

Lesson 2

Revival in the Old Testament

Can God save thousands of people in a day or week or month? Of course God can because He is sovereign but the real issue is do we believe God will, if He chooses, save multitudes of people in our day? Do we believe God can bring revival to an individual, a local church, a denomination, a city or a nation? We have proof positive that God did powerfully work with individuals, cities and nations in the Old Testament through revival.

What is revival? *“Revival is a sovereign, powerful, extraordinary moving of the Holy Spirit through he preached Word which spiritually convicts, arouses and enlivens professing, backslidden Christians in the church and which results in a supernatural acceleration of the conversion process to the unsaved “* (Jack L. Arnold). Revival is not the same as renewal. Renewal is a spiritual stirring in the hearts of true Christians to love and serve Christ more. Renewal may lead to revival but revival occurs when great numbers of people are saved which does not happen in renewal.

Revival has its origin in the Old Testament. While there were revivals under David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah in Judah, I want to concentrate on three revivals which best demonstrate what revival is. These revivals were under Jonah, Nehemiah and Asa. After this sermon, I may leave you with more questions than answers, but it is impossible to cover revival in the Old Testament in one sermon.

REVIVAL AND GOD (Jonah)

Personal Revival

God called the prophet Jonah to preach sin, judgment and repentance to the Gentile city of Nineveh. Jonah refused and ran from God. God got his attention by having him swallowed by a great fish, probably a whale. Inside the whale's belly, Jonah had a personal spiritual revival. He had time to think, examine and pray and he put his life right with God. Then God had the fish vomit him out on land probably on the coast of Palestine near Joppa where Jonah first got out of fellowship with Jehovah-God.

Revival begins in individual hearts when God starts to deal with us about our secret sins, our rebellion, our cold hearts, our indifferent spirits and our negative attitudes. Under conviction, we confess our sins privately to God and many times openly to others. We must pray, “Father, whatever it takes by the power of the Holy Spirit to restore my love and commitment to Christ, do it!”

Mass Revival

Having experienced personal revival, Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh and began to preach judgment. ***“On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned (destroyed)” (Jonah 3:4).*** We are not told all that Jonah preached but it most certainly included the message of how a sovereign God hates sin and sinners and whose wrath burns hot against them. Nineveh was to believe and repent (change their attitudes about Jehovah and their sinful lifestyles) and follow the one, true God of heaven and earth. Through Jonah, God was calling the whole city of Nineveh to be accountable to Him and to acknowledge that He alone is God.

Revival will come as Christians and ministers of the gospel declare man’s awful sinfulness and the consequences of sin which is eternal judgment. Revival will come as we teach that each person is accountable to God alone.

“The third great cardinal article of belief which has been ignored is man in sin and under the wrath of God. Here is a doctrine that the natural man abominates. Go back again and read the histories of revival, and you will find in all those periods of deadness and declension that people did not believe in sin in that way. They did not believe in the wrath of God. And I suppose there are no two things in connection with the Christian faith that are so abominated today, as the doctrine of sin, and the doctrine of the wrath of God” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Revival).

The Ninevites believed God. They trusted Jehovah alone for their salvation. ***“The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth” (Jonah 3:5).*** Notice carefully that belief in Jehovah resulted in some changes in the lives of the people - they fasted and put on sackcloth as an outward sign of inward repentance. They gave evidence with their lives of salvation.

The conversion of the whole city of Nineveh may be the greatest revival in history. It is estimated Nineveh had anywhere from eight hundred thousand to one million people in it. Let’s say one million people were converted in forty days. Critics say this is impossible but nothing is impossible with a sovereign God. Every conversion is humanly impossible but conversion is

from God not man and nothing is impossible with God. It is God alone who converts souls. A sovereign God can convert a city of one million, but a city of one million left to its own freewill could never turn to God in mass. It is true that people have to hear the gospel, believe and repent in order to be saved but the reason they do this is that God is sovereignly working for, on and in them to make this happen.

“The basis of everything is the sovereign, transcendent, living God, who in his eternal, glorious

freedom, acts, intervenes, and interferes with the life of the whole Church and of individuals. And if there is anything that is more obvious than anything else in the life of the Church today it is the failure to start with, and to believe that truth" (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Revival).

Finally the king of Nineveh heard about the message of God's judgment and the revival that was taking place among the people and he believes and endorses it. ***"When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from the throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (Jonah 3:6-9).*** Notice carefully the revival did not begin with the king but with the general populace.

The history of revival shows that it always starts from the bottom going up not the top going down. In my opinion. Christians are wasting much time, money and effort reaching leaders in government or business in order to spark revival when they ought to be reaching the general populace who when converted will influence leaders for Christ.

REVIVAL AND THE WORD (Nehemiah)

God called Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around the city. After the wall was built and the Jewish exiles from the captivity in Babylon were settled in, there was a called assembly of all the people at which time the Law of Moses was read to the people.

"When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand.

And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law" (Neh. 8:1-3). Ezra stood on a high platform (not a pulpit) as he read the Law out loud. "Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion...." (Neh. 8:4a).

This was a powerful moment of worship for the people. It may well have been the moment some of them were saved. Great emotions were displayed as they worshiped God. ***“Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground” (Neh. 8:5-6).***

Revival always brings great emotion towards Christ who is the center of revival. Emotions and emotionalism are two separate concepts. Emotionalism is when man whips up and excites the human emotions so as to manipulate people to think they are experiencing God when they are really having only an emotional high. In true worship, however, emotions are stimulated by God to bring praise and glory to Him.

“Man-made enthusiasm and emotionalism is superficial and cheap. In real revival, emotion is not produced or manipulated by man. It is a response to the unsought, unexpected, but powerful working of God’s Spirit upon the inner depths of people’s souls” (Wesley Duewel, Revival Fire).

The Levites also spread out among the people to help them understand what was being read. ***“The Levites...instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that***

the people could understand what was being read” (Neh. 8:7-8).

This was a revival which came as a response to the Word of God. It was not the Law of Moses that caused these people to get excited. It was Jehovah-God of whom the Law spoke that got the people excited. They were experiencing God corporately. When people get serious about scripture, the seeds for revival are being set up. Someone has said, “Revival is re-Bible.” Lastly, this revival in Nehemiah 8 led to a great big party where there was joy and excitement. This sacred day was to be a day of joy not grieving. “Nehemiah said, ***“Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength ... Then the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them” (Neh. 8:10,12).***

With revival will come weeping, shouting, great bursts of joy and other emotions because there is a general atmosphere of the presence of God.

“If you read the history of all the revivals of the past, you will find that they have been periods when men and women have believed this book to be the word of God. They have believed it literally, they have regarded it as the revelation of God, and the truth concerning him, and man’s relationship to him, and all that involved They have submitted themselves to it. they have not stood above it as judges and as those who can decide what is right and what is wrong” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Revival).

REVIVAL AND MORAL CHANGE (Asa)

Asa was the fourth king after David in Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel. When the kingdom divided into Israel and Judah. Rehoboam and Abijah were very wicked kings and took Judah into all kinds of idolatry and sexual immorality.

Asa, son of wicked Abijah, came to the throne and reigned for forty years. He was a man after God’s own heart. From the moment he took the throne, he began to prepare the nation to come back to Jehovah-God. The first ten years of his reign were a time of peace and he seized this opportunity to devote much of his energy to turning the nation back to God. He removed all altars and high places dedicated to foreign gods and destroyed the stone pillars of the Asherah poles surrounding the altars. An Asherah pole was dedicated to the fertility goddess and connected with horrible sexual perversion. This revival had tremendous moral implications to the nation of Judah.

Sometimes I think we do not understand how great this kind of a revival really was. It would be like revival coming to the USA. Churches would be cleaned out of immorality, materialism and hypocrisy. TV would be cleaned up of all smut. Politics would be reformed. Drug traffic and abortions would be eliminated. Revival has a way of cleaning house.

As the nation began to clean up morally, God brought great military victories to Judah. On arriving back in Jerusalem after defeating Zerah the Cushite with a numerically superior army, God raised up the prophet Azariah to challenge and warn Asa. ***“The Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Obed. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, “Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. But in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them. In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil” (2 Chron. 15:1-5).*** Our human responsibility is to seek God! We are to seek God to bring revival! We are to pray for revival! It is God who brings revival!

Asa continued to pursue his revival efforts and in his fifteenth year, he gathered the whole nation together and held a service of sacrifice to Jehovah. Asa called upon everyone in the whole nation to recommit their lives to the Lord, making a solemn covenant with Jehovah. ***“They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul. All who would not seek the LORD the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman. They took an oath to the LORD with loud acclamation, with shouting and with trumpets and horns. All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholeheartedly. They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the LORD gave them rest on every side” (2 Chron. 1:12-15).*** By covenant, they promised God to be faithful, true and loyal to Jehovah-God, turning from sinful pagan idolatry. The people were in the midst of revival and emotions ran high.

In revival, Christians often make many promises, vows and covenants with God because they sense His presence and want to do His will.

Asa was so committed to revival that he removed his own grandmother from her position as queen mother because she had made a Asherah pole. ***“King Asa also deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a***

repulsive Asherah pole” (2 Chron. 1:16). Because Maacah set an evil example and practiced idolatry, Asa made a tough spiritual call and deposed her.

When revival comes, many tough calls will be made in the area of morality. We will take stands even against loved ones because we love Christ more.

Even though the revival under Asa was not complete - he did not remove the pagan high places from Israel - his heart was with Jehovah his God. “Although he did not remove the high places for Israel, Asa’s heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life” (2 Chron.

1:17). Asa could do what he did because he had personal revival in his own heart

Revival is starting in us when we begin to love Christ more than ourselves, more than others, even our loved ones, and more than things. Restoration to our first love is vital to revival. ***“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love” (Rev. 2:4).***

When revival comes, there will be spiritual reform in the church and moral reform in the nation. When revival comes, the church will influence culture and not visa-versa. When revival comes, Christians will insist upon morality in the church and impart morality to society. In

revival, the church will lead the culture instead of following it.

CONCLUSION

After hearing about revival under Jonah, Nehemiah and Asa, is there any question in your mind that a sovereign God could revive you? That God could bring revival to your church? That God could save an entire city if He chose to do so?

If you doubt, it is because you do not know how great your God is, how powerful is the death of Christ for sin and how mighty is the work of the Holy Spirit to save.

If God choose to give revival, it will come as we look to the sovereign, transcendent God to do what we cannot do - revive professing, backslidden Christians and save massive numbers of people. **NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD!**