

# Revival - Part 1

by J.I. Packer

---

*J.I. Packer explores the theological and historical dimensions of revival, emphasizing its divine nature and impact on the church and community.*

**Duration:** 1:18:42

**Scripture:** Psalm 67:1-2, Isaiah 60:1-3, Zechariah 8:5

**Topics:** "Revival", "Spiritual Renewal"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the impact of God's blessings on his people and the resulting evangelistic overflow. He emphasizes that when God blesses his people, the world feels the impact and nations are drawn to the light and life that God has given to his people. The preacher also highlights the presence of sin when God comes close, as the Holy God reveals the knowledge of one's sins. He then delves into his understanding of revival, drawing from Psalm 85:6 and emphasizing the suddenness and fast work of God's blessing during times of revival. The sermon concludes with a mention of the overnight maturity of love and service that occurs during revival.

---

## Transcript

Well, I appreciate very much that welcome and introduction. It establishes a basis of fellowship between you and me right from the start. I was wondering how I should set about establishing that basis of fellowship for myself.

I thought that perhaps the best way of doing it was to make reference to the great George Whitefield, who went to my old grade school. No, that isn't the way to say it. Whose grade school I was privileged to attend some 200 years after.

Let's say it that way round. This was in Gloucester, England. George Whitefield, as you know, was the focal point of the awakening on both sides of the Atlantic in the 18th century.

And he had a way of dealing with this problem of fellowship with all sorts and conditions of denominations. There was a bit that used to recur from time to time in some of his sermons. He would look up to heaven, look up to the sky, and call out to Father Abram, whom he used to envisage as occupying the position of Saint Peter in Roman Catholic mythology.

And this is the dialogue that he would go through. Father Abram, what have you got up there in heaven? Any Baptists? No. Any Presbyterians? No.

Any Episcopalians? No. We don't know any of those names up here. We are just Christians up here.

I am with you, brothers and sisters, as a fellow believer, a Christian. I am with you as a Reformed Christian. In the 18th century, a Dutchman, I think it was, wrote a textbook of Reformed Christianity under the title, Synopsis of the Purer Theology.

I am a Reformed Christian because I believe the Reformed faith needs to be the purer theology. And, as has already been said this morning by Sonny, I recognise that the purer theology needs to vindicate itself by bringing forth the purer life in its adherence. I was struck some years ago, five years ago I suppose, when somebody said to me about the books I have written, they are all spirituality really, aren't they? It had never occurred to me that they were.

I thought that I was asserting key doctrines which have to be asserted for the glory of God. But when I thought about it, I realised, yes, of course they are. Because just like the Puritans, who have meant so much to me, I don't find myself able to let any matter of doctrine rest until I have tried my best to bring it down to earth and show what difference it ought to make in people's lives.

And please God, I shall go on writing that way and I shall go on lecturing and preaching that way. That, I believe, is how it ought to be. That most certainly is how it is in the Scriptures.

And from that standpoint also, I find myself very much in the right place in this conference. It's already become abundantly plain that your concern is not just with purer doctrine up in the clouds. You want to see the Church renewed and transformed by the purer doctrine that God has given us to see and share.

So do I. So are we in fellowship? I believe we are. And I proceed on that basis. You've given me a great subject to explore with you.

I say, you. It was actually Uncle Ernie Riesinger. Every Calvinist uncle.

Wonderful man. It was Uncle Ernie Riesinger who gave me the subject. I was happy enough to accept it.

He asked me if I would talk about revival. I said, yes, by the grace of God, I would. And now I set myself to do just that.

Let's start with a word. Where does that term revival come from? It's an 18th century word. It originally was part of a three-word phrase.

Both sides of the Atlantic in the 18th century, they were talking about the revival of religion. You can, of course, have a revival or a quickening and renewal of interest in all sorts of things. Quite specifically, revival of religion was the 18th century interest.

And, of course, when we talk about revivals, we are focusing on revivals of religion as our interest. The phrase was used in a book title by the great Jonathan Edwards in 1742. Edwards lived before the days of publisher blurbs on dust jackets.

And, therefore, like most 18th century and 17th century men, he went in for long titles rather than short ones. He wanted book titles that would explain to everybody what would be in the book if they bought it

and read it. And the work I'm thinking of is the work titled Reflections on the Revival of Religion in New England in 1740.

A classic statement, incidentally, of the theology of revival, which I embrace and I suspect you do also. In 1835, nearly a century afterwards, another impressive man used the same phrase for book title. It was less than 12 months after my own conversion at Oxford at the age of 18 that I had a copy of this work pressed into my hands.

It's Charles Finney's Revivals of Religion, a book which, theologically, I don't altogether go along with, but a book whose business-like passion for the winning of foes made an impression on me then, which remains with me and I trust will never leave me. Revivals of religion. That's the phrase.

That's what we're concerned about here. The general thought, as has already been said in this conference, is of divine visitation. God visiting his people, that's the phrase that recurs in Scripture over and over to express the spiritual reality of revival from the divine point of view.

God pays a visit and everything is made different as a result. But when I read Finney and Edwards alongside each other, I realised that there was a difference between the two conceptions of what was involved in God's visitation. Edwards, the pioneer, and in my book, the greatest theologian of revival that the world has yet seen, pictured God's visitation as like a wave breaking on the seashore.

A wave coming in, powerfully as the big waves do, and flooding the world. And in expanding this vision, he laid great stress on the sovereignty of God in revival, and he stressed that it was through the successive waves of spiritual blessing that broke on the world that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, was advanced and built up. You know I expect that he was a post-millennialist and his vision was of the kingdom of God advancing until the whole world was brought under the dominion of Christ before the judgment day.

And his doctrine of revival in its broadest statement was just this, that it was by the successive breaking of waves of revival upon the world that the kingdom of Christ had been extended and would be extended until the earth was filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Finney's conception was a little different. He didn't use Edwards' picture of the breaking waves.

He used rather the image of the harvest that the farmer reaps following his wise sowing and tending of the seed. And his thought focused around the means that must be used to bring about revival in the church. In analyzing the notion of revival, he focused on evangelism.

That is, the converting of those who came to the church services but had never yet come to know the Lord. And in talking about the means of revival, he stressed preaching, the preaching of the gospel, and prayer, passionate, honest, hearty, serious prayer from God's people. And these, he maintained, were the means that God had guaranteed to bless.

So that he would say, you may have revival in your church if you want it. Well now, I'm glad that you're not saying amen to all of that. Because this is really very one-sided.

For Finney to say that there's no warrant for expecting a visitation of God until one begins to pray and preach the word is entirely justified. But for Finney to say, as it were, that we've got God in our pocket so that we can have revival any time we like it, provided we are prepared to work for it, is overstatement of a kind which eventually boomerangs, you know, in Finney's own ministry. He wrote his revivals of religion at

the end of ten years which was a very fruitful, genuine revival ministry.

God had used him as an instrument of revival. It was revival time, and churches had been quickened, in many cases, in a quite momentous way. But then after he'd written his revivals, and his book on revivals, and published it, the era of revival ebbed away, and he preached, and prayed, and taught others to preach and pray as he'd done before, and revival didn't come.

He never was able to cope with that in his own theology. He never understood why it was. And at various times in the next 40 years of his life until his ministry ended, he was casting around and offering views to the world as to why it was that revival was not coming in the way it had come in those first ten years.

And he made guesses like it's because we don't teach the second blessing, Christian perfection, it's because we don't campaign violently enough against the institution of slavery, it's because we don't practice vegetarianism. He even got to that. The truth was that he was flummoxed.

He committed himself to this theology that if we seek it with all our heart, we may have it. And, as I said, in the latter years of his life it didn't come in the way that it came in those first ten years. And I think that just as one has to say that it's only because Calvinism is true that there are any Arminians in the world, I mean, there wouldn't be any Christians at all to go wrong in their doctrine of grace if Calvinism wasn't true.

So, with Finney, if Edward's theology of revival hadn't been true, there never would have been those ten years of blessing out of which Finney generalized in a slightly off-key way. Can you see that? But, nonetheless, Finney's business-like passion for the winning of souls and the renewing of the Church is something that I think ought to be admired, whatever corrections we find it necessary to make in his theology. Well, there were two concepts, two different ways of spelling out the notion of a revival of religion.

In this twentieth century there's been a third. You'll find it, for instance, in the book by Richard Loveless titled *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. It's a twentieth century development.

It has resulted from study of the story of what happened in Jerusalem in the early days, Acts 2 through 11. This is the notion of, and I borrow Loveless' phrase, continuous as distinct from cyclic revival. That is to say, the notion of revival as a continued state, a state of health in the Church, is contrasted with the older notion of revival as a visitation from God.

I suspect that both notions can be linked together without loss to either. I think there's truth in the continuous revival notion. I think that one can express it by saying that notion is pointing to the hope of revivedness.

The constant quality of Church life, just as I think, I do think, with Edwards and with Spinney both, that the basic notion of revival from which you must start is the notion of divine visitation at a time of spiritual deadness and apathy. If you look at the so-called renewal movement in the Christian churches, the charismatic renewals and the various offshoots of that movement which we've seen in recent years, I think that at heart, however well or however clumsily they express themselves, what they're really after is the ideal of a Church that is continuously healthy because it's open to God and thoroughly committed to the path of Christian obedience. And I don't want to lose that thought from my theology of revival, and I trust that you don't either.

So what is one to say? Well, I've talked about how the word is used. Let me now try to tell you how I understand the reality to which the word is referring. Let me offer you my understanding of what revival is based on my suspicion that there's some truth in each of these three notions.

Some. More perhaps in one than in the other two. But I'll leave you to work out which I have in mind when I say that.

But let me say it from Scripture. Let me put it to you from Psalm 85 and verse 6, that famous prayer which I'm sure you could repeat to me. Will thou not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you? Thou turns into you in my new international version which I've got here, and that's the form of words which I follow now.

Without going into the theology of revival, which is there in Psalm 85 in a very wonderful way, let me simply say that from that prayer I get the following points. First, the idea of revival. It is God quickening, restoring life in a situation where life has not been observable in any great measure up to this point.

Second, the subject of revival. God revives His church, His own people. Will thou not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you? Revival is a work, whatever else it has in it, that begins with God's people.

Revival, therefore, is not something that man can work up. It's something that God must send down. That isn't a way of saying that we should sit back passively and wait for it, but it is a way of saying that we are dependent on God first.

That's the third point, the agent of revival. Will thou not, will you not, revive and quicken us again? That's the point which constantly, I'm afraid, most notably, I have to say, among some indebted, get missed today. You know, a revival is an evangelistic campaign.

Man organizes it. Man prays for it. Man sets it up.

Man prays for it. Man says, God, you bless this thing that we've laid on for your glory. Man's in church the whole time.

And God, in effect, becomes our servant in what we call the revival. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have evangelistic campaigns. That's the question which one must discuss on its own basis and in its own terms.

I'm not speaking to that. I am only saying that whatever else an evangelistic campaign humanly organized is, in and of itself, it's not revival. Revival is God's work.

Revival is God sending down from heaven a blessing beyond anything that man can work up and certainly, as I said when we first started looking at this verse, beyond anything that will have been seen in the church in the immediately preceding past. You can see then how encouraged I was when 25 years ago, I think it was, I saw an advert in a Christian journal I have it clipped here before me. In large letters, it says, Don't plan a revival.

I saw those words and I said in my heart, Aha, they're giving the message of love. Then I looked at the small print and my heart sank again. Don't plan a revival, big letters, until you have these three samples of colour advertising planned especially for the church which wants something different but must operate on a restricted budget.

Write for them today. No, it wasn't quite the change of heart that I supposed. The agent of revival is God, not we.

And we cannot command God in this matter. Fourth aspect of the situation, the circumstances of revival, as I hinted before, God quickens at a time when the church is moribund, half dead. And under God's anger, we're going to hear more of God's anger this morning, let me just say it now in a single sentence that's there as a matter of fact in the previous verse of Psalm 85, Will you be angry with us, Lord, forever? asks the psalmist.

He recognises that God is angry with his people at present. So he says, Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again? The reviving work of God is the averting of the anger of God. More of that in a moment, just note it now.

At this point, the consequences of revival, that your people may rejoice in you, says the psalmist. Quicken us, and that will be the immediate fruit of your quickening. Joy among God's people, such as has not been there for a long, long time.

That isn't actually all that can be said. For in Psalm 67 verses 1 and 2, you've got a further bit of the pattern, which again we're going to meet again before we're through today. Look at the opening verses of Psalm 67.

I read them as they stand in the King James and in my NIV, though not actually in all modern translations. The psalmist prays, May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us. Us is his own people.

Us is believers. Us is the church. That, verse 2, your ways may be known on earth.

You're saving your salvation among all nations. A bit of the picture that you've got there is of the evangelistic overflow of God's visitation of his own people. When God revives his church, there always is an evangelistic overflow.

You've got the same picture in many places actually in scripture, but just take one in Isaiah chapter 60, opening verses. I hope you have spotted that Isaiah chapters 40 through 66 are one extended theology of spiritual revival. If you haven't spotted it before, make a note of it now and study the chapters from that standpoint.

That's what they're really about. Here we are at the beginning of chapter 60 and the oracle says, Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. Who is you? God's own people.

Zion. Yes, but we are reading this from a New Testament standpoint so we may properly say spiritual Zion. God's people.

See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the people, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Verse 2. Now look at verse 3. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your door. You see the thought? God visits his people.

There's light there. There's life there. The world is impressed.

There's power here. There's a quality of living here that we cannot but envy. We need it.

So the nations come to the light of Zion. Kings come even to the brightness of the rising of God upon his own church. That's how it is in times of spiritual revival.

You can see, can't you? Revival is a corporate work. You can, of course, have such a reality as personal revival. Scripture has a good deal to say about it.

But why you can't have revival as a corporate work without personal revival, you can have personal revival, this individual and that individual and that individual, finding a new, what shall I call it, a new height and depth and length and breadth of life and the love of God without anyone around sharing that blessing. And where you've got persons revived in isolation, you don't have the visitation of God in revival of religion of which Edwards, Finney, Lovelace and all the rest have been speaking. There's a characteristic work of God renewing his church, reviving his church, of which Psalm 85 is speaking and which acts 2 through 11 instances There's a great deal about it in Scripture but essentially it's a corporate thing.

And it's the impact of that work of God on a community, transforming that community into a company of people renewed by divine light and power. That this text, Psalm 85, 6 and the Isaiah text and the Psalm 67 text and many other texts in Scripture are speaking. So I give you this notion which we'll work with in all our study of revival.

Revival is God extending his kingdom through the restoring of his church. There you've got, I think, the whole essence of the work of God brought together in a single notion. God extends his kingdom that's the evangelistic overflow through the restoring of his church.

That's the quickening of life among the moribund, apathetic, enfeebled people of God. What happens then in revival? In subsequent talks I shall talk I shall be referring to this in detail but let me just give you a checklist of the main points now. Again, have them in mind as we work with all of this.

In time of spiritual revival and I'm spelling it out now in New Testament terms eight things happen thus. God comes close. That's how it all starts.

The sense of the presence of God in holiness and in mercy is restored to his people as everybody has to face him in Isaiah 61. 64 verse 1 I should say. It's pictured of God coming down.

Coming down among his people. God comes close. And so second thing that happens sin is seen when the holy God has come close.

You can't escape the knowledge of your sin. It's like the light being turned on in an attic which nobody has been in for years. All the dirt is shown up straight away.

Sin is seen. And so the third thing that happens is this. The gospel is loved.

They ask are there special revival doctrines and the answer to their question is yes most certainly. The doctrines of Christ's substitutionary atonement for our sins and of God's free justification through grace for sinners who believe on Christ. Those are the doctrines which are always at the heart of revival preaching and revival blessing.

Check it out historically and you'll find it so. For the gospel is never so loved as when God has come close. And sin is seen.

Sin is seen not only by those who are not yet Christ but sin recognised in the lives of those who are but who because God hasn't come close in the past as now he has and therefore who hadn't lived their lives in the light of God as now they're forced to do they just hadn't seen the sin that was there. The gospel is loved and among God's people the fourth thing that happens is that repentance goes deep very deep. I served my first piece of ministerial beauty as an assistant to a man who'd been converted in revival in Ulster in the 1920s.

I lived with him and worked with him he was a funny fellow but I learned from watching him that one thing that marks all revival converts is that repentance goes deep. They have a sensitivity to sin which others don't have. They have a depth of exercise about their own personal sin which others don't have.

I said the gospel is loved I meant it's loved because people see their need of it as they've never seen their need of it before. I now say that repentance goes deep as part of my explanation of what happens when the gospel comes to be loved as never before. Evangelical repentance springs from the knowledge of God's grace.

That grace is appreciated at a deeper level than ever. Repentance goes deeper than ever before. Fifth thing that happens at time of revival God works fast.

Paul at Thessalonica ran a mission which lasted three Sabbaths then they ran him out of the city you'll remember. But those were revival times. Paul ministered in the power of the Spirit.

He left behind him a church, a lively church a church that moved into maturity it seems very fast you would suppose that from the positive things that Paul can say about them particularly in 1 Thessalonians. And in 2 Thessalonians you may recall in chapter 3 and verse 2 he asks them to pray in very striking terms he says pray that the word of God may run.

That's rendered in all sorts of ways in our English translations speed on is what you have in the RSV have free course is the rather less adequate translation that you have elsewhere but the Greek says that the word of God may run it's the most vivid thing as it did among you says Paul Paul himself had been thrilled by the speed with which God had worked to bring forth and mature that Thessalonian church it's like the Old Testament phrase expresses a nation it seems is born in a day God works fast at times of revival it's always so and there's much scripture pointing to the suddenness with which God's blessing comes on people in a very deep and wholehearted way come alive to God and there's an overnight maturity of love and service I'll tell you in a minute what are some of the key

passages of scripture about this I haven't time to go through it all now we'll come back to some of it later but just let me say it in formula terms now God works fast at revival times and after what sometimes seems like years in which nothing has happened in a matter of days a tremendous amount happens through a blessing of God's Spirit on the feet of the Word that's been sown and sixth thing that happens the church becomes itself what I mean by that is that the deepest Bible idea about the nature of the church here on earth as also in heaven is that the church is the people who know their Lord present in their midst they gather and He's there and they know He's there and the enjoyment of His presence in worship, in fellowship in receiving His ministry as they give, we in the church

shall I say, give Him our praise that's the essence of church life Christ in the midst it's pictured in the first chapter of Revelation seven golden lampstands representing seven churches and in the midst one like the Son of God it was promised by the Saviour in words which were not just a pious formula but they were

words which were intended to matter the reality of future church experience when two or three meet together in my name there am I in the midst do it and seek me there and you'll find me there it's a promise and it was a matter of experience in fact in those days of revival quality ministry in the apostolic age when the church was founded you have that for instance in what Paul says astoundingly to my mind in 1 Corinthians 14 where right at the center of that long disquisition

explaining why there were other things so much more worth doing than speaking in tongues Paul says this just imagine he says that the whole church meets together and you all speak in tongues and there comes in someone ignorant or unlearned won't they say that you're mad but of course they will says Paul what good will that do them but he says if when you come together you all prophesy and you can see from the way the verse goes on that when he says that what he has in mind is something very like what we would call preaching the gospel prophesying there is testifying to one testifying to the congregation by one another one and another about the wonders of God's saving grace to sinners if you all prophesy says Paul and there comes in someone ignorant and unlearned well what happens then

I'll tell you says Paul he is convinced by all he is judged by all the secrets of his heart are made manifest and falling down on his face he'll worship God and acknowledge that God is among you in truth God is here among these people and in comes the guy who spiritually was nowhere and straight away he feels it how could Paul say that he could say it brothers and sisters this is I think as certain as anything can be because it had actually happened that Corinth in the past he could appeal to their memory of it happening he could simply say that and know that this would count with the Corinthians as an argument yes of course it has happened and it will happen we can expect it to happen again but you couldn't get away with a statement like that in a church where it had never happened even

once now could you how many churches can you think of yours or any others where that sort of thing has been happening in our day well I'm simply saying that I mustn't take it any further that in times of revival the church becomes itself as the people of the present and this is a matter of real experience which those who wander in even become aware of let alone those who are Christ and who look forward to getting together in church because it means getting together with the Lord well that's the sixth thing that happens seventh thing that happens the world feels the impact that the evangelistic overflow we're going to be looking at Zechariah shortly let me just tell you how Zechariah in his theology of spiritual revival expresses the thought it's actually in Zechariah chapter 8 he

envisages revival blessing in Old Testament terms as blessing to Israel and this is the way that he spells out the pattern in Zechariah chapter 8 verses 20 to the end of the chapter this is what the Lord Almighty says when renewing and reviving blessing has come to you many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say let's go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty I'm going, you coming with me? and many peoples of powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat Him this is what the Lord Almighty says in those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say let's go with you because we've heard that God is with

you now I don't intend to discuss the dispensational significance of that passage which as you know divided a lot of Christian expositors I intend only to make from it this one point when God blesses His own people there's the evangelistic overflow the world feels the impact and nations come to the light which God has given to His people to share the life that God has given to His people and the church becomes a power in the land and a power in the world the world feels the impact of revival blessing in the church and

eighth thing that happens this of course is the let down but it's the condition of things in this world and we are fools if we suppose that anything changes when revival comes Satan keeps pace Satan can't create but Satan can destroy and Satan tries to destroy the whole

rationale of his life the whole motivation of Satan is to destroy what God has done to spoil it, to mess it up to befoul it, to discredit it he's trying to do it in the personal life of each single one of us and when God pours out His blessing and revival Satan is there keeping pace seeking and regularly succeeding at point after point in discrediting the works by fanaticism and folly and error and stupidity and all kinds of things that really are scandalous this was why Edwards you know had to write his reflections on the revival of religion in New England in 1740 there had been so much fanaticism and scandal connected with the work that there were many critics saying there's nothing here except human folly nothing of God at all Edwards had his answer to that Edwards spells out his

answer actually in another work it's a little treatise but it's golden you should read it it's titled The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God where Edwards argues on the basis of 1 John 4 verses 1 through 6 that any state of affairs that results in Christ being honoured scripture being heeded the gospel being taken seriously and love springing forth among professed Christians is most certainly a work of God at its heart even if the fire has been accompanied by some very acrid and unpleasant smoke because Satan who is responsible for the smoke has no interest in producing any of these altered states which have just been lifted Satan isn't interested in exalting Christ and getting the Bible taken seriously and making people take the gospel seriously and love each other as a

matter of conscience in a way that they never did before no, said Edwards, that's God and it was by calling attention to that fact and by dealing very soberly and justly with the follies that Satan induced detecting them for what they were that Edwards vindicated the 1740 Great Awakening Satan keeps pace and so you mustn't be romantic, friends in your thinking about revival when God blesses what happens is that you exchange the problems of deadness for the problems of liveliness I know which set of problems I would rather be dealing with myself I have no interest, and I speak as a pastor in spending my life tending a graveyard neither have you, I think who are in ministry you too feel the burden and the distress of that my graveyards can be very tidy places and liveliness can be a very

disorderly thing but oh God, grant us the problems of liveliness in our day rather than bogging us down amid the problems of deadness as so many churches are bogged down at this present time well, these are the things that happen that was what I wanted to say to you I want you to have this notion or this general notion of what the work of revival involves before we begin our Bible study oh you say, are we going to do some Bible study? indeed we are what we are going to do, brothers and sisters is to explore a little and we can only do this in a superficial way but we are going to explore a little some of the precious things that are there in the prophet Zechariah chapters 1 through 8 where you have a pretty full scale theology of revival spelled out in what we may call pattern or paradigm

form it's all spelled out in terms of the Old Testament dispensation it's all spelled out in terms of the specific state of affairs into which Zechariah spoke we make allowance for that but the principles that Zechariah sets before us in his prophecy are principles which apply to all God's work of spiritual revival anywhere at any time as you will see to be sure, this isn't the only place in scripture where you have a full scale theology of revival, theology I mean of the spiritual restoration of God's people you have that also, as I've already said in Isaiah, chapters 40 through 66 you have it also, in briefer compass in the first ten verses of Isaiah 35 you have it also in Ezekiel many chapters, notably 36 and 37 you have it reflected in

some of the great prayers of scripture Isaiah 62

through 64 were started there and also Psalm 85 for which I quoted earlier Psalm 80, of which we were looking last night Psalm 79 also Habakkuk chapter 3 and you have narratives of God's work reviving his people in many places in scripture most notably three times in 2 Chronicles revival under Hezekiah and revival under Josiah and what are the chapters 15 and 16 I think it is that is Isaiah 31 is Hezekiah 35 and 36 I think is Josiah and then that leads on to the books of Nehemiah and Ezra Ezra and Nehemiah, proper order and in both of those books there's a record, among other things of God pouring out revival blessing on his people through the actions of the actions of Ezra and Nehemiah the spiritual leaders of God's people in those days and then you get to Acts 2-11 and though of course

there's a unique element there it's the beginning of the Christian dispensation God is pouring out his spirit upon the apostles in a way that has some unique things about it God is establishing the church but the pattern of the blessing is as before and before we are through we shall see what the elements in that pattern are now there's a great deal in Scripture about revival I haven't given you all the passages anything like it but I hope I've given you enough to be going on with in your own studies that was all I wanted to do this moment well, what we're going to do is to look at some of the highlights of the first eight chapters of Zechariah we're going to do so in answer to the question that is there in all our hearts what hope have we of revival in our time how are we to seek it how

may we prepare the way for it if indeed there's anything at all that we can do about it Zechariah is answering those questions as a matter of fact by his God-given theology of revival I'm going to ask you to read with me in a moment the first six verses of the first chapter of Zechariah and there we shall see Zechariah setting before us what is really central the key thought in his theology of revival right the way through and that is what I call the doctrine of the two-fold return just look at verse three and you see it there this is what the Lord Almighty says return to me declares the Lord Almighty and I will return to you says the Lord Almighty the theology of the two-fold return the heart of Zechariah's teaching about spiritual revival before we move into that for our last few

minutes let me just say after the opening oracle of the book chapter one verses one through six you then have a section from chapter one verse seven to the end of chapter eight in which you have a series of promises of restoration after the summons to God's people to return to him then comes God's promise God's spelling out of what's involved in his promise that he will return to them and the passage consists first of eight visions of restoration chapter one verse seven through chapter six verse fifteen and then two chapters of exposition of what restoration means chapters which pick up and amplify the summons of God to his people to return to him chapter one verse three and the promise of God that he will return to them also chapter one verse three chapter one verse three in other words

is the text of which the rest of Zechariah one through eight is the exposition we shall see that as we go along now let's read the first six verses of Zechariah chapter one and I make on it my comments they'll have to be made very briefly because the clock has beaten us but we shall be returning to some of this tomorrow in the eighth month of the second year of Darius the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo and this is what God said just pause there a moment and let me fill in the situation for you the date is given precisely it's November 520 B.C. and the situation into which Zechariah is sent to speak this oracle is as follows the captivity the burning of God's temple took place so they now calculated in 586 B.C. in 536 B.C. 16 years before

Zechariah Cyrus king of Persia who has just conquered Babylon sent Joshua and Zerubbabel and the exiles back from captivity to Israel to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple we know from secular sources that encouraging the parts of the empire to practice their own religion was the principle of policy which Cyrus followed but of course under the providence of God it comes to the Jewish exiles as a marvelous vindication of the truth of God's word exiles followed by return had been promised exile had taken place as God's act of disciplinary judgment now comes return in the providence of God which they couldn't have accomplished nor could they have expected but Cyrus sends them home to rebuild the temple and they are thrilled and they are awestruck and they go back to Jerusalem in a spirit of

worship and great joy and as Ezra chapter 3 tells how as soon as they got there they set up the altar they laid the foundation for the temple they got going with the work but then came opposition it's all described in Ezra and so the work was stopped and then they found that economically living in Jerusalem as the ruined city as indeed it was was no joke at all it was very hard making a living there and so morale began to drop so it continued for 15 years until on September the 1st 520 BC three months before Zechariah two months, sorry, before Zechariah came the word of the Lord to Haggai who came to the people with a message we find it in his own prophecy which we have the message, consider your ways, think God's first word to drifting human beings is regularly think to his own people,

bumping along the bottom as we might say he says think justice to the ungodly world, he says come let's reason together, think think about what? well think about your priorities says Haggai you're experiencing drought you're experiencing poverty you're short of everything and the temple isn't up yet, you've abandoned the work of rebuilding it and remember the temple was the place where God centuries ago promised his presence and his blessing can you wonder that you're suffering drought and poverty and lack of everything when you're neglecting the building of the temple and spending all your time thinking about how you can put your own homes together some folk were trying to build rather grand homes, it was their way of defying the poverty and misery of Jerusalem, well should you be doing

that says Haggai when the house of God hasn't yet been built consider your ways, get your priorities straight, first things first that's the message of Haggai and you can see the Christian correspondences of all that without my selling the mouse well following Haggai came Zechariah and as David Baron comments while Haggai's task was chiefly to rouse the people to the outward task of building the temple Zechariah coming after him, thought to lead the people to a complete spiritual change something much bigger, something much deeper than Haggai had spoken of, a complete spiritual change, one of the fruits of which would necessarily be increased zeal in the building of God's house, that I think says it very well Zechariah in the word of the Lord, at the prompting of the Spirit of God, calls

the people to complete spiritual change to seek it with a promise that if they seek it, they will find it.

This was God's word to them. He's speaking two months after the work started and I mean the work of renewing the rebuilding of the temple people, I expect are already beginning to feel this is a tremendous job for us, it's more than we can manage and at this moment God in his wisdom sends his word through Zechariah to lead people to seek that complete spiritual change which will keep them at it until the temple is built and keep them at it thereafter so that they really do become God's holy people in the world bringing glory to his name. That's the situation and the word of the Lord comes to the prophet Zechariah and this is how it goes.

The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Would you have expected God's word of encouragement to those who actually turned their hand, put their hand again to the task of rebuilding the temple? Would you have expected his first word to them to be one of rebuke rather than a word of encouragement? It was a rebuke. It was a very stern word indeed but there was a reason for that.

There's a difference between working for God and turning to God. Haggai's word had led them to start working for God, rebuilding the temple and they'd been hard at it for two months but they hadn't yet turned to God in their hearts. Brothers and sisters, you know this perfectly well for it happens in your own church.

There are folk who are prepared to do this and that and thus work for God but they don't turn to God. I'm not saying that they're not believers in any sense at all but I am saying that they do their duty as church members working for God without any indication of the kind of thing that Zechariah wanted to see and they're still found indulging their little moral napses and they're still found living lives of spiritual formalism. Is their heart in the worship of God? Do they love the Lord? Well, not really but they do things for the church but they haven't yet returned to the Lord.

That was the condition of the Israelites to whom God sent Zechariah as his second messenger to speak this rather stern word which is beginning to unfold in verse 2. The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore, tell the people this is what the Lord Almighty says. You return to me says the Lord Almighty.

If you don't I shall be angry with you too but you return to me declares the Lord Almighty and I will return to you. Not by any not as a result of any kind of magic not as an automatic thing. God's blessing is never automatic.

He's sovereign and His good gifts, His visitations His blessings only come at His discretion but what God is saying to them here is that they have no reason to expect that He will revive them renew His work among them if they are not laboring to renew their own godliness whereas conversely if they do labor to renew their godliness and in that sense to return to Him in a radical way, more about this in future studies then they have reason to expect and hope and anticipate that He will return to them with blessings such as they've never known. This is what the Lord Almighty says. Return to me and I will return to you says the Lord Almighty.

Don't be like your forefathers. To whom the earlier prophets proclaimed, this is what the Lord Almighty says, turn from your evil ways and your evil practices return to me. That is what God said to them but they would not listen or pay attention to me declares the Lord they heard my word and they didn't hear it they stopped their ears to it they didn't take me seriously.

Verse 5 Where are your forefathers now? Oh, they're dead and gone. And the prophets who delivered these messages do they live forever? No, they're dead and gone as well. What remains? What remains is the ineffaceable memory of what happened.

History plain public history for everyone to observe and take note of. This is what remains. The history referred to in verse 6 Didn't my words and my decrees which I commanded my servants the prophets overtake your forefathers? Didn't it happen? And before they died didn't they acknowledge that it had happened? Didn't they repent? End of verse 6. And didn't they say the Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve just as He determined to do.

The word of the Lord stood. The word of the Lord was fulfilled. Brothers and sisters if we are going to be realists in this whole matter of seeking revival we've got to learn to reckon with the anger of God over those who don't take Him seriously don't seek His face although they profess to be His don't practice righteousness don't abandon evil ways that sort of thing brings down God's curse.

Revival follows the anger of God. The anger of God is expressed so the Old Testament tells us over and over again in impoverishment in impotence impotence against hostile spiritual forces in imperviousness to the word of God people hear it and they don't hear it. God says return to Me and they don't do it.

Aren't we seeing the fruits of God's anger against us? Yes even here in supposedly Christian North America in these days. We are seeing spiritual impoverishment it was Charles Colson who has a right I think to speak the amount of traveling that he's done in North America who said and indeed says often in public that what his travels to and fro over North America for prison fellowship have taught him is that in North America Christianity is 3,000 miles wide and half an inch deep. We are a shallow formal lot.

Even those of us who call ourselves evangelicals, alas that's how it is. And spiritually we're impoverished and impotent. Do I need to stress that we're not impacting this country for Christ? I don't think I need to.

I think you know it all too well. And imperviousness to the word of God as it searches heart and conscience. Many of you are pastors and you can testify to that.

You know that this is our condition. We are under the anger of God corporately in our quest for revival. We'd better recognize if we're realists that that's where we start.

Reckon then with the anger of God. Reckon with the appeal of God. Return to me and I'll return to you.

And reckon with the agenda of God who promised, who said through Zechariah return to me and I will return to you. Because God is sovereign you can never program revival or predict revival at such and such a date. But because God is sovereign you can never preclude revival.

He loves his people. We shall see more of that before we're through. He loves to bless his people.

Return to me he says and I will return to you. There's hope there. Reckon with these things brothers and sisters.

I must stop now. But we go on from there digging into Zechariah's theology of revival in our next two studies. May we pray for a moment together before we close and move into lunch.

Gracious sovereign faithful heavenly Father in Jesus name we draw near and say to you Lord we are among those who have called forth your anger and we are humbled and ashamed. Father we are among those to whom you have spoken this morning saying return to me and as those who have heard that word we ask you that it may sink down into heart and conscience and that we may turn to you in these days of cause. More honestly at a profounder level in our personal lives than ever before.

And Father we are those who have heard you saying to Israel through Zechariah I will return to you and hearing those words our hearts have leapt. We are longing gracious Father that you should in power and glory return to us. As we return to you so Lord draw near to us that we may know something of your quickening blessing in our own lives before this conference is through and that we may take that beg to our own church.

Oh grant it gracious Father for Jesus sake and for his praise. Amen. Glad that you have heard this tape from the Southern Baptist Conference on the Faith of the Founders.

I'd like to say some things about what this conference is, what it intends to do and upon what principles it operates. First of all, all who hear these tapes need to realize that this conference is not a political movement. It has no designs on seeking to run any candidate for any office within any denomination.

It is strictly a conference for personal edification of pastors, elders, deacons and members of Baptist churches. It is not a political movement of any kind. Neither do we consider it a place for airing negative and critical vendettas against other groups.

We're quite aware that there's much that could be said about pagans, Turks, Jews, Atheists, Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, Catholics, Armenians, Moderates, Hyper-Calvinists and people of other theological persuasions including ourselves that would not be favorable. But this conference is designed for a positive presentation. Positive edification is our goal.

To embrace the truth with such vigor that error must of necessity fall. What are we? We are Southern Baptists. We welcome people from other denominations, from other traditions.

We cherish the fellowship that we have with them and we feel that the doctrines around which this conference centers are so broadly evangelical that many people can enjoy them. But our stated purpose is to provide edification for people within Southern Baptist life. We affirm our Southern Baptist heritage and desire to recapture it.

We affirm the fellowship that is available in the network of all Southern Baptist life and associations and state conventions and desire to sanctify it. And we affirm the conscientious involvement in a multiplicity of benevolences that is characteristic of Southern Baptist life. We desire to reform it.

We affirm the task of the Foreign Mission Board, the Home Mission Board, the Brotherhood Commission, the Sunday School Board, the Christian Life Commission. All of these have good and proper goals and assignments. We desire to see men within these who believe the gospel and we desire these men to come there not through political manipulation but through the individual training of man so that God and his providence may place people who are prepared in those positions.

Also, what we are, we are Calvinistic. We do not apologize for that. We believe that Calvinism is the gospel in its purest expression.

We could rightly call it Paulinism, what Christians would not call their doctrine Pauline. We could rightly call it Augustinianism. But Augustine developed his understanding of the doctrines of grace in a context that was not so aware of the necessity of the doctrine of justification by faith.

So we call it Calvinism because not only does it have the great Pauline and Augustinian doctrines of justification by faith but it also sets these within the context of imputed righteousness as our only standing before God as set forth in the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. And a third thing we are, in addition to being Southern Baptist and Calvinistic, we are experiential. We do not have the attitude of those guys out there don't know this.

But our attitude, hopefully and prayerfully, is this question, has my mind and my heart absorbed and is it being molded by the reality of these doctrines? And it is in this context that we seek to apply all the

doctrines of grace. We are happy that you have listened to this tape and pray that God may benefit you in it and perhaps in its providence may lead you to attend one of these conferences. God bless you.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/3/SID3755.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ji-packer/revival-part-1/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**