

THE REMEDY OF REVIVAL

2 Chronicles 34-36

In this lesson we learn about the history of American revivals and what it takes to bring revival again.

OUTLINE

From the Old Testament to the present day, revivals have come when apathy and sin have dominated. But we don't have to be apathetic about revival, waiting for it to "happen." Revivals happen one person at a time, and they can begin with a single committed soul.

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OVERVIEW

We often encounter the word “revival” in the news. The economy needs revival, an older Broadway show is experiencing a revival, and a rundown part of town is experiencing a revival with new housing and shopping. And it’s also used of athletes who have been through a slump in their careers, then suddenly experience a revival of performance and interest by the media.

One such athlete is the pro-basketball player, Jeremy Lin, who is one of the first Asian-American players in the NBA. He was a walk-on at Harvard and, in his senior year, led the Crimson to a winning season. But the pro teams weren’t interested. Finally, the New York Knicks gave him a contract and he took Manhattan by storm. But then he battled injuries and surgeries and his career waned. This year he is playing for the Charlotte Hornets and is experiencing a revival in his career.

Lin is happy for his basketball revival, but there is another revival he is more concerned about: a revival in the worldwide body of Christ. As a committed Christian, Jeremy Lin is praying that God will send genuine spiritual and moral revival to the Church.

I couldn’t agree more with this standout athlete! America is in desperate need of spiritual and moral revival. That is the subject of this lesson. May we join with the psalmist who wrote, “Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?” (Psalm 85:6)

REVIVAL IN THE BIBLE

Second Chronicles is the Bible’s handbook on revival. Chapter 34 describes the remnant that returned from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple and keep hope alive in Israel. But it would take a revival among the people.

Second Chronicles 34–35 describes a major revival under King Josiah. The evil King Manasseh had ruled Judah for 55 years, allowing the nation to sink to terrible depths of depravity. When Manasseh died his likewise evil son, Amon, took the throne for two years. Then came King Josiah—grandson of Manasseh, son of Amon—to the throne at age eight. By the grace of God, Josiah had a heart for righteousness (2 Chronicles 34:2).

A Humble Leader

In the eighth year of his reign, at age 16, Josiah “began to seek the God of his father David.” And at age 20 he began purging

Judah and Jerusalem of idols and high places of idol worship (2 Chronicles 34:3). At age 26 Josiah began a huge project to restore the temple in Jerusalem to its former glory (verses 10–12).

A Holy Book

During the temple renovations, the workers found a long-lost copy of the Book of the Law and brought it to Josiah (verse 14–17). Josiah was shocked when he read the words of God’s covenant and saw how far the nation had fallen. He called for a prophet to come and help him understand the will of God. Huldah the prophet assured Josiah that because of his humility before God, the nation would receive help (verse 27–28).

A Hungry People

Encouraged by Huldah’s words, Josiah announced a revival meeting, and everyone gathered at the temple. Josiah read the words of the Book of the Covenant to the people and committed himself and the nation to keeping God’s statutes (verses 30–31). The people followed the king’s lead and committed themselves to reviving the nation, including the reinstatement of Passover (2 Chronicles 35:18–19). The nation followed the Lord for “all [Josiah’s] days” (2 Chronicles 34:33).

Josiah led the revival from the throne, and Jeremiah the prophet led from the pulpit. The prophets Zephaniah and Nahum joined in. I believe Josiah’s revival was responsible for the shaping of Daniel and his three friends who were later taken to Babylon.

Future generations always feel the impact of revival. That is certainly true for the revivals that have occurred in America.

REVIVAL IN AMERICA

Past revivals prove an important point: Revivals are possible! That is good news for us in our day. Following is a survey of five periods of revival in America that impacted the nation and the world.

The Great Awakening: The 1740s

This awakening is one of the most famous movements in the history of American Christianity. The Pilgrims who landed on America’s East Coast in 1620 arrived with Bibles in hand. Their intent was to gain religious freedom. The Puritans followed the Pilgrims and began founding colleges for the training of ministers and students from a biblical perspective—colleges like Harvard and Yale.

But the spiritual fervor of the colonies began declining in the 1600s. Godly preachers began to bemoan the spiritual condition of

the people and churches. In the 1720s God unleashed a revival in the Colonies. It began in New England and spread to other states, mainly through the efforts of young people.

The name most associated with the Great Awakening is Jonathan Edwards, a pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards was a prodigy, a genius. He entered Yale at age 12 and graduated when he was barely 15 years old. He was ordained at age 19, was teaching at Yale at age 20, and later became president of Princeton. His sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" is the most famous sermon in American history.

He preached that sermon on Sunday, July 8, 1741, and great repentance broke out in the service. The fear of hell spread throughout the village with people begging God for mercy and salvation. Five hundred people were converted that night, sparking a revival that would see thousands enter the kingdom.

British evangelists like John Wesley and George Whitefield were preaching in England and in America, seeing similar results as happened with Edwards. Converts filled the colonies; new theological training schools were opened: Princeton, Rutgers, Dartmouth, and Brown. Missionaries went into the wooded frontiers to evangelize Native Americans. This revival set the stage for the American Revolution.

The Second Great Awakening: The Early 1800s

After the Revolutionary War, Christianity in America spiraled into another decline. Efforts toward advancing the kingdom of God were eclipsed by efforts to build a new nation. Rationalism from the European Enlightenment began infiltrating universities and politics. People flooded into the frontier, west of the Appalachian Mountains, where few churches existed. Even in towns and cities, only a small percentage of the people attended church. Intellectuals like Voltaire in France, and his disciple in America, Thomas Paine, attacked Christianity. Most professors at the universities were no longer professing Christians. The same could be said for most students.

The great historian, J. Edwin Orr, has written that "the last two decades of the eighteenth century were the darkest period, spiritually and morally, in the history of American Christianity."¹

Thankfully, revival came again. It started at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia. The president of the college joined a small group of students in praying for revival and God answered. More than half

the students repented and believed. The revival spread to other colleges and onto the American frontier. Outdoor revival meetings in Kentucky in 1801 clogged the roads as thousands upon thousands came to places like Cane Ridge to repent. Multiple preachers preached at the same time to different portions of the huge crowds. People sang, shouted, fell to the ground weeping, and were gloriously converted.

Preachers spread out from these meetings to all parts of the frontier and the East Coast. In 1806, students praying at Williams College in Massachusetts committed to go anywhere in the world God might send them. In 1812, Adoniram and Ann Judson sailed from Salem, Massachusetts, as America's first foreign missionaries. Thousands of churches began sending missionaries which led to the modern missionary movement—a result of the Second Great Awakening.

Other results came: the abolition movement, prison reform, child labor laws, women's rights, and rescue missions. Untold numbers of parachurch mission organizations sprang up, many of which are well-known today.

The Third Great Awakening: The 1850–60s

The pendulum swung back toward apathy by the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1858, another revival broke out. It began with a small prayer meeting in a Dutch Reformed Church in New York City. Within a few months, 50,000 people in the city were meeting for prayer. The movement spread to other major cities. Estimates are that between one and two million souls were saved.

At the height of the revival, offices and stores across the nation closed for prayer at noon. Newspapers and telegraph offices were flooded with news of the prayer meetings. From this revival the YMCA was birthed in America along with Moody Bible Institute and several youth movements. When the Civil War broke out, tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides attended prayer and preaching services and were saved.

Gospel preaching and singing flourished during the Third Great Awakening. Our hymnbooks today still contain the hymns of Ira Sankey, Fanny Crosby, and others who penned songs of worship and revival: "Revive Us Again" and "Blessed Assurance" being examples.

The Global Revival: The Early 1900s

After the Civil War, the light of revival dimmed again. As after the Revolutionary War, recovering from the Civil War occupied the

energy of the nation. But in the beginning of the twentieth century, a revival broke out (possibly) in Wales in the United Kingdom.

When a young Bible student named Evan Roberts preached a sermon in his village of Loughor, seventeen people attended to hear his four points: confess sin, put away doubtful habits, obey the Holy Spirit, and confess Christ openly. But by the end of the week there were sixty converts and a revival was under way. Within three months, 100,000 people were added to church rolls in Wales.

Roberts went to Liverpool in England and continued to preach. People from England, Ireland, Scotland, Europe, and America streamed to Liverpool to hear him. Thousands believed. The revival spread to all those countries and more including South Africa, India, Korea, China, Japan, Brazil, Indonesia, and more.

Cities and colleges in America were again turning to God and His Word. The revival reached the West Coast among students at Seattle Pacific College in 1905. Portland, Oregon, experienced such a move of the Spirit that it is still called "Portland's Pentecost."² The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906 kicked off the Pentecostal movement. Itinerant preachers found their way into the Appalachian Mountains and started churches, many of which still stand today.

There has not been another global movement like that of 1905-1910, although the post-World War II years saw the birth of organizations that developed worldwide ministries: Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru), Youth for Christ, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and others.

The Jesus Movement: The 1960-70s

Then came "the Sixties"—the most turbulent cultural decade in American history. President Kennedy and his brother, Bobby, and Martin Luther King, Jr. were all assassinated. The Vietnam War divided the country as did racial tensions. There were riots on campuses and in the streets. Drugs and rock music dominated young peoples' lives. Watergate brought government to a standstill in the early '70s. President Nixon resigned in shame.

In 1967, a Christian couple opened a coffee house in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, ground zero for sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Other Christian coffee houses began opening up and down the West Coast. Long-haired hippies found Jesus and waded into the Pacific Ocean to be baptized. A revival called "The Jesus Movement" was born.

Billy Graham wrote a book called *The Jesus Generation*. *Look* magazine and *Time* magazine wrote cover stories about "the Jesus People." Pastor Chuck Smith started Calvary Chapel, a church that welcomed this new generation of believers. They brought their guitars, formed bands, wrote songs, and birthed a new wave of worship music. Explo '72 drew 80,000 young people to the Cotton Bowl in Dallas for a week. Colleges experienced revival. Many of today's church leaders came to Christ during "the Jesus Movement." Thousands of college students were disciplined by Campus Crusade, the Navigators, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and other campus ministries. Many of those students joined the staffs of those organizations, multiplying their impact.

We need another revival today. In his book, *The Secret of Christian Joy*, Vance Havner writes:

The greatest need of America is an old-fashioned, heaven-born, God-sent revival. Throughout the history of the Church, when clouds have hung lowest, when sin has seemed blackest and faith has been weakest, there have always been a faithful few who have not sold out to the devil nor bowed the knee to Baal, who have feared the Lord and thought upon His Name and have not forsaken the assembling of themselves together. These have besought the Lord to revive His work in the midst of the years, and in the midst of the fears and tears, and in wrath to remember mercy. God has always answered such supplication, filling each heart with His love, rekindling each soul with Fire from above.³

A TWO-FOLD PLAN FOR REVIVAL

We cannot orchestrate revival, but we can lay the groundwork in two ways.

Pray for Revival Personally

First, pray the prayer in Psalm 85:6: "Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?" The Old Testament scribe Ezra wrote, "And now for a little while grace has been *shown* from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival . . ." (Ezra 9:8). We must ask God to do the same for America and the world—to "give us a measure of revival."

Practice Revival Personally

Rededicate yourself to living in a perpetual state of revival personally. Revival happens one person at a time; we must let it begin with us. It is what the apostle Paul talked about when he said "be filled with the Spirit"—speaking, singing, giving thanks to God, submitting to one another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:18-21). We can pray, "Revive us," but we should begin by praying, "Revive me!" Let us pray as did a hymnist of yesteryear: "Let the Holy Spirit come and take control, and send a great revival in my soul."⁴

Nine times in Psalm 119 the psalmist prays for revival (verses 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159). Those would be excellent verses for every Christian to meditate upon as he or she seeks personal revival. If we are to change the world we must first ask God to change us. When the flame is ignited in our heart we can pass the flame to others.

Begin today: Pray for, and practice, revival!

Notes:

1. J. Edwin Orr, *Campus Aflame* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1971), 19.
2. J. Edwin Orr, *Campus Aflame* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1971), 110.
3. Vance Havner, *The Secret of Christian Joy* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1938), 24.
4. From the chorus of the hymn, "Send a Great Revival," by B. B. McKinney.

APPLICATION

1. Read 2 Chronicles 7:11-16.

a. What was the occasion of this passage? (verse 11)

b. What circumstance did God tell Solomon might occur in the future? (verse 13)

c. Outline the steps God told Solomon the people should take: (verse 14a)

- "will _____ themselves"
- "and _____ and _____ My face"
- "and _____ from their _____ ways"

d. Outline the response God promised: (verse 14b)

- "I will _____ from heaven"
- "will _____ their sin"
- "and _____ their land"

e. Is God's promise of healing conditional or unconditional?

f. Even though this promise was made to Israel, can the Church benefit from the principles found in this verse? (1 John 1:9)

g. What is the focus of God's judgment in verse 13? How is that a reversal of the blessings of the covenant? (Deuteronomy 28:4-5, 8, 11-12)

h. How does the promise of Deuteronomy 28:1-2 parallel with Galatians 6:7?

2. What direct action did King Josiah take to precipitate revival in Judah? (2 Chronicles 34:3-7)

a. Because Josiah was king, he could take these unilateral actions. How is America different in terms of government?

b. In a way, Josiah legislated revival in Judah. Why would that be harder in America?

c. Based on the history of revival in America, have revivals been from the top down or the bottom up?

d. Therefore, what is the power and responsibility of the individual Christian in bringing revival?

e. Do a rough calculation of the time gaps between major revivals in American history. Are we "due" for a revival now? Overdue?

3. How do the words of Ezra 9:8 apply to America today?

a. In what sense has "grace" been shown to America?

b. What might be God's purpose in that grace?

c. What has to happen to the Church's "eyes"? What do we need to see?

d. What could you pray for that might speed revival in America?

DID YOU KNOW?

"Revival" by definition means to restore something that previously existed—such as a strong Christian consensus in America. A monument to that original consensus was erected in 1889 in a park on Allerton Street in Plymouth, Massachusetts—the largest solid granite sculpture in the United States. It features a female figure personifying Faith, pointing toward heaven with her right hand while clutching a Bible with her left. On the four sides of the base are smaller statues representing Morality, Law, Education, and Liberty. Because of its obvious and strong Christian theme, the Park Service does not highlight the statue—another sign of the need for revival in America.