

Revival Today: America's History of Biblical Revival and Its Modern Application

Matthew Musser

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2022

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

David E. Adams, D.Min.
Thesis Chair

Chris L. Jones, Ph.D.
Committee Member

James H. Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

Date

Abstract

There is a need for revival within the church today. Christian revivals are becoming less and less popular in the current times. Is this due to a subtle shift in America's culture? Or is this decline of religious revival the result of something deeper? This thesis will seek to discover the biblical foundations of revival in American history. First, it will analyze some of the biblical revivals that took place in the Old Testament, Gospels, and Book of Acts. Then it will transition into how these biblical principles have been the cornerstone for many of the great revivals in American history. The historical research will include an analysis of the biblical accounts of revival, with careful cultural studies and exegetical commentary. Also, an investigation into the historical accounts of American revival will be conducted.

After the historical research has been performed, this thesis will attempt to draw applications for today. The goal of this thesis will be to provide specific and concrete ways for church leaders and pastors to incorporate methods of revival into their own ministry. The author hopes that these methods will be both biblically and historically based so that there might be a revival of revival within the Church today.

REVIVAL TODAY	4
---------------	---

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
List of Tables	6
Definition of Terms	7
Introduction and Overview	8

Part One: Revival in the Bible

Revival in the Old Testament	11
Revival under Moses (Deuteronomy 30:1-10)	12
Revival under Jonah (Jonah 3:1-10)	13
Revival under Ezra (Ezra 10:1-15)	18
Revival in the New Testament	21
Jesus' Ministry of Revival	21
The Apostles' Ministry of Revival	25

Part Two: Historical Revival in the American Church

A Chronological Overview of Revival in American History	27
The Great Awakening (1734-1743)	28
The Second Great Awakening (1800-1840)	30
The Urban Revivals (1875-1885)	31
Revival in the 1900s.....	32
Sociological Components to American Revival	33
America's Founding and Religious Freedom	33
War and Social Unrest as a Catalyst for Revival	35
Youth Movements Leading to Widespread Revival.....	37

Biblical Availability and Authority39

Part Three: Modern Application for Revival Today

Pray 41

Prepare..... 42

Persuade..... 42

Preach..... 43

Pursue..... 44

Bibliography 46

List of Tables

Table

1. Examples of Biblical Revival in the Old and New Testaments.....	11
2. Critically Labeled Revivals in America’s History.....	28
3. Prominent Evangelists in American Revival	32
4. Revivals in Youth Culture	39

Definition of Terms

Revival: a moment in time when a prophet, apostle, or preacher goes to a gathered group of people and gives them God's message, which is followed by humble repentance and a genuine desire to follow the Lord in a renewed way.

Awakening: similar to revival, yet distinct in both its magnitude and effect, as it results in nationwide commitment and cultural changes.

Repentance: a key component in both biblical and historical revival, it involves the individual forsaking of sin and dependence upon the Holy Spirit for godly, daily living.

Youth Culture: consisting of both teenagers and young adults this group of people has had a significant impact on the religious influence of America's culture.

Social Movements: those events, usually coinciding with religious revival, that drastically impacted the landscape of America's political and collective culture.

The Church: described in both the local church and universal Church context, designated by capitalization. The Church exists as the primary means of conveying the gospel to the world, through equipping its members to share and show the love of Christ.

Revival Today: America's History of Biblical Revival and Its Modern Application

Christian revival is dying. There is no question about it. What was a key component of American Christianity as little as 25 years ago, now has been discarded as an artifact of an ancient age.¹ The question is: what has changed? What has caused this swing towards evangelistic indifference in the church? Ultimately, there are only a limited number of options.

The first is that God never did use revivals or great evangelistic meetings in the first place. They were not the method he used to bring about repentance and revival in the Bible or throughout church history. They are merely a farce, schemes of men to gain power and attention. This view believes such revivals are not of God's Spirit and are instead the result of the plans of man.

The second possibility is that though God did use these types of assemblies in the past he no longer requires them. They are a relic of ages gone by and now God uses different means to renew the church. This view finds difficulties when it comes to the unchangeable nature of God. It straddles a thin line by saying that God's nature does not change but his methods do.

But there is another option. The historical revivals of America's past are founded in the biblical revivals of ancient antiquity, with both holding important, practical applications for the Church today. It is this last view that motivates the research of this thesis. Its author holds out hope that God is still able to send revival and renewal to the Church. It is His Church, after all. With this in mind, this thesis will begin by looking at the biblical accounts of revival in the Old and New Testaments. To start, a working definition of revival will be made, in an attempt to clarify the terms and circumstances of the biblical narrative.

¹ Carey Nieuwhof "Revivals are Dead: 5 Things that Will Never be the Same Again," Accessed March 27, 2022. <https://careynieuwhof.com/revivals-are-dead-5-things-that-will-never-be-the-same-again/>.

Once this biblical understanding and appreciation of revival has been established this thesis will analyze past revivals in American history. These will be examined in light of their biblical foundations or lack thereof. General themes and common ideas will be extracted from these revivals. Also, the impact of these revivals on the modern church and its leaders will be discussed.

After an adequate comprehension of the biblical and historical roots of revival has been established the thesis will conclude by developing practical application points for modern preachers and pastors. It is the goal of this thesis to be not only descriptive of past revivals, but also prescriptive and helpful to the modern minister and church.

Revival is not for the vivacious. It is not even for the dead. It is for the dying. Again, it is no secret that Christianity is dying in the postmodern world of America. It is into such a situation that an influx of revival is most needed and will be most effective. Let there be revival today!

Part One: Revival in The Bible

In order to find the correct viewpoint, of the possible ones listed above, the first place one must turn is to God's Word. The doctrines and opinions of men change every day. Despite this generation's best efforts to gather more scientific data and advanced technologies, the problems that plague the human heart remained unsolved. People are constantly trying to find something in which they can put their faith, but the fleeting opinions of mankind are insufficient to hold such deep, foundational convictions.

So, there must first come a realization that, amid changing sentiments, there remains something constant. The Bible has been, and will always be, the baseline from which all change can be measured. Jesus vouched for the authority of the Scriptures (Matt 5:18). And when things seem to be at their worst and most chaotic, the Church must turn back to the truth of God's

Word. Through a solid reading of his Word (and subsequent study and preaching), one can see true revival.² Ultimately, revival will bring the hearts of men back to their Creator. Paul commended the Thessalonians who “received the word of God, which you heard from us, [and] accepted it not as the word of men but as what it is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers”³ (1 Th 2:13). The same revival is desperately needed today.

Perhaps part of the turning away from religious revival is a neglect to appreciate its biblical foundation, particularly in the Old Testament. Too often, evangelistic meetings are chalked up as charismatic and emotional. Revivals today are often seen as a ploy of the modern church to gain new members and eventually new money. Or, on the other hand, people see them as outreach events that are designed to draw in tremendous numbers of people and boost the church’s popularity. Obviously, such a structure is not biblical and should not be accepted by anyone.

First, it is important to describe what this thesis will classify as *revival* in the Bible. The modern concept of revival involves large meetings of individuals, some of whom are from the church, who come together to hear God’s Word spoken by a preacher or evangelist and then are given an opportunity to respond publicly. In recent years the use of the word revival has also included large evangelistic meetings intended to present the Gospel message. So, for this thesis revival in the Old and New Testaments, will be those times where a prophet or Apostle goes to a group of people and gives them God’s message and encourages them to repent, which, of course, is also a central theme of modern revivals.

² Kenneth Berding, *Bible Revival: Recommitting Ourselves to One Book*, (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2018), 7.

³ Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture, references are taken from the *English Standard Version*, (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2006).

Table 1. – *Examples of Biblical Revival in the Old and New Testaments.*⁴

Scripture	Date	Location	Leader	People Group
Deu. 30:1-10	1462 B.C.	Mt. Sinai	Moses	Israel
1 Sam. 7	1074 B.C.	Mizpah	Samuel	Israel
2 Chron. 19	870 B.C.	Judah	Jehoshaphat	Judah
Jon. 3:1-10	767 B.C.	Nineveh	Jonah	Gentiles
Ezra 10:1-15	458 B.C.	Jerusalem	Ezra	Returned Exiles
Luke 3:1-17	26 A.D.	Jordan River	John the Bapt.	Jews
Luke 4:14-15	27 A.D.	Galilee	Jesus	Jews
Acts 2:14-41	30 A.D.	Pentecost	Peter	Jews
Acts 8:4-8	31 A.D.	Samaria	Phillip	Gentiles
Acts 13-28	48-57 A.D.	Mediterranean/Europe	Paul	Everyone

Obviously, there is no shortage of such examples in the Bible. For brevity, this thesis will focus on the key revivals in the Old Testament, the ministry of Jesus, and his Apostles in the book of Acts.

Revival in The Old Testament

Obviously, there is no shortage of revival examples in the Old Testament. This thesis will focus on the three primary instances. These samples carry the same themes and messages as many of the other cases found throughout the Old Testament. As mentioned, repentance and an emphasis on the attitude and behavior of the listeners plays a large role in the revivals of the Old

⁴ Information for this table gained from <https://romans1015.com/bible-revivals/>.

Testament. In his book, *Return to Me*, Mark Boda discusses how repentance in the Old Testament serves several purposes. At times, repentance causes the disciplinary hand of God to cease, and elsewhere it causes the people to experience the full blessings of the land. It can also cause the surrounding nations to be drawn to Yahweh as they see the forgiveness he offers to Israel.⁵ Each of these will take place in the following stories of Revival in the Old Testament.

Revival Under Moses (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). Moses sums up all that the people of Israel need to know in his farewell address. If ever there was a need of revival it was now. The people were in a similar position as their forefathers. Would they display the same level of disbelief, or would they step forward in faith? Moses' message to them was straightforward and basic. He set before them two options: blessings or curses. Two choices: life or death.

First, Moses said, "when all these things come upon you..." (Deu 30:1) It was not a question of *if* but *when*. This is important to remember, especially in a culture, and at a time, where everyone thinks they can get away with everything. Recompense and reward should both be stressed from the pulpit.⁶ The reality of a just God who will make a just judgement must be emphasized. God does not play games (Gal 6:7).

Next, Moses says clearly, "which I [God] have set before you" (Deu 30:1). Both the blessing and the curse. Some people might think that this shows the cruelty of God. But it actually shows the sovereignty and power of God. He does not just use the good things in life to draw people to himself. He is able to help his people in the deepest, darkest moments of their lives, if they will let him (Rom 8:28).

⁵ Mark J. Boda, *Return to Me: A Biblical Theology of Repentance*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 154.

⁶ Rick Warren, "Preach the Truth of the Bible to See Real Transformation." Accessed March 22, 2022. <https://pastors.com/transformed-by-truth/>.

The key to returning to God is repentance and this involves forsaking one's selfish, sinful ways; instead, now obeying the voice of God and his commandments. And to do this wholeheartedly, involves giving up on sins once held onto. Obviously, this is not easy, but it is necessary, if a person is to follow God with all their heart and with all their soul. The reality of possible exile and continual wandering is also seen here. Additionally, elsewhere in the Old Testament narrative it is seen that "[t]he discipline of exile will prompt a remembrance of these covenant principles and motivate them to 'return' and 'obey' Yahweh..."⁷

Moses closes his address to the people by reminding of the conditional nature of the Covenant. He says that God will restore their fortunes, gather them together, and clean their heart (v. 3, 4, 6). It is no coincidence that the passage is symmetrically centered around the idea of the people having a pure heart.⁸ All of this is done in order that the people will love the Lord with their whole heart and commit to living for him (v. 7-8). The Hebrew implies the use of the mind, or intellect, in knowing God.⁹ Ultimately, Moses indicated that God would take delight in blessing the people and in being their God were they to follow these commandments (v. 10).

Revival Under Jonah (Jonah 3:1-10). The story of Jonah is also well-known by most Christians today. Indeed, even some in the secular world have heard this great tale and marveled at its miracles and intense plot line. But this book is more than a story and it records the events of history accurately and faithfully. Jesus attested to the legitimacy of the story of Jonah (Matt 12:39-40), and if he believed it, then so must his Church.

⁷ Boda, *'Return to Me'*, 44.

⁸ *ESV Expository Commentary (Volume 2): Deuteronomy-Ruth*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 282.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Historically, there is recorded a great religious revival in the city of Nineveh outside of the biblical testimony. Harold Willmington explains: “It is known that about this time there was a religious movement in Nineveh, which resulted in a change from the worship of many gods to that of one God, whom they called Nebo.”¹⁰ He goes on to describe how this change to monotheistic religion was likely caused by the preaching of the prophet Jonah. Willmington states that Jonah “did not preach repentance to the Ninevites in the name of Yahweh (the Hebrew God of the Covenant), but in the name of Elohim (the triune Creator of the universe; Gen 1:1).”¹¹ This explains the historical evidence of Nineveh’s repentance and allows modern readers to trust that the Bible’s representation of history is correct, and moreover, beneficial to us today. In its four brief chapters the book of Jonah outlines a story of God’s command, his judgement, and his compassion and grace.

The record of the Bible and ancient history clearly determine that the people of Nineveh were extremely wicked. The city itself was founded long ago—around 2350 B.C.—by the ancient king Nimrod and had now grown to cover a vast area, over a three day’s journey in diameter (cf. Gen 10:8-12).¹² It was a hub of commerce and trade for the Assyrian Kingdom. It would eventually become the capital of the empire before its subsequent collapse around 612-609 BC.

¹⁰ H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible*, 30th ed, (Carol Stream, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), eBook Version, Jonah Preaching (Demonstrating God’s Power).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² C. E. Autrey, *Revivals of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 87.

As for the people of the city, they were ruthless. They were known for their ability to torture and murder.¹³ So then, it should come as no surprise that Jonah, out of fear or anger, was hesitant to go to Nineveh to preach to them. And so, he fled the call of God, going in the opposite direction to try to get away from the mission placed on his life. What a comfort it should be to ministers today that no matter their past decisions, even if they have deliberately turned their back on God's command, he can still use them to accomplish his task.

Because, as it were, God gave Jonah a second chance. After he had brought him to the shores of Nineveh (not by boat, but by fish) God's speaks to Jonah a second time. From this it can be seen that an important principle is that the spoken word of the Lord is what starts any true revival.¹⁴ Whether it is spoken for the first time, the second time, or the thousandth time, revival is initiated by the word of the Lord and not the word of man. Notice Jonah was to preach "the message that I [God] tell you." (v. 2) Jonah was not to preach the message he wanted to preach. Neither was he to preach the message that the people wanted him to preach. Sadly, each of these in great abundance today. Preachers who are quick to use the pulpit for their own personal agenda or to espouse the popular, trending ideologies of their day.¹⁵ The pulpit is not meant to be another platform for man to speak, but a place where the Holy Spirit of God can speak through man.

So, Jonah gets up and makes his way to Nineveh. And he does so "according to the word of the Lord" (v. 3). His message was of judgement. It was simply this: "Yet forty days, and

¹³ Bolin, M. T. "Nineveh as Sin City." Accessed March 28, 2022. <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/related-articles/nineveh-as-sin-city>.

¹⁴ Berding, *Bible Revival*, 59.

¹⁵ Hiller, Bob. "The Pulpit is Not Your Platform." Accessed March 22, 2022. <https://thejaggedword.com/2016/06/10/the-pulpit-is-not-your-platform/>.

Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (v. 4). Yet, the people responded. Also, that his message had a time element to it. The people had 40 days. Too often preachers neglect the fact that the tolerance of God is only temporary. Thus, people are under the delusion that they have all the time in the world. They live it up while they can, unaware that they are storing up judgement for themselves on the day when God’s righteous anger will be revealed. Yet, God says, “My spirit shall not always strive with man...” (Gen 6:3. KJV). If the Church is to have effective ministers of the gospel, then it must make “the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16).

And it was such a message that caused belief in the people. Verse 5 states, “the people of Nineveh believed God.” Autrey states that it seems that the entirety of the city now believed the word spoken to them by the prophet Jonah.¹⁶ And now they feel it is necessary to change. They sought the Lord with desperation. They displayed a hopeful trust in the Lord, that Autrey observes was unique among the Gentile nations in the Old Testament.¹⁷

They repented in sackcloth and ashes. Word of the approaching judgement reaches the king, and he issues a command that the people are to do three things. First, he said “let man and beast be covered with sackcloth” (Jon 3:8). Sackcloth was simply a sign of repentance. It was uncomfortable and abrasive. But the people would put it on to show outwardly, what they had decided inwardly.

Then, they “call out mightily to God” (Jon. 3:8). This means, of course, prayer. Occasionally, the president of the United States has called on the people for a day of prayer. But

¹⁶ Autrey, *Revivals of the Old Testament*, 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

you don't hear much about it. Very few news outlets will cover it. Very few people will observe it. But there is much to say about the power of united prayer (Matt. 18:19-20; Jam. 5).

Then finally, came the act of repentance itself: "Let everyone turn from his evil way..." (Jon 3:8). It is one thing to repent on the outside. But even hypocrites can repent on the outside. That's why Jesus says, when it comes to repentance and faith, it is more important what you do in private, than in public:

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matt. 6:16-18)

And neither is it enough to pray a prayer and expect repentance. These are good things for a start, but they are not enough by themselves. And so it is, that a sign of repentance, a prayer of repentance, should be followed by the act of repentance.

This repentance was done with the hope that somehow, someday God might stop the impending disaster that was before them (v. 9). It is interesting that believers today have a greater hope. For we have Jesus, who is a greater prophet than Jonah. He said, "[t]he men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41). Moreover, Christians do not have to question and wonder whether or not God will forgive them. They can look at the cross and know, without a shadow of a doubt, that God can forgive them because of what Christ has done.

Because the truth is that, in God's sight, each person is no different than these Ninevites. To be sure, they may not go around killing and fighting. But, even today, the wickedness of this

generation has not escaped God's sight. Though people today may be more cultured, they are no less sinful. And as a result, they are in just as much need of revival, and the mercy of God, as the people of Nineveh were.

Revival Under Ezra (Ezra 10:1-15). If the revival under Moses' came at a time of decision, then revival under Ezra came at a time of disobedience. It was Ezra that led the second wave of returning Jewish exiles back to the land of Israel. The people had experienced times of fluctuating faith. They had started to rebuild the Temple but, suffering persecution and opposition, their work was suddenly halted. Along came such prophets as Haggai and Zechariah who encouraged the people to continue their restoration efforts. Eventually, the people were able to celebrate the Passover in the Promised Land after many years.

Ezra was thrust into this position to teach a ready people about the Word of God. Ezra was a scribe, skilled in the word of God and specifically chosen for this task (Ezr. 7:6). The Bible teaches that Ezra was a student of the Law of God. It says he "had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel" (Ezr. 7:10).

First, Ezra *studied*. Revival is founded in a careful study of God's Word. To think on the acts of the Lord is one of the greatest blessings of the Christian. In fact, "Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them" (Psa. 111:2). Berding comments that "[i]f we are going to have a revival of the Bible, one area we need to address is how to understand it when we actually do read it."¹⁸

Next, Ezra was careful to *do* the Lord's Law. It is no secret that much gets lost from the head to the hand. Ezra did not allow this to happen to him. He was not like the hypocrites Jesus

¹⁸ Berding, *Bible Revival*, 28.

spoke of when he said, “do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do” (Matt. 23:3). True revival will never get far unless it is initiated in the faithful actions of its leaders.

Finally, Ezra was able to *teach* the people of God about the Law of God. There is no shortage of people trying to teach others about God. Every religion has their own kind of *evangelism*, each one trying to win more members to its cause. What sets the Christian preacher apart is his willingness in “declaring...the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). He must not pick and choose the portions of the text he preaches on, as is popular in many heretical sects.

Before Ezra began his return journey, he called for a time of fasting and prayer. He did so in order that he and his people might humble themselves before God (Ezr. 8:21). Revival starts with humbleness. And if it starts with it, then a humble spirit should not be far from revival at any time. One of the quickest ways for ministries to derail—especially larger ministries—is through the pride of a leader. Pride puts ministries in opposition to God and to his people. If one were to think that pride and self-centeredness endear them to the common man, then they would be sorely mistaken. People will follow a humble leader far quicker, and far longer, than they will a prideful one.

And so, Ezra gets ready to preach to the people. He is aware of their problems. He knows their sin. And they are ready to listen. There is displayed a genuine desire within the people to hear and learn the Word of God.¹⁹ Though, they have abused the opportunity of returning to their homeland to intermarry with the foreigners who were displaced in the land, they are now prepared to follow the Lord. Of course, the foreign people of the pagan cultures brought with

¹⁹ Autrey, *Revivals of the Old Testament*, 151.

them their own gods and religious ideologies. And so, it might be on the part of revival to call the people once again to a pure, untainted faith.

Now comes the crucial moment in Ezra chapter 10. After praying and confessing his sin, and the people's sin, Ezra is found weeping and mourning in the house of the Lord. Therefore, it is not always great excitement and enthusiasm that was the catalyst that sparked revival. The passage reads "a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly" (Ezr. 10:1). To be sure, there is great excitement in the church today. There is a great deal of hand-raising, joyous singing, and confident proclamation in the modern church. And so, many people go to church for the boost it gives them. They get by week-to-week off of the spiritual support they receive on Sunday morning. Perhaps, in the midst of the *halleluiahs* and *amens* the modern Church has lost the brokenness that accompanies true and genuine repentance. The church today could do well with a little less shouting and a little more weeping.

And so, the people admit their failings. "We have broken faith with our God..." (v. 2) they say. And the Israelites go on to say, "but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this" (v. 2). The gospel presentation that stops at the sinfulness of man is not sufficient. The grace of God must always be emphasized. Revival offers the hopeless help and the helpless hope. It is interesting to note that it was only after the people wept bitterly and admitted their own shortcomings that they were able to affirm the hope that remained in God. False hope is abundant and prevalent today. And it is a real problem. False hope comes from telling people they can make it on their own. That their own schemes, and adherence to certain principles are enough to save them. The problem with such teaching is that it appeals to the pridefulness of

men and, more frankly, it is quite unbiblical. The psalmist puts it this way: “The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue” (Ps. 33:17).

Finally, they make a commitment to follow the Lord. Verse 3 starts with “Therefore let us make a covenant with our God...” Covenants or oaths in the Old Testament were used to affirm one’s commitment to a certain set of principles or guidelines. If one were to take an oath, then they were expected to keep it no matter what. Saul was prepared to kill his own son after he made a rash vow (1 Sam. 14). So, by making this promise these men were binding themselves in no small way. They were expected to stand by what they had said (Lev. 19:12). They agree to send away their foreign wives, the words used here are not describing divorce, but more of a pejorative context.²⁰ Additionally, the people reinstated the practice of the Sabbath and observed the feasts and celebrations of the Lord.²¹

Revival in The New Testament

Jesus’ Ministry of Revival. To be sure, if God has used revival in the past, then it would certainly be present in the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth. After all, if ministers are to follow anyone’s example on biblical teaching and preaching should it not be the Son of God himself? Surely, in him is found the perfect model of how to preach to an erring people, in both attitude and action. He spoke in such a way that the people were forced to make a decision about him. Some said he was the Messiah, the Christ (Jn. 7:40-41). Others could not accept this and tried to make excuses (Jn. 7:41-42). And still others wanted to throw him in prison for the words he

²⁰ David J. Shepherd and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 38.

²¹ Autrey, *Revivals of the Old Testament*, 155.

spoke (Jn. 7:44). And preaching today should drive people to the same point of commitment.

Either they will accept him, excuse him, or try to quiet his message down!

As is customary in the life of Christ, the start to his revival did come as one might expect. Perhaps one would think he would burst onto the scene with a fiery sermon, or powerful message. But such was not the case. The Bible has a great deal to say about the early stages of Christ's ministry. And in a rush to jump ahead to what one might mistakenly feel are the more important parts of his ministry, there is the danger of overlooking these simple and foundational principles of revival at the start of his ministry. These values would set the stage for the remainder of his three-year ministry, as they should for Christian ministries today.

First, the Bible says that these things take place "when he heard that John had been arrested..." (Matt. 4:12). John was known for the act of baptizing with water those who were repentant of their sins. This earned him his modernly accepted name, John the Baptist. John's method of ministry contains many parallels the various prophets and leaders previously mentioned in the Old Testament. And so, this message has remained constant throughout all time.

With this in mind, Jesus begins his own ministry. He does so at the *right time*. He fully understands that the weight of ministry is now squarely upon his capable shoulders. John is no longer able to preach the message, so Jesus picks up right where he left off (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). And so, not only is it necessary that Jesus begin his ministry after John's imprisonment, it is also theologically relevant. He trusts God's perfect timing and knows that his own life is perfectly suspended in God's great plan for this world.

But next, not only did Jesus start his ministry at the right time, he also started it in the *right way*. The Bible says, "he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in

Capernaum by the sea...” (Matt. 4:12-13). It is likely that he went down to Capernaum with only a few of his disciples and close family members (Jn 2:12). Notice, Jesus does not take this opportunity to go out, but he first withdraws from outside world. This was done by the directing of the Spirit of God. Luke sums up the start to Christ’s ministry this way: “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all” (Luke 4:14-15). It is likely that Jesus started his ministry in this area to reconcile the Jewish and Gentiles communities of the region.²² Additionally, a constant theme throughout Jesus’ ministry is his withdrawal to desolate places to pray, especially after speaking to great crowds of people (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). And this habit had been firmly established in the beginning of his revival ministry.

Verse 14 gives us the purpose for his journey up to Capernaum: “so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled...” Here it is clear that Jesus acted in accordance with the Holy Scriptures. Matthew is quick to mark the many crucial moments of Jesus’ ministry by stating that they were done in order to fulfill the Jewish prophecies (Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). And so, put simply, the model of Jesus’ ministry was to fulfill the Old Testament’s predictions concerning him. Being well-versed in the Torah from an early age, Christ knew precisely what to do in his ministry and when to do it.

What does this mean for modern Christian ministers today? Obviously, they are to be as familiar with the Scriptures as possible, in order to make their ministries as effective as possible. This will undoubtedly make the spark of revival closer to igniting in the hearts of the people.

²² Jeannine K. Brown, *Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 40-41.

Notice, that the Bible describes the first people to witness the ministry of Jesus as a “people dwelling in darkness” and “those dwelling in the region of the shadow of death.” He first met with the hurting and broken. To him, these were the right people to start his ministry with. The outcasts and the rejected. That is not to say, he ministered exclusively to such people, but they did play a critical role in his earthly ministry.

Christian leaders are too often convinced that in order for their burgeoning ministries to succeed they need the backing of the powerful and prosperous. But such is not the case according to the Scriptural evidence. Look at Jesus’ word to the seventy-two sent out to expand his ministry:

Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ (Luke 10:3-11)

Jesus instructs his followers to go new towns and cities and to preach a simple message: “The Kingdom of God has come near to you.” And the people who respond to this message are not judged on their merit or social status. Instead, they are marked by their reaction to Christ’s messengers. Were they welcoming? Or did they reject?

The truth is Christian ministers will come across both in any area of ministry. Whenever and wherever the message of the Lord is shared there will be those who accept and those who deny. But they are not to be prejudice with whom they share this all-important gospel. In fact,

Christ indicates that when they minister to the least of these, then they are in fact making the most impact for his kingdom.

The Apostles' Ministry of Revival. Like Jesus the Apostle's modeled the correct example of how to minister to lost and hurting people. They carried the message of Jesus on after his ascension, preaching about him and sharing his teaching (Acts 17:18; 20:35). As such, the manner and methods of their teaching and religious meetings were closely related to those of Christ himself. Both Paul and Peter would travel into the synagogues in order to teach the people, as did Jesus (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2).

Central to the message of the Apostles, as has been seen in the Old Testament prophets, is an emphasis on the need for the people of Israel to repent in order to accept the message of God. Boda remarks that the theme of repentance in the New Testament is flowing out of the prominence that was placed on it in the Old Testament. He states, "Repentance is thus the key response required of the community, one associated with confession of sin, behavioural change and baptism. Repentance signals the inbreaking of the kingdom, which results in forgiveness of sin and an approaching baptism with the Holy Spirit."²³ And again he says, "The New Testament continues the same emphasis on repentance that runs like a scarlet thread through the entire Old Testament. The climactic redemptive-historical events of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension did not bring an end to the message of repentance but highlighted its necessity."²⁴

In a similar way Nave observes that "In Luke-Acts the universal saving purpose of God is the plan of God, repentance must also be understood as part of that plan. Repentance is

²³ Boda, *Return to Me*, 164.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 189-190.

commanded of all people because repentance is that which secures the salvation of God in the lives of all people.”²⁵ With this understanding of repentance it is clearly seen why the Apostles highlighted it in preaching.

It is worth noting that the Apostles carried on their ministry despite extreme opposition and persecution. In fact, the opposition they faced seemed only to strengthen their resolve and further the effectiveness of their message. The Jewish leaders continued their persecution of the early Christians, with the Roman Empire only compounding the pressure. And so, it clear that the Enemy sees Revival just as much as God does. Ravenhill observes in his classic text *Why Revival Tarries* that Paul was known in hell, just as he was known by God.²⁶ And the Devil is opposed to the ministry of revival, as it draws people away from sinful lifestyles, and points them towards a relationship with Jesus Christ. And so, in Acts, Luke traces the ministry of a few key leaders, namely Peter, Philip and Paul, to show how revival takes place, first in Jerusalem then to the ends of the earth.

The church growth in Acts occurs in distinct stages. First, with the eleven personal disciples of Jesus in the Upper Room, then after Peter’s Pentecost Revival in Acts 2 the Church swells to over 3,000 believers. This message perhaps set the foundation for revival in the church for years to come. Swindoll comments on what made this early revival message effective: “Peter’s sermon appears very well organized; it was uncomplicated, direct, scriptural, and Christ-centered...”²⁷ In Acts 4 the church growth continues with others 5,000 men making decisions for

²⁵ Guy D. Nave, "The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts." (Brill, 2002), 36.

²⁶ Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 163.

²⁷ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Acts*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 54.

Christ, bringing the total number to 8,120. Eventually, the Luke begins to lose count and simply record that “multitudes” are brought to Christ after the initial Jerusalem revival.

Part Two: Historical Revival in the American Church

Following these biblical examples, the American church has experienced a number of religious revivals throughout its history. From the time of its original founding, until as late as 50 years ago, Christian revival has been a hallmark of this nation. Though these revivals are well-known in Christian circles, a reminder of biblical principles is essential. And so, the following revivals will be explored, and their biblical foundations analyzed.

A Chronological Overview of Revival in American History

In order to better comprehend the depth of American revival it is necessary to summarize the major events that have marked Christian influence in this nation. These revivals are undeniable in their impact and influence on American culture. Each occurred at a significant point in American history and had a defining impression on the social and spiritual behavior of Americans across the country. The most prominent of these revivals will be analyzed and discussed to better appreciate their mark on American culture.

Table 2. – *Critically Labeled “Revivals” in America’s History.*²⁸

Name	Date	Origin
The Great Awakening	1734-1743	Northampton, Massachusetts
The Second Great Awakening	1800-1840	Logan County, Kentucky
The Businessmen’s Revival	1857-1858	New York City, New York
The Civil War Revival	1861-1865	Richmond, Virginia
The Urban Revivals	1875-1885	Chicago, Illinois
Welsh Revival	1905-1906	Western Pennsylvania
The Azusa Street Revival	1906-1909	Los Angeles, California
Post-World War II Revival	1947-1950	Los Angeles, California
The Jesus Movement	1968-1972	Costa Mesa, California
The Promise Keepers Revival	1991-1997	Boulder, Colorado

The Great Awakening (1734-1743). Known as the first of America’s religious resurgences, the Great Awakening took place in the mid-part of the 18th century. After the ministry of John and George Wesley spread to America in the late 1730’s America was ready for a religious emergence. In his preaching Wesley emphasized the need for the individual to place his or her faith in Christ, to share that faith with others, and ultimately with the world.²⁹ Initiated by the fervent preaching of Jonathan Edwards, religious meetings were held with emphasis

²⁸ Information gathered from <https://maninthemirror.org/2015/06/30/a-brief-history-of-spiritual-revival-and-awakening-in-america/>.

²⁹ John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions: In Four Volumes*. (Philadelphia: Printed by J. Cruikshank, 1794), 67.

placed on reaching the lost and convicting the strayed. Edwards and other like-minded preachers of his time focused the responsibility of revival on the act and character of God.³⁰ They saw God as the main Designer and Initiator of revival and change in people's lives, and thus encouraged their hearers to seek him in earnest prayer and supplication.

Meanwhile preachers such as George Whitefield were also causing significant spiritual shifts. Whitefield was eager to preach in America when given the opportunity and traveled all across the new nation preaching fiery and convincing sermons. He left his own personal agenda out of his preaching and instead focused on the personal difficulties and dilemmas of his listeners. He recalls in one of his journals the endearment with which he and his congregants had: ““The poor people were much concerned at my bidding them farewell; and, after I had taken my leave, many came to my lodgings, sorrowing that they were to see my face no more for a long season.”³¹ This is reminiscent of Paul's departure with the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:37-28).

Robert Caldwell asserts that Whitefield and his associates shifted the focus of spiritual renewal onto a fresh view of the gospel and seeing the things of God in a new and unique way. He continues in saying that they emphasized repentance based on a love for God and faith in Christ, as given by God the Father. This would then logically be followed by a life of

³⁰ Robert W. Caldwell, *Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 73.

³¹ Richard L. Bushman, *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 27.

commitment as the believer experienced the blessings of redemption according to the theological understanding of Whitfield and some of his contemporaries.³²

The Second Great Awakening (1800-1840). Much like its predecessor, the Second Great Awakening occurred at a time of spiritual apathy and indifference. With church membership and attendance dwindling, revival was sparked in the backwoods of the frontier. John Boles describes how at the turn of the 19th century there appeared another great revival on the horizon. Ignited by fiery sermons in Kentucky, revival spread quickly across the previously luke-warm southern states.³³ In similar fashions college campuses began to feel the need for a return to biblical values. The student-led revival at Hampden-Sydney College in central Virginia were the initial sparks of what would become the Second Great Awakening.³⁴ This would trigger a fundamental reliance upon the Word of God that would last for decades to come. Coupled with the fervent evangelistic teaching of James McGready and Charles Finney church attendance and membership swelled, going from 350,000 to 3,000,000 members.³⁵ This movement would have continual effects on American religious activity, even after the official revival died out. Timothy

³² Caldwell, *Theologies of the American Revivalists*, 42.

³³ John B. Boles, *The Great Revival; Beginnings of the Bible Belt 1st ed.*, (University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 70.

³⁴ David E. Adams, "The Development of Youth Ministry as a Professional Career and the Distinctives of Liberty University Youth Ministry Training in Preparing Students for Youth Work," (Liberty University, 1993), 22.

³⁵ Patrick Morley, "A Brief History of Spiritual Revival and Awakening in America." Accessed Jan 26, 2022. <https://maninthemirror.org/2015/06/30/a-brief-history-of-spiritual-revival-and-awakening-in-america/>. Morley, *The Second Great Awakening, 1800-1840*

Smith observes that despite common belief that the religious fervor of this time passed with Finney and his cohorts, the reality was that revivalism was intact leading up to the civil war.³⁶

The Urban Revivals (1875-1885). Coming out of the Civil War and with the religious reappearance of the last 25 years, now quelled and turned to spiritual indifference, another of America's great revival was on its way. America was now infiltrated with poisonous ideologies of evolution and the authority of the Bible was being challenged in scholarly circles.³⁷ Into such a scene, came the effective preaching of Dwight L. Moody. He would remain committed to the truths of God's Word despite growing opposition and mockery.

However, at this time a distinction between man-made and God-sent revival was forming. Less emphasis was placed on the outpouring of the Spirit in bringing about revival, and more attention was placed on the people's response to the message of God, as it was expressed through the biblical narrative.³⁸ Additionally, American Christianity was becoming increasingly controlled by the American economic system. Cooper argues that by the time of American evangelist Billy Sunday in the early 1900s, revival had lost much of its original meaning and was now seen as full-blown entertainment and nothing more.³⁹ However, it is worthy to note that these revivals were not completely void of biblical teaching. At this time a significant emphasis was placed on the imminent return of Christ and the need of the believer live a holy and worthy

³⁶ Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, (Chicago, IL: Barakaldo Books, 2020), 48.

³⁷ Morley, *The Urban Revivals, 1875-1885*.

³⁸ William H. Cooper, *The Great Revivalists in American Religion, 1740-1944: The Careers and Theology of Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, Dwight Moody, Billy Sunday and Aimee Semple McPherson*, (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2010), 108.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

life. This would be a continuing theme in revivals throughout the mid-to-late 1800s.⁴⁰ Thus, they did reflect many biblical principles, though they did seem to be starting to adapt to America's market-driven lifestyle.

Table 3. – *Prominent Evangelists in American Revivals.*

Name	Main Revival
Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)	First Great Awakening
George Whitfield (1714-1770)	First Great Awakening
Charles Finney (1792-1875)	Second Great Awakening
Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899)	Great Chicago Revival
Billy Sunday (1862-1935)	Boston Crusade
Billy Graham (1918-2018)	Los Angeles Crusade
Jerry Falwell (1933-2007)	Moral Majority

Revival in the 1900s. Revival in the 20th century imitated its preceding counterparts in many ways. The theatrical preaching of Billy Sunday drew abundant crowds with more than 100,000,000 people hearing his sermons and approximate 1,000,000 or more conversions.⁴¹ Various religious organizations, such as Youth for Christ and Campus Crusade were initiated with an emphasis placed intentional evangelism and personal recommitment. Billy Graham began his distinguished and extensive ministry in the early part of 1949 at the Los Angeles Crusade. Each of these religious emergences caused significant impact on the lives of individuals

⁴⁰ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 172.

⁴¹ Morley, *The Revivals of 1905-1906*.

inside and outside of the American Church. Additionally, each of these newly found Christian organizations remained truly committed to biblical guidance. They sought to change the hearts and minds of the American populace by informing them of the gospel message found in God's Word and called the people to live a life of personal commitment to Him.

Sociological Components to American Revival

After reviewing the chronological order of revival, it becomes clear that there were various social and political occurrences that are inseparable from religious revival in America. From the onset of its creation America has been committed to religious freedom and practice. Despite facing numerous times of war and social turbulence, Americans have consistently returned to Christian values. These movements are often sparked in direct opposition to the social and civil issues of the day, and they have encouraged a return to biblical teaching and authority.

America's Founding and Religious Freedom. The religious heritage of America's founding is undeniable. In an attempt to seek liberty from the oppressive and oftentimes demanding England religious system, many pilgrims fled to the New World in order to faithfully practice Christianity. These pilgrims saw their escape from the Church of England as a sort of *Exodus* experience. David Gelernter remarks on the theology of the Pilgrim father William Bradford saying, "Bradford's comparison between Puritans and ancient Israel is central to the American revolution and the emergence of the new nation. Americans saw themselves as

Israelites throwing off a tyrant's yoke."⁴² This idea of America following the biblical example of a godly nation would play a key role in the developmental stages of its government's creation.

Though some have sought to undermine America's religious beginning, it is historically evident that it was established in Judeo-Christian values that would affect the trajectory of the nation's existence. Mike Lee comments on this in his book *Our Lost Constitution*. He observes that far from detaching God in social and political gatherings, the Founding Fathers placed paramount importance on religious activity. Lee remarks that national leaders often would call the nation to times of prayer, modeling this emphasis by praying at the onset of many of the meetings. God was placed on the center of currency and federal buildings. Additionally, the Founding Fathers saw it as the purpose and design of every nation to submit to the will of God and seek him in prayer.⁴³

And so, even from the founding documents it is clear that the early American's favored religious liberty and protection. Article III of the Articles of Confederations reads:

The said States hereby severally enter into a firm league of friendship with each other, for their common defense, the security of their liberties, and their mutual and general welfare, binding themselves to assist each other against all force offered to, or attacks made upon them, or any of them, on account of religion, sovereignty, trade, or any other pretense whatever.⁴⁴

⁴² David Gelernter, "The Bible's Influence: The Bible and America History," Accessed February 22, 2022. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/11/the-bibles-influence-the-bible-and-america-history/>.

⁴³ Mike Lee, *Our Lost Constitution: The Willful Subversion of America's Founding Document*, (East Rutherford, NJ: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015), 65-66.

⁴⁴ Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson. *America's Founding Documents: The Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the United States Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the Bill of Rights*, (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group, 2018), 11.

Thus, the Founding Fathers of America felt they had an obligation to uphold God's ordained plan for political entities. They saw America's creation as an important and necessary response to ungodly and unbiblical leadership. The *Federalist Papers* state:

The first question is answered at once by recurring to the absolute necessity of the case; to the great principle of self-preservation; to the transcendent law of nature and of nature's God, which declares that the safety and happiness of society are the objects at which all political institutions aim, and to which all such institutions must be sacrificed.⁴⁵

Therefore, from America's first and fundamental documents the adherence to biblical principles is evident. This testifies to the larger historical narrative that because of its Christian tradition and heritage, America was primed for revival from its founding.

War and Social Unrest as a Catalyst for Revival. Another crucial factor in the expansion of religious revival in America involved various times global and domestic conflict. Particularly, at the onset of the Civil War the call for religious devotion remained blatant. Timothy Smith references this time saying, "the cutting edge of American Christianity after 1850 was the revival, adopted and promoted in one form or another by major segments of all denominations. One writer declared on the eve of the Civil War that the most characteristic feature of the religious history of the century was the increasing recognition, cultivation, and expectations of revivals."⁴⁶ This would have important implications as the Civil War grew into a national divergence that swept the nation. Gelenter concludes that both Union and Confederate armies felt a great degree of religious obedience. He states that in an attempt to lead the nation through such a political and religious crisis president Abraham Lincoln relied on the Bible for

⁴⁵ Ibid., 374.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 35.

guidance: “Lincoln turned to the Bible more and more frequently and fervently as the war progressed. His heterodox but profound Christianity showed him how to understand the war as a fight to redeem America’s promise to mankind.”⁴⁷

In a similar way, both of the World Wars sparked a return to Christian values and beliefs. This occurred particularly in those witnessing the horrors of war firsthand and forced to deal with the reality of death and the life after. Such atrocities caused Americans across the country to consider their eternal fate and current obedience to God’s Word. Jack Brymer comments on this time of American history:

In the aftermath of World War II, America seemed to be searching for spiritual restoration and reclamation. At the same time, the nation was putting its young people in the spotlight, perhaps out of a sense of gratitude to those who had fought and died in the war. The eagerness of youth for religious fulfillment and pervading spirit of public interest in young people led to what was called the youth revival movement.⁴⁸

This movement would continue to have national repercussions and will be discussed more in detail later.

Another irrefutable contributor to the resurgence of American revival were the significant social movements of history. The Civil Rights Movement of 1954, led by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called the nation to countrywide repentance and obedience. This movement was unquestionably religious in its origin. Fredrick Sunnemark quotes a close friend and associate of Dr. King as saying, “[t]he basis of Martin Luther King’s ministry and mission was the ethics and morality of the Crucified Carpenter from Galilee...[F]irst and foremost he

⁴⁷ Gelernter, "The Bible’s Influence: The Bible and America History," <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/11/the-bibles-influence-the-bible-and-america-history/>.

⁴⁸ Jack Brymer, "1940s Youth Revival Movement Filled Spiritual Vacuum of Age." Accessed February 21, 2022. <https://www.samford.edu/news/1999/1940s-Youth-Revival-Movement-Filled-Spiritual-Vacuum-of-Age>.

was an unapologetic proclaimer of the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth.”⁴⁹ Like Dr. King’s ministry, the Women’s Suffrage Movement (1848-1920) and America’s Industrial Revolutions (1876-1900) were both preceded and followed by noteworthy religious revival.⁵⁰ In a similar way, the well-known YMCA (1851) was initially started to share the Christian faith with young men, by relating Christian ideals to their everyday lives.⁵¹

Youth Movements Leading to Widespread Revival. As previously, mentioned the influence of youth on American religious behavior is clearly distinct. Most current research suggests that 85 percent conversions take place before age 30, and the majority of those before the age 25.⁵² In the First Great Awakening George Whitefield began his public ministry at the very young age of 21 and would spur the youth of the New England area to religious interest.⁵³ Prior to the Second Great Awakening, students met at Yale College in order to pray and study Scripture. This group would continually grow with over half of the student body becoming members. This would have a substantial impact on the revivals of the next few years and create an atmosphere within the American culture that was suitable for revival.⁵⁴ In addition, the birth of Sunday School in 1780 due to the work of Robert Raikes was a considerable contributor to the

⁴⁹ Fredrik Sunnemark and Inc NetLibrary, *Ring Out Freedom: The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 11.

⁵⁰ "Prominent Religious Events and People in American History." Accessed February 21, 2022. <https://www.thearda.com/timeline/tlRank1to2.asp>.

⁵¹ Adams, "The Development of Youth Ministry as a Professional Career and the Distinctives of Liberty University Youth Ministry Training in Preparing Students for Youth Work," 28.

⁵² Wendell Smith, "History of Revival and Young People." Accessed February 21, 2022. http://www.youthnow.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=231&catid=43&Itemid=58.

⁵³ Smith, "History of Revival and Young People." http://www.youthnow.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=231&catid=43&Itemid=58.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

emergence of revival in youth of the era.⁵⁵ As of 1835 an estimated 1,500 students made public professions of faith in Christ from 36 colleges across the United States.⁵⁶

These Christian youth movements would continue to be a part of the major revivals of the 20th century. Brymer states that in “the mid-to late 1940s, Christian youth emphases sprang to the fore around the country, particularly among evangelicals. In Chicago, Billy Graham, Torrey Johnson, Mel Larson and others led Youth For Christ, a national program.”⁵⁷ Adams describes the Youth for Christ Movement: “a grassroots movement with a youth rally as the rudder. Initially, there was no structure, no headquarters, just powerful personalities who rallied thousands of teenagers.”⁵⁸ This outreach program would lay the preliminary foundation for Reverend Graham’s worldwide ministry. In addition, this transformational youth movement of the 1940s would have sweeping effects on many Christian organizations today. Many ministries are the direct result of these youth movements: summer missions, camp programs, and college campus ministries.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Adams, "The Development of Youth Ministry as a Professional Career and the Distinctives of Liberty University Youth Ministry Training in Preparing Students for Youth Work," 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁷ Brymer, "1940s Youth Revival Movement Filled Spiritual Vacuum of Age." <https://www.samford.edu/news/1999/1940s-Youth-Revival-Movement-Filled-Spiritual-Vacuum-of-Age>.

⁵⁸ Adams, "The Development of Youth Ministry as a Professional Career and the Distinctives of Liberty University Youth Ministry Training in Preparing Students for Youth Work," 50.

⁵⁹ Brymer, "1940s Youth Revival Movement Filled Spiritual Vacuum of Age." <https://www.samford.edu/news/1999/1940s-Youth-Revival-Movement-Filled-Spiritual-Vacuum-of-Age>.

Table 4. – *Revivals in Youth Culture.*⁶⁰

Movement	Influential Leaders	Effect
The Great Awakening	George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards	Whitefield began his ministry at age 21, while Edwards crowds primarily consisted of young people.
The 1857 Revival	Dwight Moody, C.T. Studd	In 1858 Moody started an outreach for young people, Studd was one of his students.
College Revival	Yale College	Students at Yale College began prayer meetings and Bible studies.
Youth Revival Movement	Youth For Christ	The Youth For Christ movement started revival among America's youth

Biblical Availability and Authority. The obtainability of the Scriptures has recurrently affected the willingness of God's people to partake in revival. Robert Aiken was instrumental in making the Bible readily available through print to the people of the Colonial Period. His Bible produced in 1782 was the only Bible ever officially authorized by the United States government.⁶¹ Jeffcoat comments on Aitken's desire to see the Bible placed in the hands of the American people: "He was commended by President George Washington for providing Americans with Bibles during the embargo of imported English goods due to the Revolutionary War."⁶² By providing Bibles to the average American, Aitken influenced the course of American religious thought for years to come.

⁶⁰ Information gathered from <https://www.samford.edu/news/1999/1940s-Youth-Revival-Movement-Filled-Spiritual-Vacuum-of-Age>.

⁶¹ John L. Jeffcoat, "English Bible History." Accessed February 22, 2022. <https://greatsite.com/english-bible-history/>.

⁶² Jeffcoat, "English Bible History. <https://greatsite.com/english-bible-history/>.

Additionally, the various biblical translations that were produced throughout American history carried crucial weight in revival history. The American Standard Version, the first American translation after the King James Version, was published in 1901.⁶³ This narrowly preceded the revivals of 1905-1905 and the effective revival ministry of Billy Sunday. The Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s initiated the N.I.V. translation.⁶⁴ Similarly, the E.S.V was produced in 2002 to create a more accessible translation that remained true to a word-for-word version. This took place at a time of national crisis in the hopes that the American people would return to the teaching of the Lord.

To go alongside with the availability of the Bible, the authority of the Bible has also been a vital factor in revival history. Perhaps the greatest example of this was the Moral Majority founded by pastor and evangelist Dr. Jerry Falwell. The Moral Majority originated in 1979 in response to the cultural regression of the time.⁶⁵ The defining marker of the Moral Majority was a return to biblical principles and conservative values. This call to dependance upon the Bible as the source of truth and authority in the lives of people caused nationwide modifications with an almost instantaneous effect on the American political landscape, causing the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.⁶⁶

⁶³ Jeffcoat, "English Bible History. <https://greatsite.com/english-bible-history/>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Amy Tikkanen, "Moral Majority," Accessed February 22, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moral-Majority>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Part Three: Modern Application for Revival Today

With the biblical and historical basis of revival established, this thesis will briefly construct a suggested response for the American church today. The fundamental question is: should revival today be any different? Generally speaking, many within the modern church have adopted the belief that mass-evangelism events are going extinct. Therefore, any attempt to create a modern application is purposeless.

Still others might suggest that there is no need to produce an outline for revival? After all, if the Holy Spirit wishes to send revival, he will work it out. And it is certainly true that no revival will take place without the Spirit of God, however, just as He worked through the earthly plans of Paul and the other early ministries, so it should be the hope ministers today that He can use our plans for his purposes.

Pray

Genuine revival will never get far apart from the prayers of the people. In fact, no revival will even get off the ground unless it is based firmly in prayer. Frank Damazio sees prayer as the essential starting point to a plentiful harvest in revival: “Revival means understanding that now is the time to seek God and that we are the people. Only God can send rain, and we should seek God until He rains upon us. We can prepare for the rain—plow the ground and ask—but only God can revive his people.⁶⁷ Therefore, the first, and most important, step in the revival process is prayer. Of all the great revivals of history, prayer played a central role. Individuals, churches, and communities should be in constant prayer for revival. Local churches can be encouraged to gather together in order to mutually pray for revival. Additionally, it would be helpful to develop

⁶⁷ Frank Damazio, *Seasons of Revival: Understanding the Appointed Times of Spiritual Refreshing*, (Portland, Or: BT Pub, 1996), D374.

dedicated prayer teams that will lift up the lost family and friends of those in the church in prayer.

Prepare

Secondly, there is undoubtedly preparation that needs to be made for any revival. A natural part of holding any large event in a public place is to prepare those individuals who will be working. This involves practical training for everyone involved. The logistical organization of things such as building, staff, and advertising should be discussed. Ravenhill observes that it is at this stage that many churches lose focus. He attributes the lack of revival to several causes including the diluting of the gospel message and lack of prayer. But he also indicates that selfish behavior on the part of the members and church body can delay revival.⁶⁸ In order to combat this self-centered focus, it would be beneficial for churches to hold evangelism and outreach classes that will practically train their members in engaging with the community. Moreover, church leaders and staff should be adequately prepared with those people who might come to an evangelism event, but not a church service. Finally, volunteers should be recruited to assist in the practical aspects of a coming revival.

Persuade

In this step the congregants of a particular church begin to actively invite people to the revival. This means encouraging them to “come and see” Jesus. Obviously, this is no small task in a post-modern world. But biblically minded Christians are the best prepared to take the message of God to a dying world and initiate revival. Kenneth Berding states that “God never intended that you merely read the Bible on your own, hold it in your heart, and develop a

⁶⁸ Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries*, 59-62.

personal relationship with God through it...God intends that his message be communicated from one person to another— yes, until it overtakes the world!”⁶⁹ This involves being apologetically aware of the current issues facing the secular world. In their book, *The Last Christian Generation* Josh McDowell and David Bellis discuss how to engage with a culture that has lost its grip on absolute truth. They encourage the reader to stand on the legitimacy and sufficiency of Christianity:

But Christianity isn't a mere religion, and it's not simple based upon various teaching. Christianity is based on the life, character, and identity, of a person— Jesus Christ. Christ did not come to earth to teach Christianity—Christ *is* Christianity. That is what makes Christianity unique. It is a personal relationship with the personal creator God. Most religions of the world are based on philosophical propositions or theological ideologies. Remove its founding prophet or guru and that religion remains essentially intact. That is because these religions are based on teachings, not upon the founding teacher.⁷⁰

McDowell and Dellis go on to observe that the outside world is not committed to Christ as the only way to Heaven: “We have an entire generation that believes that the power of faith is in faith alone. They think the sincerity and intensity of the one believing is what counts. When in fact, the power of our belief rests not in us but in the power of the One in whom we place our trust.”⁷¹ And so, with the appropriate worldview in place Christians across American can become better prepared to interact with a lost world.

Preach

⁶⁹ Berding, *Bible Revival*, 58.

⁷⁰ Josh McDowell and David H. Bellis, *The Last Christian Generation*, (Holiday, Fla: Green Key Books, 2006), 35.

⁷¹ McDowell and Bellis, *The Last Christian Generation*, 107.

Of course, at some point in the revival comes the actual preaching. It is worth noting that there is a wide variety of methods and means in Christian preaching. There is however comfort to be found in that not all of the leaders of past revivals preached exactly the same way, neither did the biblical prophets and apostles. The most important aspect of the preaching is Holy Spirit commitment on the part of the preacher. Johannes Wessels observes that “[a]lthough there have been big differences in hermeneutics and the interpretation of the Scripture...the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation and preaching has always remained very prominent in reformed, evangelical and Pentecostal circles.”⁷² And as such, the preacher’s main purpose should be to not stifle the Spirit. Obviously, messages should focus on aspects such as converting the lost, convicting those who have strayed and encouraging them to renew their commitment to Christ, and also celebrating with those who have been walking in faith.

Pursue

A revival that lasts a week or a weekend is pointless unless it changes individual lives. Coming to the altar really does nothing unless one gets up and lives each day for Christ. With this in mind, God-sent revivals will not fan-out when the lights are off and the show is over. Those who come forward during the revival in an act of commitment should be instructed to tell someone about their decision, begin to read the Bible (and be given one if necessary), pray every day, and attend one of the churches in the area of their residence. This is where the process of personal discipleship takes precedence. Michael Brodeur states that “We want to see a generation awaken, and I believe the only way this dream will be realized is through life-on-life

⁷² Johannes M. Wessels, "The Bible as Seedbed for Revival in the 21st Century." *In Die Skriflig*, 54, no. 2 (2020), 4.

discipleship.”⁷³ This discipleship can start by giving new-Christians follow-up materials that might include a small, practical book on how to live for Christ.

It is important to receive the contact information of any new attenders so that they are not overlooked. Over the following weeks they should receive an email thanking them for their attendance and congratulating them if they made a decision for Christ. Additionally, a follow-up call or email will greatly increase their chances of attending a local church. They can also be directed to a number of online ministries that provide content for new believers.

⁷³ Michael Brodeur and Banning Liebscher, *Revival Culture: Prepare for the Next Great Awakening*, (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2013), 141

Bibliography

- Adams, David E. "The Development of Youth Ministry as a Professional Career and the Distinctives of Liberty University Youth Ministry Training in Preparing Students for Youth Work." Liberty University, 1993.
- Autrey, C. E. *Revivals of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960.
- Berding, Kenneth. *Bible Revival: Recommitting Ourselves to One Book*. Ashland: Lexham Press, 2018. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5520367>.
- Boda, Mark J. *'Return to Me': A Biblical Theology of Repentance*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5614076>.
- Boles, John B. *The Great Revival; Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. 1st ed. University Press of Kentucky, 1972. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt130hpp4>.
- Bolin, M. T. "Nineveh as Sin City." Accessed March 28, 2022. <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/related-articles/nineveh-as-sin-city>.
- Brodeur, Michael and Banning Liebscher. *Revival Culture: Prepare for the Next Great Awakening*. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2013.
- Brown, Jeannine K. *Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015.
- Brymer, Jack. "1940s Youth Revival Movement Filled Spiritual Vacuum of Age." Accessed February 21, 2022. <https://www.samford.edu/news/1999/1940s-Youth-Revival-Movement-Filled-Spiritual-Vacuum-of-Age>.
- Bushman, Richard L. *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina]: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969.
- Caldwell, Robert W. *Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017. <https://go.exlibris.link/9hh38qml>.
- Cooper, William H. *The Great Revivalists in American Religion, 1740-1944: The Careers and Theology of Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, Dwight Moody, Billy Sunday and Aimee Semple McPherson*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2010.
- Damazio, Frank. *Seasons of Revival: Understanding the Appointed Times of Spiritual Refreshing*. Portland, OR: BT Pub, 1996.
- ESV Expository Commentary (Volume 2): Deuteronomy-Ruth*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2021.

- Gelernter, David. "The Bible's Influence: The Bible and America History." Accessed February 22, 2022. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/11/the-bibles-influence-the-bible-and-america-history/>.
- Hamilton, Alexander, John Jay, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson. *America's Founding Documents: The Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the United States Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the Bill of Rights*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group, 2018.
- Hiller, Bob. "The Pulpit is Not Your Platform." Accessed March 22, 2022. <https://thejaggedword.com/2016/06/10/the-pulpit-is-not-your-platform/>.
- Jeffcoat, John L. "English Bible History." Accessed February 22, 2022. <https://greatsite.com/english-bible-history/>.
- Lee, Mike. *Our Lost Constitution: The Willful Subversion of America's Founding Document*. East Rutherford, NJ: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015.
- McDowell, Josh and David H. Bellis. *The Last Christian Generation*. Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2006.
- Morley, Patrick. "A Brief History of Spiritual Revival and Awakening in America." Accessed Jan 26, 2022. <https://maninthemirror.org/2015/06/30/a-brief-history-of-spiritual-revival-and-awakening-in-america/>.
- Nave, Guy D. "The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts." Brill, 2002.
- Nieuwhof, Carey. "Revivals are Dead: 5 Things that Will Never be the Same Again." . Accessed March 27, 2022. <https://careynieuwhof.com/revivals-are-dead-5-things-that-will-never-be-the-same-again/>.
- "Prominent Religious Events and People in American History." Accessed February 21, 2022. <https://www.thearda.com/timeline/tlRank1to2.asp>.
- Ravenhill, Leonard. *Why Revival Tarries*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2004.
- Shepherd, David J. and Christopher J. H. Wright. *Ezra and Nehemiah*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018.
- Smith, Timothy L. *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*. Chicago: Barakaldo Books, 2020. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6223503>.

- Smith, Wendell. "History of Revival and Young People." Accessed February 21, 2022. http://www.youthnow.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=231&catid=43&Itemid=58.
- Swindoll, Charles R. *Insights on Acts*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016.
- Sunnemark, Fredrik and Inc NetLibrary. *Ring Out Freedom: The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- The Holy Bible English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006.
- Tikkanen, Amy. "Moral Majority." Accessed February 22, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moral-Majority>.
- Warren, Rick. "Preach the Truth of the Bible to See Real Transformation." Accessed March 22, 2022. <https://pastors.com/transformed-by-truth/>.
- Wesley, John. *Sermons on Several Occasions: In Four Volumes*. Philadelphia: Printed by J. Cruikshank, 1794.
- Wessels, Johannes M. "The Bible as Seedbed for Revival in the 21st Century." *In Die Skriflig* 54, no. 2 (2020): n/a.
- Willmington, H. L. *Willmington's Guide to the Bible*. 30th ed. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011.