeeded him on the throne. While Abijah had a pretence of faith, the Bible describes him as a man whose heart was not fully committed to the Lord his God (see 2 Kings 15: 2).

We understand from 2 Chronicles 14:3 that Abijah's son Asa removed foreign altars and pillars that had accumulated in the land during the reign of his father, Ahaziah.

[14:1] Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. And Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land had rest for ten years. [2] And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God. [3] He took away the foreign altars and the high places and broke down the pillars and cut down the Asherim [4] and commanded Judah to seek

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*the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to keep
the law and the commandment. (2 Chronicles*

14)

These idols and pagan articles seemed to sap the strength from Judah.

During the reign of Abijah, there was a constant war between Israel and Judah (see 1 Kings 15:6). Idols of foreign gods were scattered throughout the land. They were continually clashing with their brothers and sisters in the nation of Israel. There was no peace for the people in these days. They were unable to have victory over their enemies.

Under Solomon, Rehoboam and Abijah there was a slow but steady erosion of faith. Idols and foreign altars were cropping up in the land as people turned their backs on the one true God. The fullness of God's blessing had departed. Sin and rebellion against God were on the increase. A general apathy toward the things of the Lord filled the land. The people of God were no longer at peace with God, nor were they at peace with their brothers or sisters. They needed a fresh visitation of God to break their chains and refocus their attention on God and His word.

The Revival and how it Started

When Asa became king, he immediately removed the idols that had been left in the land during his father's reign. According to 2 Chronicles 14:4, he commanded the people of Judah to seek the Lord and to obey His commands.

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[4] and commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment. (2 Chronicles 14)

As the people of Judah turned their hearts to the Lord, the blessing of God returned to the land. 2 Chronicles 14:6 tells us that the Lord gave them rest.

[6] He built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest. He had no war in those years for the LORD gave him peace.

Their wars were over. They lived in peace on all sides. When the enemy did attack, the Lord gave them victory. This, however, was only the beginning of what God wanted to accomplish in the lives of His people.

Revival really broke out when the Spirit of God spoke to a prophet by the name of Azariah. Azariah spoke that word to king Asa and the people of Judah and Benjamin. Listen to what he told them:

[15:1] The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, [2] and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. [3] For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law, [4] but when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. [5] In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. [6] They were

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*broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation
and city by city, for God troubled them with
every sort of distress. [7] But you, take courage!
Do not let your hands be weak, for your work
shall be rewarded.” (2 Chronicles 15)*

King Asa was so touched by the words of the prophet Azariah that he set out to remove the idols that remained in Judah and Benjamin. He repaired the altar of the Lord that was in disrepair and invited his people to Jerusalem for a great assembly. People came from all over Judah and Benjamin to Jerusalem. At that time, the priests sacrificed seven hundred head of cattle and seven thousand sheep to the Lord as the nation confessed their sin before God. Before God, in that assembly, the people committed themselves, by means of a covenant, to seek their God with all their heart and soul (2 Chronicles 15:12).

The seriousness of their vows to God is seen in the covenant they made that day:

*[12] And they entered into a covenant to seek
the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their
heart and with all their soul, [13] but that who-
ever would not seek the LORD, the God of Is-
rael, should be put to death, whether young or
old, man or woman.*

Anyone who did not serve the Lord with all his or her heart and soul would be put to death.

2 Chronicles 15:14 describes the day as a day of loud shouting and the blowing of trumpets and horns to the glory of God. This was not a quiet event. It was no doubt very solemn, but there was much shouting and loud blowing of trumpets. We are not told what people shouted. It

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may have been related to seeking the forgiveness of God or even shouts of joy for forgiveness and the obvious move of God they were experiencing. What is clear is that the people were experiencing great joy as they sought the Lord. While the meetings were loud with shouts and trumpets they were also characterized by great joy:

[15] And all Judah rejoiced over the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around. (2 Chronicles 15)

What a celebration there must have been in Jerusalem in those days. The people left Jerusalem having met with God. Their lives would be changed. Their nation would no longer be the same.

The revival that broke out in the days of Asa continued even after his death. Asa's son Jehoshaphat succeeded him as king in Judah. Jehoshaphat followed in the steps of his father. He too loved the Lord and walked in His ways. He sought to rid the land of idols. 2 Chronicles 17.6 tells us that the heart of Jehoshaphat was devoted to the Lord:

[6] His heart was courageous in the ways of the LORD. And furthermore, he took the high places and the Asherim out of Judah. (2 Chronicles 17)

In the third year of his reign, Jehoshaphat sent teachers throughout the land with the Book of the Law to instruct the people in the ways of God:

[7] In the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah; [8]

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and with them the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah; and with these Levites, the priests Elishama and Jehoram. [9] And they taught in Judah, having the Book of the Law of the LORD with them. They went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. (2 Chronicles 17)

As the Word of God went out, people were touched by it and confessed their sins. As they confessed these sins, the power of God fell on the nation. The fear of the Lord fell on the nations. No-one dared to attack Judah. They knew that God was with Judah.

[10] And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, and they made no war against Jehoshaphat. (2 Chronicles 17)

The power of this revival touched many aspects of their community life. Jehoshaphat appointed judges in the land and gave them these words:

[5] He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, [6] and said to the judges, "Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the LORD. He is with you in giving judgment. [7] Now then, let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, or partiality or taking bribes." (2 Chronicles 19)

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These judges went out to judge with a sense of the fear of the Lord. They realized that the Lord saw and heard every decision they made. Their judgements were made accordingly. The revival of that day touched the judges and legal officials so that they judged according to the Law of God. They feared to offend the Lord God in their decisions and so were careful to judge with righteousness and truth.

The revival also impacted the religious leaders. Jehoshaphat appointed priests to administer the law of the Lord and gave them these orders:

[8] Moreover, in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel, to give judgment for the LORD and to decide disputed cases. They had their seat at Jerusalem. [9] And he charged them: "Thus you shall do in the fear of the LORD, in faithfulness, and with your whole heart: [10] whenever a case comes to you from your brothers who live in their cities, concerning bloodshed, law or commandment, statutes or rules, then you shall warn them, that they may not incur guilt before the LORD and wrath may not come upon you and your brothers. Thus you shall do, and you will not incur guilt. (2 Chronicles 19)

As priests, they too were to serve in the fear of the Lord. They were to do so "in faithfulness," and with their "whole heart" (2 Chronicles 19:9), being careful not to "incur guilt before the Lord" lest the wrath of God fall on them.

The revival also had a significant impact on the political life of God's people. On one occasion the Moabites and the Ammonites joined forces to attack Judah. 2 Chronicles 20

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tells us how Jehoshaphat and his military commanders dealt with this situation. Jehoshaphat was alarmed at the news of this danger. He resolved in this matter, however, not to rely on his wisdom but to seek the Lord. He called the people of Judah together. When the nation had gathered, this great political leader stood in front of them, bowed his head and lead them in prayer. Before the entire country, Jehoshaphat confessed his inability and lack of wisdom to deal with the situation:

[12] O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” (2 Chronicles 20)

When was the last time you saw a political leader leading his citizens in prayer? Have you ever seen that leader confessing before the Lord his or her lack of wisdom and power to deal with the state of the nation? When was the last time you saw that leader cry out to God with all his heart and soul to come down from heaven and pour Himself on his land in need? The revival that broke out in the reigns of Asa and Jehoshaphat forced political leaders, judges, and religious leaders to their knees.

As Jehoshaphat prayed, the Lord spoke to Jahaziel the prophet. Through Jahaziel, the Lord told the people not to be discouraged. He promised them victory. When the king heard this word from the Lord, he fell on his face on the ground and worshipped. Seeing their leader bowing down in worship, the people also fell on their faces and praised the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Let's not forget the context of this prayer. The enemy is approaching with an army so vast that it inspired fear.

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God's people, however, have placed their confidence in Him. Even as the enemy approached, they are on their faces before God. They are overwhelmed by His grace and power. Their hearts are filled with His presence. There is immense joy and praise in the worst of times.

The next day Jehoshaphat prepared his army for battle. After consulting with his people, he decided to place a choir in the front line. The responsibility of this choir was to sing praises to the Lord as they entered battle. As they marched toward the enemy, they were to praise God for His splendour and holiness. They were to lead the army by singing: *"Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures forever"* (2 Chronicles 20.21). We can only imagine what it would have been like for a choir to lead this army into battle.

As they advanced, God sent an ambush against the Amorites and the Moabites. They were so confused that they began to fight amongst themselves. By the time the Judean army arrived, they had found only dead bodies on the battlefield. God's people returned home victors without having to fight the battle. When the story of what happened that day spread, the fear of God spread to the surrounding nations. God's people lived in peace. No-one dared to attack. The nations knew God was with Judah.

In a time of spiritual compromise, God moved in the hearts of His people to deal with the sins of their nation. In a day where God's people had lost their former glory, God touched them again with his power and glory.

Lessons learned from this revival

What do we learn from this revival? Notice that it was not until God's people dealt with the sin in their midst that God

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moved in power among them. How often have we grieved the Spirit of God by our compromises? How often have we excused or rebellion? We have sometimes accepted our weakness as normal. Do you want to see God move in power? Recognize your sins. Don't hide them, cover them over or excuse them. Accept that they are an offense to a holy God. Sin and spiritual compromise stand between our God and us.

The revival in the days of Asa and Jehoshaphat was characterized by "the fear of the Lord." Judges were instructed to judge in the fear of the Lord. Priests were commanded to serve in the same way. The fear of the Lord fell on pagan nations as they saw God moving in the lives of His people. What is this fear of the Lord? A quick look at the way in which this phrase is used in the Bible shows us that there is a strong connection between fearing the Lord and following His precepts (Psalm 111.10), listening to His instructions (Proverbs 1.7-16), and walking on His path (Proverbs 23.17-22).

This revival of this day seemed to begin when God's people took His word seriously. The words of the prophet Azariah spoke powerfully and seemed to summarize what took place in those days: "If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:2). Azariah went on to remind the people that their faithfulness to God would be rewarded:

[7] But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded." (2 Chronicles 15)

With those words ringing in their ears, the people set about to cleanse the land. Encouraged by the teachers of the Word, the people cleansed their temple, their homes and

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their hearts. Judges put aside corruption and partiality and judged with fairness. Priests made it their goal to warn God's people about sin and evil. Kings sought the wisdom of God and put aside their ideas and agendas. The ordinary citizens fell on their knees and confessed their sins to God. The work of their hands was rewarded. God moved among them. There was joy and peace as the Lord liberated them from the fear of all enemy nations. Blessing was restored, and God's people once again walked in fellowship with their God.

For Consideration:

Describe the conditions before the revival in the days of Asa and Jehoshaphat? Compare these conditions to what is happening in your society today?

What is the connection between the cleansing of the land and the revival that broke out in those days? Could this revival have taken place if God's people were not willing to deal with the sins that had polluted their land?

Can we expect revival if we are unwilling to confess and repent of our sins? Would you be willing to deal with the sins that a revival would expose in your life?

The revival in the days of Asa and Jehoshaphat was a revival of the "fear of the Lord." What would such a revival look like in our day? What is the connection between the fear of the Lord and putting aside our sinful ways?

Revival Under Asa and Jehoshaphat

What role did the teaching of Scripture have in the revival of Asa and Jehoshaphat? Do we take the Scriptures seriously in our day?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you the humility to recognize your sin as He exposes it to you. Ask for the grace to repent and have victory over these sins. Ask God to forgive you for not taking these sins seriously or for excusing your behaviour.

Ask God to help you to find the time to study His Word. Ask Him to speak to you through this Word. Pray that you would have the courage and strength to change whatever needs to be changed so that you are walking in tune with Him.

Pray that you would have a more profound sense of what it means to fear the Lord. Ask for a heart that fears or reverences the Lord in every part of your life.

Ask God to revive you spiritually as you step out in obedience and learn to walk faithfully with Him.

CHAPTER 2 -

REVIVAL UNDER HEZEKIAH

2 Chronicles 21-32

Conditions Prior to the Revival

After the revival in the days of Asa and Jehoshaphat, the people of Judah returned to their sinful ways. Eight kings would come and go before God would move again in revival power among the people of Judah.

When Jehoshaphat died, Jehoram, his son, became king in Judah. He married the daughter of the evil king Ahab of Israel. He began his reign by killing all his brothers to ensure that his throne would be uncontested.

[4] When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Israel. (2 Chronicles 21)

He also restored the worship of pagan gods in the land of Judah.

[11] Moreover, he made high places in the hill country of Judah and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom and made Judah go astray. (2 Chronicles 21)

Because of this evil, God sent the Philistines, the Arabs, and the Edomites against him. Under his father's reign, these nations feared the God of Judah. They did not dare

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attack His people. Under Jehoram, however, they were no longer afraid. By his actions, Jehoram had driven the fear of God from his land. This was a period of spiritual decline. The presence of God was no longer evident in Judah. Even the surrounding nations understood this.

The next four kings to reign in Judah would continue in the ways of Jehoram. Ahaziah chose to rely on the evil counsel of his mother rather than seek the Lord:

[3] He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly. (2 Chronicles 22)

After the untimely death of her son, Ahaziah's mother Athaliah, whose evil counsel Jehoram had followed, proclaimed herself queen of Judah. To guarantee her reign, she killed all members of the royal family except for one young male child who was hidden from her. She continued to lead Judah into sin and rebellion against God. Her people assassinated her and replaced her on the throne with the young child who had been hidden from her.

Joash, the child who had escaped the cruel hand of Athaliah, began his reign by serving the Lord. He repaired the temple and restored the worship of Jehovah. The problem, however, was that after the death of the priest Jehoiada, Joash abandoned the temple. 2 Chronicles 24.24 describes the result of this turning away:

[24] Though the army of the Syrians had come with few men, the LORD delivered into their hand a very great army, because Judah had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Joash. (2 Chronicles 24)

Revival Under Hezekiah

Judah was powerless against her enemies. Even a small band of Syrians defeated the large Judean army in battle. The nations who feared to attack the people of God under Jehoshaphat now easily defeated them. Joash's servants would ultimately assassinate him, and his throne was handed over to Amaziah (2 Chronicles 24:25-27).

Like Joash, Amaziah served the Lord initially but chose to bow down to the foreign gods of Edom. When God sent a prophet to rebuke him for this, Amaziah refused to listen. During his reign, the northern kingdom of Israel invaded Judah and took away the treasures of the temple of God. The citizens of Judah assassinated Amaziah (2 Chronicles 25:27).

These days were days of political unrest. The people of Judah assassinated four successive leaders. Two of these leaders called for the brutal murder of members of their own family to assure their reign. The nation had abandoned the principles of God's word. The people bowed down to foreign God and ignored the purpose of God for them as a nation.

Under the leadership of king Uzziah conditions improved for a time. He built up the nation again. When things began to improve, however, Uzziah became proud. In his pride, he abandoned the Lord. The Lord struck him with leprosy, and he died in isolation from his people.

Jotham, who took the throne after the death of Uzziah, did nothing to stop the evil practices of the nation. When King Ahaz came to the throne things went from bad to worse. He proved to be a very corrupt king. He sacrificed his son on an altar to pagan gods. He closed the doors of the temple of God in Jerusalem and set up foreign idols in the streets of Judah. Shrines to foreign gods were built in

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every town and city of Judah. Ahaz brought Judah to its lowest point spiritually. Under his reign, the worship of God was abandoned and replaced by the worship of Baal.

The nation that had once inspired fear was now weak and helpless against her enemies. God's presence and abundant blessing were no longer evident in the land. Political unrest was rampant. Four of her leaders had been assassinated. Two royal families had been wiped out. With the worship of Baal, immorality abounded in Judah. Temple prostitution was on the rise. Children were sacrificed on altars to pagan gods in Judah. These were dark days for the people of Judah.

The Revival and how it Started

The revival began with the crowning of Hezekiah. At the age of twenty-five, this king had a burden for restoring the worship of God. 2 Chronicles 29:3 tells us that he wasted no time in reopening the temple. The verse tells us that he did this in the first month of his reign. From the context, we understand that the temple of the Lord was in disrepair. Hezekiah called a meeting of the priests and Levites and commissioned them to consecrate the temple. They were to remove all defilements and prepare it for worship.

In those days no sacrifices were offered for the sins of the people. The doors of the temple were closed. No incense was going up to God. Hezekiah's told the religious leaders that he intended to make a covenant with God so that His anger be turned from the nation. The result of this encounter between Hezekiah and the religious leaders was that the doors to the temple were opened, and the priests and Levites "consecrated themselves and went in as the king had commanded, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 29:15).

Revival Under Hezekiah

This process of cleaning the temple was a massive task. 2 Chronicles 29:16,17 tells us that the priests went into the temple and began to remove all the unclean things that had accumulated over the years. They brought them to the temple courtyard where the Levites gathered them up and took them outside the city limits to be destroyed. It took sixteen days to cleanse and purify the temple (2 Chronicles 29.17). They informed king Hezekiah when they had completed their task.

Early the next morning Hezekiah called a meeting of all the city officials. As political leaders and representatives of the people, they gathered in the temple. Hezekiah brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs and seven goats and gave them to the priests, commanding them to offer these as a sin offering to the Lord God. When the priests brought the goats in for the sin offering, the king and his political officials laid hands on them confessing their sin publicly as a nation.

When the sacrifices began, Hezekiah ordered the musicians to sing to the Lord. As the trumpets and the instruments played, and the choir sang, the whole assembly fell to the ground in worship and adoration of the one true God. This continued until all the sacrifices were offered to God. We can only imagine what this ceremony would have been like. What was on the people's minds as they bowed with their faces to the ground in worship of Jehovah? How long had it been since they had worshipped the God of Israel? How many of them had been guilty of bowing the knee to Baal?

After the sacrifices Hezekiah commanded the musicians to continue playing and singing to the Lord. 2 Chronicles 29.30 tells us:

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[30] And Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped. (2 Chronicles 29)

The people present that day were filled with gladness and praise as they met with the Lord God. This service seemed to go on for a long time. When the Levites finished praising the Lord, Hezekiah invited the people to bring thank offerings. All those whose hearts were willing (2 Chronicles 29:31) brought burnt offerings to the Lord. 2 Chronicles 29:31-36 describe what happened:

[31] Then Hezekiah said, "You have now consecrated yourselves to the LORD. Come near; bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD." And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all who were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings. [32] The number of the burnt offerings that the assembly brought was 70 bulls, 100 rams, and 200 lambs; all these were for a burnt offering to the LORD.

[33] And the consecrated offerings were 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep. [34] But the priests were too few and could not flay all the burnt offerings, so until other priests had consecrated themselves their brothers the Levites helped them until the work was finished— for the Levites were more upright in heart than the priests in consecrating themselves. [35] Besides the great number of burnt offerings, there was the fat of the peace offerings, and there were the drink offerings for the burnt offerings. Thus the service of the house of the LORD was restored.

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The response of the people was beyond anything the king could have imagined. There were so many sacrifices to offer that day that the priests had to enlist the help of the Levites to skin the animals. There was a sense of the presence of God. What they saw happening could only be explained as a visitation of God. 2 Chronicles 29.36 says:

[36] And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because God had provided for the people, for the thing came about suddenly.

This was only the beginning of this great revival in Judah. In 2 Chronicles 30 Hezekiah send word to Israel and Judah to come to the temple in Jerusalem for a Passover celebration. He called both Israel and Judah to repent and return to the one true God.

This was the first Passover celebration that had been observed for a long time. Couriers were sent throughout the countryside. While they were generally scorned in the territory of Israel (2 Chronicles 30.10), in Judah, where the Spirit of God was working, the response was very different.

*[12] The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD.
(2 Chronicles 30)*

In preparation for this Passover 2 Chronicles 30.14 tells us that the people set to work to cleanse the city of its impurities:

[14] They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw into the brook Kidron. (2 Chronicles 30)

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Foreign altars and idols were sought out and broken down. These objects were thrown into the brook Kidron outside the city. Every evidence of pagan worship was destroyed and removed. Nothing that would offend their God could remain in the streets.

A large crowd responded to the invitation of Hezekiah. For seven days these people remained in Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles 30:21 describe this time:

[20] And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. [21] And the people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness, and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing with all their might to the LORD. [22] And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the LORD. So they ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD, the God of their fathers. (2 Chronicles 30)

These were days of great gladness. 2 Chronicles 30:20 tells us that many people were healed of affliction. During those seven days, the people praised the Lord and listened to the preaching of Hezekiah. They also offered many sacrifices to the Lord.

When the seven days of celebration were over, the people decided to remain another week and continue their praise and thanksgiving (see 2 Chronicles 30:23). During this second week, Hezekiah donated one thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep and goats for the assembly to offer to the Lord. The town officials were also moved by the

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Spirit of God to provide another one thousand bulls and ten thousand more sheep and goats.

The people did not want to go home. Their one-week celebration was stretched out to two weeks of praise and thanksgiving. 2 Chronicles 30:24 tells us that God's Spirit moved among the priests and a number of them consecrated themselves to Him. 2 Chronicles 30 goes on to describe what took place at that time:

[25] The whole assembly of Judah, and the priests and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the sojourners who came out of the land of Israel, and the sojourners who lived in Judah, rejoiced. [26] So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. [27] Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven. (2 Chronicles 30)

The people of God experienced the presence of God in those days. His grace and favour were showered down on them. They were filled with the joy of the Lord. 2 Chronicles 31:1 tells us that when they left this meeting, they went throughout the region of Judah smashing down idols and sacred stones that had been used for the worship of other gods. From the temple, the revival spread to the entire city of Jerusalem and on to the country of Judah. Even the northern kingdom of Israel felt its impact.

King Hezekiah commanded the people to contribute financially to the ministry of the Levites, so this work of God

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could be sustained. The response to this order was so great that in four months the Levites had so many contributions that storehouses were built to hold the overflow (see 2 Chronicles 31.2-11). The work of God lacked no resources. The fruit of this revival was seen for months. The nation was changed. The temple was cleansed of its impurities. The city of Jerusalem was purged of its pagan idols. The country was renewed in its devotion to God and the work of God that had been abandoned for years now lacked no provision.

Lessons learned for this revival

As we examine the revival under Hezekiah, we see that it had as its roots a desire to see the nation and the temple cleansed of its impurities and sin. The revival began when Hezekiah committed himself, as a young twenty-five-year-old king, to purify the temple of its defilements. Once again, it was sin that separated God from His people. The revival began in the temple and with the religious people of the day. Over the years they had let things slide. The temple had become defiled with the influences of the false religions of the day. It needed to be cleansed. For over two weeks the priests and Levites dealt with these defilements in the temple.

2 Chronicles 29.15 tells us that these priests “went in to purify the temple of the Lord, as the king had ordered, following the word of the Lord.” It was the word of the Lord through Hezekiah that directed them in their efforts. They took the word of the Lord seriously, and for sixteen days the priests worked to purify the temple, taking out armloads of articles that were forbidden by the Law of God. How many such items and practices would we find in the church of our day? Is it possible that our churches need to undergo such a cleansing?

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As these impurities were removed, God's Spirit, who had been grieved, began to reveal His presence. He moved His people to confess their known sins. Tens of thousands of animals were sacrificed as God moved in cleansing power in the lives of His people. As they confessed their sins, the worshippers were freed from guilt, and their hearts began to overflow with joy and thanksgiving to God.

The people were so touched by God and His presence that they flooded the temple with gifts. One week of celebrating God's praise was stretched out to two weeks. Their hearts were moved to worship and praise the God of Israel.

The revival began when God's people became serious about obeying His word and dealing with their sin. Once again, the Word of God played a vital role in this revival under Hezekiah. Hezekiah understood the teaching of the Law of God. He would not rest until he saw his people living in obedience to that law. He saw his society in the mirror of God's Law and knew that something needed to be done. He committed himself to do his part in calling people back to the teaching of God's Law.

Judah had reached its lowest point under Ahaz. Idols were everywhere in the country. Temple prostitution, child sacrifice, and immorality abounded. How easy it could have been for Hezekiah to throw up his hands in despair. Who was he to deal with so vast a problem in his society? Before God, however, he knew he had an obligation to do his part. God blessed Hezekiah's efforts. Through this man, the nation was cleansed of its defilements and returned to God.

God is looking for a man or woman today whose greatest desire is that His Word is honoured in our church and

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society today. He is looking for servants who will commit themselves to do their part in calling God's people back to God? He is calling us to let the light of His word shine into the hidden recesses of our lives to expose any sin or defilement. He is asking us to submit to what that Word reveals, not only in theory but also in reality. He is calling us to repent and to confess the sin His Word and Spirit reveal to us. The temple must be cleansed. Our mind and thoughts must be purified. Not until we become serious about dealing with these evils can we expect to see God move in power in our churches and our land. May God break us by his Word and renew us in His Spirit through our obedience to Him.

For Consideration:

Describe the political, moral and spiritual climate in Judah prior to the revival in the days of Hezekiah.

What was the burden of Hezekiah? Where did this burden come from?

Hezekiah ordered the cleansing of the temple. How has the church of our day been influenced by ungodly philosophies and ideas? From what impurities does the church of our day need to be cleansed?

The revival of Hezekiah's day brought a renewed passion for God and a willingness on the part of His people to give

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sacrificially to the work of His kingdom. To what extent do you personally need to experience such a revival?

What role did the confession of sins play in the revival of Hezekiah's day? Could this revival have happened if the people were unwilling to deal with the sins of the past and present?

The central theme of the revival of Hezekiah's day seems to be that of "cleansing". God moved to cleanse the temple, the city and the country of its impurities. What does this teach us about the focus of God in revival?

For Prayer:

Ask God to help you to examine your life in the light of His Word. Ask Him to give you a seriousness about what He reveals about your life through this Word.

Take a moment to pray for your church. Ask God to reveal any impurities He finds there. Ask God to give the members and adherents of your church a passion to deal with any impurities He reveals.

Ask God to give you the strength to resist anything that does not bring Him glory in your life. Ask Him to renew your passion and delight in Him by removing all the distractions and obstacles that keep you from Him.

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CHAPTER 3 -

REVIVAL UNDER JOSIAH

2 Chronicles 33-35

Conditions Before the Revival

The revival that took place under King Hezekiah had a significant impact in his day. After his death, however, his son, Manasseh, became king in his place. Manasseh was very rebellious and evil and brought the nation of Judah to a new low in their spiritual history. 2 Chronicles 33 and 2 Kings 21 record this story.

Manasseh came to the throne as a child of twelve (2 Chronicles 33:1). He restored the worship of Baal in Jerusalem and Judah (2 Chronicles 33:3). By setting up altars to Baal throughout the land, he restored the evil practices his father had driven out of the nation. Manasseh worshipped the stars. Hezekiah, his father, had cleansed the temple of the Lord. Manasseh built pagan altars and placed them in the temple (2 Chronicles 33:4). In both the inner and outer courts of the temple, Manasseh installed altars used for the worship of the stars (2 Chronicles 33:5). He had his sons burnt to death as a sacrifice to his pagan gods in the Valley of Ben Hinnom (2 Chronicles 33:6). He practiced sorcery, divination, witchcraft and consulted mediums (2 Chronicles 33:6). 2 Chronicles 33.9 describes the reign of Manasseh:

[9] Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the

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nations whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel. (2 Chronicles 33)

2 Kings 21.16 adds to this description of his reign:

[16] Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. (2 Kings 21)

Manasseh was one of the vilest kings Judah had placed on the throne. He destroyed all that his father had fought so hard to achieve. The revival of his father's day had not impacted him. Under his reign, the land returned to its sinful practices and rebellion against God.

The Lord sent prophets to speak to Manasseh and the inhabitants of Judah, but they refused to listen (2 Chronicles 33:10). God then sent the king of Assyria against him. The Assyrian king took Manasseh into captivity (2 Chronicles 33:11). Notice the impact that this captivity had on Manasseh:

*[12] And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.
[13] He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.*

There in his captivity, Manasseh repented of his evil deeds and turned to the Lord God. Manasseh's life was radically changed after his encounter with God in Assyria. He

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experienced his own personal revival. When he returned to Jerusalem, he destroyed the foreign gods he had set up (2 Chronicles 33:15). He cleansed the temple as his father Hezekiah had done and restored it to its original condition, commanding Judah to return to the Lord their God and to abandon their evil practices (2 Chronicles 33:16). While things did change in Judah because of this personal revival, this work of God did not seem to spread as he had in the days of Hezekiah. 2 Chronicles 33.17 tells us:

*[17] Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the LORD their God.
(2 Chronicles 33)*

The people of Judah did listen to their king and sacrifice to the Lord, but they did so in the high places where they worshipped their pagan gods. There is evidence here of compromise. They offered sacrifices to God in the place where they had worshipped their pagan gods. They had not completely cut their ties to their past rebellion.

When Manasseh's son Amon came to the throne, he returned to the evil ways of his father's past. He did not repent of these evil deeds as Manasseh had, but continued to lead Judah away from the Lord. His officials conspired against him and assassinated him in his palace. Josiah became king in his place.

To summarise this period of Judean history, we see that under the reign of Manasseh, Judah reached a low point in their spiritual history. They desecrated by installing altars to foreign gods in its courts. Occult practices were on the rise. Child sacrifice and immorality were in evidence in the land. Violence was rampant. Manasseh slaughtered many citizens of Judah. While Manasseh did experience a personal revival, that revival did not spread. He

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encouraged his people to worship the Lord God, but they did so in a way that compromised the truth. They were not wholehearted in their commitment to the Lord their God. Under the reign of Amon, his son, Judah continued to wander from God and His purpose for their lives.

The Revival and how it Started

Things began to change in the land when an eight-year-old king by the name of Josiah came to the throne. This young child had the heart to seek the Lord. The strange thing about this was that his father Amon was an evil king. He did not learn about the Lord from his home environment. God placed His hand on this young life, however, and prepared him to lead His country into another great revival.

When Josiah was in the twelfth year of his reign, he began to purge Jerusalem and Judah of its high places and idols. Under his administration, altars to Baal and the idols used in the worship of foreign gods were torn down and smashed. 2 Chronicles 34.7 tells us that he had these idols crushed to powder. He was very serious about this matter. He did not want to see these idols being repaired and placed back in the land. They were destroyed completely. He also burned the bones of the priest of this false religion on their altars. This not only desecrated these altars but removed any trace of these priests from the land. All evidence of foreign religion was removed from Judah. Nothing remained.

By the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah ordered the purification of the land and the temple. The priests and carpenters set to work repairing and cleansing the temple as the king had commanded. As they were working, a priest by the name of Hilkiah made an amazing discovery. He

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found the Book of the Law. For many years this book had been lost. No one read it. It was hidden in the rubble of the temple. Hilkiah gave the book to a Shaphan, the secretary. Shaphan took it to King Josiah and read it to him.

The reading of this Book of the Law and the response of Josiah to it precipitated a revival that spread throughout the countryside. When Josiah heard the words of the Lord as recorded in the Book of the Law, he tore his robes in a sign of mourning. He knew that the anger of God was on them as a nation. He knew that they had sinned against Him. He felt the weight of their sin as a nation. He asked the priests to inquire of the Lord about the words of this book. The priests went to a prophetess by the name of Huldah who had a word from the Lord for them. She told them that the judgement of God was indeed on the nation. God had seen the repentance of Josiah, however, and was pleased with him. His eyes would not see the disaster that God had planned for this rebellious people.

When they took the word of the Lord back to King Josiah, the king invited his people to come to the temple. When they had assembled, he read the Law to them. When he had finished reading, he led the people into a renewal of their covenant with the God of their fathers. They committed that day to keep the words of the Book of the Law with all their heart and soul:

[31] And the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. [32] Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin join in it. And the inhabitants of

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*Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God,
the God of their fathers. (2 Chronicles 34)*

Josiah continued his battle against idolatry and Baal worship in the land. The Bible tells us that while Josiah lived and reigned, the people did not fail to serve the Lord their God.

2 Chronicles 35 describes a Passover celebration that took place during the days of Josiah. Josiah provided 30,000 sheep and goats and 3,000 cattle to be sacrificed to the Lord (21 Chronicles 35:7). Beyond the offerings made by King Josiah, his officials “willingly” contributed another 7,600 Passover offerings and eight hundred more cattle.

[8] And his officials contributed willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the chief officers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings 2,600 Passover lambs and 300 bulls. [9] Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethanel his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for the Passover offerings 5,000 lambs and young goats and 500 bulls. (2 Chronicles 35)

Approximately 41,400 animals were sacrificed to the Lord God at that Passover celebration!

2 Chronicles 35.18 describes this Passover as follows:

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[18] No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah, and the priests and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 35)

The Lord was moving among His people. The temple was restored and cleansed. Pagan idols were ground to powder. All traces of foreign worship were removed from the land. The people of Judah renewed their vows to serve and honour God alone. The king and his officials contributed generously to the service and praise of the Lord their God. Once again God's name was being worshipped in Jerusalem. The Passover celebrated in those days was unlike any that had taken place. God was revealing His presence in Judah.

Lessons learned from this revival

Josiah had a burden to restore the worship of God. It was not, however, until the Book of the Law was discovered that revival broke out in Judah. As that word was read to the king, he was broken. That book brought conviction of sin and brokenness to his heart. He took the book and read it publicly to the people of Judah. That same conviction and brokenness pierced the soul of the nation. God met them in His inspired Word.

As in Josiah's day, the Word of God needs to be pulled out from under the rubble. It has become hidden in the clutter of modern philosophies and ideas. It has been buried under traditions and customs. Its importance has been undermined. It is pushed aside because it is not convenient. Its teaching has become so watered down it is no longer

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recognizable. This Word has been removed from our public schools. Government policies are made which are in direct violation of its principles. Liberal theology has stripped away the truth of this Word and made it little more than an interesting religious novel. Is the authority of this Word lost to our society today? It was not until God's people rediscovered the Book of the Law and became serious about its application that the Spirit of God moved in revival power in the days of Josiah.

The revival in Josiah's day was directly connected to the rediscovery of the Word of God. Once again, we see that God moved in power when His people allowed His word to redirect their lives and point out sin in their lives. Do you want to see a revival in your life? Turn to the word of God. Search it with all your heart. Let it reveal Christ in all His beauty to you. Let it show you how far you have drifted from God and His ways. Let it redirect you into the paths of righteousness. Commit yourself to study and apply its pages to your life. When it convicts you of your sins, confess them and be reconciled to God. Accept its encouragement. Step out boldly in its promises. God will meet you in these pages? He promises that all who truly seek Him, and His ways will find Him (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13).

For Consideration:

What were the spiritual conditions in Judah under the early reign of Manasseh

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What did it take for Manasseh to come to the Lord? How did this renewal affect his life and reign as king of Judah?

Compare what took place under the reigns of Manasseh and Josiah by examining the following two verses:

Manasseh:

*[17] Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the LORD their God.
(2 Chronicles 33)*

Josiah:

[6] And in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, [7] he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 34)

What difference do you see in how these two kings dealt with sin in their midst? How is compromise an enemy to revival?

How important was the discovery of the Book of the Law to the revival that took place in the days of Josiah? What role did that Word play in shaping the revival?

Has the authority of the Word of God been lost to our generation? Explain

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For Prayer:

Ask God to teach you how to live under the authority of His inspired Word. Ask Him to show you if there are areas of your life where you are not walking in submission to His Word.

Ask the Lord to keep you from compromise when it comes to obedience to His purpose for your life.

Thank the Lord that He can bring change in the life of even the most rebellion person. Thank Him for how he transformed the life of Manasseh. Ask Him to work in the life of someone you know who seems hardened to His Word.

CHAPTER 4 –

REVIVAL UNDER EZRA

AND NEHEMIAH

Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah 8-13

Conditions Before the Revival

Despite the revivals of their past, the people of God continued to fall into sin and rebellion against their God. Because of their sin, God sent His people into captivity. Israel, to the north, was the first to go. The Assyrians attacked and took her into captivity. The nation of Judah, to the south, remained a few years longer in her land, but the Babylonians invaded and forced her into exile as well. For years the people of God lived away from their homeland. In the year 538 BC King Cyrus of Persia declared freedom for the Jews to return to the land of promise. Under the capable leadership of men like Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews began the long process of rebuilding their country. They built houses and important buildings. They also set up an altar to the Lord. Plans were set in place to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed by their enemies.

Israel's neighbours did not appreciate the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem. They were not too keen on seeing this once powerful city restored to its former glory. They opposed the rebuilding by sending a letter to the king of Persia claiming that if they rebuilt the city, the Jews would no longer feel any allegiance to the king of Persia. This accusation brought a halt to the reconstruction.

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Through His prophets, God encouraged His people to persevere in the rebuilding process, despite the opposition. When further letters were sent to the king of Persia, the response returned in favour of reconstruction. The work of rebuilding the temple of God was completed under the reign of King Darius of the Medes and Persians. These were days of tremendous joy for the Jews. The temple was dedicated by the sacrifice of one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and twelve male goats (one for each tribe). Ezra 6:22 tells us about the celebration of the first Passover in this new temple:

[22] And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. (Ezra 6)

There was great excitement in the air in those days. They had been given the opportunity to start all over. God had allowed them to return to their homeland. He had put it in the heart of the king to allow them to complete the work on the temple. Now they stood in the completed temple worshipping the Lord God who had delivered them from captivity and restored their blessing.

It was into this situation that a Jewish priest by the name of Ezra arrived from Babylon. Ezra 7.6 describes this individual for us:

[6] this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. (Ezra 7)

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Ezra 7:9-10 goes on to say:

[9] For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him. [10] For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. (Ezra 7)

These verses tell us two important details about Ezra. First, he was skilled in the Law of Moses. Notice that he was not just knowledgeable in the Law of Moses, but he also taught and lived it out in his personal life.

The second detail we need to see in these verses is that that hand of the Lord was on him. God was blessing him and his efforts. His ministry was powerful because he chose to walk in obedience to the Word of God and teach it to the people. In the revivals we have examined to this point, we have seen just how significant the Word of God was in the spreading of revival fires. God sovereignly brought a man who loved, studies, taught and walked faithfully in the truth of His word to Jerusalem at this crucial point in Israel's history.

It was not long after Ezra arrived that he discovered that the people of God who lived in Jerusalem were not walking in obedience to the Law of Moses. The first evidence of this was in a report brought to him in Ezra 9:

[9:1] After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the

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Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. [2] For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.”
(Ezra 9)

God's people had been marrying women from pagan nations. The city officials were particularly guilty in this matter. The Law of Moses forbade the intermarriage of Jews and women of pagan religions. While this had apparently become quite accepted in the land, notice the response of Ezra to this news:

[3] As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. [4] Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. [5] And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak is torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God
(Ezra 9)

Ezra was appalled that this practice was unchecked in Israel. He knew that God's word was clear on this matter. This flagrant sin broke his heart. Pulling hair from his beard and head, Ezra sat in mourning before God. As Ezra examine the situation in Jerusalem, he found that these foreign wives had led their husbands into unfaithfulness toward the God of Israel. While others overlooked this sin,

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Ezra grieved deeply in his heart because of it. This shows us just how dedicated this man was to the Word of God.

The Revival and how it Started

When Ezra discovered the sin of intermarriage with pagan women, he tore his tunic and pulled hair from his beard and head as a sign of mourning. Ezra 9.4 tells us that everyone who trembled at this sin gathered together under the leadership of Ezra. Ezra led them in prayer for the state of the nation. Listen to his prayer:

[5] And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God, [6] saying:

“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. [7] From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. And for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today. [8]

But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. [9] For we are slaves. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair

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its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

[10] "And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, [11] which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land that you are entering, to take possession of it, is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness. [12] Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.' [13] And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, [14] shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape? [15] O LORD, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this."

Notice that Ezra felt deep shame as he approached God about this matter (Ezra 9:6). He recognized that, as a nation, they were guilty of disregarding the law of God. He confessed their sin to God. As Ezra and the people prayed, crowds of people began to gather:

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[10:1] While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly. (Ezra 10)

As they listened to Ezra pray with such passion, the crowd was convicted of their sins and began to weep bitterly (Ezra 10.1). As they wept before God, a man by the name of Shecaniah spoke to Ezra. He felt they needed to do something to make things right with God. We have a record of this proposal in Ezra 10:

[2] And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. [3] Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law. [4] Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it." (Ezra 10)

As a result of this proposal a proclamation was issued throughout the land. Ezra 10:7-8 give us the details of that proclamation:

[7] And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, [8] and that if anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all his property

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should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles. (Ezra 10)

They decreed that all Jewish exiles were to assemble in Jerusalem within three days. Anyone who did not come to this assembly was to forfeit his land and property and be banned from the nation. We see just how serious the people who gathered before Ezra took this matter.

Over the next three days, people began to gather in Jerusalem. On the third day, the day of the great assembly, the people stood in the pouring rain to hear Ezra speak (Ezra 10:9). He told them that they had sinned against the Lord their God by marrying foreign wives. He challenged them to confess this matter to God. He also encouraged them to separate from their foreign wives. This issue could have been very controversial, but the Spirit of God had been moving in their presence. With one voice, the assembly recognized their guilt. Right then and there a plan was devised to deal with this matter. One by one they put away their foreign wives and got right with God. Their hearts were broken, as God moved among them in revival power.

Nehemiah 8 speaks of yet another time when God used His servant Ezra to sweep the nation with revival. On this occasion, Ezra stood before the people with the Book of the Law. Opening the book, Ezra began to read aloud (Nehemiah 8:1,2). He started reading at daybreak and continued until noon. As Ezra opened the Book of the Law, the crowd rose to their feet in respect for the word that was about to be read (Nehemiah 8:5). The priests and Levites explained the words to the people so that they understood clearly the requirements of God.

[8] They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that

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the people understood the reading. (Nehemiah 9)

The purpose was that God's people understand its meaning. As the book was read and explained, the people responded:

[6] And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. (Nehemiah 8)

Hearts were broken by the reading and preaching that day. As people listened, tears began to stream down their faces. They were convicted of their sin and failure to walk in God's purpose for their lives. The atmosphere of grief was so heavy on the assembly that day that the Levites were forced to move among the people to calm them down:

[9] And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. [10] Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." [11] So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." (Nehemiah 8)

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We can only imagine what that meeting looked like. As you looked over the large crowd that gathered that day, you could hear the wailing of God's people for their sins. The whole assembly seemed to have been moved to weep under the conviction of God. Some had fallen to their faces on the ground begging God for forgiveness. What was taking place here was not orderly. To the outside observer, this assembly appeared to be in a state of chaos. This was not the case, however. God was moving among them. His Spirit was breaking men and women of pride and revealing their sin.

On the second day of these meetings, the people returned to hear the word of God again. As Ezra read from the Book of the Law, they discovered that the Lord had commanded them to live in booths in the seventh month of the year to commemorate their deliverance from Egypt (see Leviticus 23:39-43). Seeing that it was the seventh month of the year, these people immediately spread the Word throughout their towns that people were to collect branches and make these booths as commanded by God. The people of God had not observed this command for years. Nehemiah 8:17 describes this time of celebration:

*[17] And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing.
(Nehemiah 8)*

For seven days they celebrated this feast with great joy and rejoicing.

Seventeen days later they gathered together again. Nehemiah 9:2-3 describe what took place:

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[2] And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. [3] And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.
(Nehemiah 9)

By this time, the men of Israel had separated from their foreign wives (Nehemiah 9:2). They gathered now before God, and for one-quarter of the day, they stood listening to the reading of the Word of God. Then for another quarter of a day, they confessed their sins. On that great day, the Levites lead the people in praise confession of sin.

When they finished praying, they renewed their covenant with the Lord God. They put this covenant in writing, signed and sealed it before the Lord. Together they bound themselves in an oath to seek the Lord and His ways. Nehemiah 10 gives us a summary of this binding agreement. In this covenant they agree to the following:

1. Not to give their daughters in marriage to the pagan nations around them nor to take their daughters for their sons (Nehemiah 9.30).
2. Not to buy merchandise from their neighbours on the Sabbath day and to forgo all work on that day (Nehemiah 9.31).
3. To give their offerings on a regular basis for the work of the Lord (Nehemiah 9.32-39)
4. Not to neglect the house of God (Nehemiah 9.3).

Great things were taking place in those days. God's Spirit was moving in power among His people bringing conviction of sin. In return, they were committing themselves

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afresh to live in obedience to the revealed will of God as recorded in the Book of the Law. While there was deep conviction and grief over sin, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God brought great joy and blessing.

Lessons learned from this revival

The revival that took place under the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah came about when Ezra who was well versed in the Law of God began to confess the sin of intermarriage with pagan women. While this was a fairly common practice in the nation at that time, Ezra took it very seriously and acknowledged their guilt before the Lord. As others of like mind gathered with him, the Israelites repented and got right with God.

A similar thing took place in the book of Nehemiah. As the Book of the Law was read and preached, sins were exposed. God's people responded with humility and confession of sin. They did not stop at confessing sin; they also chose to make things right. They publicly covenanted to serve the Lord and to put away all evil from their midst. As they did, God filled them with joy and blessing.

These revivals sprang from the preaching and reading of God's Word. The Spirit of God moved people to listen with new attentiveness to the teaching of the Word and opened their eyes to the truth it taught.

How serious are we about the word of God? How much does it grieve you that our churches and countries have wandered from the principles taught in that Word? Are there not times when we have accepted disobedience and disregard for the Word of God as being the norm for our day. Do we not need men and women like Ezra who refuse to rest as long as the Word of God is disregarded? How

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many times have we chosen to ignore sins in our lives, considering them too small to worry about? I dare say that its pages would condemn each one of us. Are we willing to listen to what the Word of God says? Are we ready to hear its rebuke? It is only when we are willing to listen that we can expect to see God moving in power in our midst. God moves among those who seek Him with all their heart.

For Consideration:

God's people had returned from exile but were ignorant of the teaching of the Book of the Law. As a result, they were marrying foreign wives and ignoring celebrations that God had ordained. How important was the instruction in the Law of God during the revivals of Ezra and Nehemiah?

God chose to use a man who was well-versed in His law to bring revival to the nation of Israel. Why was Ezra a good choice as leader of this revival?

What did the revivals of Ezra and Nehemiah's day accomplish or change in the land of Israel? What was the result of these revivals?

What needs to change in your society? What needs to change in your church? What is the connection between obedience to the Word of God and the Spirit of God moving in our midst? Is it possible that we want to see a revival in our day without dealing with our sin?

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For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you a more open heart to the truth of his Word. Ask Him to give you a willing and humble heart to walk in obedience to what it says.

Ask God to forgive you for not taking sin in your life and your community seriously. Ask Him for a heart to see sin as He sees it.

Pray that God would bring conviction of sin to our churches and societies. Ask the Spirit of God to open hearts and mind to the truth of the Word of God and its purpose for us.

Ask God to strengthen and equip your spiritual teachers to preach and teach with clarity and the conviction of Ezra.

CHAPTER 5 –

REVIVALS IN THE

BOOK OF JONAH

Jonah 1- 4

While there is not a lot of information available to us in the Bible about the revivals that took place during the days of Jonah, it is essential that we touch on this briefly in the context of this study.

Conditions Before the Revival

In Jonah 1:1-2 we have a record of the call of Jonah to go to Nineveh:

[1:1] Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, [2] “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” (Jonah 1)

Notice what the Lord has to say about the city of Nineveh in verse 2. Nineveh was a “great city.” The word “great” speaks about the size of the city. The connection between the word “great” and the size of the city is seen more clearly in Jonah 3:3:

[3] So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. (Jonah 3)

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According to verse three, it took three days to walk across Nineveh.

While the city of Nineveh was a large city, Jonah 1:2 tells us that it was also an evil city. This was the reason God was asking Jonah to go to Nineveh. As a prophet of God, he was to speak to the people about their evil ways.

The book does not go into detail about the evil of Nineveh at the time. Jonah 3:8, however, sheds some light on the situation. When Jonah spoke to the people of Nineveh, the king issued a decree:

[8] but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

The words of the king here show us that even he recognized that his people had been committing evil. While the citizens of Nineveh never claimed to serve the Lord or be governed by His law, even by their standards, they understood that what they were doing was evil. Notice also that that king ordered that everyone turn from “the violence that is in his hands.”

The use of the word “violence” shows us something of the nature of the evil. Apparently, things were getting out of hand, and people were resorting to violence to get their way. As I consider these words, I think about a city that was unsafe. Violence and evil poured into the streets, and the stench of it was so offensive to God that He sent Jonah to tell them that if they did not repent and change their ways, He would destroy the city within forty days (see Jonah 4:7-8).

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It is also of significance to look at the life of the prophet Jonah at this time. When the Lord called him to go to Nineveh, he chose to run from that calling. The prophet explains this action in the last chapter of his book. Listen to his prayer to the Lord after He forgave the inhabitants of the city:

[2] And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. [3] Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah hated the Ninevites. This may be because of their evil reputation and violence. His disdain for the people was such that he did not want God to forgive them. He felt they deserved the full measure of God's wrath on their lives.

We see here not only the reputation of the Ninevites but also the heart of Jonah as a servant of God. He harboured hatred in his heart toward the people of Nineveh. His hatred was such that he preferred to die rather than see these people forgiven. Both Jonah, as a prophet and the people of Nineveh needed a touch of God.

The Revival and How it Started

We are very familiar with the story of Jonah as he travelled in the opposite direction to Nineveh. He boarded a boat and set sail for Tarshish. God pursued Jonah on that boat. The sailors encountered a great storm and began to fear for their lives. The nature of the wind was such that the

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sailors feared that the gods were angry with them. Jonah 1 describes the scene on board the ship:

[4] But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. [5] Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. [6] So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." (Jonah 1)

The sailors were desperate to save their lives. They rebuked Jonah for not calling out to his God on their behalf. Desperate to find why the gods were angry with them, the sailors cast lots to see if there was anyone among them who was the cause of their predicament. The lot fell on Jonah:

[7] And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. [8] Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" (Jonah 2)

That day, Jonah, who had been running from God, was forced to confess his sin to the sailors. Confession of his sin, however, was not enough to calm the storm. Jonah

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needed to get off the boat. Only when the sailors agreed to throw him overboard, did the winds calm.

What is crucial for us to note here is what happened when the sailors throw Jonah overboard.

[15] So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

[16] Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. (Jonah 1)

The sea ceased its raging. The sailors understood from this that the God of Jonah was a mighty God. That day, on board the ship, these sailors recognized the God of Jonah. They offered sacrifices and made vows to Him. A small revival broke out on that ship because Jonah confessed his sin and submitted to be thrown overboard. The sailors returned home having experienced the incredible power and compassion of the Lord God. They understood what it was to sin against such a holy God. There on the deck of that ship, they met the Lord God of Israel.

The second revival that we read about in the book of Jonah took place in a very different place. After Jonah was thrown into the sea, the Lord sent a large fish to swallow him. There in the belly of that fish, Jonah's life was at stake. He had cause to reflect on his life and rebellion against God. It was there in that fish that Jonah began to call out to the Lord. Jonah 2:7-9 record what happened spiritually to Jonah at that time:

[7] When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. [8] Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

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[9] But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (Jonah 2)

That day, Jonah "remembered" the Lord and prayed to Him. To that point, he had been running from his God and did not want to speak to Him. There in the belly of that fish, Jonah confessed that those who turn to idols forsake their hope of God's steadfast love (verse 8). The prophet made a solemn promise that day to sacrifice to the Lord with a voice of thanksgiving and fulfil all his vows of obedience and faithfulness to God. Jonah committed himself again to seek God and serve him faithfully.

God gave Jonah a second chance. The fish spit him up on dry ground, and God renewed His call to Jonah to go to Nineveh and speak to them about their sin. This time Jonah obeyed.

While there is no question that Jonah had met with God and had experienced a transformation, that transformation was not complete. Prejudice against the people of Nineveh remained in him. His personal revival did not mean that Jonah had no more work to do on his spiritual life. It did, however, place him in Nineveh where he preached the message God gave him.

The message Jonah preached was simple. He told the people that God would destroy the city in forty days (Jonah 3:4). While the word was simple and Jonah preached with prejudice and bitterness in his heart, the city felt its impact. Notice the response of the people to the words of Jonah:

[5] And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. [6] The

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word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. [7] And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, [8] but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. [9] Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." (Jonah 3)

Jonah's prophecy so impacted the citizens of the city that they called for a fast. They believed what he told them and grieved for their predicament. When the news reached the king, he also believed. Notice, however, that while he mourned and fasted, he also called for action. He told his people not only to fast but to put away their evil ways and turn from their violence. Grieving for sin was not enough; the king understood that their sin was an offense to the Lord God. They needed to address this sin if they were to avert the terrible judgement prophesied.

That day, the people of Nineveh turned from their evil ways. Violence ceased in the city, and the entire city was moved to fast and seek the compassion and forgiveness of the God of Israel. The result was that the anger of God was turned from them and the city spared.

Lessons Learned from these Revivals

The book of Jonah has some crucial details to show us about the work of God in revival. Notice first the role of preaching and the Word of God. It was not until Jonah

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spoke to the sailors and introduced them to the God who made the heavens and the earth that the sailors understood the source of their trouble. When they heard Jonah speak to them about his sin and rebellion against God, they believed.

It was the word of the Lord that impacted the people of Nineveh. Jonah preached to them in simple terms, but the message from the Lord was clear. That word touched their lives, and they believed.

Notice second that the word of God was backed up by the power of God. Jonah introduced the sailors on the ship to the Lord. When they threw him overboard, the wind ceased. The power of the God of whom Jonah spoke broke them.

The power of God was also demonstrated in the life of Jonah as well. The fish God sent carried Jonah to safety. Jonah miraculously survived this trip to shore. These things would not go unnoticed and would have had a powerful effect on Jonah, confirming the power and compassion of the God he served.

Consider also the locations of the revivals of Jonah's day. A great work of God took place on a sinking ship in the middle of the sea. It took place in the belly of a fish making its way to shore to vomit. Finally, it took place in a pagan city that did not claim to serve the God of Israel. The Ninevites had no godly leadership to direct them or help them understand what was taking place.

The leaders of these revivals were not where they should have been spiritually. Jonah led a group of sailors to the Lord when he was still dealing with his own rebellion. He preached an angry and bitter message to a people he

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hated and wanted to perish, but that message changed their lives. Jonah was not perfect. He was a struggling and bitter prophet.

The king of Nineveh challenged his people to turn from their evil ways and seek the Lord. He did not know the Lord God of Israel himself. As the king of a pagan city, he would have to turn from his own evil and violent ways. When Jonah did not prove to be willing to lead the people of Nineveh in this revival, the Lord used the king of the city to give them direction in what they needed to do. At his command, they fasted, repented and ceased their sin.

God does not only use people who were spiritually mature to bring this revival. The word preached by Jonah was not eloquent or even spirit filled but it was enough to bring a whole city to its knees and save them from the wrath of God.

For Consideration:

What do we know about the conditions in Nineveh before the preaching of Jonah?

What was the condition of Jonah's heart at the time God called him to go to Nineveh?

How did God demonstrate His power to Jonah and the sailors on the ship? How did this demonstration confirm the word that was spoken to them?

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What connection is there between the preaching of the word and revival?

What is the connection between the confession of sin and the revivals that took place in the book of Jonah?

What do we learn about the people God uses to stir up revival?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He can use us even when we are not perfect. Thank Him for times He has used you, despite the issues you struggled with in your life.

Ask the Lord to forgive you for times when you have believed that the power in your ministry came from yourself and your personal ability.

Do you have attitudes that need to be addressed in your life? Ask the Lord to enable you to change your heart.

Ask God to give you the grace to take His Word seriously. Ask Him to empower you to be effective in pointing men and women to the Saviour.

CHAPTER 6 –

REVIVAL AT PENTECOST

Acts 1-5

We come now to the New Testament and the revival that took place at Pentecost. This is probably one of the most familiar of all the revival accounts in the Bible.

Conditions Before the Revival

The Lord Jesus had returned to be with His Father. For three years He ministered in Israel, demonstrating and preaching the truths of the Kingdom of God. The Jews of His day rejected His message. The Son of God had come among them, and they did not want Him. Instead, they treated him like a criminal. He was falsely accused. During His stay on earth, Jesus had healed their sickness, delivered them of their evil spirits, and even raised their dead. He fed them when they were hungry. He encouraged them when they were without hope. He warned them of the dangers to come. Despite this, the crowd still cried out: “Crucify him, crucify him.”

After the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, all that remained of the crowds that had followed Him was a small group of one hundred and twenty believers. They were without strength or wisdom. They were afraid of the religious authorities. They were powerless before the community of their day. The early church needed to experience the enabling power of the Spirit of God in their lives.

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The Revival and how it Started

Acts 2 describes how revival took place in the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The believers had gathered together on the day of Pentecost. As they were together, they heard a great wind filling the room where they met. As they watched, a great tongue of fire appeared and fell on each one individually. As the Spirit of God filled them, they began to speak in other languages, declaring the wonders of God (Acts 2.11b). The Spirit of God spoke through these early believers proclaiming the wonders of God in the various tongues of the day.

From the context, we understand that this meeting was quite noisy. People in the vicinity noticed that something peculiar was taking place. They listened and heard believers speaking in different languages. Acts 2.8-11 gives a list of the languages these believers were speaking. During the celebration of the Pentecost, Jews from all corners of the globe came to Jerusalem. For many of them, Hebrew was a second language. To hear their language spoken in a foreign city was a strange thing indeed. They came in masses to listen to what these believers were saying.

These once timid believers now boldly stood before the crowd proclaiming the wonders of God. Something happened to these men and women of faith. They were not the same after the Spirit of God fell on them.

The crowd wondered at what was happening. Some accused the believers of having too much to drink. Others were perplexed and didn't know what to think. Peter stood up and addressed the crowd. He explained to them that what they saw was in direct fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel who prophesied that in the last days, God would pour

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out His Spirit on all flesh. He went on to speak about the Lord Jesus. He told those present that Jesus was alive and all who called out to him would be saved. He pleaded with them to repent of their sins and identify with Christ in baptism. So powerful was the movement of the Spirit of God that day that thousands of people came to faith in Christ and were added to the church. Their numbers grew from one hundred and twenty to about three thousand. Acts 2.42-47 shows us what was taking place in the life of the early church during these days of revival.

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching

As we have seen in the revivals of the Old Testament, the Word of God played an essential role in the revival at Pentecost. Acts 2.46 tells us that believers met every day in the temple courts. You can be assured that part of this meeting involved the teaching of the Word of God. These believers were not satisfied with a weekly sermon. They hungered for the Word of God. The word “devote” indicates that they not only listened to the words of the apostles, but they also put them into practice in their lives. These early believers were excited about the truths they were learning from the Apostles. God’s Spirit had created a hunger for God’s Word in their lives.

They devoted themselves to fellowship

Not only did the early church devote itself to the Word of God. Acts 2.42 tells us that they also dedicated themselves to fellowship. The word “fellowship” has changed somewhat over the years. Today when we talk about fellowship we speak about a cup of tea with other believers and a conversation about the weather and the latest sports scores. Fellowship in the early church had a much deeper meaning. Verses forty-four and forty-five tell us that when

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these believers spoke of fellowship, it meant that they were willing to sell everything they had and give to the poor and needy in their midst. Houses and land were sold. Priorities were radically changing. No longer were they concerned only for themselves, this revival changed them from being self-centred to being others centred. They saw the needs around them and did not hesitate to sell everything to share with those in need.

They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread

The Bible tells us that the believers devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. What did this celebration mean to these early believers? The larger context would indicate that this breaking of bread included sharing a meal and taking time to remember the Lord's death as He had commanded. Remember that it was in the context of a communal meal that the Lord performed what is now known as the Lord's Supper. The breaking of bread served two purposes. It provided them with a means of ministering to the needs of the body by providing them with a meal. Most importantly, however, it was a way of declaring the death and resurrection of the Lord to those who attended that meal.

As believers remembered what the Lord had done for them, their hearts overflowed with gratitude and thanksgiving. This celebration also gave them cause to reflect on their own lives considering what he had done for them. This was a time to take a spiritual inventory of their lives. The early church was committed to sharing the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. They were determined to examining themselves in light of these life-changing events.

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They devoted themselves to prayer

God's Spirit also brought the early church to its knees in prayer. These early believers were moved to lift their hearts in praise and adoration of their God and King. By prayer, they confessed their sins and shortcomings. By prayer, they called out for God's enabling in their lives and ministry. By prayer, they heard God direct them in the steps they were to take. They devoted themselves to this constant communion with God and to seek His wisdom and guidance.

They enjoyed the favour of all people

Unbelievers began to see a real difference in the lives of these believers. There was a difference in how they talked. There was a difference in how they did business. There was a difference in how they treated their neighbours and friends. There was a difference in how they lived their lives before the law of the land. There was nothing that the unbelieving world could say against them. They were model citizens. They were model neighbours. They exemplified the mind of Christ in all they did.

They ate together with glad and sincere hearts

Another essential characteristic of this revival was the fact that it drew believers together. The early believers ate together with glad and sincere hearts. The word sincere indicates that there were no rough or jagged edges in their relationships with each other. This says something about the force of this revival. Acts 4.32 tells us that they "were one in heart and mind." As God's spirit moved among them, they were forced to deal with their relationships. Broken relationships were healed. Joy was again restored to their relationships. They experienced the unity of spirit and

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mind. Old hurts and prejudices were forgiven and cast aside.

People were coming to the Lord every day

So powerful was the movement of God's Spirit in the lives of His people that every day unbelievers were touched and came to faith in the Lord Jesus. People were healed of their diseases; evil spirits were cast out. People were delivered from the kingdom of Satan and coming to faith in Christ. There could be no doubt that God was moving in their presence.

The revival that broke out in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost would change the world. Those influenced by this great revival would leave the city of Jerusalem and preach the gospel to the Samaritans and Gentiles. From there the gospel would spread to the far corners of the known world.

Lessons learned from this revival

We see from the revival at Pentecost what God can do in the simplest of believers. The church after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was in desperate need of empowering. Through these simple believers, God would start a revival that would impact the world for years to come. Christianity would never be the same.

The Spirit of God radically changed lives in the days of this revival. There was power in service that had never been seen. People were coming to know the Lord Jesus daily. Priorities were shifted. Needs were met. This revival came about when the Spirit of God fell on His church. It was a sovereign act of God to empower and enliven His people.

Revival at Pentecost

Barriers between believers were removed. The mind of Christ and His compassion were much in evidence as believers sold everything they had to provide for the needs in their midst. No longer did they hoard up things for themselves when their fellow believer was in need. Their dreams and ambitions for the things of this world were swept away by an overwhelming desire for God. How we need the Lord to move among us in our day. How we need to see our attraction to the world broken. How we need our hard hearts melted. How we need to be filled to overflowing with the Spirit of God. How we need in our day to see a fresh movement of God's Spirit in our midst.

What we see in this revival is how the Holy Spirit breaks the hardened human heart. He lights a flame under each believer and melts down indifference and bitterness. As eyes are focused on the Lord Jesus, the things of the world lose their attraction. Believers loosen their grip on their earthly possessions and focus on the essential matters of the Spirit. Indifference is broken. Spiritual apathy is destroyed. Pride and rebellion are dissolved. God is glorified. How we need to see this work in our day.

For Consideration:

Describe the condition of the church before the revival of Pentecost. Why did the early church need a revival?

Was there anything that the believers did that brought about this revival? To what extent did this revival take them by surprise?

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What difference did the revival at Pentecost make in the church? What changes came about in the lives of the believers?

What is the condition of the church in your society? Do you need to see a fresh work of God's Spirit to renew believers in your church? Explain.

For Prayer:

Take a moment to compare your experience of the Lord with what was taking place in the early church during the revival at Pentecost. Ask the Lord to work in you as He did in the lives of those early believers?

Thank the Lord that what is impossible to us is possible to Him. Thank Him that His power and enabling are at our disposal for the work to which He has called us.

Does the unbelieving world see the power of God at work in the church of our day? Ask God for a fresh outpouring of His Spirit on our church so that His glory and power can be demonstrated through us again as it was at Pentecost.

CHAPTER 7 –

REVIVAL IN SAMARIA

Acts 8:1-25

Conditions Before the Revival

The work of God in Jerusalem during the time of Pentecost brought tremendous growth to the church in that region. The Christian faith was expanding so rapidly that the Jewish leaders the day began to take notice. Jews were coming to know the Lord Jesus and converting to Christianity. The Jewish leaders began to resent Christians. Men like Saul felt it was their duty to deal with this problem. Saul, in particular, believed it was blasphemous to claim that Jesus was the Son of God. Receiving permission from the religious leaders of the day, he set out on a campaign to destroy Christianity. He did so by arresting believers and had them tried and imprisoned for heresy.

One prominent leader of the Christian faith was a man by the name of Stephen. He was stoned to death for preaching about Christ. Saul was present at that event and gave his consent to the brutal murder of Stephen. The result of this and other actions was that the church in Jerusalem scattered, and believers fled the city to save their lives. Acts 8:3 describes the persecution under Saul in the following terms:

[3] But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. (Acts 8)

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Saul, as a principal leader of this persecution, ravaged the church. He entered Christian homes and took men and women captive. Their crime was being a believer in Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:4 tells us that these scattered believers preached the good news about the Saviour to those they met. By this means, the message of Jesus was spreading outside of Israel. God used this persecution to bring even more people to Himself.

We have the record of a man by the name of Philip, who left the city of Jerusalem at the time of this persecution. Acts 8:5 tells us that he fled to the region of Samaria.

After the conquest of Israel by Assyria, many Israelites were taken captive and brought to Assyria. So that the land would not be abandoned entirely, the Assyrian king settled people from countries he had conquered in Israel in the place of the Jews. These foreigners took possession of the region of Samaria:

[24] And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities. (2 Kings)

We can understand how these foreigners would be looked down on by the Jews of the day. They took over property that belonged to Israel. Bitterness developed between the Israelites and these foreigners that would span generations. These settlers would become known as the Samaritans.

Revival in Samaria

2 Kings 17 tells us that the Samaritans did not “fear the Lord.” They polluted the land of Israel with their pagan worship and practices. This resulted in the judgement of God. That judgement came in the form of wild animals:

[25] And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD. Therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. (2 Kings)

When it was discovered that the people of the land were being killed by lions, the Assyrian king understood that the God of Israel was angry with the Samaritans.

[26] So the king of Assyria was told, “The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land. Therefore he has sent lions among them, and behold, they are killing them because they do not know the law of the god of the land.”

To remedy the situation the king sent an Israelite priest to instruct the Samaritans in how to worship the Lord God in the way He required. The intention was to avert the wrath of God (see 2 Kings 17:27-28).

The result of this instruction is found in 2 Kings 17:29-33:

[29] But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the shrines of the high places that the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities in which they lived. [30] The men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, [31] and the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak;

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and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. [32] They also feared the LORD and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. [33] So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. (2 Kings 17)

The Samaritans did not give up their religious beliefs. They simply added the worship of God to their list of religions. They “feared the Lord but also served their own gods.” The Samaritan religion was a mixture of Old Testament law and paganism.

The Revival and How it Started

It was into this situation that Philip arrived at the time of the persecution in Jerusalem. Despite the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, Philip began to preach about Jesus Christ.

[5] Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. (Acts 8)

The Spirit of God was with Philip as he preached, and the result was that the Samaritans believed:

[6] And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. [7] For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who

Revival in Samaria

were paralyzed or lame were healed. [8] So there was much joy in that city. (Acts 8)

Notice what is happening in Samaria according to these verses. Acts 8:6 tells us that the “crowds with one accord paid attention.” The verse speaks of “crowds.” The word is plural implying that there was more than one crowd. Philip spoke on numerous occasions to large numbers of people.

We also need to take note of the phrase “with one accord.” This too is important and shows us the attitude of the people who listened to Philip. They were of one mind and heart to listen to what he had to say. The Samaritans, as a group, were open to what Philip had to teach them about Christ.

The power of God was present to back up the words of Philip in those days. Acts 8:6-7 tells us that Philip performed miraculous signs in Samaria. Those signs included casting out demons and healing the sick. As the crowds came to the meetings Philip was holding, they heard him preach the good news of the gospel of Jesus. They saw evidence of the power of this Jesus of whom he spoke when they were healed and delivered from their spirits. The city was filled with joy and rejoicing (Acts 8:8)

One of the best-known converts during that time was a magician by the name of Simon. He was powerfully struck by the miracles that were taking place in those days.

[13] Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. (Acts 8)

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Simon was a man who magic amazed the crowds. What he saw happening under the ministry of Philip, however, shocked even him. He was impacted by these powerful demonstrations of God's might and he believed the message Philip preached.

Acts 8:12 helps us to understand the focus of the revival that took place in Samaria:

[12] But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8)

The miraculous signs that took place during those days pointed to Jesus Christ. They confirmed the spoken word of Philip about Jesus the Son of God. The focus of these days was not on the signs, and miracles, however, but on Jesus. The Spirit of God was moving with the purpose of bringing lost souls to Christ for salvation.

The impact of the revival in Samaria was such that news of what was happening reached the city of Jerusalem (Acts 8:14). Peter and John travelled there to see for themselves this great move of God. When Peter and John laid hands on the converts, the Spirit of God filled them (Acts 8:17). The lives of these new converts would be forever changed by the presence of the Holy Spirit on their lives.

As the apostles left Philip, they took advantage of the opportunity to preach the good news to other cities in Samaria on their way home. By this means, the gospel spread even further in this region.

Nothing more is mentioned in Scripture about this revival and its impact on Samaritan society. No mention is made

Revival in Samaria

of any church being established because of this work of God's Spirit. What is clear, however, is that many believed in the Lord Jesus and were filled by His Spirit. Many were healed of their sicknesses and diseases. Still, others were delivered from oppressive evil spirits. We can only imagine that these things would have made a difference in Samaria for the glory of the Lord.

Lessons Learned from this Revival

The revival that took place in Samaria took the Samaritans by surprise. To the best of our knowledge, they were not expecting or praying for such a move of God to take place. God, however, moved in power through Philip who preached the good news of Jesus.

The preaching of the gospel was central in what took place in the revival of Samaria. It was accompanied by signs and miracles, but these occurrences had, as their goal, to back up the truth Philip taught about Jesus. The Spirit of God was introducing Christ to the Samaritans.

There is no question that the revival in Samaria had an impact on society. It impacted society by introducing people to Jesus and His power. As demons were cast out the community would be transformed. As people came to Christ, the whole region would be impacted.

While the revival at Pentecost seemed to empower the church, the revival in Samaria appeared to be a move of God to bring people to himself. There did not seem to be any preparation for this work of God. They did not clean out the temple or break down their pagan altars. There were no long nights of prayer, crying out for God to move among them. The simple preaching of God's Word opened

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the hearts and minds of a rejected people, and they heard the message of the gospel of Jesus for the first time.

For Consideration:

How did the revival of Pentecost stir up trouble for believers?

Who were the Samaritans and why was their bitterness between them and the Jews?

What do we understand about the religious beliefs of the Samaritans?

What role did Philip's preaching have in the revival in Samaria?

How did the miracles Philip performed back up his preaching?

What impact did the revival in Samaria have on the community?

Revival in Samaria

For Prayer:

Are there people in your community who have been pushed aside or neglected? Ask God to reach out to them?

Thank the Lord that the preaching of the Word of God can bring renewal and revival to our communities.

Ask the Lord to demonstrate His power through you so that the truth you proclaim is backed up by what is happening in your life.

CHAPTER 8 –

REVIVAL IN EPHESUS

Acts 19

Conditions Before the Revival

We know very little about the believers in Ephesus before the revival that took place in this great city. Ephesus was, at one time, estimated to have been the fourth largest city in the world. It was a significant commercial centre and Roman capital of Asia. It housed the temple of Artemis which was an incredible structure. Artemis or Diana was a fertility goddess. This led the people to all kinds of immoral practices. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul would encourage them to put aside this immorality (Ephesians 5:2-3).

A group of John the Baptist's disciples lived in the city of Ephesus. John the Baptist had often preached about Jesus. He taught that He was the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. As John's disciples, these disciples would have believed in Jesus. When Paul asked these disciples if they had ever received the Holy Spirit, however, they responded by telling him that they had never even heard about Him.

[19:1] And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. [2] And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." [3] And he said, "Into what

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then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." [4] And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." [5] On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [6] And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. [7] There were about twelve men in all. (Acts 19)

From this, we understand that the faith of these men was incomplete. They knew nothing of the power of the Spirit of God in their lives.

When Paul began preaching in the city of Ephesus, he spoke at the synagogue. For three months he reasoned with the Jews of that area (Acts 19:8). When the people began to speak evil of him and his message, however, he left the synagogue to teach in a lecture hall in the city.

[8] And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. [9] But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. [10] This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews, and Greeks.

Prior to the revival in the city of Ephesus, we have examples of believers who knew nothing about the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives. These believers wrestled with the immorality around them and needed to be warned by Paul

Revival in Ephesus

to flee from such practices. Their community was apathetic towards the preaching of the gospel and spoke evil of Paul's instruction. The believers seemed to be a powerless minority in a big immoral city.

The Revival and How it Started

Things began to happen when Paul took some believers aside and instructed them in the ways of the Lord. Every day Paul had discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Believers come with their questions and Paul would answer them. For two years Paul did this. Acts 19:10 tells us that all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia heard the Word of God. This must have been a powerful ministry. People would have heard about Paul's teaching and come from all over Asia to listen to him teach the people who gathered around him. His reputation was growing in this province.

During those days, God also began to do extraordinary miracles through the apostle. It was quite likely that this too began to draw great crowds to hear Paul speak. Handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched the apostle were taken back to the sick and the those possessed by demons, and they were delivered (Acts 19:11-12). The power of God was on Paul in those days. God wanted to do a work in Ephesus. He was preparing the Ephesians through the powerful preaching of Paul and the equally powerful signs and wonders that backed up what the apostle was teaching.

The preaching and miracles touched the people of Ephesus. Even the unbelieving Jews had to admit that there was something extraordinary happening in their midst. They had to recognize that there was power in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 19:13 tells us that some of these

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Jews went around driving out evil spirits in the name of Jesus. Of note is a group of seven sons of the high priest whose name was Sceva. The story of their interaction with a demon is recorded for us in Acts 19:14-17:

[14] Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. [15] But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" [16] And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. [17] And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.

As they attempted to cast out a demon, it spoke to them and said: "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" Then the man in whom the evil spirit was living jumped out at the sons of Sceva and began to beat them. Though there were seven sons present that day, this one man overpowered them all, stripped them of their clothes and beat them so badly that they ran from the house naked and wounded.

When news of this incident reached the ears of the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, a great fear came over the town, and the name of the Lord was held in high honour (Acts 19:17). It was through this incident that the Lord brought revival to the town of Ephesus.

What was it about this incident that shook up the town? They saw the power of evil. One man, possessed by an evil spirit, overcame seven respected Jewish exorcists. The city was horrified at this demonic power. They knew

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only one power that was able to protect them from this kind of evil—the power of the Lord Jesus whom Paul preached.

The Spirit of God used this incident to move in the city. Acts 19:17-18 tell us:

[17] And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. [18] Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. (Acts 19)

The fear of God fell on the people of Ephesus. Notice that the unbelievers were not the only ones touched that day. Acts 19:18 tell us that believers came confessing their sin and “divulging their practices.” In other words, they openly acknowledged their sin and evil practices.

For the first time, they realized how serious their evil practices were. Convicted by the Spirit of God, they began to confess their sin publicly. Those who had practised sorcery brought scrolls and occult materials and burned them publicly. The value of material consumed that day was estimated to be fifty thousand pieces of silver.

[19] And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. (Acts 19)

This movement of God’s spirit began to spread throughout the countryside. Acts 19:20 tells us:

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[20] So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. (Acts 19)

This revival brought a city to its knees in confession of their sin. The masks were taken off. They were more interested in being right with God than having their friends think highly of them. They brought their sins out in the open and dealt with them.

Imagine what was taking place in those days in a modern setting. Imagine the people of your town gathering in a central location confessing their sins. There is a fire burning as people gather in the cool of the evening. One by one people come with tears in their eyes and confess that they have been unfaithful to God. Here comes the pastor of a local church with a stack of pornographic magazines. Before the community he confesses his sin of lust and throws his magazines into the fire, falling on his knees pleading with God for forgiveness. Next, there comes a member of your church who confesses marital unfaithfulness to her husband. Another comes and admits that he has been stealing from his company but wants to make things right. The town drunk comes with his bottles and throws them into the fire. A teenager works his way through the crowd and throws his drugs into the flames saying that he wants to make things right with his family. One by one the town is moved by the Spirit of God to confess their sins and make things right with each other. How hard it is to imagine this sort of thing taking place in our town, yet it took place that day in Ephesus.

Lessons Learned from this Revival

God can use the strangest means to bring renewal. In Ephesus, he used an incident between some unbelieving Jewish exorcists and a demon-possessed man. The

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ground was being prepared by the preaching and miracles of Paul. The faithful teaching of Paul was melting the hardness of their hearts. These powerful demonstrations proved to the Ephesians the reality of what Paul preached.

Sin separated God from His people. In this revival, as in all the other revivals we have looked at in this study, people are moved to confess their sins. This revival brought them back into line with the teaching of Scripture and God's purpose for their life.

This revival causes us to look deeply into our hearts. What are we trying to hide from God? What secret sins do you need to deal with in your life? In revival, God's people are overwhelmed by their guilt. God holds the mirror of his Word up to their lives. They see themselves as they really are. They are broken by what they see. I dare say that if God held up the mirror of His word to our lives and enabled us to see ourselves for who we are, we too would fall far short of His standard. Do you have the courage to ask Him to reveal to you your true nature? Are you afraid of what you might see? When God moves in power among us, we recognize our shortcomings. This is a very humbling experience. Confession of sin, however, is the key to renewal and personal revival.

For Consideration:

What do we know about the city of Ephesus before the revival that took place there? What was the spiritual climate of the city?

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How significant was the teaching of Paul in Ephesus? To what extent did the teaching and miracles of Paul prepare the citizens of the city for a work of God's Spirit in their midst.

How did the incident with the sons of Sceva bring about the great move of God?

What is the connection between the fear of God and the confession of sins? What sins would you need to confess if you were in Ephesus in those days?

For Prayer:

Take a moment to pray for your town or city. Ask God to move in power to bring people to Himself.

Ask God to make you willing to confess and deal with any sin that separates you from Him and keeps you from walking in His purpose.

Take a moment to thank the Lord that He is more powerful than all the forces hell can send against us. Thank Him for the hope we can have in Him.

CHAPTER 9 –

SUMMARY

In this study, we have examined various times of corporate revival in the Bible. I would like to take a moment to conclude with a note about some common threads in these movements of God.

The Centrality of the Word of God

The preaching and teaching of the Word of God seemed to play a vital role in the revivals that we have examined in this study. Under Jehoshaphat, teachers of the Law were sent throughout the country of Judah to instruct God's people in the Law. As the people listened and submitted to that instruction, the fear of the Lord fell on them and the surrounding nations. It was the rediscovery of the Book of the Law that precipitated the revival under Josiah. During the time of Ezra, people would listen for hours to the reading of Law of God. It was Jonah's declaration that he was a servant of the God who made the heavens and the earth that caused the sailors to fear and ultimately bring their offerings. Jonah's preaching of judgement moved the people of Nineveh to repentance. Philip's preaching about Jesus stirred up revival fires in Samaria. At Pentecost, the church met every day to hear the teaching of the apostles. In Ephesus, people came from all over the province to listen to the instruction of the apostle Paul.

Each of these revivals was solidly undergirded by the preaching and teaching of the truth of God's Word. It was

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this Word that brought God's people under conviction of sin and guided them through these times of revival. God's Spirit moved in power confirming the preaching and teaching of the Word.

Signs and Miracles

The preaching of the Word of God was, in many cases, accompanied by mighty signs and miracles. These miracles varied from revival to revival. In the revival of Hezekiah's day, God demonstrated his power to heal (2 Chronicles 30:20). Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and spit up alive on the shore. At Pentecost believers were empowered by the Spirit, spoke in tongues and experienced the power of God in healing and miracles. Philip cast out demons and healed the sick. Paul did the same in Ephesus. Attitudes changed, and societies experienced renewal. All these things were indications of the presence of the Lord defeating the power of sin. They did not take priority, however. They backed up the message that was being preached and moved people to accept Christ or to make themselves right with God.

Confession and Repentance

In the revivals we have examined we saw people coming under deep conviction of sin. The Word of God, as it was taught, read, preached and backed up by signs, revealed to those who heard it that they were not right with God. They came to understand the fact that they were under the wrath of God. The Word and the Spirit exposed their secret sins and shortcomings, but it did not stop there. So powerful was the conviction of sin that they were moved to repentance. They trembled at the thought of how much they had grieved a holy God. They made it their priority to be restored in their relationship with Him.

Summary

People publicly confessed their sin. At times, restoration of their relationship with God cost these people dearly. In Ezra's day, they separated from their foreign wives. In Ephesus, they burnt occult material worth a fortune. On other occasions, they had to die to their pride. They were willing to pay the price, however, to be reconciled with God. Revival brought deep brokenness and conviction of sin.

Worship and Joy in the Lord

Another reoccurring theme in the revivals we have examined is that of worship and joy in the Lord. 2 Chronicles 15:15 tells us that the people of Judah "rejoiced over the oath" they had made to the Lord. Under the revival in Hezekiah's day God's people "sang praises with gladness and bowed down to worship" (2 Chronicles 29:30). There was "very great rejoicing" in the days of Ezra (Nehemiah 8:17). The sailors on the ship in the days of Jonah bowed down to worship the God of Israel. There was "much joy" in the city during the ministry of Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:8). In these revivals we see people bowing down to God in the worship of His name. He is the focus of these times of renewal. When people found God and got right with Him, they were filled with joy and praise.

Empowering for service

Before these moves of God, believers were powerless and weak. They did not seem to have any impact on their society because of sin. In many cases, believers were being influenced by the world around them, and their relationship with God took second place. As they dealt with their sin, however, the power and presence of God were manifested in their midst. They experienced a power in service that they had never experienced before. Unbelievers were

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converted in large numbers. Filled with the joy of the Lord and His power, believers began to win the respect of the unbelieving world. God's presence was evident sometimes through signs, wonders, and miracles. At other times this power was demonstrated in the unity of believers, or victory over sin.

Reordering of Priorities

As God moved in the lives of His people, priorities were shifted. Contributions to the work of the Lord increased. In the book of Acts, believers sold their possessions and gave to those in need. Under Hezekiah, a week-long celebration extended to two weeks and all other obligations in life were put on hold. God's people would sit for hours and listen to the reading of the word of God in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. People gathered every day in the temple after the revival at Pentecost. Everything else seemed to take second place to the times they spent with the Lord.

Renewal of Covenant Commitments

The revivals in Bible times forced people to renew their commitment to the Lord. Covenants were renewed under Jehoshaphat, Josiah, and Ezra. People committed themselves to serve the Lord and obeying His word. Oaths were made that would radically change the lives of God's people and those around them.

These moves of God brought people back to God and His purpose for their lives. They exposed the sin and failures of God's people and empowered them to get back on track. God's people were renewed in joy and zeal in service of their Lord.

Summary

How did these revivals come about?

What was it that brought about these revivals? What were the conditions that precipitated these moves of God? Let me break this down very simply.

God's side

God sovereignly chose to move in each of these revivals. This was a decision He made Himself. Sometimes this was in answer to prayer, but there were other times when the Lord seemed to move without prayer being offered. Jonah did not anticipate a personal revival—He just wanted God to leave him alone. The sailors on Jonah's boat cried out to pagan gods and not to the God of Jonah. We have no record of unbelievers of Samaria praying for revival, but God touched them in a life-changing way. Behind each of these revivals, however, God moved men and women to hunger after Him and to seek His purposes. Revival begins with God and His sovereign choice not to leave us in rebellion and sin.

Human side

One day God appeared to Solomon one day and said:

*[14] if my people who are called by my name
humble themselves, and pray and seek my face
and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear
from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal
their land. (2 Chronicles 7)*

While God makes the initial step in revival, He expects us to respond to His prompting. When God places hunger in our heart, He expects that we will seek to fill that hunger

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by turning to Him. When God places a burden to pray and seek His will, He expects that we will respond to that call. When He convicts us of sin, He expects that we will humble ourselves, seek His forgiveness and repent.

Listen to what Azariah the prophet said in the days of King Asa:

[15:1] The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, [2] and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. (2 Chronicles 15)

Through Asa God reminds us that we need to seek Him with all our heart. While He puts a hunger in our heart, we must respond to that hunger and seek after Him.

While God begins the process of revival, we see Him moving in power when men and women respond to the prompting of His Spirit to humble themselves and seek His face. This humbling involves the confession of sin. It also implies a commitment to His Word and prayer. Often it will require putting aside other interests. God initiates and enables. We respond in disciplined obedience. There are different ideas about what we can do to bring revival to our land. It seems to me, however, as I examine the accounts of these Biblical revivals, that all we can do is seek God and walk in obedience no matter the cost. God does the rest.

The revivals of Scripture were not of human origin or planning. God's people could not predict when or if God would move. What they did, however, was confess the sin God

Summary

was revealing to them, and seek His enabling to make things right.

How can you recognize true Revival?

I want to be very concise in this answer. What is the one thing that characterizes revival more than anything else? As I have examined the revivals of the Bible, I would have to say that true revival is marked by the conviction of sin. In true revival, God's people are forced to confront their sin. More than all the signs and wonders, renewed commitments, promises, or zeal in worship, is a deep heartfelt sense of falling short of God's standard and a burning desire to get right with God.

True revival will always lead us to deal with sins and shortcomings before God. When these sins are confessed and forgiven, there is a renewed power in service and worship. When guilt is removed, God's people rejoice in the joy of the Lord. God's presence is manifested in our midst. Unbelievers see the difference.

Let me close by quoting the prophet Isaiah:

[2] but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. (Isaiah 59)

Isaiah makes it clear that sin separates us from God and His purposes in our lives. It is sin that blocks our view of Christ. We need God to give us victory over these sins today. We need Him to break us and to release us from the overwhelming desire to satisfy the cravings of our sinful nature. May God grant that we might be renewed and

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delivered from ourselves as He moves among us in revival power.

REVIVAL	PRIOR CONDITIONS	CONDITIONS DURING	LESSONS LEARNED
Asa and Jehoshaphat	Spiritual compromise, broken relationships, loss of former glory, and defeated by sin	Conviction of sin, renewal of covenant, rejoicing in God, teaching of Law, "fear of the Lord" and renewed worship	God moves as His people become serious about obeying His word
Hezekiah	Spiritual decline, political unrest, abandoned temple and Baal worship	Cleansing of the temple, public confession of sin, renewal of worship, rejoicing in God, and increased contributions	Revival begins with the cleansing of God's people
Josiah	Occult practices, abandoned temple, violence, and religious compromise	Cleansing of the temple and the rediscovery of the Law. Mourning over sin and renewal of covenant.	Revival comes when God's people rediscover God's Word and are broken by their sin
Ezra	Religious compromise as the people rebuilt the ruined city of Jerusalem	Conviction of sin and the reading of the law resulting in the putting away of foreign wives	The Word of God fuels the fire of revival as it reveals our sin before God.
Jonah	Rebelliousness of Jonah, lostness of the sailors and the violence of Nineveh	Jonah repents and chooses to obey God. The sailors recognize, and worship God and Nineveh puts away its violence and repents	The power of God is demonstrated despite the weakness of the people involved
Pentecost	A weak church and a crowd that has rejected the Lord Jesus	Boldness in witness, powerful preaching followed by a hunger for Word & prayer, mass conversion and unity of believers	Revival enlivens and empowers the church BUT also costs something

Summary

Samaria	Pagan beliefs and ignorance of the gospel	Preaching of the Word, healing of the sick, casting out of demons and the conversion of souls	Revival brings lost souls to Christ in a surprising and unexpected move of God
Ephesus	A powerless church that had truth but no life	Daily instruction in Word, miracles, and wonders, public confession of sin and destruction of occult books	Revival moves God's people to remove their masks and deal with sins hidden deep in their lives

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These books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism, and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

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