

## CHAPTER TEN

### Pentecost: The Beginning (Revival, A. D. 30)

Revival cannot be organized, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.

G. Campbell Morgan

Evangelist Charles Finney once described revival as “the people of God renewing their obedience to God.” Because God’s people tend to wander from him, revival may be as old as humanity itself. Using Finney’s definition, we can say that accounts of revival are recorded throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

The wandering of God’s people was often followed by a return to him. The story of Jacob and his sons’ return to Bethel may have been Israel’s first revival (see Gen. 35:1-15). Generations later there came a renewing of the nation when Moses brought the people to Mount Sinai (see Exod. 32-33). Joshua also saw Israel revived at Shechem (see Josh. 24), as did Gideon in his day (see Judg. 6-9). Samuel gathered the people to Mizpah in repentance (see 1 Sam. 7), and Elijah called Israel back to God at Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18).

Yet revival in the Old Testament was not limited to Israel. In what some have called “the greatest revival in history,” Jonah became the unwilling prophet who brought revival to Nineveh, where an entire evil pagan city turned to God (see Jon 3).

Other revivals were associated more with kings than prophets. Judah experienced revival during the reigns of righteous kings who initiated reform, rulers such as Asa (see 2 Chron. 15), Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 18:4-7; 2 Chron. 29-32), and Josiah (see 2 Kings 22:1-23:25; 2 Chron. 34:1-35:19).

Even after the Babylonian captivity, God raised up prophets to call the nation back to himself. A remnant experienced a revival under the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, which energized them to begin work on a new temple (see Ezra 5-6). A later revival under the teaching priest Ezra finally broke the bondage of idolatry in Israel (see Neh. 8-9). Jewish tradition holds that during this final Old Testament revival, the Old Testament canon was established.

## A New Kind of Revival

The last of the prophets calling Israel back to God was John the Baptist. His plain preaching called people to repent of sin and “prepare the way of the Lord” (Matt. 3:3). Vast crowds came out to hear John preach and to embrace his message as he traveled up and down the Jordan River.

In calling Israel back to God, the prophet Joel had made an unusual statement: “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28). In an age when the ministry of the Holy Spirit was limited to only a few especially chosen by God, the day of which Joel spoke must have seemed like a dream world. After all, the prophet was describing an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on people regardless of their sex, age, and socioeconomic status.

Nevertheless, this declaration was in fact the promise of God. But the promise would not be fulfilled for eight centuries. It described a new kind of revival.

### **The Day of Pentecost**

The church itself was born in the midst of that new kind of revival among 120 followers of Christ: “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:1-2). By the end of the day, “about three thousand souls were added” to the emerging church (v. 41).

Peter himself identified the events of that day as a prototypical fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (see Acts 2:16-21). What happened on Pentecost became the model of a new kind of revival in our present age. According to the late British pastor Martin Lloyd-Jones, “It is a truism to say that every revival of religion that the Church has ever known has been, in a sense, a kind of repetition of what has happened on the day of Pentecost.”

### **United in Prayer**

The biblical account of the Pentecost outpouring begins ten days before Pentecost with 120 men and women united in prayer: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14). One can only wonder at the self-evaluation that must have gone on during those ten days. On at least one occasion, time was taken to set in order things perceived to be out of order (see Acts 1:15-26).

It was during a prayer meeting that the church first experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. History records the stories of a chain of revivals growing out of Christians united together in prayer.

Endued with power from on high, the apostle Peter and the rest preached the Scriptures. Many spoke in unlearned languages, a work of God that enabled the Pentecostal evangelists to cross linguistic barriers to preach to strangers in Jerusalem for the feast. As they preached, the Holy Spirit did his work of bringing intense conviction to those

who heard. In deep anguish of soul they cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

When called upon to repent, 3,000 did so. Their conversions were marked by stability in the days following as “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). What began on Pentecost continued, “and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). In spite of hostile persecution, the church at Jerusalem was established and continued to grow.

### **Beyond Jerusalem**

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit wasn’t limited to Jerusalem. In fact, the history of the early church has been called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” because of its continuous record of outpourings.

Philip saw a repetition of many aspects of the Pentecost outpouring when he preached the gospel in Samaria (see Acts 8:5-25). Peter acknowledged similarities between Pentecost and the phenomena accompanying the introduction of the gospel to Gentiles in Cornelius’ home (see Acts 10:1-11:18). There appears to have been another outpouring in Antioch that established the prototype of missionary churches in this age (see Acts 11:19-30; 12:24-13:3).

The converted rabbi Saul of Tarsus experienced outpourings of the Holy Spirit during his first (see Acts 13:4-14:28) and second (see Acts 16:6-18:11) missionary journeys as Paul the apostle. He described aspects of revivals experienced in Thessalonica (see 1 Thess. 1:5) and Corinth in his various epistles.

### **Revival in Ephesus**

One of the most significant revivals recorded in Paul’s ministry occurred during his extended stay in Ephesus (see Acts 19:1-20:1, 17-38). The Ephesian Revival spread beyond the city limits, so that “all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). At its peak, conversions to the Christian faith so impacted the economy of the city that the idol makers themselves rioted, fearing the loss of their trade (see Acts 19:21-41).

The revivals that energized the early church tended to face in the complacency of the established church. Even in Ephesus, Christians began wandering from their first love (see Rev. 2:4). By the end of the first century, the churches brought into being during the Ephesian Revival were rebuked by the Lord himself and called upon to repent (see Rev. 2-03).

## **Pentecost (A.D. 30)**

Pentecost was the greatest revival known to humankind and the greatest demonstration of God’s power to transform lives and influence society. Pentecost is the foundation of Christianity, separating the new, life-changing movement from its Jewish

roots. Pentecost was so extraordinary that the event will never be repeated, yet the experiences of Pentecost are a challenge to any dying church that God can revive his people with his power—no matter the difficulties, no matter the circumstances.

Several demonstrations of power that were manifested on Pentecost don't appear to be normative in Christian experience. Most believers don't expect them in everyday Christian living, and most believers haven't experienced them. For example, on that day there suddenly came a tremendous sound from heaven, and a rushing wind filled the entire house where the 120 were praying (see Acts 2:2).

Did they hear a gigantic sound blasted from a heavenly stereo, and was it an actual hurricane-type gale? Whatever the miracle, we should keep in mind that in the New Testament, wind stands for the Holy Spirit, and it filled the whole house. The important fact was not the wind but the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit that everyone felt.

Next, fire licked through the air like a tongue—a split tongue—fire to burn, judge, and consume (see v 3). Again, we shouldn't get caught up in focusing on the crackling fire in the air. It was the Holy Spirit burning away the old failures of the apostles and, from then on, forming them into bold witnesses of the message of the gospel.

Actual fire fell upon them, coming down in two (or split) flames. The fire symbolized that their speech or words would burn like fire, to judge the world for its sins and iniquity. The flames were doubled, indicating that God's gift of the Holy Spirit was double the power of anything previously experienced.

Suddenly, everyone began to speak in foreign languages not their own (see v 4). God gave them a new ability to witness the message of Jesus Christ. Miraculously, they had the vocabulary, dialect, sentence structure, and word choice necessary to speak languages they hadn't previously known. God gave them this gift so that each listener could hear and understand the message of Jesus Christ in his or her own tongue.

During Christ's earthly ministry, multitudes heard him, and many were healed. When he died, however, many turned away from him, refusing to take up their cross in the face of scathing criticism or to follow Jesus to Calvary. After Calvary, the greatest recorded number of believers that gathered was "five hundred brethren" (1 Cor. 15:6).

In the Upper Room, approximately 120 were tarrying, praying and waiting on God for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised them, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They prayed for ten days that the Holy Spirit might come.

Ten days is a long time to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17), yet, in God's timing, they had to pray that long for him to work all things together for good (see Rom. 8:28). The Lord waited to answer their prayer until the day of Pentecost, because then they would have the greatest potential to spread their message to the known world: At least a million Jews would be present in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. Also, the "first

fruits” from their farms were celebrated at this feast, and God wanted to give the “firstfruits of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:23) on that day.

There were many other reasons why the church had to wait for Pentecost. Jesus had said that the Holy Spirit would not be poured out on them in his lifetime on earth, “because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). And why was the Holy Spirit withheld until Pentecost? Because through Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, heaven was transformed: “When [Jesus] ascended on high, [he] led captivity captive ... [and gave gifts unto] men” (Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8).

Jesus was the first resurrected person to enter heaven. Before this time, righteous souls who died went to “Abraham’s bosom,” which was also called Paradise (see Luke 16:22; 23:43). When Jesus entered triumphantly into heaven, he ushered all the saved Old Testament saints with him.

Also remember that Jesus told his disciples it was necessary for him to go away, because if he didn’t leave them, the Comforter wouldn’t come (see John 16:7). After Jesus entered heaven, the stage was set for the Helper to come to the disciples.

As Jesus had been with them in ministry, the Holy Spirit would do much more for them. Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit “dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). When Pentecost came, the way was prepared for the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer. The only question is, does the believer want the Holy Spirit indwelling?

After Jesus died, the disciples knew only what Jesus had taught them. Even though Jesus was the Teacher-arguably the best Teacher of all times-still they had lingering blindness, ignorance, and doubt. Jesus had told them, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:12-13).

So the disciples spent ten agonizing days in prayer for the Holy Spirit. For if they hadn’t acted in faith that Jesus’ promise would be fulfilled, there would have been no Pentecost. If they hadn’t believed Jesus’ words that they would “receive power” (Acts 1:8), they might have stumbled out into ministry against heathen darkness, only to fail. For ten days they prayed without getting their answer. But fifty days after the passion of Calvary (see Acts 1:3), the Holy Spirit at last came in power.

God’s greatest demonstration of revival happened on a Jewish feast day because God’s plan was “for the Jew first, and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). The greatest revival manifested from heaven happened in a Jewish city, at a Jewish celebration, to Jewish believers. But it introduced something entirely new-the church-and the beginning of “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit came on the Jewish Pentecost, empowering Jewish witnesses, resulting in 3,000 Jewish converts.

As we’ve noted, on Pentecost, there were miraculous signs, a powerful wind, tongues of fire, believers speaking in other languages. Instantly, the believers experienced what Jesus had promised: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works

that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12). Instantly, they received more power than they’d received in three years of following Christ. Instantly, the Holy Spirit gave them authority to attack the dark, evil kingdom.

Previously the disciple of denial, Peter now received what Jesus had promised: “power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Peter was transformed from an evasive coward into a powerful preacher. When the crowd accused the disciples of being drunk, bold Peter stood up to say, “These disciples are not drunken, as you suppose, seeing that it is only nine o’clock in the morning” (Acts 2:15, author’s translation). He boldly proclaimed, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

But his boldness wasn’t finished with the proclamation of the gospel. Peter declared, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know-Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up” (Acts 2:22-24). When the crowd cried out in response, “What shall we do?” Peter had only one command: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).

The hostile crowd mocking the disciples didn’t believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, so courageous Peter commanded them to be converted and “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ,” which required an admission on their part that they were wrong about the deity of Christ. In baptism, they fully confessed him as their Savior and their Lord.

The Holy Spirit worked mightily in this revival meeting, because “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). It was only natural that the Spirit used these men, because “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3).

The Spirit began instantly his work of drawing unsaved people to Jesus Christ. The greatest fruit of the first revival meeting was the conversion of 3,000 people: “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (Acts 2:41). The revival continued as the new believers were “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

### Reviving the Ephesian Church (A.D. 58)

Paul’s ministry at the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus continued daily for two years, “so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). This approach to ministry marked a departure from previous methodology used by Paul and may be viewed as a new evangelistic strategy to bring revival. According to an early Syrian text of this passage, Paul taught the Scriptures daily from 11:00 A.M. through 4:00 P.M.

The content of Paul’s teaching during these sessions was apparently communicated to others in Ephesus and other cities by those who heard him. Some believe these were the

classes to which Paul referred when he later urged Timothy to train faithful men (see 2 Tim. 2:2). Using this method, Paul trained those who in turn went to other cities and established churches in smaller towns and cities that the apostle might otherwise not have visited. Paul's ministry during this period included not only a strong emphasis on teaching but also a number of unusual miracles (see Acts 19:11). There were occasions when people were healed and demons cast out simply because they came into contact with a piece of cloth that Paul had used. So spectacular were these and other miracles that soon those outside the Christian community attempted to duplicate them.

Many Jews recognized the reality of demon possession but relied upon the Jewish rite of exorcism to cast unclean spirits out of a possessed person. When a group of itinerant Jewish exorcists came to Ephesus, a situation arose that gave great spiritual impetus to the church. Seven sons of a Jewish chief priest named Sceva attempted to practice their rite of exorcism with near-disastrous results (see Acts 19:13-16).

When they addressed the demon "by the Jesus whom Paul preaches" (v 13), the demon responded, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" (v 15). The demon-possessed man then turned on the seven exorcists and overpowered them. The men fled from the house naked and wounded, probably grateful that they were still alive.

Naturally, reports of this event spread through the city of Ephesus quickly. The people were overcome with fear, "and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (Acts 19:17). This event shocked many believers into a renewed understanding of the reality of the spirit world and its influence in the occult religions of the day.

Many confessed their own involvement in these practices, and as an act of repentance, they brought the books they had used in these practices "and burned them in the sight of all" (Acts 19:19). The total value of the books destroyed at that time was estimated at 50,000 pieces of silver-with each silver piece probably worth a common day's wage. This response among believers resulted in continued spiritual and numerical growth in the church: "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (Acts 19:20).

Paul intended to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost (see 1 Cor. 16:8), but a situation arose that may have cut his stay short. The evangelistic efforts of the church were so successful that the silver industry in the city, which earned much of its profits through making silver shrines used in worshipping Diana, was beginning to suffer a financial setback. It didn't take them long to recognize a relationship between their drop in sales and Paul's evangelistic zeal. At a meeting of the silversmith guild, one craftsman, named Demetrius, noted: "This Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship" (Acts 19:26-27).

The worship of Diana was the chief religious cult of the city of Ephesus. According to their myths, Diana was "born" in the woods near Ephesus at the site of her temple when her image fell down from the heavens. She was usually portrayed as a multibreasted goddess. Her temple in Ephesus was not considered her home, but rather the chief shrine where she could and should be worshiped. The silver shrines made by Demetrius and his

colleagues were probably crude copies of the temple, which were normally purchased by pilgrims at the temple and carried home as worship aids in the cult.

Those engaged in the silver trade making these shrines were an integral part of the temple economy. Paul's success in the evangelization of Asia Minor meant that they were losing pilgrims to the temple, with the result that sales were diminishing. The burning of occult books probably shocked Demetrius and the others into recognizing that the decline in their trade was more than a passing phase.

If these Christians continued to be successful in their evangelistic efforts, it might well be that the magnificent temple in their city would become obsolete and even destroyed. Incensed at the prospect, the silversmiths began chanting loudly, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:28). In the confusion that followed, most of the city filled the public theater, but they were for the most part confused as to why the meeting had been called.

Somewhere in the rush, two of Paul's companions from Macedonia, Gaius and Aristarchus, were seized by the mob and taken into the theater. Paul wanted to join his friends, but his disciples and a number of public officials sympathetic to Paul convinced him to remain outside.

In the midst of the confusion, the Jews appointed Alexander as their spokesman to address the crowd, but when he began to address them, they once again broke out in the chant, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:34). The chanting continued in the theater for about two hours. Only then was the city clerk able to gain control of the meeting and address the crowd.

The official argued that no one was disputing the greatness of the beloved goddess, and warned them that such uprisings could result in the unwanted involvement of Rome in their civic affairs. He noted that if Demetrius and the other silversmiths had a legitimate concern, the issue could be addressed by open courts and officials. Then he managed to dismiss the assembly quietly.

After the riot ended in Ephesus, Paul realized that he'd once again become the center of a controversy that threatened to hinder the continued ministry of the church. He therefore called the Christians together and revealed his plans to leave. After he embraced those with whom he'd spent so much time, he began his journey to and through Macedonia. Later, in Jerusalem, when Paul delivered the money he'd raised for the Christians there, he was arrested and ultimately sent to Rome, where he died for his Lord.

### A Summary of the Pentecost Revival

The greatest revival that ever happened took place on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on the 120 believers praying in the Upper Room. Because of his indwelling, they established the church, evangelized the Mediterranean world, and became the channels through whom Christianity was delivered to the world. Why was this the greatest revival? Because without it, none of the other revivals would have occurred.



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## The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: from Pentecost to the Present

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