

THE
REVIVALS
IN THE
BIBLE

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BIBLE

VERNON C. LYONS

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PREFACE

S OON AFTER MY conversion I developed an intense interest in revivals. Through the years I eagerly read representative sermons of the leading evangelists of the past, the main biographies of these men, and also the main accounts of all the important revivals in the history of Christianity. This reading totaled scores of volumes. My purpose in doing so was the same as it has been for other men; namely, that the reasons why those revivals took place might be discovered so that we might have revival today. What was it necessary for the people to do in order that God might pour out His Spirit upon them? What did the preachers preach to bring about those revivals? What did the people pray for? What could one expect God to do during times of revival? The answers to these and many other questions were sought by reading about the revivals in the history of Christianity.

I never regretted all this reading but I finally became aware that if I wanted the right answers to these questions, I was neglecting the most important source of information—the Bible. There were a number of revivals in biblical times, and we have the accounts of them in the Scriptures; but I had never given close attention to these records of the revivals in the Bible.

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This is a field that has been greatly neglected. Though there are scattered sermons on some of these revivals, there is no book in the English language that takes up the study of these revivals in the Bible. It is far more important that we know about these revivals than all the other revivals.

I have not written for the minister nor for the student, but have earnestly endeavored to write for the layman. I earnestly pray that through a study of these revivals that we, God's people, might learn what we have to do in order to have revival, what will happen when we do have revival, and what the results of revival will be. There is no better way to find out than by studying the revivals in the Bible.

The study of these revivals in the Bible has led me to the firm conviction that once we meet the biblical requirements, God will give us a mighty spiritual awakening the like of which the world has never seen. God is waiting. Are we willing?

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INTRODUCTION

NEVER IN THE 2,000 year history of Christianity has there been such a flurry of proposed methods for doing God's work. We are told to take polls to find out what kind of church people want. Market research tells us how to evangelize! Surveys are a "must" if we are to succeed. It is another book with the latest concept. Go to another conference to find the secret of successful church work. After we have used up our hours reading the books and emptied our pockets traveling to the newest workers' conference, we find it is outdated and there is a new book and a more cutting-edge conference.

What became of the old Book? Has the gospel changed? Do we not find all we need in the revivals in the Bible? There is no new sin. People are basically the same. There is no new message. Has the devil led American Christians on a long detour, causing us to miss the biblical basics?

Careful attention as to how God worked in the past will reveal what He can do today. *The Revivals in the Bible* are not mere history, but God's inspired instructions for His work in our time.

CHAPTER 1

THE REVIVAL IN A FAMILY

Genesis 35:1-5, 9-15

THE FIRST WORDS of the chapter “and God said” (Genesis 35:1) strike our eyes. Everything that is honorable, profitable, good, and holy comes from God. Whence came the heavens? The earth? The stars? The sea? From God!

As we are about to consider this revival in Jacob’s family we must know who started it—God started it. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). Revivals are not planned by men, started by committee meetings, or brought in evangelists’ suitcases. They are brought about by a word from God.

Arise, Go up to Bethel

What did God mean by these words, “Arise, go up to Bethel” that he spoke to Jacob (Genesis 35:1)? Let us go back to Jacob’s early life at home. Isaac, then an old man, told his son Esau to go out into the field and get some venison and prepare it for him and then he would bless him. Esau went about to do this but in the meantime Isaac’s wife, Rebecca, told Jacob, the younger son, to go and take one of the flock and she would prepare the kind of meat that Isaac liked.

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Long before Esau had returned Jacob had come to his father, Isaac, told him that he was Esau, and deceitfully received the blessing that was intended for his brother. Esau, coming home and discovering what had happened, was so furious that he sought to kill Jacob, but Jacob's mother advised him to leave. What a woeful life! Jacob had deceived his father; his brother sought to kill him; his mother told him to leave home; and so he left.

Jacob had never been away from home before. His brother had gone out in the fields hunting, but not Jacob. He was always near his home, near his father, near his mother. Now he had traveled a day's journey from home, and it was a miserable trip. As he lifts up one foot and puts down the other they seem to say, "Ja-cob—you—lied—to—your—fath-er." As the wind slides through the trees it hisses out, "Jacob, you deceived your father." The journey is long. The sun is hot. Jacob is weary. If it were only himself that he had to carry along he could have been more lighthearted, but he is also bearing his iniquities. The burden presses down upon him until he can bear it no longer. He cries out, "My sin! O my sin! My sin is ever before me!" He is tired and alone as the sun sinks in the west, the daylight fades away, and darkness closes in—what a lonely country—what a desolate place. Finally, since he can find nothing better, he gathers a few stones together for a pillow and goes to sleep.

As Jacob lies sleeping, he thinks he is alone, but not so, for God is there. The darkness is split open with the glory of heaven, and sin is driven away as the presence of God fills the place. Jacob sees a ladder reaching up to heaven with angels going up and down upon it and God standing at the top. He hears a voice—God's voice.

I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again unto this land; for I will not leave thee

—Genesis 28:13-15

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Jacob has met the Almighty. He felt so near to God—so near that he could stretch out his hand and touch the steps of God’s throne. Jacob awoke and said, “Surely the Lord was in this place: and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place: this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven And he called the name of that place Bethel” (Genesis 28:16-17, 19).

The night was gone, and the light was filtering through the darkness as Jacob resumed his journey. Finally, as he came to his Uncle Laban’s home, his eyes fell on Rachel, Laban’s daughter. For seven years he worked for his uncle that he might have Rachel as his wife, but in vain, for he was given her sister, Leah. Seven more years he worked for Rachel, then for six more years he labored and became possessor of much cattle.

After having worked twenty years for Laban he had wives, children, servants, and cattle. In the morning he would care for his cattle, in the afternoon he would play with his children, in the evening he would count up his earnings, and through the night he would be with his wives. When did he pray? When did he spend time with God? Jacob had forgotten about God! Over twenty years separated Jacob from the Bethel experience. The twenty years with Laban and without God had been difficult ones for Jacob. In the day the drought consumed him, the frost troubled him by night, and sleep departed from his eyes.

Jacob left Laban’s house to live at Shechem. There his daughter Dinah was defiled, and in return her brothers killed the men of Shechem for their wicked act. Jacob, who had once met God, was now living in that wicked city. It was here that God said unto him, “Arise, go up to *Bethel* and *dwell there*” (Genesis 35:1). To us Bethel is a cold, empty, meaningless word, but not so to Jacob. At the sound of that word his heart leaped, and his soul thrilled as his mind flew back over the twenty years and he saw again the light, the glory, the ladder to heaven, and the angels. He felt again the power of God surge through him, as he recalled how God had spoken to him. He remembered that dreadful place, the house of God, the gate of heaven—Bethel. “I will go back to Bethel! I will again meet God! Whatever the cost, I will return!”

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Have you had a Bethel in your life? A time when you met God face to face? A time when His loving kindness sought you, His mercy amazed you, His glory was round about you, and His love melted your soul? A time when God was so near that you felt you could touch Him? When you heard Him speak to you in what you thought to be an almost audible voice? But since that time things have come in—perhaps twenty years have passed as in Jacob’s life. The burdens of raising a family, financial worries, your wages changed ten times like Jacob’s, these would all weigh heavy on your heart.

You have spent so much time earning a living and taking care of your family that you have not had time for God. His glory has departed, His Word is no longer precious, His great love no longer makes you weep. Oh, go with Jacob back to Bethel! Again go to meet God, return to the One who has blessed you in the past, and see if His hand is not still able to pour out blessings, and His lips still overflow with grace and forgiveness. Return to Bethel!

The first time Jacob had been to Bethel he was there for only one night, but now God told him, “Go up to Bethel and *dwell there*” (Genesis 35:1, italics added). This life where God was near and even spoke to him was not to be spasmodic—an experience for only one night—because Jacob was told to go to Bethel and “dwell there.”

Jacob’s Household is Cleansed

“Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, ‘Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: And let us arise, and go up to Bethel!’” (Genesis 35:2-3).

Is it not of significance that the first revival in the Bible took place in a family? We do not read about a church being revived, nor a nation, but a family. Today we pray that we might have revival in our churches. We pray that our nation might turn to God, but we have forgotten about our homes. We are willing to pray for a revival in the church, and then if it does not come we can lay the blame on our president or on some of the wicked politicians. But you dare not pray for a revival in your own home, for if you do and

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it doesn't come, then whose fault is it? Then whose sin is hindering? The price is great, but if you would have a revival in your church you must first have one in your home.

When the Philippian jailer asked Paul what he must do to be saved, Paul replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house" (Acts 16:31). Did this mean that when the jailer believed, his wife and children would be automatically saved also? Not at all, but Paul knew that when one in the family is converted and lives a holy life, the others will see this with the result that they will turn to God also. If your religion is the real thing it will stand the test at home.

Jesus called out to the little man in the tree, "Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house" (Luke 19:5). Jesus wanted to go home with Zacchaeus, but we are willing that Jesus should go any place with us except home. We do not want Jesus to hear the radio programs that we listen to, nor to see the books and magazines that we read. We do not care to have Him around when we have our family troubles and fights. We do not want Jesus to see that the commands, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1) and, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath" (Ephesians 6:4) are broken every day in our homes. Revival must start in our homes.

Jacob knew that his God was a jealous God and would not give His glory to another. Therefore Jacob said to his household, "Put away the strange gods that are among you" (Genesis 35:2). He knew that if he were going to return to Bethel, God should have first place in his family. If you would return to Bethel with your family you must put away *the strange gods*.

The Cities Round About Them

We read, "And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them" (Genesis 35:5), for they realized that God was with Jacob. Those who were near him, even his neighbors with all their other concerns, knew that his home was different from theirs, since God was the ruler of Jacob's home, and the strange gods were put out. God's presence does make a

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difference. A family that loves God and does His will is a rebuke to a family that goes its own way, the end thereof being the way of death.

If you have a revival in your family your neighbors will know it, and you will not think yourself better than your neighbor for you will find the Scriptures to say, “He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth” (Proverbs 14:21). You will not seek to do anything against him for again the Bible says, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor” (Romans 13:10), and in another place, “Devise not evil against thy neighbor” (Proverbs 3:29).

Finally you will heed the command of Christ as He said, “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). Your neighbor’s hard heart will be moved toward God when he sees that you love him as you love yourself. As he sees your family live in godliness and holiness he will cry out with the psalmist, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2).

Jacob at Bethel Once More

Bethel had not changed nor had God changed, but it was Jacob who had strayed away from Bethel and away from God. God was still willing to fill Jacob’s cup till it ran over, to satisfy his mouth with good things, and to renew his strength so he could mount up with wings as an eagle. When Jacob returned to Bethel he found God—the God who is from everlasting to everlasting, who is never in a hurry and yet who is never late—waiting for him.

We read that “God appeared unto Jacob” (Genesis 35:9). But you say, “Does not the Scripture tell us that no man hath seen God at any time?” (John 1:18). Wait! Do not argue with Jacob because he says that God appeared unto him. But you say, “‘God is a spirit’ (John 4:24) and how can a spirit be seen?” Yes, God is a spirit, but Jacob was a spiritual man. The natural man cannot see that which is spiritual, but cannot the spiritual man see that which is spirit? There is no paradox here. Finite words cannot fully describe or explain an infinite God. We can see God! “God appeared to Jacob.” God will appear to us!

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We read also that when God appeared unto Jacob, he blessed him. It is good when our friends bless us, we desire the blessing of our father, and our pastor's blessing is received with reverence. But what can equal the blessing of God? Perhaps you have seen others receive a blessing from God and you too desire a blessing from the Lord. You seek a blessing and God does bless you, but alas, you have only the one. Do not seek a blessing from God. Seek God! Blessings are nothing; God is everything. Seek God and find Him, for then you will have all the blessings you can hold. But remember, before God blessed Jacob He appeared to him, and before God appeared to him he went back to Bethel, and before Jacob went back to Bethel he put away the strange gods.

Jacob had gone to Bethel. God had appeared to him, and he had received a blessing from the Lord. No longer was Jacob, which meant supplanter, a fitting name for him. God changed his name, giving him the new name of Israel, a prince with God. Yes, the new name was much more fitting for the new man.

Also we find that the old promise was renewed when Jacob returned to Bethel. Undoubtedly Jacob had forgotten all about the promise that God had made to him at Bethel those many years ago, but now it was reaffirmed.

Furthermore we read that God talked to Jacob. Not only God talked to Jacob, but also that Jacob talked to God. If, when Jacob had returned to Bethel, God had not appeared to him, God had not blessed him, and God had not changed his name; still it would have been worth the journey just to have talked with God. The God of the universe stoops to talk with men. What an opportunity, what a privilege! With reverence and awe we should come before His presence. How we should put all our earnestness, all our mental powers, all our spiritual forces into this talk with God, for He is the God who never slumbers or sleeps, whose ears never weary of hearing the footsteps of faith approach His throne. How often we like fools, have rushed hastily before the God of heaven and earth. Let us come before Him reverently, making our requests with all humility that we may talk with Him aright.

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“And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with Him, even a pillar of stone” (Genesis 35:14). Why did Jacob do this and what was the pillar for? Here is the reason. In the days after this as he lived at Bethel, the blessing that God bestowed upon him would seem to lose its freshness, and then Jacob would look at that pillar of stone and once more God would bless him abundantly. Or someday he might begin to doubt the promise that God had made to him. But when he beheld that pillar he would remember the exact words God had spoken to him and the doubts would vanish. Then as Satan would come with temptations, Jacob would see the pillar and be reminded of the appearance of God, the blessing, the new name, the renewed promise. He would lift up his voice and cry out, “What, sin against the God who has done all this for me! Sin, and displease God who has condescended to talk with me, and to bless me! Never! Never! Get thee behind me, Satan.”

When you go back to Bethel, set up a pillar in the center of your memory that you may never forget that day. Write it in your diary, make a note on the flyleaf of your Bible, do anything to remember it; but never forget the day when you and your family returned to God. Jacob never regretted that he returned to Bethel, and neither will you regret returning to God. We will never have revival in our churches or in our nations until Christian families go back to God. Whatever the cost, with your family, return to Bethel!