

# Jackson, mich., Tornado

by Martin Knapp

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*The revival in Jackson, Michigan, led by the evangelist, was a remarkable movement of God that brought thousands to Christ and transformed the community.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 85:6, Proverbs 11:30, Matthew 9:37, Acts 2:41, 1 Corinthians 3:6

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

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## Description

Martin Knapp preaches about a remarkable revival in Michigan led by evangelist Mr. Weber, where a debt burdened church in Jackson experienced a mighty revival movement after clearing their debt. Despite initial skepticism and opposition, Mr. Weber's confident prophecies of hundreds of conversions came true, with hundreds flocking to the church and many being saved. The revival stirred the entire city, with reports of tangible results, overflowing crowds, and hundreds of conversions, leading to a newspaper 'war' between critics and supporters. The revival culminated in a powerful closing service with overwhelming attendance and numerous baptisms, marking one of the greatest revivals of the time.

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## Transcript

This was one of the most remarkable revivals in the history of Michigan. Dr. F. Reasner, an official member of the First M. E. Church, met the evangelist at the Lake Side Campmeeting and obtained a promise from him, that, if the church called, he would come and labor at Jackson. In due time the official call came, and, true to his promise, September 31st found Mr. Weber at Jackson, at the head of what was to prove a mighty revival movement. The following concerning the opening there is from his own pen, "Jackson, Mich., i a city of twenty-two thousand population. It is called the hardest city in Michigan. Several noted evangelists had been there without stirring the entire city. It seemed as if Satan had become so entrenched as to defy the churches and all that was good.

"The church, the largest in that conference, had been burdened with a debt of \$40,000, which seemed to crush out all the spirituality, in fact all they could attend to was to raise money to pay the interest. Bro. J. Graham, a man full of tact and push, being pastor, crowded the question day and night of paying off the debt. Some said, 'It cannot be done'; but be, true as the needle is to the north, when he undertakes anything, said, 'It must be done.' This 'It must' was pushed night and day, until the debt was entirely liquidated, and now the church was in a condition to enjoy a glorious revival ... The church was in a very low state of spirituality and the signs of life were few."

A prominent member of the official board says, "The spiritual condition of our church, as also the community, was at a low ebb. Our prayer and class meetings were thinly attended and the singing of the old hymn,

'Live at this poor dying rate,' seemed to express the real condition of our church."

There was a large Catholic population, and the Protestant churches were cold and formal. As truly as of New England towns in Whitefield's times, it might have been said, --

"To the lust of office and greed of trade,

A stepping stone is the altar made;

Everywhere is the grasping hand,

And eager adding of land to land;

And earth, which seemed to the fathers meant

But as a pilgrim's wayside tent,

A nightly shelter to fold away

When the Lord should call at break of day,

Solid and steadfast seemed to be,

And Time has forgotten Eternity!"

Reports of Mr. Weber's successes and eccentricities had preceded him, and Sunday evening the people, wide-awake with curiosity, gathered to his first meeting. After singing, and fitting preliminary remarks by the pastor, the evangelist took charge of the service. His remarks were reported by the daily papers as follows, --

"Bro. Weber said he did praise God for what He had done and for what He was going to do, for the people were going to have an old-fashioned Methodist time. He did not want scientific singing, but singing from the heart. 'Glory hallelujah' was then sung, after which there was prayer by the Revs. M. S. Sly and J. Graham. 'Bringing in the Sheaves' was then sung, Mr. Weber remarking that the sheaves would begin to be gathered before next Sunday. After, 'Shall we gather at the river?' was sung with great fervor, by the choir and congregation, led by the revivalist, prayer was again offered.

"The people had come to hear a sermon,' Rev. Weber said, 'but he did not come to preach.' He just came to help Revs. Graham, Sly, and perhaps other ministers, who were in the congregation. In the afternoon he had taken a retrospective view of the situation in Jackson, in prayer in his closet, and as he had thought of the condition of a large portion here, his heart had bled for them, but the God who had given him thousands and thousands of converts had not deserted him. Perhaps some of his hearers did not like his ways, and perhaps he would not like them if he knew all about them; on this score he and they were mutual. He had not come to stay a few days. He had told his folks in Ohio that he was going to be gone between one and four months, and if the ministers would stand by him, his bones would bleach before he had left, until he had made five hundred to one thousand converts here in Jackson.

"At Findlay, O., thirty-five came forward the second night. When he left the tally, that showed five hundred and thirty converts. The church was not large enough to hold those who came, and hundreds went away. He was reminded of a story of a man who saw but one devil on the roof of a house. He asked what he was doing there, and the devil replied, 'There is a church quarrel here, and I can keep them in order alone.' Passing on, he found a church lined with devils, for there a revival was going on, and it took all the power of Satan to hold a few back. This town was going to be mightily moved for God, and multitudes saved, who are now going 'pell-mell' to hell. He expected that many would go away mad, but some of them would come back glad.

"At Marysville, O., during the hot weather in June, he had made four hundred and three converts in four weeks; the church and yards were thronged, and one young man was so anxious for salvation that he jumped into the church through a window. The people must be careful how they acted in regard to this work. He had heard of a little dog barking at the moon. The moon went on shining, and when the little dog died, even then the moon did not stop. The people could hark at this work, but it would still go on. All he asked of this people was a ten days' probation, and then they could look for a moving of the Spirit. There was so much preciseness that Christ was almost driven out of the churches. At his church in Ohio, the people had said, 'monkey show,' and would not stand it. Then he tried to preach in the usual precise kind of a way, but he dropped into the pulpit paralyzed. The people begged him to go on, and the next night twenty-five or thirty souls said, 'I want to be saved.'

"Last year he had seen three thousand converts. He had come to be just like himself; he could not be anybody else if he tried. In reply to the slander that he worked for money, the speaker said he had refused a position worth between \$5,000 and \$6,000 a year, and had given up a place at \$10 per day, when he was through college, to go into this work, a place where he would not have been libeled by newspapers, cursed and damned by a good many people, in whose way he stood. He wanted personal work in the congregation, and night after night with penitents. He wanted the people to know that they were saved. For himself, he did not wish to go to heaven on a guess. He did not believe there were people enough, with red-hot personal experiences, in the congregation, to lead the coming throng to the altar, and the church was going to be too small for the congregations of the coming nights."

He then closed with the benediction.

The speaker's independence of man, earnestness, and confident prophecies of coming crowds and great success, aroused a great deal of criticism. Especially his statement that, under such unfavorable circumstances, there would be from five hundred to one thousand conversions.

Satan, who had been defeated through him many times before, and understood well that the evangelist meant every word he said, sent as strong a detachment of devils to Jackson as he could spare, and the battle at once began.

At the next evening service he "gave an invitation for those who knew they were saved to stand up. A good number arose. He then asked any who would like to know they were saved to arise, and as many more arose.

His pointed sermons and earnest efforts, both in public and private, soon stirred the entire city. A peal followed a peal of denunciation of the popular sins of the church and the people. They would hardly recover from one surprise before another was ready.

"Through the celled chambers of secret sin

Sudden and strong the light shone in;

A guilty sense of his neighbor's needs

Startled the man of tithe deeds."

Purity, Innocence, and Virtue waved their hands and rejoiced. Truth and Uprightness defended the evangelist, and urged him on. Error, Vice, and Hypocrisy counseled together how they might paralyze his power. As elsewhere, unconverted professors were among the chief opposers. The Jackson Star, a "wandering star" to whom we fear is "reserved the blackness of darkness, forever," from the beginning ridiculed the revival and the evangelist, as the following extracts from its columns indicate, AMUSEMENTS -- REV. MR. WEBER.

The M. E. Church has contributed its share to the amusements this week. Rev. Mr. Weber is a star of a considerable magnitude. Though he was not extensively billed, he has played to large houses all the week. Matinees every afternoon.

#### WEBER'S FROLICS

The Rev. Mr. Weber continues his nightly performances at the M. E. Church, and, no matter what the attraction at the other theater, he fills the house nightly. He is really a good actor, and the large houses are greatly pleased.

Tadpoles often fall during a tornado, and this was simply one of them. Two of the Star reporters were converted before the meetings closed. Glory to God! The Jackson Citizen, the official paper of the city, and one of the leading newspapers in Michigan, by able editorials and reports of the meetings seemed to feel it an honor to use its extensive influence in every way to support the evangelist and the revival. This led to a sort of newspaper "war" which helped the work, and did honor to the Citizen. The following extracts from it give us something of an idea of the effect of the revival, even in the secular circles of the city. The revival services at the First M.E. Church, under the management of the young revivalist, Weber, are the talk of the city. Whilesome have faith that God will use him for much good, others are wishing that he may be successful, and yet reserve their judgments. While some others have their fine sensibilities very much ruffled by the unusual, manners of the man, others flatly denounce the service as wanting in common respect to the house of God.

Those who have faith that good will come of this effort are 'costly those who are devoted, earnest Christians, that realize the necessity of the hour, and remember that God uses various methods and instrumentalities to bring about his purposes. Those who are afflicted by the style of the man, are those who know but little of religion outside the forms and ceremonies of the church rarely at prayer meetings, seldom at class, never enthusiastic except at socials and entertainments. And, strange to say, those who flatly denounce are those who seldom enter a church, have little regard for religion, and have faith in nobody but themselves.

Please note the sentences which we have italicized. They contain the secret of opposition to all genuine revivals.

In another issue, the Citizen said, --

"The controversy going on in the minds of hundreds who have listened to the sermons of Rev. J. H. Weber, the evangelist, seems likely to be left to the city press for final settlement. The Christian churches believe that his mission is to do good, and the two thousand people who throng the Methodist church building every night to hear him, is pretty conclusive evidence that he is not repudiated by the citizens of Jackson."

While the newspaper dueling was going on, the tide of convicting and converting power was continually rising, and the attendance kept increasing, until hundreds would come and be unable to gain admittance. Did all the ministers of the city stand by the evangelist? We presume not; some did not by Jesus, nor Wesley, nor Finney. Very many people, regardless of creed, are drawn, as by magnetism, to the clear, crystal draughts of gospel truth, that are dispersed so freely in genuine revivals, and though offered from the tin cups of informality, they much prefer this to vainly sipping from the silver chalices of emptiness. They therefore naturally go where they can get and do the most good. So it is not strange that sometimes, as of old, "Grave pastors, fearing their flock to lose, prophesied to empty pews that gourds would wither, and mushrooms die, and noisiest fountains soonest run dry."

This was true of, at least, one minister at Jackson, and has frequently been known to occur in the history of revival movements. No proselytizing is allowed by Mr. Weber. All Christians are invited to co-operate, and his converts sometimes join different churches. He does a great deal of personal work, and proselytizing preachers sometimes get terribly stung. In one town, the Presbyterian minister stood aloof from the meeting, but, like a hawk, would swoop down on any of the converts that he was anxious to have in his church. In one instance, as he was about to seize his would-be prey, he was met by this stinging rebuke, "You paid no attention to us before we were converted and we shall go with those who did." He flew back to his retreat a disappointed and we trust a wiser man.

Though the meetings of the first week were declared to be glorious ones, yet each week would surpass the former, until, under the head of "WONDERFUL CROWDS, WONDERFUL INTERESTS, WONDERFUL RESULTS," it was reported, "In the language of the pastor, it beggars description. He doubted if any church in Michigan or Detroit Conferences had ever seen such a day, -- so full of tangible results. He did not think that any pastor had ever been permitted to administer the rites of baptism to so many people, all the result of one revival, as he had, during the morning service."

A special to the Commercial gazette, headed, "EXTRA" -- ORDINARY RELIGIOUS REVIVAL -- PHENOMENAL SUCCESS OF A YOUNG CINCINNATI EVANGELIST," declared the meetings "surpassed anything of the kind ever known in this section. The church, in its audience room and galleries has a seating capacity of over two thousand, which have nightly been crowded, while hundreds were turned away for want of even standing room, and even now the interest still increases, so that it has become necessary to throw open the lecture room and parlors of the church in the basement, which have been crowded as well, and thus two meetings were in progress at the same time. The records show nearly eight hundred conversions, over three hundred of which have already united with the First M. E. Church, and perhaps as many more at the different churches in the city."

A correspondent of the Michigan Christian Advocate wrote, --

"Nothing in this city is so much talked of as the revival now in progress in our church. The Holy Spirit is doing His office work, and all over the city men and women are under powerful conviction. Those who once hated and reviled now sing glad anthems of praise unto Him who hath redeemed them. On Sunday evening our church was 'packed,' no other word will convey the idea. The city press places the number at

two thousand five hundred. Bro. Weber preached from the text, 'The great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?' and for more than forty minutes, he held his audience before the judgment seat of God, and many of the stoutest hearts quaked and trembled.' At one point in his sermon he spoke of the trump of God sounding, and thereached down and took the cornet from the hands of the cornet-player, and held it aloft, and his effect upon his audience brought to mind the incident in the life of Lorenzo Dow. 'God is in His holy temple, and not unto us, but unto Him, be all the glory.'

It was estimated that as high as from five hundred to one thousand persons went away, on a single evening, unable to gain admittance.

## REVIVAL WAVE

We copy the following important report from the Lamp of Life, Rev. J. S. Smart, editor, where it was published under the above caption, --

"The following letter from Rev. John Graham, pastor of the first M. E. Church, Jackson, Mich., will be read with profound interest, and with thanksgiving and praise to God, for the wonderful works of his grace, Jackson, Nov. 20, 1883.

"Dear Bro. Smart, -- In respect to the revival now going on in our church, anything I might say will fall short of the reality. It goes beyond everything I have ever seen. We have been carrying forward service now into the eighth week, and since the third week the work has taken on the most solid type, spreading largely among young men, the middle aged, and reaching to some away up in the sixties. The conversions are clear, and, one thing remarkable, most of them are converted on once coming to the altar.

"Up to the present, there are reported eight hundred conversions. There are converted, nightly, from twenty to thirty. We have so far gathered into the First Church three hundred and fifty, and will, at least, get four hundred. Seven have just united with the Haven-street M. E. Church. They gain to Jackson Methodism, at present, by probation and by letter, will be over five hundred and fifty. Many old letters have been hunted up. A few have united with other churches, and many have been converted belonging to adjacent villages. The crowds are simply overpowering. The church is packed night after night. Then, some nights, we have an overflow meeting in the lecture room that will be filled, holding about five hundred.

"The whole city and surrounding country are moved with a deep religious influence, and everywhere men and women are talking about the revival. Last Sunday was the most wonderful day I have ever seen. During the week, a baptismal service was announced, for Sunday morning. Every available seat in the audience room was filled. We gave an invitation to the candidates to come to the altar. It was first filled with parents, presenting their children, then by probationers, and for one hour and one-half I administered the rite of baptism. One hundred and forty-four were thus dedicated to God, one hundred and ten of whom were adults.

"Mr. Weber is a combination of eccentricity and force, is deeply in earnest, and works along the old lines of Methodism. He practices our altar service, and believes in people knowing they are saved. I have given you the main facts without any attempt at finish whatever. Yours, J. Graham."

The closing service was a fitting climax to all that had gone before.

On the final night, persons were admitted only by tickets. The spiritual atmosphere, as compared with the first night, was changed as from January to June. The rainbow of promises fulfilled arched the spiritual sky.

The songs of victory and praise rose from multitudes of happy hearts, and fifteen hundred came to bid the evangelist farewell. "He could not pronounce the benediction without giving one more opportunity to those who had so long resisted. The altar was filled, and eleven souls came out into the light."

Thus closed the labors of Mr. Weber in one of the greatest revivals of this or any age.

At Pentecost, there was at least one hundred and twenty evangelists baptized with the Holy Ghost, to aid in the meeting. Here there was only one. The Pentecost congregation was composed largely of devout Jews, who were walking in the light they had, and looking for the Messiah. The Jackson congregation was largely made up of slaves to Worldliness, Prejudice, and Vice. God was glorified in both. To Him be the praise! Amen.

## REVIVAL INCIDENTS

### A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

Two little children went home and there begun shouting, praising God. The parents became alarmed about them, and the mother came to the meetings and was converted.

**BREAD CAST UPON THE WATERS** Here Mr. Weber met a man whose salvation he had sought years before, when they were laborers together 'n a shop. This man was converted, and said to the evangelist, "Many times I thought of the words you said to me at the shop."

### "ZACHAEUS, COME DOWN"

At the close of one service all who wished prayers were asked to rise. Among the number who arose **MUSCULAR RELIGION.**

A man came into Mr. Weber's room, at the hotel, and wanted to fight him, because he had called attention to his wife, who was "cutting up" in church. The evangelist "put him out of his room."

One evening a woman was converted just as Mr. Weber was about to take his text, and shouted aloud in her new found joy.

### "YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN"

In his sermon on the new birth, the evangelist said, "Some say, 'I do not understand this being born again. Don't you think people are educated to it?' Now, whenever I hear this, it reminds me of the story I have heard told of the Chinese emperor with the pig, who thought that the pig was dirty because always kept in an unclean place. He thought that, if kept in a clean place, it would be clean and like a little lamb, and so he called his wise men together, and they concluded to take a young pig, put him in a clean place and educate him. This was done, and they taught him many tricks, until at last they thought him all right and concluded to fix him up and take him out for a walk, which they did. Everything went all right until they came to a mud-puddle, when in went the pig. At this the emperor was wroth, and declared those in charge of him had not given him the proper education, and compelled them to be placed in dungeons, and others selected to continue the education of Mr. Pig. After a while, they took the pig out again. Many said, 'Why, he was tempted that time;' but by and by they came to another mud-puddle, and the pig was soon in again all over."

## RUNNING OVER

One of the tests of conversion which the people meet in genuine revivals, is liberality. At the close of this meeting, after all its expenses were met, there still remained three hundred dollars in the treasury.

Mr. Weber went from Jackson to Millersburgh, O., where over one hundred and forty professed conversion, and closed the year with another sweeping tornado at Fort Wayne, Ind., in which over four hundred professed to have found the Saviour. During the last two days of 1883, seventy were saved in his services, and between three thousand and four thousand during the year. Referring to God's blessing, he writes, "It is a great deal better than I deserve."

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,

Praise Him, all creatures here below,

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/martin-knapp/jackson-mich-tornado/>

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