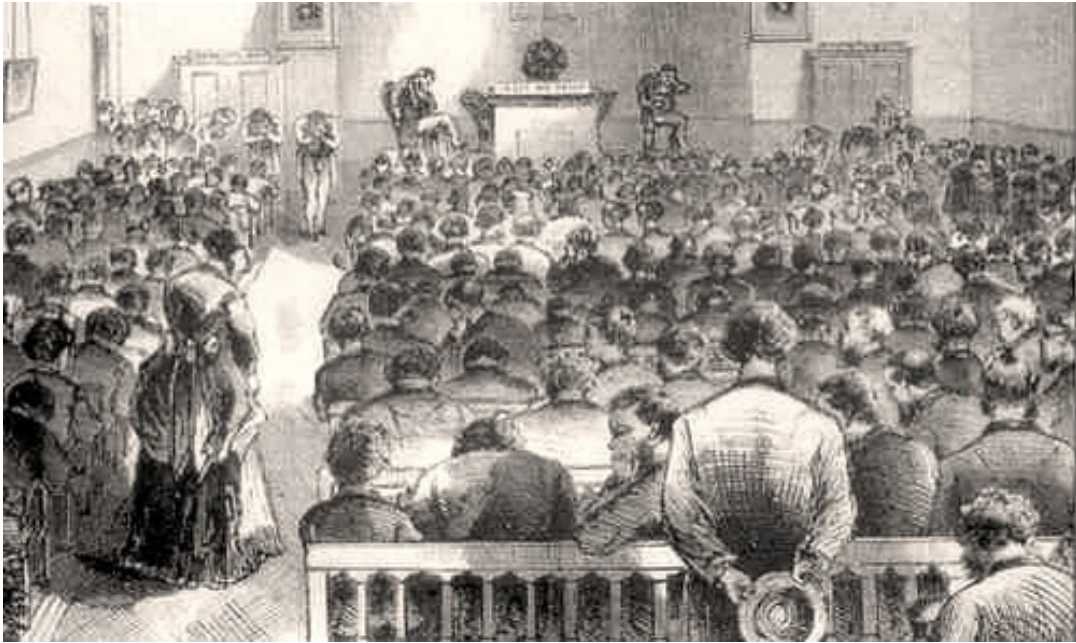


THE NEED FOR REVIVAL



REVIVED! PART 2

T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

The Need for Revival

The Need for Revival
Revived! Part 2
T. M. Moore
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *The Need for Revival*

We're not likely to devote much effort to praying for revival until we believe the need for revival is great and urgent.

The psalms teach us how to think about a church and a world that are in need of God's reviving grace. As we study, pray, and sing these psalms, we will begin to get the mind of Christ on this important subject. Only God can heal our broken and rebellious world. Only God can restore glory and mission to His Church. Only revival, renewal, and awakening can keep the world from destroying itself.

These psalms show us why and how to pray for revival. Let's make good use of them, shall we?

This *ReVision* series, "Revived!", is designed to help you understand why revival is so important, and how we can seek it together from the Lord in prayer.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

And if you find this study helpful, please let us know. How have you benefited from this study? Go to our website, www.ailbe.org, and use the Contact Us button to share your story.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The World in Rebellion: Psalm 2

*Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us.”* Psalm 2.1-3

To rebel or to submit?

A common complaint – made more emphatic during seasons of political jockeying – is that there isn’t much love in the world. Whether the symptom is incivility, cocooning, churlishness, indifference, greed, name-calling, hoarding, blame-shifting, bullying, or any of a dozen other maladies that seem to be everywhere on the rise, the complaint is the same: “We just need to *love* one another!”

We would do well to consider why this lack of love is so pervasive in our society. It will not surprise us to learn that Jesus has the diagnosis: “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Matt. 24.12).

The reason why so little love is in evidence in our day is that people are in rebellion against God and His Law (Ps. 2.1-3). And not just secular, unbelieving people. Believers are in rebellion against God and His Law. *You* might be in rebellion against God and His Law. Instead of yielding their hearts to the Spirit, Who comes to teach and empower us for obedience to God’s Law (Ezek. 36.26, 27), many people, including many believers, prefer to follow the deceitful inclinations of their stone-cold, loveless hearts (Jer. 17.9).

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day prided themselves in being staunch adherents to the Law of God, when in fact, they had substituted for the Law human traditions which gave them power over the people they were supposed to serve, and allowed them to live in relative prosperity amid their Roman captivity (cf. Matt. 15.1-9; 22.23-29).

The people in our generation – including many who identify as Christians – do not want to be under the “bonds” and “cords” of the Law of God. They want to be the captains of their own fate, autonomous, shape-shifting, values-swapping epicenters of moral and ethical decision-making, who prefer to go with the flow – though, as they suspect, the flow is heading over the waterfall – rather than to be anchored by the unchanging, holy and righteous and good Law of God.

The world is in rebellion against God, His Messiah, and His Law. If there ever was a reason to devote ourselves to praying for revival, it is certainly now; and our prayers must certainly include this condition among those for which we seek healing.

God’s answer to rebellion

God has a solution to this chronic and deadly condition, and it has nothing to do with politics: He has appointed His Son as King of the cosmos, and He is giving everything over to Him to revive, restore, retool, repair, and redeploy:

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,

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And distress them in His deep displeasure:
“Yet I have set My King
On My holy hill of Zion.”
“I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
The nations *for* Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.” (Ps. 2:4-8)

The way back from our rebellion against God is by submitting to His King, embracing the Good News of His salvation and Kingdom, and returning to “the Law and to the testimonies”, as the prophets of old counseled.

And this is yet another reason both why the world needs revival, and why revival must begin with each of us (2 Chron. 7:14). *We* are those who have turned from God’s Law, even though we know Jesus commended keeping and teaching that Law as crucial to living in His Kingdom (Matt. 5:17-19). Our failure, as followers of Christ, has encouraged the world to look in places other than God’s Law and Word for its moral and ethical values. And, having thrown off God’s Law – with the encouragement of Lawless Christians – the peoples of the world are now in outright rebellion against Him.

God warns that a day is coming when this rebellion will be put down, and all rebels will perish under His wrath (Ps. 2:10-12). But we do not know when that day is coming. In the meantime, God calls all rebels to “Kiss the Son” and come under His power and authority, that they might once again find a true anchorage in His Word and Law, so that love for God and neighbors may increase on earth as in heaven.

In times of revival, this is precisely what happens.

Praying Psalm 2 for revival

Pray Psalm 2, using it to seek the Lord’s mercy and grace to help the world in its time of need. Pray that people will recognize that their rebellion against God is dangerous and futile. Pray that they will realize they have no power in themselves to heal the blight of lovelessness that has settled on the world. Pray for believers, that they will take up the Law again, and organize their lives and communities around its holy and righteous and good teaching.

Pray that, as a result of meditating in God’s Law day and night (Ps. 1), our love for God and neighbors will grow (Matt. 22:34-40), and our sense of the blessedness of the Gospel will increase, so that we once again take up our mandate to call the world to see Jesus, exalted in glory and advancing His rule on earth as it is in heaven. Pray for boldness for yourself and your fellow believers. Pray that believers and churches everywhere will be revived, and will get back on track with the task of making all the nations disciples (Ps. 2:8; Matt. 28:18-20).

Only God can put down this rebellion that is rending the fabric of humanity and gouging deep cliffs of tribalism throughout the world. We serve the Lord in fear, rejoice with trembling, and kiss the Son Who died and rose again as we come to God in repentance and faith, seeking His blessing for all who put their trust in Him, and calling on Him to revive us again.

For Reflection

1. Why does neglect of or indifference to God’s Law lead to a lack of love?

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2. Why is the only solution to mankind's rebellion against God a *spiritual* rather than a *political* one?
3. What is your own relationship to the Law of God? Are you part of the problem of lovelessness, or part of the solution? Explain.

Next Steps – Transformation. Begin using Psalm 2 to pray for revival. Set up a schedule to meditate on the Ten Commandments as part of your daily time with the Lord. Listen as His Law guides you in showing greater love to Him and to your neighbors.

2 A World of Lies: Psalm 12

*Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips and a double heart they speak.* Psalm 12.1, 2

The course of rebellion

It is quite likely that, when Paul outlined the course of those who rebel against God and His truth (Rom. 1.18-32), he had this psalm in mind. God is continually revealing Himself to people everywhere. The things He has made, and the work and culture in which people engage, bear witness to God's Deity, as well as His wisdom, goodness, and love (cf. Acts 14.17; Ps. 19.1-4; etc.). In doing this, God intends that people should acknowledge Him and seek to know more of Him, that they might be saved (cf. Acts 17.26, 27).

But, as we shall see when we consider Psalm 53, none of those who rebel against God will seek Him. Rather than seek Him, those who rebel against Him *deny* Him, refusing to give Him thanks, turning away from Him and His Law, and setting themselves up as the only reliable authority for their lives. They make idols of all kinds of things, and they devote themselves and all their resources and strength to realizing the promise of those idols, making up the rules of morality as they go along.

When God is rejected, godliness is rejected, and godly people become scarce (Ps. 12.1). And without the restraining example and influence of godly people, the lies of the devil lead people into all manner of deceptions, half-truths, and outright falsehoods, as they cobble together worldviews made of sand, hoping to build castles they can rule by their own authority.

Flattery, gossip, backbiting, fake news, slandering, duplicitousness, double-speak, and empty boasting become the normal means of communication among people who are caught up in the lie (vv. 2-4). The weak and powerless get the short end of the stick, as those who rely on their own autonomy make the rules, set the agendas, and direct all the advantages of life to themselves (vv. 3-5). Oppression, of one kind or another, exists alongside the exercise of power to create societies in which "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold..." (Yeats).

Meanwhile, those who live in fear, oppression, need, and uncertainty cry out for relief and safety. Too often, they put their hopes in politics, thinking that the promises of those caught up in the lie might improve their situation. But this is not the safety they hope it will be, and it's not the safety they need.

Can there be any doubt that Psalm 12 applies to our day? Those who rebel against the Lord and His Law (Ps. 2) turn to the lie and themselves, and the exercise of power however it may be secured, to get what they want out of life. That some folks get trodden underfoot or left behind with the mess is just the way things are.

The place of safety

Psalm 12.1-5 depicts a world of increasing polarities, where the powerful aggrandize themselves by every false and self-serving means, and the poor, needy, fearful, and oppressed cry out for safety. This is the world of our day, when the nations are in rebellion against God and His Law, and the godly – those who should have been holding to God's Law and proclaiming His Word – are nowhere to be seen.

What is needed at such a time as this is for God to arise (v. 5) and to brandish His silver Sword of truth, to create a place of true safety for all who seek Him (vv. 6, 7). God's Word is pure and tried. It is reliable and sure. What God promises, God will perform. What God proposes, nothing can oppose. When God comes

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wielding His Sword, none can stand against His will. The Word of God is the only true safe space for all who feel triggered by the lie in its many and varied forms. All who run to that safe space find power to take that Sword in hand against all earthly powers, for the glory and honor and praise of God, and the progress of His Kingdom on earth (Ps. 149).

God's safe space – His Word – is no place to huddle and cower, waiting for the storms of oppression to pass. It is a place for the refurbishing and fortifying of the soul; for discerning and embracing the larger will and plan of God; for preparing each day for spiritual warfare; and for building pure lives and good works through the Good News of the King Who reigns over all.

Without this work – God arising and equipping His people to fulfill their calling to His Kingdom and glory – the wicked will continue to prowl on every side, and vileness will continue to be exalted as truth by those who rebel against the Word of God (v. 8).

Praying Psalm 12 for revival

We must therefore pray that God will show us our true safe place, and that He will arise amid the lies of these sad, deceived, and oppressive days, to bring revival to His people, renewal to His churches, and a great awakening to the falling-apart world.

As you pray Psalm 12, let verses 1-4 help you feel sadness for the lost world. Pray for people in your life who do not know the Lord. Pray for world leaders, academics, people in the media and in pop culture. Pray that they will see that they are living a lie, that they have lost their way, and that they need to discover a safe place in God.

Then pray that God will arise (vv. 5-7) by renewing in us, His people, a hunger for His Law and all His Word, that we might shelter there daily, be renewed and refortified in every aspect of our lives, and go forth, Sword of the Spirit in hand, to seek God's Kingdom and righteousness in our own spheres of influence – our own [Personal Mission Fields](#). Unless God arises to confront, convict, revive, empower, and transform us, we have no reason to believe that conditions in this world will ever improve.

Call on the Lord to arise in the hearts of all His people, to kindle in us a hunger for His Word, to fill us with His Spirit – which is the Spirit of His Law and of Christ and the Gospel - and to empower us to stand up for Jesus amid these wicked and vile times, as lights in the darkness and salt in times of decay, to show and proclaim Jesus to the world.

The lies will only end when truth is brandished far and wide; and that will only come as God revives us, His people, to follow and proclaim our King and His Kingdom.

For Reflection

1. What does it mean to say that people are autonomous? Why is this a futile way of living?
2. How does God “arise” in such times as are outlined in Psalm 12?
3. Why is the Word of God our only true safe place? What should that safe place do for us?

Next Steps – Preparation: You can see how Psalm 2 and Psalm 12 go together. Try praying them together for a few days, and listen as God speaks to your own soul about what He wants from you.

3 Seek the Lord: Psalm 53

*Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!
When God brings back the captivity of His people,
Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad. Psalm 53.6*

Any seekers?

People are created for seeking God. Paul says this is the reason God separated humankind into nations, with borders, politics, cultures, and social systems of many kinds (Acts 17.26, 27). It is built into the human soul to aspire beyond the confines of body, time, and space, and to connect with Him in Whose image we have all been created.

As if to emphasize the importance of this as the fulfillment of our humanity, Scripture repeatedly commands people to seek the Lord (cf. Deut. 4.29; 1 Chron. 16.10, 11; 22.19; 2 Chron. 14.4; 15.12; Ps. 105.3; etc.). The problem with people who are in rebellion against God, and who prefer the lie to Him and His truth, is that their seeking mechanisms have all been compromised. Their minds are beclouded in the darkness of unbelief, and their hearts are hardened against the true and proper goal of all seeking. Under such circumstances, people don't stop seeking, they simply turn to other things and pursue them, in the vain belief that idols of their own imagining will bring the peace and joy in their souls which only God can provide (cf. Rom. 1.18ff.).

Given that, as our psalmist confirms (cf. also Rom. 3.11), people in the unbelieving world are not seeking the Lord, it begs the question as to why churches have gone to such extraordinary lengths over the past generation to attract a category of people who, apparently, don't exist? Why have we jettisoned so much our traditions and heritage – of singing, confessing our faith, worship, disciple-making, and so forth – in the vain belief that by accommodating to the spirit of the age, “seekers” will find their way to us and be saved? God says, “There are none who seek Me; all have turned aside.” But we say, “We don't think so. We think seekers are out there, and we're going to do everything we can think of to draw them to our churches.”

Doesn't that seem a little hubristic?

And what about us? Jesus commands us to seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God as the defining priority and all-pervading motif of our lives (Matt. 6.33). But do we even know what that entails? Do we believe that we have received the Kingdom, and that we are called to work in its power to see it come in greater fullness on earth, as it is in heaven (Dan. 7.18; 1 Cor. 4.20; Matt. 6.10)? Are we seeking Christ and His Kingdom, that we might be entirely consumed as living sacrifices for Him (Rom. 12.1, 2)? Or do we go to our churches because we're seeking Jesus to do something for us?

The Church captive

In Psalm 53, David envisioned the people of God captive to the rebellious, lie-filled world. The salvation that God had invested in His people was bottled up within them, as they hunkered down behind the walls of their city, hoping not to be overwhelmed by the rising tide of lies and rebellion all around.

This is an apt way of thinking about the state of the Church in our day. Many observers insist that the Church has fallen captive to the spirit of the naturalism and narcissism of our day, that we have become ensnared in the tar babies of materialism and entertainment, and that we have exchanged our birthright as sons and daughters of the living God in the belief that we can have Christ and all this world's goods and fun as well. That stuff about dying to yourself and taking up your cross? That's not for us; or, if it is for us, we can define it so that it sounds like a great, non-risky adventure of fun and feeling good.

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We don't realize that the unbelieving world, to employ a contemporary colloquialism, is having our lunch – eating us like bread, as David put it (v. 4). The unbelieving world is content, for now, to have us pursue our faith as a private matter, keeping our commitments to the Lord within the parameters of space and time defined by our participation in church. But let us seem like we intend to bring Jesus and His rule into the culture, the workplace, or the schools, and the howls of protest rise like ravenous wolves, backing most of us down to the relative comfort of the four walls of our church. Or let us talk about Him freely, confidently, continuously in any place other than our Bible study group, and they will call out trigger warnings, accuse us of hate crimes, invoke the separation of church and state, and otherwise not so politely tell us to shut up.

And we seem all too ready to comply with their demands.

We have become captive to the culture and its agenda, and the way we practice our faith is being shaped more by the temper of the times than the teaching of God's Word. We may not like being told that we have become a Church captive, but it is what we need to hear above all. David spoke these words to the people of God in his day, and he left them for us – twice in the book of psalms (Ps. 14) – to urge us to be on guard against such a condition befalling us as well.

And the only way out of this is by recovering our calling as seekers of the Lord.

Praying Psalm 53 for revival

Psalm 53 insists that our adjustments, accommodations, gimmicks, projects, and programs aimed at attracting “seekers”, are a waste of time. The unbelieving world wants only to devour us, not to join us. As we shall see in Psalms 74 and 79, the ways of the world have so leached the Church of its unique vitality, that what we are and how we practice our faith today would hardly be recognizable to previous generations of the faithful.

Let Psalm 53 reveal our true condition and our true need: We are a people captive to the world, and we need God to bring us out of this captivity, to fill us with the joy and gladness that can only be found in Him, and to revive and renew us, so that “the salvation of Israel” would come roaring forth from our churches once again, in words of truth and deeds of sacrificial love.

Pray this psalm in an attitude of self-examination, asking the Lord to show you any ways you have become captive to the world. Pray for your church, and all the churches in your community, that God might bring His Spirit of conviction and repentance to the entire Body of Christ, and that He might quicken His saving power within us again, and give us His Spirit in power to make us true and courageous witnesses for Jesus Christ (Acts 1.8).

The salvation of God will only come roaring out of His Church again when His people have been delivered from their captivity. Our programs and projects won't make this happen. Only God can free us and revive us, and we must seek Him according to His Word, so great is our need for revival today.

For reflection

1. Why do we keep insisting that the world is chock full of seekers, when God says none are seeking Him?
2. Why did Jesus insist that seeking His Kingdom and righteousness must be our defining priority and all-pervading motif in life?
3. Do you agree that the Church today is captive to the spirit of the times, rather than the Spirit of Christ? Explain.

Next steps – Transformation: Spend the next few days praying Psalm 53 at various times during the day.

4 Arise, O God: Psalm 74

*Arise, O God, plead Your own cause;
Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.
Do not forget the voice of Your enemies;
The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.* Psalm 74:22, 23

Asaph and his times

It's quite possible that Asaph was not the most popular worship leader of his day.

Asaph was appointed by David to lead musicians, singers, and the worship of God's people in the temple that was shortly to be built (cf. 1 Chron. 25: 1-6). His calling was to "prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals," "according to the order of the king." Asaph was thus expected to teach the people of Israel, and to do so with the authority of a prophet.

His twelve psalms (50, 73-83) give us a flavor of the kind of teaching he brought, once the temple had been built and he began to serve under the oversight of Solomon. His themes are dire, harsh, threatening, and filled with images of corruption, dissolution, and the downfall of the nation. At the time he served, Israel was experiencing the high-water mark of her existence, ruling over all the surrounding nations, awash in riches, and sporting a temple and system of worship that was a wonder of the world in its day. On every hand, it seemed the blessings of God just kept coming (cf. 1 Kgs. 10). And indeed, God was very good to His people during the days in which Asaph led them in worship.

But Asaph was a prophet, and prophets often see things that elude the notice of the rest of us. Asaph saw in himself an easy tendency to want to rebel against God, to be done with Him and His Law, and join the bands of rich and carefree people who were everywhere to be seen in the city of Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 73). But God had His hand on Asaph, and He enabled him to recognize and confess his covetous tendencies, and to return to the Lord, seeking and delighting in Him as his highest objective and hope.

It may be, as Asaph pondered how easy it was for him, a prophet and worship leader, to drift from the Lord and His salvation, that he began to notice indications that people around him were giving in to their fleshly desires and material lusts, all the while they continued worshiping God and putting up a good front before their neighbors. After all, had not even King Solomon taken many wives and concubines, and set up kiosks to honor their false deities, even on the grounds of the temple?

The more he observed and thought about this, the more he could see where these compromises would lead. The nation had opened its doors to worldly ways, and it would not be long before God acted in judgment against them. The people of Israel needed revival, and Asaph determined to put that need before them, front and center.

The sanctuary compromised

We're going to look at two of Asaph's psalms – 74 and 79 – as we continue working to understand the need for revival. Then, in the final part of this study, we'll consider Psalm 80, another of Asaph's psalms, and how it can help us in laying hold on the promise of revival for our day.

Psalm 74 begins with a question. Asaph wanted to know why God had cast His people off, why He was angry with them, and seemed to have turned His back on them. The evidence of this, to Asaph's prophetic eye, could be seen in the compromised state of Israel's worship. Granted, they were doing all the right things in worship (cf. Ps. 50:8); however, their worship lacked sincerity, gratitude, devotion, and daily obedience (again,

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Ps. 50.14-22). To Asaph, it was as if an enemy had come into the temple, hoisted his own pagan banners, defaced the worship God prescribed, and torched the sanctuary (Ps. 74.4-7). And the damage had spread throughout the land, so that every local gathering of worshipers was equally invaded and compromised (v. 8). True preachers of the Word were no longer in evidence, and no one could tell how long this tragic situation would continue (vv. 9, 10). If this process of compromise and corruption were to be arrested, God Himself would have to do it (v. 11).

And Asaph knew that God was capable of doing so. He recalled the greatness and power of God – Creator, Savior, sovereign Lord, Deliverer of His people, Ruler of all things (vv. 12-17). He was certainly capable of reviving the people, should He choose to rise up and do so.

As Asaph looked into the souls of God's people – beginning with the king and his court (1 Kgs. 11.1ff) – he could see that they were embracing pagan ways, giving in to worldly desires, and flooding the sanctuary of God with darkness, rather than light (vv. 18-21). He called on God to arise, to plead His case against His people, rebuke and destroy those who were in rebellion against Him, and restore His people in His ways (vv. 22, 23).

In Asaph's mind, God's people were giving in to all the wrong desires. They were bringing the ways of the world into the worship of God. And in so doing, they brought the rebellion of lawlessness into the sanctuary of the Lord. The people were no longer seeking God; they were seeking their own pleasure and convenience.

Praying Psalm 74 for revival

As we pray this psalm for revival, we need to allow Asaph's insights to search our souls. Are we compromising our Kingdom-and-glory calling (1 Thess. 2.12) by harboring worldly desires? Do we delight more in material things, entertainment, and ease than in the Lord and His calling? Have we so changed the face of worship in our churches as to have abandoned all that God's Word teaches us? Have our Christian life and services of worship become arenas for worldly, materialist, self-seeking ways to strut our stuff (Ps. 12.8)?

We need to look to God, to renew our vision of God – of His greatness, beauty, majesty, wisdom, glory, might, and power, as well as of His wrath and threat of judgment for all who rebel against Him and His ways (vv. 12-17, 1-3). God is more to be desired than the things of this world (Ps. 73.25-28). His Kingdom is more beautiful and more enduring than all the regimes of men. His Son rules over the earth and its peoples, and He is in the business of making all things new, not of accommodating holy practices to worldly agendas.

And then we must call on God to arise, and plead His own cause. Plead with God to arise in your soul, to revive you day by day, and to fix your gaze on Christ and His Kingdom in everything you do. Pray for God to arise and revive all His people, to renew our churches, so that we return to God's ways of worshiping, making disciples, and taking the Good News to the world. Pray that God will arise and strike shame and terror in the hearts of His enemies, that, as we proclaim His message to the world, many of them would kiss the Son of God and submit themselves entirely to Him (Ps. 2.12).

Asaph saw things that most people chose not to see. In our day, we need more people with the vision of Asaph to come to the Lord to revive them, and to intercede for their churches and the world, that revival, renewal, and awakening might once again spread throughout the earth. At a time when revival was needed in the history of ancient Israel, King Hezekiah instructed the people to pray and sing the psalms of Asaph and David (2 Chron. 29.30). This is good advice for our own day as well.

For reflection

1. How can you know if your soul is being compromised with worldliness?
2. How can we tell when our churches are turning from God's ways to the ways of the world?

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3. Do you agree that the Church today is captive to the spirit of the times, rather than the Spirit of Christ? Explain.

Next steps – Transformation: Spend the next few days praying Psalm 74 at various times during the day.

5 For Your Glory: Psalm 79

*Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,
For Your name's sake!
Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"* Psalm 79.9, 10

Desolation and reproach

The psalms of Asaph seem to go from bad to worse. But they're only reflecting his view of the spiritual state of the nation in his day, and Asaph's increasing sense of urgency for God to revive and renew His people. Israel in Asaph's day seemed to be doing just fine, thank you. The nation was at peace, prosperity abounded, and everyone seemed to be having a good time.

But Asaph, as a prophet of God, was looking below the surface of things to the soul of the nation. He saw in his own soul, in the compromises made by King Solomon, and in the flaunting of riches and pleasures by the people of Jerusalem, a separation from God that was growing (cf. Pss. 73, 50; 1 Kings 11.1-11). While the people regarded themselves as full and living the good life, God saw them as spiritually dead, and an increasing stench to their neighbors. They were diligent in worship, but God regarded their worship as empty and hypocritical. Asaph saw the nation as becoming desolate, and a reproach to the surrounding peoples (Ps. 79.1-4).

And he knew that this situation would reflect poorly on God. He cried out, "How long, LORD?" (v. 5) How long would God allow this situation to continue, this condition to worsen? Was He not jealous for His own honor? Would He not move to rid His people of the compromises that had leached their distinctiveness, drained their vitality, compromised their witness, and emptied them of true life in God (vv. 5-9)?

Asaph called down the judgment of God against those who had defiled His worship, forsaken His covenant, and rebelled against the knowledge of the Lord. But he knew that all these iniquities were only partially the fault of the surrounding nations; the people of God had opened their hearts to these compromises, and they were the object of God's anger and just retribution.

Israel had been brought low, but most people didn't seem to realize what was happening. In his psalms – such as Psalm 79 – Asaph determined to confront the people of his day with their drift from the Lord, and to call them to seek the Lord for revival and renewal.

Repentance and mercy

Asaph understood that the way out of God's wrath and back into His favor is through repentance. He insisted that Israel needed to face up to her sins and seek the mercy of God for repentance (v. 8). Only God could forgive their sins and set them back on a proper course with Him (v. 9). Only God could remove the reproach they had brought upon themselves (v. 10), and restore them to true covenant faithfulness and life.

Israel had become captive to unacknowledged sins of materialism, sensuality, narcissism, and pragmatism (v. 11). Only God could break these chains and bonds and lead His rebellious people back into the cords and fetters of love which He had given them in His Law (Ps. 2.3; cf. Hos. 11.1-4).

Asaph understood that Israel's failure to remain faithful to the Lord, and their compromised condition, had brought reproach to the Name of the Lord (v. 12). He called upon God to act in tender mercy for the

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restoration of His people and the glory of His Name (vv. 8, 9). Only God could atone for and blot out the sins of His people (v. 9). But the people of God, who were prisoners in a dungeon of their own making, would have to cry out in groaning to the Lord, before the great reviving power of God would deliver them from their desolation (v. 11). Asaph was determined to lead them in seeking the Lord for revival.

Praying Psalm 79 for revival

When we're praying the psalms, and whenever we're reading Scripture, we have to keep in mind that God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows the true condition of our souls. We need to listen to Him, speaking in His Word, and consider carefully how what He says there applies to us.

So in praying Psalm 79, we must begin by asking the Lord to reveal any hidden transgressions, secret compromises, and flagging loyalty to Him that may be festering in our soul. Revival, we recall, begins individually, as we pray daily, "Lord, revive *me!*" God is able to bring to our attention any thoughts, inclinations of the heart, or unexamined priorities and practices that may be draining us of spiritual vitality and causing us to drift from our great salvation. Whatever God shows us about the depths of our soul, we must be quick to confess and repent of, charting realistic courses to return to the Lord and overcome evil with good (Ps. 119:59, 60; Rom. 12:21).

Let us give thanks to God in advance for how He will deliver us, and our churches, from our captivity to worldly ways, and resume His place as our Good Shepherd (Ps. 79:13). We will praise Him in advance for bringing the greatness of His power (v. 11) to come to our aid and rescue; and we will pray that He will do so for all His captive people, wherever they are.

And we will give glory to God by praising Him and by charting a new course for our lives. We are called to live for God's glory in everything we do (1 Cor. 10:31); let us be diligent to seek His ways, and to rest in the power of His Spirit, to help us bring glory to Him as He revives and renews us day by day.

We should also pray that God will intervene to deliver us from whatever enemies have caused us to turn from Him. Spiritual forces of wickedness reach out to us continually. We need God to fight for us against such foes, so let us turn to Him continually for protection, lest the ways of the flesh and world establish new beachheads in our soul, or we knowingly compromise with the enemies of the Lord.

To the extent that we have become captive to our own foes, rather than to Christ, we need revival to restore our fellowship with God. Only He can bring this glorious restoration, but we must seek it diligently in prayer.

For Reflection

1. Who are the enemies trying to keep you from a more powerful and more fruitful walk with the Lord? How do these enemies seek to divert you from the Lord?
2. How can we tell when our church is beginning to lose its spiritual vitality, and to become a desolation before the Lord?
3. Can we expect God to revive us if we refuse to seek Him in prayer? Why not?

Next Steps – Transformation: Begin praying Psalm 79 as part of your daily regimen of seeking the Lord for revival.

6 Build Up What Is Broken: Psalm 102

*But You, O LORD, shall endure forever,
And the remembrance of Your name to all generations.
You will arise and have mercy on Zion;
For the time to favor her,
Yes, the set time, has come.
For Your servants take pleasure in her stones,
And show favor to her dust.
So the nations shall fear the name of the LORD,
And all the kings of the earth Your glory.
For the LORD shall build up Zion;
He shall appear in His glory. Psalm 102:12-16*

Not the way it's supposed to be

Neil Plantinga tells us in his book, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, that sin, and all its attendant miseries and blights, are an aberration. God made the world very good, and human beings upright, to gaze on and delight in Him (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 7:29). But sin ruins everything, so that even those who know the Lord can be weighed down with the burden of wickedness in many ways. Psalm 102 is the prayer of a faithful believer, who was feeling beat down by the world of sin, and who saw the walls of God's glorious city in desperate need of repair. He was experiencing the world as not what it should be, and he looked to God to set things right.

The psalmist felt the weight of sin in the form of spiritual burnout (v. 3). God had turned away His face from him (v. 2), and his inner life was withering away (v. 4). Consequently, his strength was failing (vv. 5, 23), he felt completely out of sorts and alone (vv. 6, 7), and his enemies were on his case all the time (v. 8), adding to his sense of separation from God.

This is not the way it's supposed to be when one believes in the Lord and seeks His Kingdom and glory.

Not only in himself, but in the Lord's city as well, everything seemed broken down and in need of repair. The servants of God loved His city, even though it was but stones and dust (v. 14); but they were helpless to do whatever was necessary to build the city of the Lord to its former glory.

This is a picture of spiritual desolation; it is also a picture of hope. Because the believer in his desolation knew where to turn. He knew God could renew his soul and repair the city. And he knew that, when He did, it would be a glorious outcome for generations to come. His prayer was thus that God would arise, and have mercy on His people, and show His favor to them once again (v. 13).

It was time for God to arise, not because His people were desolate and in need of revival, but because *they recognized their need, confessed their desolation, and turned to the Lord in prayer.*

When God arises

But what does it look like when God arises? What did the psalmist want God to do, and how would he know when God's favor had returned to His people?

The psalmist believed that God would answer his prayers (v. 17). It is certain that God will not arise to revive and renew us, much less to awaken the world to His glory, until His people recognize their need, repent, and call on Him in prayer. Once they do begin to pray, it is an indication that God has begun His reviving work

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(Ps. 80.18), and thus they should be encouraged to continue praying, and to pray even more fervently.

God can rebuild His city. He can take all the seemingly insignificant dust, and all the broken stones, and renew them in His glory, so that the nations will see and fear the Name of the Lord (vv. 13-15). The Lord builds up His city by appearing to His people in His glory (v. 16), restoring their souls, renewing their vision of Christ, exalted in glory, and of His Kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven.

God renews the worship of His people, refocusing them on Himself, and leading them in fervent, exultant praise (vv. 21, 22). He strengthens His people to serve Him once again (v. 22), so that they take up the work of being witnesses, making disciples, and building His Church according to His Word. As God's people declare the Name of the Lord, the nations will see and fear, and turn to the Lord, and all this is duly recorded for coming generations, so that they also may arise and be established before the Lord (vv. 18, 28). A revival spanning generations is only prayers of confession and supplication away, if we will give ourselves to this great and glorious work.

Praying Psalm 102 for revival

Let Psalm 102 search your soul, and lead you to consider the situation in your church, and all the churches in your community. Where the Lord shows you dryness, weakness, failure of mission, complacency, or any other indications that your soul and church are not what they're supposed to be, ask the Lord to cleanse and heal you, and to give you repentance, that you may seek Him with fresh power.

Confess to the Lord that He alone has the power to bring revival to you, renewal to His Church, and awakening to the world. Review and praise Him for His many great and glorious works (vv. 25-27), especially for the fact that Jesus is established on His throne (v. 12), and that He is both building His Church and advancing His Kingdom, even while we languish in desolation. Call upon the Lord to strengthen His people for true worship and daily service in declaring His Name by their lives and words.

And pray for the generation that succeeds yours, that the great work of revival and awakening that God begins in your day will be recorded and passed on to them, that the fear of God and the Name of God may continue in glory for many years to come.

When we begin groaning because of our captivity to worldly visions and ways (v. 20), crying out to the Lord to hear our prayers and see our desolate condition (vv. 1-11), and pleading with God to revive us and renew His churches (vv. 12-27); and as we persevere in such prayers day by day, we will grow in the confidence that God will arise and have mercy on us (v. 13), and that He will restore us to His favor, and build up His broken people and city once again.

God can revive us. But we must pray.

For Reflection

1. What is God waiting for to begin a work of revival in you and your church? How might that come to pass?
2. What will be the signs that God is beginning to revive you and your church?
3. How should we expect revival to impact our world? Our children?

Next Steps – Preparation: Add today's Psalm to those you are already praying. Take one psalm per day, and use it throughout the day to seek the Lord for revival. Share with other believers how they can begin praying these psalms for revival.

7 To Set the Captives Free: Psalm 126

*Bring back our captivity, O LORD,
As the streams in the South.* Psalm 126.4

A captive people

The captivity of God's people is a major theme in the Old Testament. It symbolizes both God's power to deliver His people *from* the most unfavorable of conditions – as we see in the Exodus; and it also testifies to God's power to deliver His people *into* diminished and desperate conditions as a judgment for their sins – which was the reason for the Babylonian exile.

In a certain sense, the most sincere and faithful of the people of Israel understood that, for all their seeking of the Lord, their souls remained captive to powers that only God could overcome: “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name...” (Ps. 142.7)

Being in captivity can do strange things to people's minds. As we see in the New Testament, people who are living in captivity can become so used to it, so inured to its constraining effects, that they don't consider themselves to be captive at all. When Jesus proclaimed the freedom that comes from God's truth, the Jewish leaders responded, “We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone” (Jn. 8.32). Those folks either had short memories, or they had become so comfortable in their bondage to Rome, that they didn't consider it captivity at all.

Those who do not consider themselves to be captive to outside circumstances and powers see no need for the liberating truth of the Word of God and revival. In our day, many believers and their churches have become captive to a naturalistic, narcissistic, and materialistic worldview. They are comfortable with their things, their leisure, and their low-demand churches. They would insist that they are not captive to anything, yet they inhabit a growing ambience of self-centeredness, unbelief, immorality, and godlessness, and tell themselves it's not their problem, and there's nothing they can do about it. Especially if doing so might infringe on their own comfort.

Such people have no vision for revival, because they don't see the need for it. Their spiritual lives, and the spiritual impact of their church, are as dry as a desert stream, and they have no expectation that rivers of living water will ever flow through them to flood their community with the mercy and grace of Jesus. They are like the Jews of Jesus' day: captive, but unwilling to acknowledge it, and comfortable with their religious lives just as they are.

Sow what?

The people singing Psalm 126, as they walked together up to the temple, rejoiced that the dream of freedom they had nurtured during their captivity was at last realized. They had come back from captivity. The temple and city were rebuilt. They were rejoicing with holy gladness at the great things God had done for them (Ezra 6.15-22). Their dream of freedom, revival, renewal, and awakening had at last been fulfilled, and they were filled with holy joy. And even the schemes against them by the surrounding nations had been thwarted.

Their dream had been a long time coming. Most of that time – seventy years in Babylon – was spent in sorrowing for sins and working to fortify and increase the people of God, and to bless their neighbors as best they could (Jer. 29.4-13). The faithful people of Israel – like Daniel and his friends – daily sowed toward the promised harvest they dreamed of – freedom from captivity, revival of the nation, and a world awakened to the power and goodness of God. Though their lives were dry as a wadi in the south, they envisioned the day when waters of mercy and grace would channel through them to the world, as the holy spiritual river that

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ever refreshes the city of God began flowing in them again (Ps. 46.4, 5).

What did they sow toward such a harvest? Tears of repentance for their sins and unbelief. Remorse for having accommodated to the ways of the surrounding nations, and having left off the Word and Law of God. Seeds of faith to one another and their children, and of a vision for revival; together with the daily steps of obedience that would serve to bring that day closer. Prayers for forgiveness, revival, and awakening, probably using many of the psalms that we have considered in this series (cf. Dan. 9).

The people of Israel acknowledged their captive state, but they did not accept it. They dreamed new dreams, sowed faithful seeds, and encouraged one another to seek the Lord for revival.

We should do the same.

Praying Psalm 126 for revival

In Jesus' first public sermon, He identified Himself as the One Who had come to set the captives free (Lk. 4.18). We will not know full and flourishing freedom in Jesus until we acknowledge our need to be set free from whatever of this world yet clings to us. As we pray Psalm 126, therefore, let us be specific to sorrow for our sins, and those of the Church, and to repent of those sins and seek a new vision of what God can do.

Then let us sow seeds of that vision to one another, following God's Word, as revealed in the Psalms and elsewhere, so that we desire to be set free, revived, and renewed in the Lord, and to see the effects of such revival in the awakening of the world to Jesus. Let us dream big dreams of what God can do, based on what God has done in that past and what He has promised in His Word. And let us sow the little everyday seeds of prayer, obedience, and mutual encouragement that will put us on the path of repentance that leads to revival.

And let us encourage one another in this effort. The songs of ascent – like Psalm 126 – were to be sung together, prayed together, and used to encourage new vision and greater faithfulness among those who were seeking a new day in the Lord. Pray this psalm with friends. Here's a version of it you can sing together:

(Truro: [*Shout for the Blessed Jesus Reigns!*](#))

When God restored our fortunes all, we were like those who sweetly dream.
Our mouths with joy and laughter filled, made Him our constant song and theme.

Then the astonished nations said, "The Lord has done great things for them!"
Indeed, great things our God has done, Whose Name we praise, Amen, Amen!

Restore our fortunes, Lord our King! Let grace like flowing streams prevail.
All they with tears of joy shall sing who sow while yet they weep and wail.

They who in tears of sorrow sow and cast their seed on every hand,
with joy shall reach their heav'nly home, and bring the harvest of their land.

Sing it with your family. Sing it to yourself throughout the day. Sing it until a desire for revival burns in your soul, a vision for revival commands your hope, and a commitment to working for revival – beginning in prayer – becomes a priority in your daily life.

For reflection

1. What would be some indicators that your faith, and the life of your church, had become captive to a worldview other than that revealed in the Bible?
2. How can we nurture a vision of revival? Why should we do so?

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3. What will you begin to do to sow the seeds that lead to a harvest of revival, renewal, and awakening?

Next Steps – Transformation: Sing and pray Psalm 126 along with other psalms we’ve studied, so that you gain a growing sense of the need for revival. Download this and the previous series of studies on the theme, Revived!, and share them with some friends.

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What conditions suggest that we and our churches are in need of revival?
2. Why should pray these psalms and share them with one another?
3. What can you do to sow seeds of revival?
4. Why are confessing our sins and repenting of them important first steps in seeking revival?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this second installment in our study on seeking the Lord for revival? How are you putting that lesson to work in your daily life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.