

ZEPHANIAH, thoughts on Revival.

Readings: [Zephaniah 1:1-7](#);
[2 Chronicles 34:1-35:20](#);
[2 Kings 22:1-23:28](#).

Zephaniah was a power preacher during the last days of the seventh century before Christ. His preaching was fierce and grim and as you read this book through you may come to the conclusion that here was a very angry man, apparently due to the way his generation lived, but actually this is not the case, for when we study the background to Zephaniah's time we begin to realize that this man was a great revival preacher. He preached in the days of king Josiah and it was during this time that the king brought great reforms to the life of Israel, he turned the nation back towards God.

Zephaniah was normally found preaching in the streets, his aim was to bring a new spiritual life to this nation.

We shall be using the background of Zephaniah's times and the subject of his preaching to deal with three questions which are often asked about the act of revival today.

We shall be considering:

- (1) What is revival?
- (2) Why does revival need to happen?
- (3) How does a revival happen?

What is Revival?

The idea of revival is referring to something which was once alive, but it is very ill or has in fact died and now needs considerable work to recover or to be made alive again if possible. So if you are asking, calling for revival then why? What is wrong with your life that it needs revival?

We often use the term revival in Christian circles, it is taken to mean an input or infusion of Spiritual Life by the Holy Spirit into a person or a group of people, perhaps a physical church.

So, based upon the definition of "revival." When we talk about an act or event of revival, we must ask ourselves questions about the state of the Christian community, is it ill or is it apparently even dead?

Here are four fact which must be considered.

Before revival we have to ask, "Is the person or is the group spiritually alive to start with?" Are they involved in just dead worship, mouthing Christian words or phrases, then just fulfilling the set rituals of worship, but inwardly they have no true meaning to them. They are dead regarding the true worship and obedience to God and therefore not having a daily walk with Him.

The Bible tells us that if you have realized you are a sinner, and asked for forgiveness through Jesus, then you have been born again. If you are born again then the Holy Spirit has become part of you, making you a child of God. The Spirit may be part of your life but you might be stopping Him working by your own personal life.

Are you and the church hearing and responding to the personal prompts, the calling of God's Spirit? If you are hearing the voice of God, then are you then being obedient to the voice of this loving, spiritual, God, who is inviting you to a closer walk with Him?

So before a person or a church start calling for revival, let them first examine themselves. They must ask, "is there any reason for the fact that revival is needed? Are we dead?"

Are we being filled and indwelt by God's Spirit?

Why does it need to happen?

Looking back over the Old Testament times, the New Testament times and the church since then, we find that there have been periods of ups and downs, periods of preaching of God's Word and periods of nothing. This immediately raises more questions which we must ask.

Why does this happen so regularly?

Why does something, which is spiritually alive, die so often? Why does the history of the church also show these periodic revivals so often?

There are probably two or three reasons for this, let us look at the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah, and see if we can find the answers.

[Zephaniah 1:5,6.](#)

"1 The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

2 I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.

3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

4 I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;

5 And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham;

6 And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for him."

So these verses are a message from God through Zephaniah to the Jewish nation, so what is God telling the people?

God is pointing out the presence of sin in Mankind - as members of Adam's race there is something that prevents us relating to a Holy God, it is permanently built into just like gravity, our nature is always pulling our spiritual life away from God. We are like an aeroplane, if the engines stop, it does not matter how clever the pilot is, it just has to come down, it needs power continually to stay up in the air.

Sin is like that, it is continually pulling us away from the spiritual power of God, without a fresh input from God this must happen, human nature is that way. As a result the most natural thing about our spiritual life is that it dies!

We must therefore ask what things in our lives can cause our spiritual life to die?

What is the center of our life, our interests, what do we try to make the main interest in our life time, can it be replacing God, or perhaps it may have already become so important it has already become our god replacement?

Let me suggest some things which can become very important in our lives. Our position, status, finance, money, associates, friends, possessions, there are so many, our life commitments must always tend to block out, to prevent the influence of God's Spirit on our inner life.

God cannot work or even look upon any sins and He cannot work through us if sin is present. His power to make us Holy is stopped and the inner life becomes dead.

We each must have a source of "fuel," either from the teaching of God's Word by His church leader messengers or the studying of it ourself.

Do you read or study the Bible on a daily basis?

A second reason is a failure to pass on the teaching and spiritual life from one generation to the next - we can pass on our beliefs to another generation but how can we pass on our spiritual life, – or our own inner worship and relationship with God. You can only point the way.

You can teach, expound the doctrines of God's Word, we can take the children to church, but how can you pass on that experience of the presence and closeness of God. They have to find it themselves, and its not easy. How did you find it?

Can you explain exactly how you came to know the Lord and then how you are growing in Him? You do belong to Him, don't you? So we often find that there is one generation which worships God with all its mind and spirit and the next generation, though still attending church, has lost the will to follow closely on. The inner person has died and thus cannot pass on anything.

Returning back to Zephaniah's day let us see if there is something which we can learn for our generation and the future.

When king Josiah came onto the throne in 640 B.C. there had been 50 years of spiritual falling away.

Manasseh was the most evil king of Jewish history, his reign was a time of religious falling away from God.

This was caused by the presence, actions and possible terror of the Assyria nation, and yet there was a fascination in the Assyrian nations religious cults, this resulted in the Jews introducing illegal and false worshipping altars into the temple.

King Amon, who followed Manasseh, continued in this vein and so for over 30 years these two had destroyed the spiritual life of the Jewish nation, they led the people into deep idolatry and during this time the nation was largely converted to Paganism.

The point to notice is that despite the rejection of worshipping God, the Jewish temple was still there and being used. The sacrifices were still being made every day, the priests were doing their work, but the hearts of the people had turned away from their faith in God and they were putting their faith into the idols of the Canaanites.

King Josiah came to the throne at the age of eight by the action of assassins, who killed his father, the people then killed the assassins. Unfortunately this was not a sign of them turning back to God, more probably an act of anger over the death of the king.

King Josiah, though young, was apparently very powerful, he introduced religious reformation rapidly, he ordered the destruction of the high places and groves which were used for idol worship over a large part of the country.

By the eighteenth year of his reign the temple was being repaired and cleansed and the full true worship of God was being restored. As a result of all this cleanup, the climax was reached when the priests discovered the Books containing the Laws, as given by God, in the rubbish which had been collecting in the temple.

[2 Kings 22:1ff.](#)

These books had not been read for many years, the priests started to read the books during the so called worship rituals that these people had been using in their worship of God, but the people did not know or understand why they performed the various actions. Now they began to understand what was the reason and result of the worship.

This is a warning to ourselves, if we stop reading regularly the Word of God we could soon forget the reason for doing the correct actions of worship. We must beware, church leaders can be very quick to introduce emphasis into different actions in our worship practice. We can see it in the way our modern churches are tending to go, many people are saying "I'll have the devotion but let us forget the doctrine!"

Let me give you an example of how an action can be introduced into worship.

Why do some churches use incense as part of the worship? I was recently watching a service on television and the priests were going round waving the incense over the people, the altar, the candlesticks, apparently to cleanse them. How did this action start? Though incense were used as part of the worship in the temple worship, it is not in the Bible the way the church was using it.

We have to go back a few years to find the answer. Back in the middle ages, when people did not wash too much, the church had to be disinfected and was then made to smell nice using the incense to cover up the smells of the disinfectant, now man has turned this operation into part of his worship.

Back in the Josiah's times we find that both Jeremiah and Zephaniah began to preach in the streets of Jerusalem. Because of their preaching many of the Jews renewed their faith in God and as a result the spiritual life of the nation grew.

This process in the worship God, a period of revival, followed by a falling away from God, perhaps even dieing completely, then again revival many years later seems to occurs throughout Jewish history, and it is still happening today in the modern church. Compare the comments made by Jesus about the churches of ,

[Revelation 2:1 to 3:22.](#)

So how does a revival happen?

It often starts with an individual or a small group of people who become responsive to an action by God.

Their worship comes from their hearts, they influence their local church and it begins to change and spread through the area until hundreds of churches are in tune with God's voice and responding to His call.

Unfortunately, in some cases the growth is so slow that it may die again before it is able to spread. But God is always in control of the situation and it could be by His hands that the revival has stops for some reason.

It's interesting to note some of the things which often happen in a nation when it becomes conscious of the presence of God, people become guilt conscious of their past wrongs, and often things stolen many years before are returned to their owners. In Canada some years ago it happened and shops had to ask people to stop returning all the things they had stolen as they did not know what to do with them.

That's the effect of God's presence. That's what happens when God's power starts to work.

Remember it may only start with a small number of people. The number is not important, it is the power of God working through those people who have committed themselves totally to the will of God. Notice it's the will of God, not their own desires. With a revival in the churches there is always another event, many

people turn to God for His forgiveness, they see in the lives of those church members something great, something which they want, the people glow with the presence of God, hearts and voices are lifted up in love for God and each other. A desire to please God, to preach His word, bring Christ to the Nation. But it's not just a Sunday revival, a feeling of being good, it's there everyday of the week, and the world knows it!!!

That's revival!!!

Zephaniah was the man that God chose and was using him to speak to the Jewish nation and to awaken that spiritual desires in their hearts.

We have looked at what is revival, why we need it, now let us look at what causes it to happen, the key question?

There seem to be two ideas about revival.

1) Some feel that revival is completely as a result of God's power and His sovereignty. God chooses when and how, and it has nothing to do with man. Nothing to do with his prayers, or with his actions, in other words God lights the fuse when He knows it is right. There does seem to be considerable evidence that this is what happens.

2) There are others who preach that it is just like farming, the seeds are planted, tended and cared for, the rains come, the crop grows. And revival occurs.

Certainly there has to be preparation, the church has to be ready to move, the seeds have to be planted, the workers prepared, trained, ready for action, but will that on its own make revival occur? I doubt it, for where would the spiritual power come from, we're back to the plane with no fuel again, and what happens if it's not God's will?

3) Man cannot possibly tell God what to do.

I suspect that the truth is somewhere between these two. You cannot plan for a revival, you cannot make it happen, yet if you look at church history God has brought to the fore, people, leaders, just at the right time, to bring about and prepare the ground for God to work a revival.

Let's return to Zephaniah and set how it happened then, there appear to be two basic preconditions for revival to take place.

1) Firstly the awareness of God's Holiness.

2) Secondly a deep awareness of man's sinfulness and the need for forgiveness by God, and a desire to tell others about it.

Throughout history these have happened at each revival.

In chapter 1 of Zephaniah we see the emphasis on the Holiness of God, It emphasizes God's right to Judge Mankind and what He will do.

How do we know how Holy God is? By His judgement, because it is absolutely perfect. For we have a God who cannot look upon any sin, not even the smallest sin can be tolerated by Him, and He must punish anything which has sinned.

[Romans 3:23.](#)

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; "

In [Zephaniah 1:2,3](#) we read these words,

"I will consume and sweep away man and beast; I will consume and sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. will overthrow the stumbling blocks-the idols-with the wicked worshipers, and I will cut off mankind from the off of the earth, says the Lord."

[Zephaniah 1:7.](#)

"Be silent before the Lord God, for the day of the Lord is near; for the Lord has prepared a sacrifice and He has set apart those who have accepted His invitation."

[Zephaniah 1:14.](#)

"The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast. Hark! the voice of the day of the Lord."

Notice that revival is always accompanied by the preaching of Judgement, as we can see here in Zephaniah. Zephaniah was the first of the old testament prophets to give the emphasis to the **"day of the Lord."** That day, which is the culmination of human history, when God plans to bring to an end all that man has strived

for, a day of Judgement, is the day when God's righteousness will be shown, when all men will have to bow down to His Son.

Are you prepared for that day?

Are you ready for the Judgement of God?

There are four things which Zephaniah says about the "Day of the Lord": -

1) [Zephaniah 1:2,3](#). All are affected.

In the verses just read we find that every part of creation, the animals, the birds and Mankind are involved. Nobody, nothing will escape.

2) [Zephaniah 1:14](#). It's very imminent, the New Testament emphasizes this.

It's coming fast and it's the next thing in God's programme. Everything which has so far happened to Mankind is just building up to that one day.

3) [Zephaniah 1:1-17](#). Tells us it will be a day of great terror.

We do not want to dwell upon this as the Bible gives a full description in [Revelation 20:1ff](#).

4) [Zephaniah 2:1](#)- All nations will be judged by God, all have sinned. that means you and I!!!

In Zephaniah's day the Jewish nation had rejected God. but now they were turning back to God, a revival had started Zephaniah could see that God was already working in the Jews, to bring Judgement upon them, they were turning back to Him.

Unfortunately, it was not to last and God found it necessary to send the Jewish nation into exile as judgement for their further rejection of Himself.

He did this by the hands of the Babylonians only a few years later.

It's interesting to note that God used an even more evil nation, the Babylonians, to punish His own people and bring them to their knees.

For revival to occur man must first of all become conscious of the Holiness of God and secondly he must become conscious of his sinfulness. It starts with the Church, the body of Christ.

Are you prepared to look upon yourself in the way that God looks at you, and to ask Him "what will you have me to do?" And mean it!!

You need to humble yourself before Him.

When you think about a God who cannot even look upon sin, what does He see when He looks at your heart, and your thoughts?

[Romans 12:1](#))

"I appeal to you brethren and beg of you, in view of all the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies, presenting all your members and faculties as a living sacrifice holy and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service and spiritual worship,"

"Lord let there be revival" is a common cry from the churches. Then let us prepare our hearts, sow the seeds, so that God can light the fuse.

Let us examine ourselves.

First are we conscious of the Holiness of God in our lives.

Secondly are we conscious of the sin and self worship in our lives.

Thirdly, are we preparing ourselves for Him to work.