

Surprised by Revival

II Chronicles 28-31

Introduction

In the summer of 1787, representatives met in Philadelphia to write The Constitution of the United States of America. After they had struggled for several weeks and had made little or no progress, eighty-one year old Benjamin Franklin rose and addressed the troubled and disagreeing convention that was about to adjourn in confusion.

In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor . . . Have we now forgotten this powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance?

I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of man. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?

I therefore beg leave to move that, henceforth, prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on our deliberation be held in this assembly every morning.

We have observed in our discussions of the books of Kings and Chronicles, the fall of Israel. They had forgotten their all-powerful Friend! We saw the

collapse of this Northern Kingdom, with Samaria as its capital city, as it was captured by Assyria and sold into bondage. We will now turn our attention to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital city.

King Ahaz – Rebellion!

I invite your attention to the book of II Chronicles where, it seems, the Southern Kingdom is on the brink of destruction as well. Let us begin in chapter 28, at verses 1 and 2.

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do right in the sight of the Lord as David his father had done. But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he also made molten images for the Baals.

Now, at the very time that Judah needed a godly king, they saw an evil twenty year old man ascend the throne and take power in the land. As I read this, a thought occurred to me that had not occurred to me, for some reason, as we have read of king after king. If you were twenty years old and ascended the throne in the kingdom of your land and could have anything you wanted; could do anything without restraint or accountability; could have a life that was the epitome of your own desires, pleasures, and pursuits, what kind of king would you be? This twenty year old took advantage of his power and became evil.

The text tells us that because of Ahaz's rebellion and sin, God caused war to be Ahaz's middle name. Ultimately, Ahaz attempts an unholy alliance with Assyria, so that Assyria would protect Judah. This is

even more despicable, since Assyria had just taken his brothers into captivity. Notice verses 19 through 21.

For the Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had brought about a lack of restraint in Judah and was very unfaithful to the Lord. So Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. Although Ahaz took a portion out of the house of the Lord and out of the palace of the king and of the princes, and gave it to the king of Assyria, it did not help him.

Imagine that! Continue to verse 22.

Now in the time of his distress this same King Ahaz became . . .

(. . . humbled before the Lord . . . oh, no),

. . . yet more unfaithful to the Lord.

Ladies and gentlemen, do not think that suffering and distress automatically drives a person to God. Sometimes, it drives them further away.

By the way, that can be true of a Christian too. As Hudson Taylor, the pioneer missionary to inland China, once wrote,

It is possible for pressure that is brought into our lives, to pull us away from that sweet fellowship that we, at that moment, need more desperately than at any other time, or that pressure can press us to Him.

You have probably seen that truth in your life at times. Continue to verses 23 and 24.

For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they became the downfall of him and all Israel. Moreover, when Ahaz gathered together the utensils of the house of God, he cut the utensils of the house of God in pieces; and he closed the doors of the house of the Lord, and made altars for himself in every corner of Jerusalem.

Can you imagine that?! Can you believe how wicked this man was, even as he learned of the fall of the Northern Kingdom?

Now, at this moment, while Ezra did not include the account in the Chronicles, the book of Isaiah, in chapter 7, informs us that the prophet Isaiah came to Ahaz. He delivered to Ahaz the stunning prophecy

that, although Ahaz was close to losing the kingdom to foreigners, the throne of David would not be wiped away forever. The sign of that prophecy, according to Isaiah, was that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a son.

We know that prophecy came true centuries later, when the virgin Mary conceived the Messiah by the supernatural enabling of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the Son of David was born, who will eventually sit upon David's throne in the new Kingdom.

Well, Ahaz ignored Isaiah. He refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and repent. He later died as such a failure that the people did not even bury him with the other kings of Israel and Judah.

King Hezekiah – Revival!

Now, when we observed the idolatry and fall of the northern half of the kingdom, we recalled the words of Thomas Jefferson concerning our own nation,

I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, and that His justice cannot sleep forever.

After reading what we have just read about the Southern Kingdom and wicked King Ahaz, we can almost hear the slumbering justice of God begin to awaken. However, something remarkable happens; something unbelievable – there is a revival! Just when you thought the nation was down for the count; when any remaining faithful ones must have thought there was no hope for their nation, something incredible happened. Look at chapter 29, verse 1a.

Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. . . .

Skip to verses 3 and 4.

In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them into the square on the east.

Can you believe that?! The son of wicked King Ahaz ascends the throne, and you would expect him to do business as usual. Yet, in his first one hundred days of office, as it were, he begins to restore what his father had destroyed. His first declaration is, "Open the doors of the temple and, while you're at it, repair them. It's housecleaning time!"

Why? There is about to be a revival in the land. Who would have ever guessed that this could happen?

Steps to revival

Hezekiah began by cleaning the house of worship, which is analogous to the need in our own nation. Did you know that the priests took at least eight days to clean out all the trash in the temple? The temple had become a sort of storage shed in the nation. Any junk that they wanted to hang on to and did not quite want to throw away, they stuck in the temple. It took eight days for the priests to take out the rubbish and then, eight more days for them to ceremonially cleanse it with the blood of animals that died to bring atonement.

So, there is going to be revival. Now, look at verse 20.

Then King Hezekiah arose early and assembled the princes of the city and went up to the house of the Lord.

Imagine this! This is the President and all the members of Congress getting up early and heading for the house of the Lord.

Now, the next thing that happens is that they make offerings or sacrifices. First, the burnt offering and then, the sin offerings. We will not go into all the detail, but they are recognizing that they have sinned before God and are doing what God has commanded in the book of Leviticus to propitiate or atone for their sins. They will deal with their sins in the way God said to deal with sin. That is the beginning step.

Notice one illustration from verses 23 through 24a.

Then they brought the male goats of the sin offering before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. The priests slaughtered them and purged the altar with their blood to atone for all Israel.

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This is fascinating because of the words, as translated in my text, “laid their hands on them”. This does not sound as forceful or as dynamic as that Hebrew verb suggests. The words could be rendered, “they pressed upon,” or literally, “they leaned with their weight on” those animals. It was a symbolic gesture that was not just a pat by the priests as they laid their hands on the heads of those animals. It was a leaning with their weight. It was a pictorial way of suggesting that, “We are putting on you, that are

about to die, all of the sins of the nation. We recognize that we have deeply erred against God and we are pressing those sins into those that will give their lives to pay for the sacrifice.”

Notice the key word, in verse 24, is the word “atone”. This is the Hebrew word “kaphar,” which could be translated, “to pay the ransom price”. This sacrificial animal will pay the ransom that was demanded by sin. We know, even in the New Testament, that Romans, chapter 6, verse 23a, says,

For the wages [ransom price] of sin is death.

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What an unbelievable foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, who is, “. . . the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” This is that Lamb who will, according to I John, chapter 2, verse 2, have pressed into His body, as it were, the sin of the world.

It is also interesting in the New Testament, that we see Jesus Christ fulfilling all of the pictures of the sacrifices given to us in the Old Testament. For example, Mark, chapter 10, verse 45b, tells us that Jesus Christ came,

. . . to give His life a ransom for many.

Also, in I Peter, chapter 1, verses 18 and 19, Peter refers to the Christians as those who have been “ransomed” by the blood of Jesus Christ.

What we see happening is that the king, the congress, and the congregation are basically saying, “Oh God, we have sinned against You. We recognize that we must do what You have prescribed to deal with sin. So, we will offer these sacrifices.”

For us today, in this dispensation of grace, we simply place our faith in the substitutionary work; the atoning work of the Lamb of God, who paid the final, once and for all, sacrifice for sin.

Now, what do you do when you have been forgiven? We cry – maybe you have. We laugh with relief, perhaps. How about sing? Well, that is what they did. Look at verses 25 and 26.

He then stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with harps and lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the Lord through His prophets. The Levites stood with the musical instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets.

Skip to verses 28 and 29.

While the whole assembly worshiped, the singers also sang and the trumpets sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. Now at the completion of the burnt offerings, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped.

Can you imagine this sight? I have read of Handel's first performance of his great work, *The Messiah*, before the royalty of Great Britain. When he came to the part where the orchestra swelled and the choir sang, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," the Queen of England took off her crown and put it at her feet and stood in obeisance to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

That is what is happening in these verses. The choir is singing, atonement is made, and the king, his cabinet, and the people bow and worship. If you had been there and had waited thirty some years to see a king bow before God, you would have been amazed that revival could happen in the land. Yet, it was happening.

Let us continue our survey. Look at chapter 30 of II Chronicles. Hezekiah decides to do something unusual. It was risky, but I think God motivated his heart to do it. He invited both kingdoms together to celebrate the Passover. Those who were remaining in the Northern Kingdom, who had been left behind and had intermarried and created the Samaritan race, were invited by him to come to Jerusalem. He dispatches runners to run throughout all of the land, and we will look at that in just a moment. The runners carried a simple message that said basically, "God is doing a work in the heart of the king and the leadership and the people. We want you to come to Jerusalem and celebrate, once again, the Passover."

It must have been a stunning message. Look at verse 9b through 10.

. . . For the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him. So the couriers [runners] passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them.

You have to understand how foolish their message must have seemed. These people would have thought, "God is at work in the nation?! Revival?! The king bowing?! It's a sham! It won't last. Besides, I don't

care about the God of Israel anyway, so I'm not coming."

Look at verse 11.

Nevertheless some men . . . humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.

Can you imagine being one of the couriers, or runners? Can you imagine running through a city shouting this message, "You're invited to Jerusalem for the Passover. We're worshiping God. Come on down to Jerusalem."? Can you imagine having people then mock you, deride you, laugh at you, and say, "Fanatic! You're out of your mind."? But, some respond and receive the message!

Has it ever occurred to you that you are a courier? And, you can expect the same response these runners received. Do not let it slow you down.

Now, the nation will gather. Look at verse 21.

The sons of Israel present in Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great joy, and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day after day with loud instruments to the Lord.

They all gathered together. What a moment this must have been! I do not know if Ezra is complaining about the loud instruments or if he is thinking, "Oh, you should have heard it! It was a wonderful sound, those loud instruments playing music to God!"

I suspect he felt the latter. Continue to verse 22.

Then Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good insight in the things of the Lord. So they ate for the appointed seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the Lord God of their fathers.

This is nothing less than a revival in the land of God's people! And, notice verse 23.

Then the whole assembly decided to celebrate the feast another seven days, so they celebrated the seven days with joy.

They had extended meetings! They said, "This is too good to quit! Let's take a vote. Does anyone here want to keep celebrating seven more days?"

It was unanimous, "Okay, let's go seven more days!"

We watch our watches in church during the sermon to see how much time we have left. I often

think, “What would happen if revival broke out? We’d have to stop for the next service!”

Results of revival

Look at the first thing that follows a revival in chapter 31, verse 1.

Now when all this was finished, . . .

Stop here. What was finished? All of the offerings, the worship, the praise, the sacrifices were finished. The union of God’s people, those who would believe, gathered together when all was finished and are putting up the folding chairs and tables and taking out the trash and cleaning up. Then,

. . . all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah, broke the pillars in pieces, cut down the Asherim [wooden statue of Baal’s mistress] and pulled down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, as well as in Ephraim and Manasseh

First, they worshiped, and then, they worked. They first “cleaned up their own act” and then they set out to clean up their city’s.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the reasons that I think we are not pulling down many altars of evil or unbelief today, is because the church is not clean. We have not “cleaned up our act” and we wonder why God cannot use us to clean up the act outside the church walls. We are not worshiping; we are in a state of need of revival.

One of the greatest proofs of revival reveals itself in the last part of chapter 31. Look at verses 11 through 12.

Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare rooms in the house of the Lord, and they prepared them. They faithfully brought in the contributions and the tithes and the consecrated things; and Conaniah the Levite was the officer in charge of them and his brother Shimei was second.

Conaniah was the Pastor of Administration and his brother Shimei was his assistant.

One of the greatest evidences of God working in our lives is the way we give, rather than hoard; the way we share for the work of God, rather than keep. One of the first things that happens in the life of a revived believer is that he is able to let go, instead of hang on.

One of the toughest parts of a church service is when the collection plate comes by. There are some who think, “Oh, they don’t need me,” and pass it on. Others say, “Oh, here it comes, I’ve got to do something – someone might be looking,” so they pull out some pocket change and give God a tip. What we need to have in a revived state, is the attitude of, “Lord, this is Your work and here comes my portfolio. I’m going to make another investment in eternity now.”

That is a little too convicting, so let us go on! Look at verses 20 and 21.

Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah; and he did what was good, right and true before the Lord his God. Every work which he began in the service of the house of God in law and in commandment, seeking his God, he did with all his heart and prospered.

Who would have ever believed this? The Northern Kingdom falls into deep, dark idolatry. The Southern Kingdom experiences, in a matter of weeks, revival and this powerful impact on their nation. Who would have ever guessed?!

Could it happen in this nation in the way that would be prescribed in our dispensation? I do not want to twist this or torture the text too much. America is not Israel and President Clinton is not King Hezekiah. However, some things are analogous. We can make an analogy of the restoration of Judah and the restoration that the people of God can cause in this nation.

Can it happen in our nation? If you are a student of history, you have read of revival happening, probably with some amazement. Nearly one hundred years ago, a famous Welsh revival took place. One hundred thousand people were converted to Christianity in five months. Five years later, the wealthy financier, J. P. Morgan, wrote a book to debunk that revival. His primary criticism, according to his writings, was, “Of the one hundred thousand that joined the churches during that five month period, only eighty thousand are active today.”

That is terrible – only eighty thousand people lasted and were true out of a hundred thousand!!

By the way, there was also a social impact, once God brought people to Himself and impacted their lives. The problem today is that the church is trying to change the social structure of our decaying nation

without addressing the church first and re-establishing its purpose.

Now, listen to this. The social impact of the Wales movement was astounding. Judges were presented with white gloves; they had no cases to try. There were no rapes, robberies, murders, burglaries, embezzlements – nothing. The district council held an emergency meeting to discuss what to do with the police, now that they were inactive. Can you believe that?! It is as hard for us to believe that as it was for the people of God to believe that something was happening in Jerusalem.

That Welsh revival spread to America. Listen to an article in the *Denver Post*, dated January 20, 1905.

For two hours at mid-day, all of Denver was held in a spell. The marts of trade were deserted between noon and two-o'clock this afternoon and all worldly affairs were forgotten. Going to and coming from this great prayer meeting, the thousands of men and women around the city who had prayed, radiated the Spirit which filled them. Seldom has such a remarkable sight been witnessed. An entire city, in the middle of a busy week day, bowing before the throne of heaven and asking and receiving the blessing of the King of the universe.

Can you imagine just one sentence of that being in a newspaper today, without people screaming and hollering? It will occur when God grasps the heart of His people and revives them.

I want you to go back to an interesting insight. Please turn back to chapter 29 and look at verse 36. Can it happen again? Could it happen here? Look at this interesting verse.

Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had prepared for the people, because . . .

(. . . the thing had been thoroughly planned . . . because the revival meetings had been called . . . no),

. . . the thing came about suddenly.

This even surprised Hezekiah. It surprised the people. God moved; people repented and worshiped and served. We hear them thanking God and saying, “Lord, this took us by surprise! It happened so quickly! We didn’t even get our revival posters printed. It just happened!”

G. Campbell Morgan, the great British expositor and pastor, once said,

We cannot organize revival, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.

Do you know what we need to do? We need to set our sails. They get all twisted and we head in the wrong direction. For God to move in this nation, He must first move in His church. That means He must first move in our hearts. And, we cannot plan it, but we can pray for it. We cannot organize it; we cannot say, “Okay, Holy Spirit, between these dates we want You to come.”

We just ask God to move in our hearts; to revive our hearts. And, when He moves in our hearts, we will do what these people did, we will send runners to invite others to the work of God. We will give; we will repent. And, we will move in our city and beyond, and in the might of His power, not with weapons made of hands, we will see Him move in our city as well.

Revive Us, Oh Lord

Now, listen to the words of a song by an artist named Steve Green. It is entitled, *Revive Us, Oh Lord*. Let the words go through your heart and then, lift them back up to the Lord.

Oh Holy God and King

Hear Your people as we sing

Revive us, oh Lord

Grant us this one request

That we may know Your holiness

Revive us, oh Lord

Humbly Lord we now confess

Wandering hearts and selfishness

Revive us, oh Lord

We recognize our desperate need

For purity in thought and deed

Revive us, oh Lord

Melt us . . . and break us . . .

Mold us . . . and remake us

Do, oh Lord, what You must do

*To turn Your people's heart to You
Revive us, oh Lord*

*Fill us, Lord, this very hour
Infuse us with Your sacred power
Revive us, oh Lord
That as Your people we might be
All that You would have us be
Revive us, oh Lord*

*Melt us and break us
Mold and remake us
Do, oh Lord, what You must do
To turn Your people's heart to You
Revive us, oh Lord
Revive us, oh Lord*

We do not pray for the Lord to change our country; we pray for the Lord to change us. We do not even start by praying for the Lord to change our church, but for the Lord to change us. And, let us pray for that today.

Pray for personal forgiveness and cleansing

A man once came to Gipsy Smith, the celebrated English evangelist of an earlier time, and asked how to have revival. Gipsy asked, "Do you have a place where you can pray?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"I'll tell you what to do. You go to that place and take a piece of chalk along. Kneel down and, with the chalk, draw a complete circle all around you and pray for God to send revival on everything inside of the circle."

I want to you imagine yourself at this moment, drawing a chalk circle around where you are sitting. Before we can pray for revival to come – to our family, our church, our city – we need to first ask God to revive ourselves again. Ask God to bring revival in your circle first. Pray for personal forgiveness and cleansing.

Perhaps you have gone to your knees and you know that the first thing you need to do is give your heart to Jesus Christ. Or, perhaps you are already a Christian, but your heart has become cold and

indifferent to His soft voice. Before Hezekiah could ever hope to inaugurate the worship in the temple again, he first had to cleanse the temple. You are the temple of the living God, so first, confess your sins to the Savior. Do that now.

Sing:

*Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me,
Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me;
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me;
Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.*

Pray for faithfulness and commitment in your personal relationships

Let us also pray for our husband or wife, our children, and those in our family to either come to know the Lord or to be faithful to the Lord. Perhaps a Christian hearing this needs to make a fresh commitment to their marital relationship. Perhaps someone needs to purify a dating relationship. Perhaps someone needs to restore a broken relationship, either in their family or their extended church family.

While we do not practice the sacrifices of Hezekiah, Paul made it clear in Romans, chapter 12, verse 1, that our worship is to spill over into the marketplace and the home. He urged,

. . . to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God . . .

Christianity may be learned inside church, but it is to be lived outside the church, in the world, especially in our relationships with others.

Sing:

*Hide me Lord, in your holiness, every sin I
now confess,
Praise to you forgiving Lord,
Hide me in your holiness, hide me in your
holiness.*

Pray for the power of God to be evidenced through the ministry of your church

Now, continue praying and pray that the power of God will be evidenced through your ministry; your church to your city; your world.

You might ask, "How can God be at work through our church?"

For one thing, as we, like those couriers, reach our city and beyond for Jesus Christ, unbelievers will come to faith in Christ. A few months ago, a sweet couple who had been searching for the truth of God's word began attending our church. Soon afterward, they came to my office and, with tears in their eyes, told me that during the past Sunday service, they had together, asked Jesus Christ to come into their hearts and lives as their own personal Savior and Lord.

It is easy to talk about commitment to the Lord's work, but it is another thing to act upon the belief that investing in that work is worthy of our personal sacrificial involvement. Will you pray that God will work through you.

Sing:

In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified,

In my life, Lord, be glorified today.

In my church, Lord, be glorified, be glorified,

In my church, Lord, be glorified today.

In Revelation, chapter 5, the prayers of the saints are pictured as burning incense wafting upward to the living God. Let us close this time of prayer by letting the incense of our prayers ascend to the Father. Tell Him that you love Him and ask Him to develop His character inside you and then, through you to your world.

Sing:

Lord please make me, a Sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true;

With thanksgiving, I'll be a living, sanctuary for You.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/19/1996 by Stephen Davey.

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