

What Is True Revival?

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“Revival! June 1- June 6th — Special singing each night.” How often we have observed similar advertisements in front of various churches. Also we have seen such wording in the media announcing the special meeting. Because of this type of promotion, the average American would equate having a special meeting with revival. But, is this a *true* definition?

When the late missionary Dr. James A. Stewart first came to the U.S.A. from Scotland, he spotted such a sign in front of a church. He was riding on a bus at the time and was excited by a sign that said “REVIVAL— HERE EACH NIGHT THIS WEEK AT 7:30!” Upon seeing this, he grabbed his wife by the hand and went to see the pastor of the church.

An explanation was given that here in the Southern U.S.A., it is the custom for a church, when it has a special meeting for a time, to call it a *revival*. Then Brother James Stewart asked a very *valid* question: “It what you’re having at 7:30 each evening is a “special meeting”, why don’t you call it *that*, instead of revival?” You see, he had been in a *real revival* in Europe for much of his ministry and to call a series of meetings a “revival” was shocking to this man. He called it *prostitution* of the word “revival”.

He was right. Today, many things *pass* for revival. Sometimes a spirited gospel song is considered a revival. Perhaps when a few people shout, “Amen”, or “Hallelujah”, it is considered a revival. When several folks get saved in one meeting, some call that revival. These are all *good things*, but not necessarily revival. Others have had the audacity to proclaim that we are in a mighty revival *now*, called the “Charismatic movement”. Yet the *major* fruit of the *movement* has been a watered down gospel of ecumenism, *hardly a true revival!* Actually, the Charismatic movement has done more to bring about the one world church than any other force in history! Even when you consider that the Charismatics have called our attention to the work of the Holy Spirit, something *often neglected* in the churches, we are compelled to renounce it, as a *movement*. I say this because as a *movement*, the Charismatic movement has produced much *division* among true Christians, especially the current “name it and claim it” variety. Perhaps the most striking proof of its failure is the fact that there is

generally little *holiness*, or *biblical separation*, or *true godliness* associated with *the movement*. Too often, standards are thrown to the wind! Some of the Charismatics' own leaders have said this, so I am not trying to slander them. I do hasten to add that non-charismatics can't throw any rocks here! When we speak of holiness, *we all fall short!* But shouldn't a movement that sweeps the country and purports to be *true revival* be touching all around? Yet today we have *more bars*, *more pornography*, *more prostitution*, *more homosexuality*, *more child molesting*, *more abortion*, and *more nakedness*, *more divorces*, *more illegal drugs*, *more rebellious children* — in general, *more sin*, in spite of any movement! *A real revival would certainly change all that!* Study the history of the Great Awakening, and other revivals and you should see this clearly.

The Foundation for Revival: Truth

Since 1968 when I was called to preach, I have seen the need for revival. I titled my first awkward newsletter in 1970-71 "Revival for Survival". I still believe revival is the *only answer* for our survival.

There has been a resurgence of Puritan literature in our day. Also, the works of *sound evangelicals* of yesterday such as Charles Spurgeon, J.C. Ryle, John Brown, J. Gresham Machen and many others are abundant as perhaps never before in history *if you know where to look for them*. The average Christian book store doesn't stock too much "meaty" reading. Some declare this abundance of good literature as revival. While I certainly count it as a *wonderful thing* to see all this *good literature* published at a time when we also have more shallow, carnal, religious books available, in itself, this is not revival. *It is foundational to a revival!* Before we can have revival, **we must know who God is!** We must see Him in His *awesome majesty*. He must be glorified in His attributes. These old writers have a way of *pointing us* to this *omnipotent* God. This has been strengthened by many present day writers such as J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, John MacArthur, John Piper, Sinclair Ferguson, Jerry Bridges, etc., who seemed to have picked up the torch from earlier writers now gone such as D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, William Hendriksen, A.W. Pink, etc.

Because of this renewed interest, many preachers have come to appreciate the sovereignty of God. For many years this truth has been *pushed aside*. I have personally noticed that in the last 25 years there are many more churches and pastors *boldly* declaring the old paths. Churches have openly declared to adhere to the Westminster Confession (Presbyterian-Reformed), and the London, or Philadelphia Confessions (Baptist). These are definitely "Old Paths", and is a *reformation of sorts "in progress"*, which must come before a real revival. It is hopefully a beginning. I am grateful to God for this revelation to His called servants, but *this is not, in itself revival!*

Revival Is The Work of God!

The book of Habakkuk is one book that deserves our *careful* study in these wicked days. It is not my purpose at this time to expound all three chapters, but I do want to take a brief look at the whole book.

Chapter one deals with the prophet's complaint. Sin and violence had covered the land. The situation was much as it is today. Evildoers needed to be punished, yet, justice is forgotten and the guilty go unpunished.

God's answer is startling. He tells the prophet in chapter 1, verses 6 and 7, "For, Lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves." In verse 9 He goes on to say "*They shall come all for violence.*"

The prophet cries out about the sin and God sends the Chaldeans! This is *equivalent* to us today in the U.S., Britain, Canada, Australia and other free-world nations crying to God about our sinful nations, and having Him reply *by sending the Russians or Chinese!* A strange answer, we would say!

Then in verse 12, Habakkuk cries to God again and asks the question, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity: Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" In other words, "God, can you use *evil* people to chastise those who are *not as wicked* as they?"

Chapter two shows us *the prophet waiting* (something we all have a problem doing). He climbs upon his watchtower to *wait* upon God's answer, but, indeed God does answer when we patiently wait upon Him. The reason Habakkuk could wait patiently on God is that he had an *understanding* of God's *attributes*. He saw that:

- a. *God is eternal* — "Art Thou not from everlasting?" (1:12) As the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "He is forgetting for a moment the immediate problem, and asking himself what it was he was sure of about God. *The first* thing was, 'Art thou not from everlasting?' He is not like the gods whom men worship; He is not like the god of the proud Chaldean army. He is God from eternity to eternity, *the everlasting God*. There is nothing more consoling or reassuring when oppressed by the problems of history, and when wondering what is to happen in the world, than to *remember* that the God whom we worship is *outside* the flux of history. He has

- preceded* history; He has *created* history. His throne is above the world and outside time. He reigns in eternity, the everlasting God”.¹
- b. *God is self existent* — “‘Art thou not from everlasting, O, LORD?’ — he uses the great name ‘Jehovah’ — ‘art thou not from everlasting, O, Jehovah?’ That name tells us that God is the self existing One, the eternal I AM.”²
- c. *God is holy.* — “‘Art thou not from everlasting, O, LORD my God, mine holy One?’ He is sure, not only of His eternal existence, not only of His self existence, and His independence of everything and everybody, but that He is the ‘Holy One’, utterly and absolutely righteous and holy, ‘a consuming fire’ ‘God is light and in Him is no darkness at all’ and the moment you consider Scriptures like this, you are forced to ask: ‘Can the Lord of the earth do that which is unrighteous?’ Such a thing is *unthinkable*”.³
- d. *God is almighty.* — “‘O, Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment and O, mighty God, thou has established them for correction.’ God can take care of all His enemies when it pleases Him.”
- e. *God is faithful* — “‘My God, mine Holy One, we shall not die.’ He is recalling that God is the God of the Covenant. Though He is independent and absolute, eternal, mighty, righteous and holy, nevertheless He has condescended to make a covenant with men. For those saintly men. the prophets, and all who had spiritual understanding in Israel, this fact was more significant than anything else. While believing in the eternal attributes of God, they might have been chilled by the thought that such a God might be far away in the heavens, and oblivious of their need. But what linked Him to them was the knowledge that He was a faithful covenant-keeping God. *God had given His word and He would never break it*”.⁴

So, because of these attributes which the prophet recognizes in chapter 1, we find that he is able to wait upon the Lord in chapter 2. In this chapter Habakkuk pronounces woe concerning seven major sins of *his* day. It really sounds like our day, though. Listen to this list:

- covetousness v. 9
- murder v. 10

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Front Fear to Faith* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1953), p. 29.

² *Ibid*, p. 29, 30.

³ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31, emphasis mine. (All headings, ‘a’ through ‘e’, also by Lloyd-Jones.)

- o oppression v. 12, 13
- o drunkenness v. 15
- o adultery and/or homosexuality v. 15
- o violence v. 17
- o idolatry v. 18

While realizing the historical setting of this chapter, and that these sins *primarily* refer to the Babylonians, clear spiritual principles can nevertheless be found here. God is *always* against sin *in every age* and *sin does not change*.

For instance, as Edward Marbury says “Drunkenness itself is a *horrible sin*; it is one of the fruits of the flesh” (Gal 5:21). “Drunkenness is confessed of all men to be a sin; and they who love it best and use it most will be very angry with you if you call *them* drunkards.”⁵ Also, drunkenness leads to immorality, as Edward Marbury recognizes. “Lot was drunk when he committed incest with his daughters (Gen 19) and so overcome with wine, that he neither knew of their coming to his bed nor of their going from him.”⁶ As in Leviticus 18, both heterosexual (outside marriage) and homosexual (abnormal) relationships are forbidden, so Hab. 2:15 could mean either. Sin *never changes*, it is *always sin* and exceedingly sinful!

Habakkuk recognizes the awful problems of his day and future days and this brings him to the prayer room. Note that chapter 3 begins by saying a Prayer of Habakkuk the prophet on Shigionoth, “It was a prayer accompanied with music, neither mournful, nor joyful, but expressive of profound and strong emotion.”⁷ Like so many of the beautiful Psalms of David, this chapter is as much poetry as prayer, yet it has a *profound* theological lesson for us.

Habakkuk heard God’s voice. Like others such as Isaiah, who heard, or saw a vision of God, He became afraid. Men are in our day so flippant regarding God. They are not afraid to take His Holy name in vain! Even professing Christians speak of the Lord Jesus in such casual terms as if to say “He’s my buddy.” They try to treat Him as a “spiritual bellhop,” catering to all their needs and wants. They speak of Him as if He were all sentimental, soft, lovey-dovey; as if He would even wink at sin! *This is not the God of the Bible!* The God of the Bible, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is majestic and Holy! He is angry with the wicked every day! As Habakkuk said. *He will not look upon sin.*

My friend, if you ever see God, you’ll be in the dust before Him. Read of John *the beloved* in Rev, 1:17. No flippancy here! He fell at His feet as dead! Thomas,

⁵ Edward Marbury, *Commentary on Habakkuk* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1979 reprint. Originally written 1650) p. 506.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 506.

⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

who got a glimpse of the resurrection glory, and who had been an *intimate friend*, a *disciple*, cried when He saw Him. “My Lord and My God!”

One of the greatest problems today, even in our churches is that “there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18). A *healthy* fear of God is needed, even for Christians. In the old days a “God-fearing man” was a man who understood that “His commandments are not grievous”. Professing Christians today scoff at the commands of God, but I have news for you, *even in the New Testament there are commandments*. I realize we cannot keep them *except in Christ*, but “He worketh in you” and He says “if you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

It is awesome. There is a famine in the land “for the hearing of the word of God.” The word is *here* but *we don’t hear it*. It is preached in many places, but *who takes heed?* Ungodly humanist “law” is exalted *above* God’s law.

Habakkuk heard from God. He was God’s prophet. Yet *he was afraid*. When is the last time *you* heard from God, preacher? I mean, *really* heard from God. We all need to hear from Him. The need for God is *desperate!*

Revival Comes To God’s People

“*Revive thy work.*” Revival is a *restoration*. It presupposes a declension. In times of spiritual lull, sin runs rampant and we need a renewal.

1. It is a renewing of His work in the Church. Churches are dead without God’s breath, no matter how *orthodox* they may be!
2. Renewal in the home — our homes are falling apart. What home in America has *not* been touched, either *directly* or *indirectly*, by divorce?
3. Revival is a *renewal* in God’s people. To reach the lost, Christians *must* be renewed first in their prayers, then in their love for God, above all things. Then God becomes the *number one* topic. He is worshipped and appreciated and the ball games, the theaters and the other amusements and things of the world become “strangely dim”. In other words, God gets our worship and *all our attention*. How can we give Him *less* than all and *claim* to be Christians? Jesus said we are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. However we cannot do this in the natural man. We must be divinely enabled.
4. Revival is *awakening* (Eph. 5:14). Oh, how we need to be awakened! It is bad enough that sinners sleep the sleep of death, but professing Christians also are sleeping, and it is going to take a *loud voice*, indeed, *God’s own voice*, to awaken them!

Read the history of some of the revivals of old and you will find the same thing each time. Before an awakening swept through the heretofore unconcerned

world, it *first* arrested the Christians. Even *genuinely* born again people *need* revival. They, too, have to be *on fire* for God.

Hear these words of Duncan Campbell, who was used of God in the revival of 1949 and after, in the Scottish Hebrides Islands:

What have been the outstanding features of this movement? Three stand out clearly.

First: an awareness of God. To be fully realized, this has to be *felt*. A rector of the Church of England, referring to his visit to the Isle of Lewis, said, ‘What I felt, apart from what I saw, convinced me at once that this was *no ordinary movement*.’

Second: the main feature has been *deep conviction* of sin — at times leading almost to despair. I have known occasions when it was necessary to *stop* preaching, because of the distress manifested by the anxious, and many would find expression for the feeling in their hearts and burden of their *guilty* conscience, in the words of John Newton:

‘My conscience *fell* and *owned* its guilt
and plunged me in despair:
I saw my sins His blood had spilt
and *helped to nail* Him there.’

“*Third:* Physical manifestations and prostrations have been a further feature, I find it somewhat *difficult to explain* this aspect; indeed. I cannot. But this I will say: The person who would associate this with satanic influence is coming *perilously near* to committing the unpardonable sin. Lady Huntingdon on one occasion wrote to George Whitefield respecting cases of crying out and falling down in meetings, and advised him not to remove them from the meetings as he had done. When this was done, it seemed to bring a damper on the meeting. She said, ‘You are making a great mistake. *Don’t be wiser than God. Let them cry out. It will do a great deal more good than your preaching*’”⁸ (emphasis mine).

If you are really interested in revival, there are several books I will recommend. But if you read no other, you should read Jonathan Edwards’, *Narrative of Surprising Conversions*. Here is an excerpt from it:

It was very wonderful to see how persons’ affections were sometimes moved — when God did, as it were, suddenly open their eyes, and let into their minds a sense of the greatness of His grace, the fullness of Christ, and His readiness to save, after having been

⁸ Duncan Campbell, *God’s Answer* (Belfast: The Faith Mission, 1960), pp. 88, 89. Hymn quoted, “In Evil Long I Took Delight”, John Newton.

broken with apprehension of divine wrath and sunk unto an abyss, under a sense of guilt which they were ready to think was beyond the mercy of God. Their joyful surprise has caused their hearts, as it were, to leap, so they have been ready to break forth in laughter, tears often mingling a loud weeping.

Sometimes they have not been able to forbear crying out with a loud voice and expressing their great admiration. In some, even the view of the glory of God's sovereignty, in the exercises of His grace has surprised the soul in such sweetness, as to produce the same effects. I remember an instance of one, who, reading something concerning God's sovereign way of saving sinners, as being self moved — having no regard to man's own righteousness as the motive of His grace, *but as magnifying Himself and abasing man, or to that purpose, felt such a sudden rapture of joy and delight in the consideration of it:* yet then he suspected himself to be in a Christless condition, and had long been in great distress for fear that God would not have mercy on him.⁹ (emphasis mine).

“Revive *thy* work!” — It is God's work and as the Sovereign of the universe. He controls the keys. “Ministers knock at the door of men's hearts; the Spirit comes with a key and opens the door” (Thomas Watson).

Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9). This is true in the Salvation of a soul, of a preacher in the belly of a whale, and *of His church*. Did not Jesus say in Matthew 16:18, “Upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”?

When God begins a work, He will bring it to fruition. God is not *abandoning* His church. We must remember however that...

Revival Comes in God's Time

Habakkuk says “Revive thy work *in the midst of the years*” — just as in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son. Christ came right on time, just at the *exact moment* God had chosen to fulfill all the prophecies of His first coming. He will come again and “will not tarry” — just at God's appointed time the Son of Righteousness will appear with healing in His wings (Mal. 4:2) God has also *appointed* times of refreshing for His people. The day of Pentecost came when God had decreed it should, and likewise revival will come in God's time and in *God's way*. The Great Awakening came at just the *right* time. Reliable reports are that in the 20th century Korea, Romania, Russia, Indonesia, and the Scottish Hebrides were places that *experienced a measure* of revival. *Will God do it in Century 21?* It is all in God's time. You can't work it up or even pray it down. But,

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Narratives* (Asheville: Revival Literature, 1957 abridged edition, James Stewart, Editor) p. 55.

prayer is the place to begin to be ready for revival. God controls the time. He has decreed that one day time shall be no more. As for now, we must “redeem the time for the days are evil” (Eph 5:14).

“In the midst of the years *make known!*”

Revival is *God being really known, not just the abstract truth about Him*. Systematic theology has its place, but *theology cannot replace God!* True theology is the study of God. We must see the veil lifted and *really* study God, not just *about* Him. Oh, to really know Him, and the power of His resurrection!

Revival is a shaking of the dry bones. The dry bones were once alive, so we can apply it to today’s dead church. When the dry bones live, we can see the church again reap a harvest. *True soul-winning can only be done in the power of the Holy Ghost*.

Why Is There No Revival?

As the thundering preacher from Wales, John Elias, pointed out: “We don’t have revival because “*The Church does not feel the need* for revival as it should.”¹⁰ Elias, in one of his famous letters, makes it clear that the reason the word of God has so *little* effect in our lives is that we do not *consider* it is the Word of God.

We can have revival in any age. There is nothing in Scripture to forbid it. We must, however, apply the word of God to *ourselves*, We must pray *expecting great things* from God. We can casually say we want revival without being also *willing* to pay the price. Can we *really* cry with Habakkuk, “Revive thy Work in the midst of the years.”?

May this be our heart’s cry! Amen!

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¹⁰ *John Elias: Life and Letters* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980).

