

The Traveling Pulpit

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God's Prerogative in Revival (Part I)

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” (II Chron. 7:14)

Introduction v.14a

As we begin examining our text, we must be reminded to always interpret Scripture in context and compare Scripture with Scripture as we notice that this verse begins by saying, “if my people, which are called by my name” (v.14a). We should not misunderstand the context, but neither should we fail to glean and apply the spiritual truths that remain relevant today. This passage begins with the word, “if” which is a conditional word letting us know that we are to be surrendered to God in order to receive God’s blessings. God loves unconditionally, but He does not accept us unconditionally. As parents, we are to learn this lesson from God as we love our children unconditionally, but do not accept what they do unconditionally. Just because they’re our children, does not make their wrong-doing acceptable to us. The first word in this verse is “if” which lets us know that what is about to be said is conditional. God

states that “if” those to whom He addresses this verse will do His bidding, then He will bless them. Then, He lets us know to whom He is speaking by saying “my people which are called by my name.”

The opening chapters of Second Chronicles concerns the building and dedication of Solomon’s temple. In response to Solomon’s “prayer” (v.12), God warned Israel in the later chapters (II Chron. 21-36) of their future ups and downs, their spiritual decay, and promises of restoration which occurs on many occasions throughout their history. The remaining chapters of Second Chronicles bear witness to God’s prerogative in blessing those who follow Him and chastening or judging those who don’t. In Old Testament times, the “temple” (II Chron. 3-4) was the gathering place for believers to worship, whereas the local church is the gathering place for New Testament believers today (Heb. 10:25).

God’s “people” are those who are called by His “name” in both Old and New Testaments (Gen. 32:28, Acts 11:26). Believing Israel of the Old Testament observed the Passover in looking toward the cross, whereas Christians look back at the cross and are reminded of the Supreme Pascal Lamb who came to “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21, Jh. 1:29, I Cor. 5:7). Unfortunately, this verse that claims our attention is often misinterpreted because we fail to examine the circumstances of when it was written, to whom it was written, and why it was written. This passage, along with many others in Scripture, is not for a nation (per-se), but to the Old Testament people of God who lived in a nation that would give birth to the long-awaited Messiah. This passage is not talking about a nation that turns to God nor about national leaders that turn to God. It’s referring to God’s “people” within a nation who turn to God from their waywardness.

We must always remember that Scripture refers to an ethnic Israel and to a spiritual Israel and differentiates between the two (Rom. 9:6-8). Even the Psalmist refers to both ethnic and spiritual Israel (Ps. 33:12). There is a spiritual principle in our text that is spoken to the Old Testament believer, but can also be applied to the New Testament believer. We can learn from this verse that spiritual awakening (spiritual restoration) will not come to a nation, but to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who have drifted away from Him. This passage is not referring to citizens of just any country, but to those who are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Revival can come on various levels, such as individual or corporate, but when a sweeping revival comes to a multitude of churches, it will no doubt affect the spiritual climate of the nation in which they live, like it did in the nation of Israel. There is nothing we can do to produce revival, because only God can send it. Unfortunately, many treat this passage like a SECRET FORMULA for revival. To begin with, the word revival does not appear anywhere in this verse, but we can correctly interpret it accordingly. When we do that, we discover that revival in the ranks of Christendom is a sovereign act of God in the spiritual awakening of His people as He says, “I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” Many Christians do not properly understand the term, spiritual awakening. Mere emotionalism, religious fervor, or aisle walking is not spiritual awakening.

Before proceeding, let's examine what we mean in the church when we use the word, revival. In doing so, let's first understand what revival is NOT. It's NOT holding a series of services and calling it a revival. We can call a meeting a revival effort, but all the human effort in the world will not produce spiritual awakening. The word, "revive" or "revived" meaning restore or quicken, is only found a few times in the Bible referring to spiritual matters (Neh. 4:2, Ps. 85:6, 138:7, Isa. 57:7, Hos. 6:2, Hab. 3:2, Rom. 7:9, 14:9). However, other references are made in Scripture regarding spiritual renewal and some have counted as many as 16 revivals recorded in Scripture. God not only beckoned His Old Testament people to "repent" and "turn" (Ezek. 14:6, 18:30), but 5 out of the 7 churches named in the Book of Revelation were told to "repent" or else (Rev. 2:5,16,21-22, 3:3,19).

Revival is a spiritual awakening or spiritual restoration among God's people, found both in the Old and New Testaments. It involves the people of God responding to the desire that God has placed upon their hearts when they have wandered from Him and their need to return to a place of sincere fellowship (Ps. 37:4). Only saved people can be revived simply because a dead person is helpless and in need of a spiritual resurrection. Spiritual awakening is for God's people who will beseech Him to do the humanly impossible in the midst of our spiritual calamity. When we think of revival, let's remember that, like salvation, it is a sovereign work of God among His people. No mortal man can produce genuine spiritual awakening no more than any human being can produce a true convert. There is no secret formula or four-step program to follow that guarantees revival. The word revival can be used in both secular and sacred context, but when used in the sacred it's talking about a return to fellowship with God from which one has fallen. From Scripture, we know that a Christian can never lose his/her salvation, meaning that their relationship with God never changes, but fellowship with God can change (Jh. 10:28, I Jh. 1-2). This happens when a Christian slides down the hill of holiness. Sometimes, this is referred to as backsliding.

As we begin examining our text, there are several things that we need to understand. First, this passage is given to the Old Testament "people" of Israel whom God established in Abraham when he was called out of paganism in Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 11). Therefore, we could say that Israel was a nation in which God covenanted to send the Promised Messiah. Unfortunately, they failed God on many occasions and did not value their covenant relationship. When Christ came, the Jews rejected Him (Jh. 1:11). Secondly, this passage, along with many others in Scripture, is not for a nation (per-se), but to God's "people" in the Old Testament. However, we don't need to underestimate its value for the New Testament believer because there are biblical truths from which we can glean. No nation can expect God's blessings when it defies that which is sacred in God's sight. There is no doubt that a nation will either suffer the consequences or experience the benefits from the spiritual state of the churches found therein.

We must remember that there is a national Israel and also a spiritual Israel. The nation of Israel was chosen by God through which the Lord Jesus Christ would be born. However, just because one was born a Jew does not mean they are automatically a child of God. Only those who come to Christ in "faith" in both the Old

and New Testaments bare evidence of being the spiritual “seed” of God (Rom. 9:6-8, Gal. 3:29, 6:16). When God blesses the church, the nation wherein she is located will benefit, but if the church does not find favor with God, neither can the nation of her existence. Our text has often been associated with the need of spiritual awakening in our land. However, it’s not our “land” that needs revival, but the local churches therein (I Pet. 4:17). In the USA, it’s not Washington, the White House, Congress, the Senate, or our State or Local governments that needs spiritual revival, but the church of the living God. Our text is not about American politics, but God’s people who will bow before their God in spiritual restoration. Many of our founding Fathers were not believers; therefore, it’s not America that needs to return to God, but Christians who have wandered away from their spiritual roots.

God does challenge His “people” to “obey” (I Sam. 15:22) Him and follow His commandments. However, just because we follow His marching orders doesn’t mean that we have control of the circumstances. He does promise to bless us if we obey Him and chasten us when we go astray (Heb. 6:14, 12:8). But, there is no guarantee that a national revival will come to any nation just because people follow the principles laid out in our text. That’s because it is possible for people to cross the point of no return and judgment becomes inevitable, but only God knows when such a time has come. We do not move the Hand of God, but it is the Hand of our Sovereign God that moves us. An example of what I’m talking about is found in the final chapter of Second Chronicles (36:2-14) where we read about the 70-year Babylonian Captivity of the Jews followed by the Sovereign intervention of God under Cyrus. Spiritual awakening can be experienced by an individual Christian, an individual church, or by many local churches all of which can have a positive impact upon their community and nation. Scripture admonishes us to pray for the rulers of our nation that God’s grace will intervene in their decisions (I Tim. 2:1-2).

A Ministry Update

In this edition of ***“The Traveling Pulpit,”*** I begin a three-part study on an often-quoted Old Testament verse of Scripture, but also sometimes misunderstood. The next two editions will conclude this in-dept look into the meaning of this passage and how to properly apply it today. I don’t know of a Christian anywhere who will not agree that we need a spiritual awaking in our midst. However, we need to know where that must begin. It is certainly not a political promise, but a spiritual promise to God’s people. Unless we see a revival in the Christian homes and churches of our land, we have no reason to ever expect a change for the better in our country. All the violence and turmoil occurring around us is indication of God’s judgment and it ought to awaken people to the fear of a Holy God. Instead, hearts are getting harder and harder. However, God’s people must intensify their praying as we trust God for His mercy upon our land.

I’m glad to report that my newest book, ***The Sacredness of Sex, God’s Design For Biblical Marriage***, is ready for circulation and free for the asking. It can also be found, along with all my other books, on the books and publications page of our website. This book stresses the fact, that just as God desires for a husband and wife to have an intimate human relationship, He desires to have an intimate spiritual relationship with His Bride.

I personally have no plans at present to write another book anytime soon, but our son, Wilson (who serves as vice-president of COGM and is pastor of Rekindled Ministries), is working on his first book

and hopes to have it published in the near future. I'll keep you informed when it's available. As always, we appreciate all the prayers and support for COGM. May the Lord abundantly bless you.
Because of His Sovereign Grace.....BWM