

# Revival – it's a Gift!

Does God have a role in revival?  
**Colin Wilson** takes 'the road less travelled' around 2 Chronicles 7:14

*Some things only  
God can do...*

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**A**s the nations plunge in deeper economic and socio-political crisis, Christians are increasingly looking to God to send down restoration and blessing. However, there is a subtle but profound danger... We can be drawn into the misconception that prayer, of itself, is a tool to twist God's arm into responding to our desires. In the mysterious interplay between the Creator and His creatures, prayer is not so much a case of us getting God to do what we want, but of getting ourselves to the point of asking God to do what *He* wants. This involves much more than aiming words at heaven, or undertaking a set of religious rituals in the mistaken belief that we can impress or cajole the

Almighty. We must first seek the Lord for His mind in these matters and discern His will for the hour. Waiting before leaping is the heart of intercession. Even then there is no set-piece performance that can be guaranteed to attract a programmed response from God.

In the world of intercessory prayer over the past few years, one verse has become particularly well-thumbed. 'If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sins and heal their land'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the text embodies a tremendous assurance from God. However, as the old adage states: 'a verse out of context becomes a pretext' and the setting surrounding God's word to King Solomon is vital. Chapter seven of 2 Chronicles is God's reply to Solomon's earlier prayer; and it is these pleas of Israel's earthly king which sets the scene for God's response. So to understand correctly this particular transaction between heaven and earth, we really need to go back a chapter in our Bibles to remind ourselves of both the prayer that was offered up, and the situation within which it was made. Only

then can we come to an accurate understanding of what God said to Solomon.

## True humility

In 2 Chronicles 6 we find the people of God in great assembly to witness the consecration to God of the temple King Solomon had built. In his humble approach to the Almighty at the dedication of the 'house of God', the King was looking for reassurance; and he prayed as an entreaty. He earnestly asked of God in a repeating pattern: 'If your people will..., will you...?' It is a recurring refrain which is interlaced throughout the whole prayer. Solomon, although God's appointee on earth to 'sit on the throne of Israel',<sup>2</sup> was anxious to know if the God of Israel would bless the nation if the Jewish people were first obedient and wedded to Him.

On the platform that Solomon had built for the occasion, and with the nation assembled all around him, the king 'knelt down before the gathered peoples of Israel and spread out his hands towards heaven'. He asked God to 'hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence'.<sup>3</sup>

The sad results of national decline and concomitant woes catalogued by Solomon in

*There is a subtle but important distinction between faith in prayer and faith in the God who answers prayer*

**Fear...  
to  
keep  
you**  
*Exodus 20: 20*

his prayer were many, various and so very typical: wrong personal relationships, military defeat, drought, famine, plague, pestilence, self-sufficiency and rebellion against God; these serious problems – personal, national and 'environmental' – were all prevalent in that day and in Israel's situation.<sup>4</sup> Little wonder then that Solomon pleaded: 'Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.'<sup>5</sup> The king was pleading for mercy and restoration. His approach was childlike, but certainly not childish.

### Response, not recipe

So when God replied with repeats of 'I will....'<sup>6</sup> He was not in fact handing down a recipe for revival; neither was He doling out a prescription which, if swallowed whole by enough people in the same place at the same time, would automatically call the Spirit down. No, God was responding as a loving father to the appeals and cries of Solomon by giving a message of reassurance to Israel's king. In effect God the Father was saying: 'Of course dear child(ren), if you will... then I will....' The sense of the Almighty's response was: 'I love you and long to bless you. This is the desire of my heart. This is a reflection of my character and my dealings with you'. He was affirming that if and as the people offered their dedication to Him, so He would bless them in accordance with His promises.<sup>7</sup> God responded point-by-point to Solomon's anxious questions: and more besides. He added a 'bonus' – something that the king had not requested. Not only did God affirm that He would indeed 'hear from heaven' but – and this is the additional (unasked-for) blessing – He would 'heal their land'.<sup>8</sup>

How much our contemporary land needs healing. But the restoration we seek will not come through our persuasive efforts to corral enough people to pray together in sackcloth and ashes, in one place, at one time and for the same thing. The Word of God tells us: "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty.'<sup>9</sup> So it is not by sheer weight of praying numbers that can we somehow oblige God to do as we want.

### Heartfelt dependency

There is a subtle but important distinction between faith in prayer and faith in the God who answers prayer. Prayer should not, and indeed cannot, be used as a talisman; as a means of coercing God – if ever we were able – into responding to our requests. It is not just an intellectual compliance that our God is requiring (vital though that certainly is) but a conviction at the level of the 'heart' which seals the work.

It is in the heart that our deepest convic-

tions lie. Even in everyday parlance we speak of 'whole-hearted, heavy-hearted, half-hearted, warm-hearted, broken-hearted, hard-hearted, cold-hearted'. Mere outward compliance just does not cut it with God. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Almighty declared: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men'.<sup>10</sup> And through Joel we are commanded: 'Rend your heart and not your garments'.<sup>11</sup> Whilst the psalmist advises: 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise'.<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere Jeremiah issued God's call to 'circumcise your hearts'.<sup>13</sup>

### Repentance starts with...?

In speaking on the subject of previous revivals in history, Rev. Dr. J. Edwin Orr raised the question of the role of prayer in visitations from God. He invited consideration of whether 'extraordinary prayer' was a necessary and causal pre-cursor to revival or, alternatively, the first tangible sign that a (heaven-sent) move of God had in fact begun?

**Fear...**  
**to**  
**keep**  
**you**  
*Exodus 20: 20*

*Revival cannot be worked up; it can only be handed down*

Through the prophet Zechariah God said: 'And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son'.<sup>14</sup> The text tells us that God initiates the work of His Spirit.

The response is grief; but it is not a travail rooted in loss. Rather it is a deep conviction of personal unworthiness. It is a contrite repentance. And here's the thing. Normally when a family suffers great sorrow it gathers together, and each member consoles the other. But in their yet-future and national beholding of Christ, the Jewish people, in their collective but highly individual grief, withdraw clan by clan to a place of personal and individual privacy: 'The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei

and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives'.<sup>15</sup>

### And how is it manifest?

The true spirit of repentance may be widespread, but in essence its impact is on the heart of the individual: it is highly personal. The human/divine exchange between God and man has its origins in the grace of the Almighty. It is not something that we can manufacture: the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel was 'not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit'.<sup>16</sup>

Five hundred years later at the time of Pentecost we see the same dynamic. When under the anointing of the Holy Spirit's power Peter preached: 'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ',<sup>17</sup> the response was immediate. 'When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart...' and implored of Peter and the other apostles 'brothers, what shall we do?'<sup>18</sup> [And it is worth noting that those present were invited to repent for the forgiveness of *their* own sins, not the sins of their fathers.<sup>19</sup>]

So we notice here, in both Old Testament and Gospel times, that the intervention is a divine initiative; a sovereign act impacting upon the hearts of men and women.

True repentance is, and can only ever be a gift from God; so revival can never be obtained by set-piece prescription. Neither can it be generated by religiously performing a set of holy rituals. The genesis of any spiritual awakening lies in the father heart of God; it is an act and an expression of His mercy and grace. Revival cannot be 'worked up'; it can only be 'handed down'.

Accordingly, perhaps when we call for seasons of fasting and repentance, what we rather need is a 'fast from fasting' and to 'repent of our repenting'. We need to recognise that revival, in the ultimate sense, can only and ever be of God's grace; that every gift of grace has its origins only in the father heart of God.<sup>20</sup> Then, and only then, in true humility – with our best efforts proven to be ineffective – and in utter dependency, we will prostrate ourselves before the cross of Christ and throw ourselves on the mercy of a God whose heart's desire is to bless, and to 'hear from heaven and heal [our] land'.

1 2 Chronicles 7:14

2 2 Chronicles 6:10

3 2 Chronicles 6:19

4 2 Chronicles 6:22-28

5 2 Chronicles 6:40

6 2 Chronicles 7:14

7 cf. Jeremiah 18:7-10; 29:11

8 2 Chronicles 7:14

9 Zechariah 4:6

10 Isaiah 29:13

11 Joel 2:13

12 Psalm 51:17

13 Jeremiah 4:4

14 Zechariah 12:10

15 Zechariah 12:12-14

16 Zechariah 4:6

17 Acts 2:36

18 Acts 2:37

19 Jeremiah 31:29-30

20 Ephesians 2:8; 3:7