

# Revivals in 1 & 2 Kings

*The True God, the True King and True Obedience*

*David Gooding*

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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This text has been edited from a transcript of three of the four talks given by David Gooding at Broadway Hall, Belfast (N. Ireland) in 1981. Unfortunately the recording of one talk is missing.

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w: [www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)  
e: [info@myrtlefieldhouse.com](mailto:info@myrtlefieldhouse.com)

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## Revival in Israel under Elijah

*1 Kings 18:21; 2 Kings 1:9–10; 2:9–10.*

I propose to study briefly with you four of the major revivals in the first and second books of Kings. The revival in which Israel was led by Elijah the prophet; the revival in which Judah was led, first by her high priest and then by King Joash; the revival in Judah that was led by King Hezekiah<sup>1</sup>; and finally the revival led by Josiah, king of Judah. And what a happy and encouraging topic it will be. I grow old, as you see, grey hairs are upon me and I know it very well. But the older I grow the more impressed I become with the witness of Scripture generally, and throughout all its pages, that God is a God of recovery, of restoration, of revival, of renewal—both for the individual and for his people as a whole. That lesson that is printed on the pages of so many books of Scripture is found, with no exception, in the books of Kings.

I know you can tell me that, because of the sin of God's people, God allowed Israel to be taken away to Assyria. I know you can tell me that at the end of these two books, because of Judah's sin, God had the king of Babylon take them away to Babylon and destroy both their city and temple. I know that, and it is very gloomy reading. But in these very books that are so realistic as to tell us of that sad declension from God, you will read time and time again how God intervened to revive his people, and right almost to the very last there was a very notable revival under Josiah, king of Judah.

And I know you can tell me, if you want to, that this present age in which we live will end up in terrible declension and apostasy, and so it will. I know by the time this age is finished that wicked 'woman', Babylon, will seem to have triumphed. But, in spite of it all, God remains the God of revival and recovery and restoration; and right to the very end there is no putting any limit on God's power to revive his people.

### **No revival is ever perfect**

None of them will be until the Lord comes. I know that all revivals have petered out. And yet here is a remarkable fact that I fancy not even Elijah himself realised when he stood upon Mount Carmel to lead the nation back to God; and still less when he stood on Horeb, down in the very dumps of despair. He never realised for a moment maybe, that hundreds of years later we, in Broadway Gospel Hall in Belfast, would be encouraged by the revival he led in those far-off day. Elijah has led not only one revival—he has personally led one thousand and one revivals all down the years, as God's people, reading about his experience and the

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the recording of this meeting is not available. For a short summary, please see pages 25-26.

experience of Israel under him, have themselves been encouraged to seek the living God and have found him. If God visits you in this church with revival again, beyond what you have already seen, it will not just be you who benefit, but who knows how many more that will still come after you.

### **Israel shall be revived again**

I'll tell you something else before we get down to business. You can tell me that Israel got carried away to Assyria, and Judah to Babylon. And so they did; but they came back.

'Yes,' you say, 'I know they came back. But after the centuries they sank into deeper sin and crucified the very Lord of Glory and rejected their Messiah and refused the message of the gospel and murdered his apostles.'

Yes, that is very true, and sad and solemn reading it is. I'll tell you something else—that isn't the end of the story! They are going to be revived again. The distant callings of God are without repentance, and God doesn't change his mind. 'I wouldn't have you to be ignorant,' says Paul. 'While hardening in part has happened to Israel, it is only *pro tem*, and one day all Israel shall be saved' (see Rom 11:25-26). And if the falling away of them has been the very riches and enrichment of the Gentiles—because the gospel, being rejected by Israel, came to us Gentiles, and millions of Gentiles have believed—what shall their receiving again be, but veritable life from the dead? How gloriously wonderful the future is for that erring nation of Israel, and through her for all the nations of the world.

And you say, 'How will it come about? How will Israel ever get restored?' Well, by all sorts of ways; partly by Broadway getting revived! Is that not so? One of the things at least that spurred the Apostle Paul to his arduous labours in the gospel was that ever in his mind there lurked the hope that Israel would suddenly open her eyes to see what was happening. Here in Philippi, there in Antioch, way over in Corinth, there were scores and hundreds of Gentiles coming to know the God of Israel, JEHOVAH. Paul entertained the hope that Israel one of these days would get moved to jealousy as they saw the blessings of God coming upon the Gentiles, and that they themselves would be moved to seek the Lord and the Messiah that hitherto they had spurned. It would be marvellous, wouldn't it indeed, if God so moved in Broadway that the Jews up the Antrim Road were provoked to jealousy, and made to wonder about this Jesus?

### **Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel**

So then we are going to think together of these great revivals in Old Testament days among the people of God. First of all we start—and where else could we possibly start? —with that great revival under Elijah. You remember the story; I shall not need to tell you it in detail. Elijah gathered Israel together to Mount Carmel and the priests of Baal also gathered there. He told them to build altars and sacrifice to Baal; only they were to put the sacrifice on the altar and put no fire to it. They were to call to Baal and ask him to send fire down upon the sacrifice. Then Elijah himself would build an altar and put a sacrifice on it and call upon Jehovah. 'The God,' he said, 'who answers by fire, he is God' (1 Kgs 18:24).

The priests of Baal called, but there was no voice that answered and no fire that came. Then Elijah called on JEHOVAH, God of Israel, and fire came down and consumed the sacrifice. Israel's heart was turned back to God. That is the story.

### **What was the main issue at stake in this revival?**

I want to take a business-like approach to revival, and ask you to ponder for a moment what was the main issue at stake here. Not all revivals are the same.

When Luther preached his great liberating message, it was the discovery that justification was by faith and not by works that set Europe alight. When Wesley led his great revival it wasn't quite the same. It was the same gospel, but it was not quite the same as justification by faith. The learned theologians knew the doctrine of justification by faith: they knew an enormous amount of theology, they could give you proofs of the existence of God, and so on and so forth. What they lacked was any personal experience of the Lord. Wesley—God bless his memory—led the people into not merely a knowledge of doctrine, and who was the true God, but into a living, personal experience of God and of holy living.

What was the issue at stake in the revival that Elijah led? We read the words with which he challenged the people on Mount Carmel to face what the central issue was. 'How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him' (1 Kgs 18:21). That was the issue, and the people, we are told, answered him not a word. Of course not, for it hit home. What could they say? Truth to tell, here lay the trouble. For these past many years now Israel had been trying to have it both ways. They didn't want to throw over the worship of JEHOVAH. They had been reared as children believing in him, and father and grandfather, let alone great aunt and grandmother, had believed in JEHOVAH. Yes, but then they said, 'There's a lot to be said for Baal'! These past years they had been trying to combine the worship of JEHOVAH with the worship of Baal. They were doing the splits, their loyalties were divided, and the result had been in God's judgment upon them: a drought of rain for many months and the consequent famine and dearth.

That is why Elijah, hitting the nail precisely on the head, now challenges the people with what the central issue in the revival is going to be. If there is ever going to come a revival, it will mean facing it. 'If Jehovah is God, follow him; if Baal is God, follow him. Make up your minds, stop trying to have it both ways. Stop trying to do the splits.' For some, they would never be happy as long as they continued to compromise. But then, anyway, it was terribly illogical.

### **How do you know who is the true God?**

If Baal really was God (let's consider the proposition), you would be a fool not to follow him. That is, if he's God! Of course, if he's only a demi-semi angel or something (a demi semi quaver and not a full note), well, you would only give him a passing kind of service on some days. But if Baal is God, maker of heaven and earth, the one who holds your very breath in his hand, you would be a fool not to serve him. It's absurd, half serving him!

And the same applies to JEHOVAH, if he is God. The person who professes to believe that JEHOVAH is God, but doesn't serve him with heart, mind, soul and undivided strength—that person is a fool.

Let's ponder that therefore, for the revival is going to turn in the first place not on some great excitement but on thinking through the logic of what we believe. Our feelings come and go: one day we are moved up to the very heaven with pleasant feelings of joy and delight and we are determined to follow the Saviour and serve him. Come Monday morning and the washing and the difficulties in the factory, we get discouraged and then we don't serve. So that we had better take our emotions by the scruff of the neck and set them down sharply on the seat and tell them to be quiet for a moment and give our minds a chance to think it through.

And herein lies the secret, says the Apostle John, in our overcoming the world. I remind you what it is. 'Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?' (1 John 5:5). And how is that a helpful secret? Simply this: if Jesus is God's Son—if Jesus is the Creator incarnate, if he owns everything there is in time and eternity, if he is the author of all good, if he is the Son and heir of the Father himself—we should be fools not to serve him. No matter what I feel like, whether full of emotional joy and gratitude, or whether I am finding the going tough: if Jesus is God's Son, heir of all things, then I should be foolish indeed not to serve him. But if he isn't, well then I might as well be logical: don't serve him, serve some other god. If the world is God, serve the world. But don't let us fall into this grievous mistake of trying to have it both ways.

Our blessed Lord reminded us that no man can serve two lords, two masters. It can't be done. It will be Jehovah or Baal, but it won't be both. It will be Christ or the world, but it won't be both. 'No man can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and mammon,' said Christ (Matt 6:24 KJV).

### **Who is Mammon?**

You say, 'mammon is money'. No, it isn't! Mammon is the god of money, and that's a different thing. There's nothing wrong with money, but there's everything wrong with making a god of money. And let's get it clear what an idol was in the ancient world. It wasn't necessarily something you *loved* more than God; very few people loved their idols. But it was something they *served* rather than serving God; something they *trusted* rather than trusting God. You cannot serve two masters. If we have been setting up false gods in our lives we need constantly to be open to the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, lest from time to time we do give to things and people the service and trust that only God should have.

### **Who was Baal?**

Baal was one of the old heathen gods and he got his name simply because Baal in Hebrew means 'lord, master'; 'husband' sometimes, because it comes from that period in the ancient world when husbands were masters. (You can tell how ancient the word is!) So it means, lord and master; and just perceiving that, we can see how central the issue is. But there were lots of gods in the ancient world, and who in particular was Baal?

Baal, in the first place, was the storm god. The ancients were very observant. I can't quite tell you that they were scientists—they were far from being that, but they were observant. When they saw the great storms rolling in from the Mediterranean, the breakers and the surf roaring, when they saw the storm clouds gathering and the lightning flash, they said, 'That must really be a god.' Baal was the deification of the great forces of nature.

But because he was the deification of the forces of nature, Baal was also the god of fertility. Life and growth is a marvellous thing, when you think about it. Whether it is the seed in the field and how it germinates, or the fertility of the plants, or the human family, these things are wonderfully mysterious and they ought to provoke in everybody a sense of wonder and marvel at the gift of life, with all its mystery, that God himself has designed and given to us. It should be treated with the utmost reverence and care. But the ancients were not content gratefully to receive the gift of life and fertility from God; they made a god of it. Hence, very often, in the worship of Baal the services were little short of sexual orgies.

Now, perhaps I shall have to ask you just for a moment to think sympathetically about the Israelites. Some of them were under some pressure. Of course, it was all right for the old boys, with beards stretching down to their knees! But don't you see that, by Elijah's time, it was the modern world. You might think Elijah is old-fashioned just because you read of him in the Bible; but when Elijah lived everybody that was around thought they were the last word in being modern. Of course, they were: they were the most modern people who had lived up to that point. Therefore, they came under a great deal of pressure.

You can imagine a boy coming home from school, saying, 'Dad, our teacher has been explaining to us today what makes the storm happen.'

'How's that, then, son?'

'Well, it's the god Baal.'

'No, no, son; that's not what you were taught up at the temple.'

'But our teacher says that those people up at the temple are old-fashioned. They get what they are supposed to know out of the Bible, and that was written hundreds of years ago, but now they think it's Baal that makes the storm go. The teacher was telling us that our neighbour Eleazar sacrificed to Baal this year, and got a wonderful crop in his fields. It was Baal who did that.'

Dad doesn't know what to think now. There's no denying that Eleazar got a bumper crop this year. Perhaps it's not what Moses said, but can you afford to let go the possibility of getting a bumper crop of wheat in your field? We can still go on believing in JEHOVAH, but there's no harm, is there, in just offering a little lamb to Baal? Must we be so old fashioned and closed in our minds as to worship only JEHOVAH?

Bit by bit Israel were seduced into joining the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Baal. Some said it was the latest word in science. That's piffle, of course—absolute piffle! And can you hear now what the young folks are saying (not to their parents this time): 'Have any of you been to the services of Baal? They have wonderful times there; the music is tremendous and they're not as strict as our lot—they are so old fashioned now. They say that you should reserve for marriage what God says should be reserved for marriage. But they don't mind in Baal, and you can anticipate marriage without being married.'

One girl says, 'I don't want to go there.'

'You're chicken! You're not with it,' they say.

And so it came to pass that many of the young Israelites were professing faith in JEHOVAH but their morality was no longer what the Bible said morality was. They justified their behaviour by saying, 'It's modern; people think differently about these things nowadays.'

And you wouldn't need to be in a university in our day either, to know that young people are under tremendous pressure in this very same area. To make a god of sex and to regard what the Bible says about it as old fashioned and to think that, because the world is modern, what used to be *immorality* isn't immorality any more. But God hasn't changed. There is a true God of heaven who has given them the great and wonderful mystery of life and fertility for their joy and blessing. The gift was to be enjoyed under his rules and regulations and commands, but Israel made a god of it and forgot God's commandments and it ended, not in joy, but in famine, dearth and sorrow.

So Elijah had to challenge them. 'There's going to be revival, but we will have to make up our minds: is JEHOVAH really God, or is Baal God?'

Perhaps the young folks would need to be convinced that JEHOVAH was the true God and Baal a nonsense. And the older ones might say to themselves, 'Yes, we know that JEHOVAH is God, but while we know it we haven't been acting on our belief and serving him whole heartedly.'

'If JEHOVAH is God, follow him,' said Elijah.

'But,' said the young folks, 'that's the point, Elijah. Prove it! When we go to school and talk to our friends they have a lot of wonderful arguments. How can you prove that JEHOVAH is God, so that we may know it in our very hearts and fearlessly dare to give our lives utterly and solely over to him?'

Well, you know how Elijah proved it, and how he demonstrated it. He assembled them on Mount Carmel, he told the priests of Baal to build their altar, put their sacrifice on it and call upon Baal. So they called upon Baal, but there was no answer.

There are some folks nowadays who tell us there is no Creator and the universe just happened. They say that the ultimate forces and powers in the universe are simply the cosmic rays and the atoms and the nuclei and other such items. Do you believe that? But in the day of your need, when your heart cries out for meaning in life and what life is going to do with you, and you call upon the atoms and the cosmic rays to hear you, I tell you, no voice will come back. And if you have forgotten God, or if you don't know the God who made it all, then when your heart craves for solace and meaning, there isn't one thing that could possibly satisfy you. You can call upon your furniture, but it won't answer you. Have you made your home a god? In the day of distress, it won't answer you. It's got no voice, it's just a thing.

When the human heart asks if there is some real meaning to life: 'If there is a God, speak to me!'—how shall I know who the true God is? The answer is a sacrifice. In Elijah's day, the sacrifice was laid on the altar. When he called, the God of heaven sent down fire and consumed the sacrifice, and they knew it was God. In our day, it is still a sacrifice. How can I know that Jesus is the Son of God?

John the apostle tells us how we may know. There's one thousand and one bits of evidence, but this is preeminent among them—everything is going to depend on whether or not you believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Do you know what the evidence is, that he is the Son of



God? Well, this to start with: 'This is he who came by water and by blood' (1 John 5:6). The second half of that phrase means that Jesus Christ is the one who came into our world, and from the very start it was announced that he was the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He claimed to have come to die for the sins of the world. Nobody else ever claimed that.

We have prophets galore who exhorted us to be good, and we knew that we ought to be before they came. But our trouble was not that we knew we ought to be good; our trouble was that we hadn't been good. We have sinned against ourselves and against others; and our hearts, whether we will it or not, are from time to time harried with guilt. 'What shall I make of myself? I have sinned against myself, against my own values; I have sinned against my neighbour. Does it matter? How can I say it doesn't matter? Shall I say that life is such a thing that, when you have sinned against it, it doesn't matter? If so, life would be a very poor thing. But if sin matters, then how can I ever possibly find forgiveness and release from the sense of guilt, and of the judgment that must come upon my sin?'

There has been only one in the whole of human history that has ever suggested an answer adequate to the need. He came by blood to tell us that sin matters and must be judged by the fire of God's wrath. Ah, but to tell us also that the true God is the one who sent the fire from heaven, not on those guilty people standing around but on the sacrifice, and Calvary is where I find the true God of heaven.

I bid you to consider it: who is he on that cross? He claims to be your God. How do you know that he is? My friend, it's because no other ever loved you like that. When we deserved God's judgment, God's own Son would demand that the penalty be paid and yet suffer the penalty in our place. You will only have to make up your mind once, for nobody else will talk to you like that—nobody else claimed to be the God who died for you.

But I do not propose to preach an emotional sermon. Quite the reverse! I notice that when Elijah was keen on leading that revival he didn't say that he had a box of matches in his pocket in case the fire didn't come, just to get it going a little bit. The very opposite: he poured cold water on the whole lot. Barrels full! I want to do that tonight. I would rather that we went home not emotionally moved but thinking it logically through. Is this Jesus God's Son? Is God incarnate hanging on a cross for me? And you may come to your own logical conclusions.

Paul put it this way: 'Do you know why I serve the Lord like I do? I have come to the logical conclusion in my mind that this is the gospel:

that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Cor 5:15)

You say, 'There's one thing wrong with your sermon tonight, Mr Preacher. That revival didn't last very long.'

You're wrong: it did!

'No, it didn't, because in the very next chapter Jezebel was threatening to have Elijah's head off, and he ran away.'

Well that bit is true. But the revival lasted, and in a moment I'll tell you how.

But, just as we finish, as we have heard the gospel side of the message, so we must hear the other side. If JEHOVAH is God, there is forgiveness through the sacrifice offered there on Mount Carmel. But what would happen if they rejected that sacrifice?

After this great event Elijah ascended, and there are two, if not three, stories about how he ascended in different forms. I am going to tell you about two of those occasions.

### **Elijah ascended up a mountain**

There came a messenger from the king: *'Man of God, the king says you are to come down'*. Said Elijah, *'Do you know who you are talking about? I hope you are not just being polite, calling me a man of God: if I am a man of God let fire come down from heaven and consume you and all your men.'* And the fire came down and consumed them. You say, *'That was tough, was it not?'* Yes, it was tough, but don't you see the point? If JEHOVAH is God and Elijah is God's servant, then, if you trust God, you will repent and believe and have his blessing eternally. But if you reject God's servant, in the end there can be no half and half.

I remind you that the Jesus who suffered at Calvary is raised in heaven and the Holy Spirit has come down from heaven to convict the world of righteousness, because Jesus Christ is right. His claim was true: he is the Son of God. His ascension demonstrates it and the Holy Spirit has come.

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgement, because the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:8-11)

If Jesus Christ is God's Son, then the world that crucified him stands under his judgment. You can't have it both ways. May God write it upon our hearts. It's when we come really to believe the implications of deliberately rejecting Christ that our hearts are stirred up to be energetic in our work and faithful in our testimony for Christ.

### **Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot**

There's another story how Elijah ascended (2 Kgs 2). It is a happier story; you know it well, and I need only briefly remind you. One day as he walked, the chariots of God came and they took him bodily up to heaven—the man who had offered the sacrifice is now in heaven.

Just before Elijah went, Elisha said, *'I should like it if you gave me a double portion of your spirit.'*

*'All right,'* said Elijah, *'if you see me when I am taken, it shall be so.'*

And Elisha saw him (v. 12). Oh the wonder of it, to see that man who had offered the sacrifice ascend into heaven. And more wondrous still, as he ascended his cloak came fluttering down and Elisha took it, used it, and wore it. Fancy walking around the world in the coat of a man that has just been visibly taken to heaven! Afterwards Elisha was blessed to do miracles of grace and healing and preaching the gospel such as few men ever were commissioned to do in the whole of Old Testament history.

If JEHOVAH is God, and if Jesus is his Son, let us serve him. How shall I know that he is the Son of God? Look again at Calvary and let God demonstrate it to you. He is risen now. If he is really the Son of God and the world crucified him and God has raised him, do you see the implication for those who reject him? If you do, may God give you compassion for them. They need your gospel.

‘How shall I go and preach it?’ you say. ‘How shall I serve him and live for his glory?’ If you see him now ascended and if it catches your hearts that that same Lord Jesus Christ is alive in the Glory and has sent his Spirit to ‘clothe’ us, then in the power of that same Spirit we shall be able to serve the living Lord and be able to preach the gospel.

Let us pray

Humbly now, Lord, we thank thee for thy holy word. We ask that thou wilt give us ever more deeply to understand it and to see its significance. Help us, Lord, that we may see its bearing on our own lives. Grant that it may correct us in anything in which we need correction, so that we may serve our blessed Lord without compromise, with a faith unshaken that he is indeed thy Son. And in the power of thy Spirit, in our fellowship with him now at thy right hand, so bless us and revive us, we beseech thee, through that same Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Revival in Judah under Jehoiada

*2 Kings 11:1–4, 10–17; 12:1–12.*

We have been reading about Joash, king of Judah, but it so happens that a little while later there was another King Joash. He was king of Israel and I would like to read a little thing about him.

Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash king of Israel went down to him and wept before him, crying, 'My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' And Elisha said to him, 'Take a bow and arrows.' So he took a bow and arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, 'Draw the bow,' and he drew it. And Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. And he said, 'Open the window eastwards,' and he opened it. Then Elisha said, 'Shoot', and he shot. And he said, 'The LORD'S arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Syria! For you shall fight the Syrians in Aphek until you have made an end of them.' And he said, 'Take the arrows', and he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, 'Strike the ground with them.' And he struck three times and stopped. Then the man of God was angry with him and said, 'You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Syria until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Syria only three times.' (2 Kgs 13:14–19)

In this short series of meetings, we are studying together some of the revivals that took place in the histories of the kings of Judah, and tonight we come to study the revival that was led in Judah by Jehoiada the priest and Joash the king. So from the beginning let us ask ourselves what the crucial issue in this revival was. We noticed last time that when revivals come they very often have a lot in common. Yet, even in our own Christian centuries, revivals have not all been the same. There has generally been a distinctive issue in each of the different revivals. And so it was in the ancient world.

We noticed that in the revival led by Elijah the issue at stake was, *who is the true God*—was it Baal, or was it Jehovah? The revival reached its crucial point and stemmed from the challenge of Elijah: 'If Jehovah be God, follow him; if Baal be God follow Baal' (1 Kgs 18:21).

Now we come to another revival. It will have a lot of things in common, of course; but the crucial issue is slightly different. It is no longer, *who is the true God?* It is, *who is the true King?*

## **The background to this revival**

So let us spend some time thinking about the background to this particular revival and the big crucial issue that lay at its heart. The times before and after Joash had been very difficult and very disturbed. Starting with Joash's father, the king of Judah, for four generations running, no king of Judah had died peacefully in his palace in his own bed. That is a long while—four generations of kings. Some of us here can just about remember four generations of kings in the British Isles; if you can, then like me you will be grey-haired. Four generations of kings in Judah, and none of them had died peacefully in his own bed in his palace.

### **The kings involved**

There was King Ahaziah, who was violently executed by Jehu; Joash himself, who led the revival, but was eventually murdered by his own servants; Joash's son, King Amaziah, who was eventually assassinated by a bunch of conspirators; and his son, King Azariah, who, though he lived a long while, very early on, because of his inordinate pride and defiance of God, he was smitten with leprosy and spent all his days in an isolation leper hospital and died there in seclusion.

For four generations no king of Judah had died peacefully in his own bed in the palace. That would have been a serious state of affairs for any monarchy—it was a very serious state of affairs for the monarchs descended from David. There was something special about the kings that came of the line of David. God had promised David that he should have a son, and God had spoken in such glowing terms of David's son that Judah had come to realise that one of these days a son should be born to the throne of Judah who would be God's own beloved Messiah. They didn't know which one it would be: any one of them might eventually prove to be God's own Messiah and Saviour of the world.

It depended on the dynasty of David being continued. It was a very worrying state of affairs, therefore, when for many generations one after the other the kings of Judah came to seem exceedingly insecure. One was assassinated, one executed, another murdered, and the other, for the most part of his life, not on the throne but in an isolation hospital. There must have been many people wondering what was going to come of the line of David, and whatever would happen to God's promises for David's son.

### **The ministry of Isaiah**

It was against the background of that tremendous uncertainty that the prophet Isaiah was called to his famous ministry. He tells us that in the year King Uzziah died the fortunes of the royal house of David had sunk to the lowest they had ever been.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!' And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isa 6:14–)

Isaiah drew tremendous comfort from that vision, as did the people to whom he ministered. Even though Judah's kings were tottering, the purpose of God was going on. His earthly representatives might fail and fall, the thrones of earth seem insecure, but the Great King that one day would come of David's line was already in reserve—the blessed Son of God Almighty.

In that there is a reference to revival: revival for continuance in times that are difficult. Have you ever felt you have preached your heart out and got very little result? Have you ever preached to congregations that dwindled away to nothing? You say, 'Yes I have, but that is because I am a very bad preacher.' I understand your feeling!

When God commissioned Isaiah to preach, he told Isaiah bluntly that when he had done his preaching over long years there would be less believers than there were before. 'I want you to go and preach,' said God to Isaiah, 'until the land be emptied of its people' (see 6:9–12). Scarcely anything! Now, if I were going to choose to be a preacher, I should choose to be a great evangelist—anybody with any sense would. Great crowds coming, vast success. You wouldn't have wanted to be an Isaiah, would you—preaching to dwindling, diminishing congregations?

That same faithful prophet wrote a gospel tract, which has led millions to Christ. Through Isaiah 53 myriads have been brought to faith in God. Through Isaiah 40 countless thousands of believers, wearied with the journey, have been lifted to the very skies by the lovely words that he wrote. Here, then, is the secret of keeping going when times are difficult: the vision Isaiah had, looking behind the scenes to the great purposes of God that shall be fulfilled, and no power on earth or hell shall prevent them.

### **The women involved**

So much then for the kings that were the background, so to speak, at this time in Judah when the revival under Joash took place. But I must trouble you to consider the background just a little bit more because we have only been dealing with the men. That has left out the more important half of the world! So now let's think about the background of the women for a moment. I regret to have to tell you that, in the background to this revival, there were two of the most wicked women that the Old Testament knows about. We had better consider them.

### **Jezebel**

First of all, colourful Jezebel, and you won't need me to relate all the details of Jezebel's inglorious career. *Jezebel*—the very name is a synonym for *sin*. Having married Ahab, it was Jezebel who introduced Israel to the worship of Baal and took them into apostasy from God. It was Jezebel who used the power of the throne in order to get Naboth murdered.

You may remember the story. At one stage, having been interested in horses, Ahab turned now to do a little gardening and he wanted some extra land to put his greenhouse on, or something. It so happened that there was this man called Naboth who had a bit of ground by the palace, and Ahab went along to see if he could buy it. To his surprise, Naboth said no. It was his family inheritance and he wasn't going to sell it. Ahab said, 'Come on, man, I'll give you any price you would like to ask for it.' But, to Ahab's amazement, the man wasn't

interested in money—something about it being his God-given inheritance, and that was worth more to him than money.

Ahab was so upset that he went home, and it put him off his lunch. He lay down on his bed and began to dribble a little bit and sob, when in came Jezebel.

‘What’s wrong with you?’

‘That man Naboth won’t sell me his land.’

‘Come off it, Ahab. Leave him to me, I’ll settle him.’

Settle him she did. She got the leading judges of the land, paid a few false witnesses, staged a mock trial, and through Jezebel innocent Naboth went to his death for the sake of a little bit of gardening.

You can see who ‘wore the trousers’ in Ahab’s house. Ahab might have been king, he might have worn a crown, but the power behind that throne was Jezebel. It was Jezebel who didn’t like the look of Elijah, and less still the sound of his gospel preaching, and vowed to have his head off. It was from Jezebel that Elijah ran away. Some woman she was—from whom even an Elijah would run away.

## **Athaliah**

The great king Jehoshaphat of Judah, good man though he was, unfortunately got muddled up with Ahab and Jezebel. He was too often to be found at their dinner table, and as you might expect his son went and married a relative of Ahab’s, a woman by the name of Athaliah. She was a granddaughter of Ahab’s father, granddaughter of Omri king of Israel. She married Jehoshaphat’s son, so she became queen in Judah, married to the king of Judah.

You may have an uneasy feeling in your stomach when you hear that, observing the stable out of which Athaliah came. Well, things went not so badly while her husband was king, but then he died and her son became king. I daresay she had him tied to her apron strings. Then her son got mixed up with the wicked house of Ahab and he got executed. When Athaliah saw that her son was executed, she killed all the royal princes to a man. That is, the royal princes of Judah. Why did she do that? Simply so that she could be queen herself. She had been wife of the king, Queen in that sense. While her son lasted she was the queen mother, and I suspect he did mostly what she said.

But now her son was dead and the danger was that another king was coming. You know what older folks think the young folks are like sometimes, and perhaps the grandson who became king wouldn’t do altogether what Athaliah might ask. She knew a way of stopping that! And when her own son, the king, was dead, Athaliah rose up and slaughtered every royal prince she could lay her hands on, and ruled over the land herself.

Tonight we have to think about a queen who wasn’t content to be queen but insisted on being king. She wasn’t like her gracious majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, who is queen in her own right through descent from the House of Windsor. Athaliah had no right to the throne; she wasn’t a descendent of David. She had simply married into the family, and when her husband died it was hers by right to retire gracefully as Queen Mother so that the line of the king might go on from the male descendants of the house of David. But she wasn’t in any mood to retire. She wasn’t content to be queen, she insisted on being king in her own right. And that was what eventually raised the issue over which this revival turned: *who is the true king?*

Two women then, Jezebel and Athaliah, form the background scene of this particular revival. You say, 'You are laying it thick and heavy on the womenfolk tonight—they are not all like that.' I should hope not!

I am delighted to be able to remind you that, after many years, when all this trouble had been going on in the house of Judah, Isaiah again was eventually inspired to utter another of his delightful prophecies. Said he to Ahaz, a descendent of this crowd, 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel' (7:14). What a delightful contrast!

What would those two queens, one of Israel, one of Judah, have done to the infant Christ had they got their hands on him? They would have murdered him in cold blood, those women who were determined to be king. When Herod heard that in the city of David a Saviour, Jesus, the Christ, was born to be king, he tried to find out where he was born for the sole reason that he might slaughter him and he himself be the only king. Like him, here is Athaliah murdering the seed-royal. Had she succeeded in murdering every one of them, it would have brought to an end the line that God had determined should bring the Lord Jesus into our world. She was a wicked woman.

### **Mary, the mother of Jesus**

With what relief do we turn to consider the Virgin. We rightly call her *blessed*—the blessed virgin Mary, the woman that God used to bring in the King (Luke 1:42). What a delightful, humble soul. You women will know perhaps, exactly how she felt when the angel appeared to her and first told her of the mission God was going to give her to bring in Jesus the Saviour, God's King. Glorious was the office; yet what a difficult one it was to bear. 'How shall I do it?' she said. 'I have no husband.' Called upon to be the virgin mother of our Lord, she instinctively perceived the years of misunderstanding, of slander and whisperings that the whole thing would involve.

You know what Joseph felt when he first heard the story from Mary—he point-blank refused to believe her and was going to put her away. It took an angel to convince him that Mary's story was true. While Joseph believed, there were precious few others who did in our Lord's lifetime. You remember on one occasion our Lord was talking to the Pharisees in Jerusalem, and when the conversation got a little bit heated they turned round to him and very nastily they said, 'We weren't born of sexual immorality' (John 8:41); implying that he was.

Mary perceived it as soon as the angel told her what her duty was. This meant years of misunderstanding and public reproach, until her Son was vindicated by rising from the dead. And yet, when asked to be the virgin mother of the King, humbly she replied, 'Let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38). When she came at last to the wedding at Cana of Galilee and the people told her that the wine had run out, she said to them, 'Do whatever he tells you' (John 2:5).

My dear sisters, think again of these three women. There's Jezebel and Athaliah on the one side, determined to rule and be king and have their own way; and there's the blessed Virgin



on the other. Who do you admire more: those brazen, forceful women's lib types, Jezebel and Athaliah, or the gracious, blessed, meek, pure, holy virgin, Mary, mother of our Lord? I know surely which one you admire, and would want to be like.

But I talk to the men as well. We have to look at our own hearts. I am not so sure but there's a bit of Athaliah in every man. Every one of us does like to be king, don't we? If not of other folks, yet of our own life. That was our trouble before we got converted. We were rebels against God, determined (in polite ways if possible, but nevertheless determined) to have our own way and be king of our own lives. Now by God's grace we have seen differently: we have bowed our rebel hearts and are pleased to accept God's king, to make Christ king. But I guarantee there's not a believer here but, even since those days, every now and again something very much like Athaliah has raised its head and voice in our hearts. We find a command of Scripture that we don't particularly like and, before we know where we are, the old Athaliah inside us is for murdering that, getting rid of it and having our own way.

And so it came about that the issue of this particular revival was: *who was the true king?* If we are to know God's blessing and his reviving power, we shall have to face that issue practically in our own lives: who is going to be king?

### **How did it all happen?**

I can tell you the story briefly. I must rely upon your imagination and God's Spirit to make it real to you. Did I say that Athaliah murdered all the royal princes? Then I was wrong! She murdered them all except one. There was one little chap by the name of Joash. His aunt (good soul) managed to steal him away with his nurse at great personal risk to herself, and for six long years the little fellow was hidden in a room in the house of the Lord, while Athaliah, that impostor, reigned. Then there came the day when the Jehoiada, the high priest, who was in the know, decided to let others into his confidence. I love to imagine that scene. Quietly he got along the captains of the army that he could trust. First of all, he put them on oath, because it was a very dangerous thing and he wasn't going to show them the king until he was absolutely sure they wouldn't betray him or the young king. And when he had got them on oath that they wouldn't betray the secret, he opened the doors and to their astonished eyes he showed them the king.

I wish I could do it: I pray that God by his Spirit will do it for you just now. This world murdered Jesus Christ our Lord, the Virgin's Son. In derision they nailed the title to his cross, 'This is Jesus the King,' and they laughed at him. They thought they had seen the end of him when he was laid in the tomb. But on the day of Pentecost, Peter, inspired of the Spirit, drew the door open a little bit and he showed them the King.

### **Seeing the true King**

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.'  
(Ps 2:2-3)

Said Peter,

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:36)

My brother, my sister, have you seen the King recently? He is not dead, you know! The world may think he is dead and done for, but they who are in the know see him at the right hand of God. I tell you something more wonderful: that same Jesus will one day come to his coronation. What a day it shall be when the King, the only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords comes, and the Father himself shall draw heaven aside and show this world the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

### **Athaliah is overthrown**

It was embarrassing for Athaliah — it was more than embarrassing. She came down to see what all the fuss was about. Nobody had ever rejoiced quite like this before. She couldn't understand people's hearts being so full of joy; so she came down to see. It sounded perilously like a revival meeting or something going on in the temple. I don't think Athaliah was too keen on revival meetings, but her palace was nearby and she came down to see it all, and to her amazement there stood the king by a pillar. Not the innocent infant she thought, but with the serried ranks of the captains of the guard all with their swords guarding the king it spelt death to the impostor.

It must have been a bit embarrassing for the men who were Athaliah's ministers. They would have a lot of explaining to do. Tell me, if God staged the appearing of our blessed Lord tonight, where would you be standing? Fairly and squarely on the side of the King; or would you be found compromised with the Athaliahs of this world? How does my heart stand, and yours? Absolutely loyal to the coming King, or toying with the suggestions of disobedience that sometimes play in our minds and hearts?

### **The covenants between the people and the king**

So Athaliah was executed, and then the high priest brought king and people together and before God they made a couple of covenants. They made a covenant between God on the one side and the king and the people on the other, that they would be the Lord's people. And then they made a covenant between the people and the king, that the people should be loyal to the true king.

Tomorrow some people shall be gathered in this hall and what they will be doing is to celebrate a covenant between them and the King. That's what it will mean. They will do a lot of other things: they will sing hymns, they will pray — give thanks, but at the heart of what they do is a covenant ceremony. They shall take bread and a cup of wine — this is not the first time they have done it — and what they are doing is to remember the great covenant that our blessed Lord has made with his people. 'This is the blood of the new covenant,' said he, 'in my blood, shed for many' (see Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). They shall be renewing their loyalty to the king. It's important to be there!

You say, 'What will loyalty to the king mean? It's all right for you, Mr Preacher, to get excited standing up on that platform, waxing a bit emotional. But when it comes down to brass tacks, what does loyalty to the king mean?'

## **Joash's priority**

The first thing that Joash did was to call for the high priest. He said, 'I was hidden for a long time in one of the rooms of the Lord's house, and now that I am grown up I have observed that there are a lot of breaches. A hole in the wall there; this bit of timber has been broken for years and years, and it has not been mended.' This was the king speaking now. He said, 'Jehoiada, I want you to take money from the people, make yourself responsible, and you and your fellow priests repair all the breaches in the house of the Lord. That's number one.'

You say, 'That was a funny thing—why didn't he start revising the army or something and order a few nuclear missiles or submachine guns?' But then he was a sensible king. He knew right well that the people would obey him as long as they first obeyed God. If they were loyal to God, he was God's king and they would be loyal to him. If they had lost their sense of loyalty to God, then any day they liked they could kick the king out. So, when he became king he set about getting the people loyal to God, and rebuilding and repairing the breaches in the house of the Lord.

## **God's house today is a spiritual house**

God has a house today. Only, unlike the house in Joash's day, it isn't made of wood and cement or gold or silver. The house of the living God, the church of the living God is made up of people; and all believers are members of the house of God wherever they are and at any time of day or night. It is a spiritual house. Perhaps you will become more conscious of it when Christian folks meet together publicly. There too, you will find an expression of the house of God. Tell me, you believers who have been around this house of God for some years, around its various nooks and crannies—have you noticed any breaches in the house of the Lord recently? If you have, then loyalty to the King will demand repairing them.

## **The ransom money**

'You had better collect some money,' said Joash.

'It's going to cost,' said Jehoiada. 'Where shall I get the money from?'

'Well, to start with, you can take the census money.'

'What's that?'

The Lord said to Moses, 'When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them.' (Exod 30:11-12)

And long since, we who live in this age have become accustomed to seeing in that ancient rite of the shekels of silver, the cost of redemption. We are told that we are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18-19). And, frankly, you are not your own, you were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20). If there is work and devotion, zeal and obedience needed, it's been paid for—hasn't Christ bought it?

## A breach that existed in Corinth

Let's come for a moment to that letter in the New Testament that tells us about this covenant arrangement between Christ and his people. First Corinthians 11 reminds us of our Christian duty to come and take bread and wine and celebrate the new covenant, sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. You will remember how Paul tells us in chapter 3 that, when it comes to the church of God, Paul has laid the foundation but we are required to build thereon (v. 10). We can build properly with gold, silver and precious stones, or we can put in shoddy work. The Day shall declare it, when the Lord Jesus will come and personally inspect every bit of work that I have done for him. What about those breaches, before he comes?

There was one very big breach in Corinth. They had started calling themselves by curious names.

One lot was saying, 'I am of Paul'.

Another lot, 'I am of Apollos'.

And a third lot was saying, 'I am of Peter'.

'What's wrong with that?' you say.

What's wrong with it! Tell me, you who say, 'I follow Paul', or, 'I follow Apollos', was Paul crucified for you? (see 1 Cor 1:12-13). This is a serious matter: it is a question of who is the King and who has a right to your loyalty.

You would think I was someone special if I was invited to a garden party in Buckingham Palace; but suppose the day came and I was presented to the Queen.

She says, 'Hello, who are you?'

'I am Gooding. It is most interesting to meet you, Your Majesty—you look just how you look in the newspapers!'

'And who are you?'

'Well, actually, I am a follower of Margaret Thatcher!'<sup>2</sup>

'Excuse me, who is Margaret Thatcher?'

You don't mention Margaret Thatcher in the same breath as the Queen! Anybody knows who Margaret Thatcher is: she is Prime Minister, but that's all. You don't owe any loyalty to Margaret Thatcher. But it would be funny if I happened to have a penny in my pocket and drew it out and, instead of the Queen's head on it, it was Margaret Thatcher's head! Treason is an exceedingly serious thing. Margaret Thatcher is the Prime Minister, and if Parliament passes laws I have to keep them; but I must always acknowledge the difference between Margaret Thatcher, Jim Callaghan<sup>3</sup> and all that crowd, and the Queen.

A great King is coming. It won't do when we meet him, to find that we have taken somebody else's name—however good that person is. It is a breach in the house of the Lord that we start calling ourselves by other names than that of our blessed Lord.

When Paul comes to describe that covenant ceremony which is the Lord's Supper, he reminds them that it was on the night when the Lord Jesus was betrayed that he took bread (11:23). Why remind them of that? They are all believers in Corinth, surely Paul is not

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<sup>2</sup> British Prime Minister, 1979-1990.

<sup>3</sup> British Prime Minister, 1976-1979.

suggesting that any one of them was a traitor like Judas? Of course not—no believer is a Judas. But I remind you that this good King Joash, who set about repairing the house of the Lord, was one day assassinated by his own servants (2 Chron 24:25).

‘When you come to the Lord’s Supper,’ says Paul, ‘you will examine yourself and get right with the Lord if you have to. You will confess your sin and ask the Lord to show you anything wrong in your life so that it can be put right.’ Because, if we drink that cup of the Lord unworthily—living any old way, allowing unrepentant sin in our lives, and we come to the Lord’s Supper, that is to be guilty of the body and blood of Christ. To be carrying on with the sin that brought him to his death at Calvary, and not repent of it, is to be guilty of the death of Christ.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself. (1 Cor 11:27–29)

## Revival in Judah under Josiah

*2 Kings 22:1–23:3*

In this brief series of studies, we have been considering together some of the revivals that took place in the history of the kings of Israel and of Judah, and we noticed that, while all revivals, both ancient and modern, have certain things in common, generally there is some special and crucial issue at stake, which is different in each revival.

### **The issues at stake**

*With the revival led by Elijah, the prophet in Israel, the issue was: who is the true God? Was Jehovah the true God, or Baal?*

And Elijah came near to all the people and said, ‘How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.’ (1 Kgs 18:21)

Demonstrating to them that Jehovah was indeed the true God, Elijah led his people back to the whole-hearted serving of Jehovah.

*With the revival that was led by Jehoiada, high priest in Judah, and subsequently by Joash, king of Judah, we found the issue was slightly different. No longer, who is the true God, but rather, who is the true king? Was it Athaliah, or was it Joash, son and seed of David? In that revival, the imposter Athaliah’s treason was exposed and the true king was revealed.*

Then he brought out the king’s son and put the crown on him and gave him the testimony. And they proclaimed him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, ‘Long live the king!’ (2 Kgs 11:12)

Judah rallied in loyalty to their true king, and subsequently discovered what in practical terms loyalty to the true king would mean; in particular, by way of repairing the breaches in the house of the Lord.

*We then looked at the revival that was led by Hezekiah, king of Judah, in the days when Assyria came up with all her massed battalions and military might (2 Kgs 18).<sup>4</sup> They mocked their faith in the living God—the great truths of redemption, the election of Israel, and the purposes*

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<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the recording of this talk is missing.

of God to bring in Messiah through Israel, and Jerusalem with the house of the Lord there. Assyria, the great world power, mocked at what they thought was this stupid and primitive belief on the part of this tiny little market town up in the hills of Judea. They bade Hezekiah and all the people abandon old-fashioned, biblical myths in favour of the political theories and ideologies of the great Gentile Empire of Assyria.

Shaking in his knees, as anybody was prone to do when they first had a look at the Assyrians and their armies, Hezekiah thought he could do a kind of a compromise, by hacking off a bit of the gold out of the house of the Lord here, trimming down a little bit there, and giving it to the Assyrians in the hope that if you trimmed down your faith just a little bit, they might find it more acceptable and let you go on. But he soon found that was a terrible mistake.

Christendom hasn't found it so yet; and alas for those theologians that one by one abandon this fundamental and that fundamental of the Christian faith, under the plea that, if you still stand for the fundamentals and supernaturalism in all its glory, the modern man and woman can't believe it. So, to get them inside your church, you carve off a bit of the faith here, or trim down supernaturalism there, and hope somehow to convince them. Of course, they only conclude that you don't really believe what you say you believe, and scorn both you and your faith and go further from your church than ever.

Hezekiah and his people had to face the issue: *were they going to stand for God's truth?* When were they going to stop whittling down their faith and learn to stand for the objective truth of God's revelation? They stood, through their trust in God, rooted and grounded in the faith, like those marvellous pillars in the house of the Lord, Jachin and Boaz (1 Kgs 7:21).

### **The revival led by Josiah**

We now come to look at the revival led by Josiah, who was the great grandson of Hezekiah. When Josiah came to the throne he succeeded Manasseh, who years ago had been one of the wickedest kings that ever lived in Judah; and Amon hadn't done much to improve things in the meanwhile. So when Josiah came to the throne there were obviously things wrong with the house of the Lord, and Josiah early on set about having another kind of revival (2 Kgs 22).

Of course he had a tradition to go upon, for I daresay he'd read in their books about revivals and how to lead them. He must surely have read the ancient history about the revival led by Joash. What had Joash done? Well he'd collected the high priests and said, 'Look at the house of the Lord, it's disgraceful! Look at all those holes in the wall—mend them, repair the breaches, get the people to give the money, and then get workmen and carpenters and masons and get the job done.' And that worked in Joash's day

So Josiah, excellent young man that he was, and having read his history books about revival, did the same thing. He told the priests to collect the money and give it to the masons and the carpenters and repair the breaches once more in the house of the Lord. It is interesting to see how often breaches occur from generation to generation—there is always room for repair.

However, in the course of their repair work, in some fusty corner that no one had looked into for years, they found a book (v. 8). Being curious and opening the book they found that it was a part of the word of God. But their first reaction was utter consternation, for as they

looked into it they found that there were one thousand and one things they were doing—even in the house of the Lord, let alone at home—which were clearly contrary to the word of God.

That posed a real issue, and what were they going to do about it? Were they going to say, 'Well that's very interesting; but of course that's what Moses wrote and it's rather old-fashioned stuff and it couldn't be done nowadays'? Or were they going to say, 'This is the word of God and it's too bad if it hasn't been adhered to, but we're now going to start and do it just like it's written'? So, in a nutshell, that was the issue in that revival: *were they going to obey the word of God?*

But you may say to me, 'I don't see much difference in that particular issue and the one you said was the issue under Hezekiah. In that revival you said it was a question of standing for God's truth—what on earth is this, if it isn't exactly the self-same thing?'

Well I suppose it is in a way; but there is a difference, and an important difference. If the theologians were trying to sum up the difference between these two revivals they would say that the revival under Hezekiah was concerned for God's *objective* truths, and the revival under Josiah was concerned much more about God's *subjective* truths.

### **Objective truths of the faith**

God's objective truth is a term that is sometimes used for the great facts of our faith. The great historic realities, such as the existence of God and the evidence for it; the fact that Israel were his chosen people; the great fact of the virgin birth; the deity of the Lord Jesus, his sinless humanity, the reality of his miracles, the fact of his atoning death, the historical reality of his literal resurrection and the certainty of his coming again. These are the great objective truths of the gospel and we must stand for them like veritable pillars, whose function was to uphold those beautiful capitals to the eyes of mankind so that people might be attracted to the house of the Lord by the beauty of those capitals upheld by the pillars.

So the church, 'the pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Tim 3:15 KJV), is responsible to uphold the objective truths of God's self-revelation, to stand by them and guard them in all their beauty and their potential for fruitfulness, and not compromise on the great objective truths of the faith.

### **Subjective truths of the faith**

But as well as what you might call those great objective truths of the faith, the Bible has a lot of other truths that you might quite reasonably call subjective truths. These are the truths that tell me that not only did God become incarnate and visit our planet and die upon a cross and rise again for our salvation, but they say to me directly that I need to apply that truth to myself. I need to be born again, to be reconciled to God, to have that word applied to my rebel heart, to end my rebellion and obey God's holy word. And being born again into the family of God, I will constantly need to allow that word to examine me and let the Holy Spirit apply it, so that I might progress in holiness and thus adorn the gospel that I profess to preach to men.

How shall I help God's cause, if on Sundays I stand preaching the objective truth of God and on Mondays in my work I'm as bad-tempered and mean and selfish as I can possibly be? What use shall I be, standing before God's people telling them that God loved them so much



that he gave his Son to die for them, if on Tuesday evenings I make my own house a very unpleasant place by my lack of love and carping criticisms and impurities of spirit? What good shall I do, if I stand and preach the gospel and have never been converted and born again by that same gospel myself? (That last word particularly is for the ears of theologians.) That is the comparatively short explanation. There is a slightly longer one but it isn't so different.

### **Vessels for cleansing found in the house of the Lord**

For a moment let us forget about Josiah and come with me to the house of the Lord, this very house that Josiah set about repairing. We went on a visit there in our imagination this morning. As we came into the courts, we saw facing us those two stately *pillars*, Jachin and Boaz, with those delightful capitals of lily work and chains and pomegranates on top. As I have already indicated, we saw in those pillars, holding up those lovely capitals, a helpful and vivid picture of our duty as members of the house of God to be a pillar and ground for the truth, to hold God up to the eyes of men and women.

In the court of that very same house of the Lord you would have found some other things. There would have been an *altar* of course, with sacrifices and the shedding of blood, where men might find forgiveness of sins. But very noticeable and prominent above all else in the court of Solomon's temple, there would have been an object called a *sea*. It was in fact an enormous bowl of water, rather an ornamental one, and it stood on the backs of a dozen oxen. Some people think there must have been a system of pipes or something, so that the water in this great bowl could be drawn down through these pipes and may possibly even have come out through the mouths of the oxen whose backs carried the *laver*.

However, there it was—this enormous laver filled with water, called the sea. And not content with that, had you looked around you would have found ten more *lavens*, smaller ones, each of them arranged on top of a stand with wheels so that you could move them to wherever you liked. Obviously, in this house of the Lord, water was going to be important, and you apparently were going to need it all over the place, at any time.

You say to me, 'What was all that about?' Well, it was for the simple, practical purpose of cleansing. It taught those ancient Israelites that if you would serve acceptably in the house of the Lord you would need to be cleansed. In the altar there was *cleansing by blood*, and at the laver there was *cleansing by water*.

You will remember that likewise in our day and generation God has provided us with cleansing through Christ. Two types of cleansing: there is cleansing by blood, and there is also cleansing by water. We rightly sing, 'What can wash away my stain? Nothing but the blood of Jesus'.<sup>5</sup> It is a biblical idea, 'the blood of Jesus [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin.' (1 John 1:7). There is cleansing by blood through Calvary.

But another Scripture reminds us that 'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word' (Eph 5:25–26). So, for us too, there is cleansing by blood, but also cleansing by water. As

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Lowry (1826-1899), 'Nothing but the blood of Jesus' (1876).

Hebrews 9:14 informs us, the blood of Christ cleanses our consciences. Happy is the man or woman who has personally discovered that marvellous cleansing from the guilt of sin.

### **Cleansing by blood**

If I am speaking to somebody now and you've never let God cleanse you from the guilt of sin—you still carry with you the burden and the chain of the past, you have no certainty of forgiveness in your heart, the prospect of eternity strikes fear within you—Oh friend, listen, there is cleansing for you. There is release from the guilt that burdens your conscience: there is cleansing in the precious blood of Christ.

You say, 'How does the blood of Christ actually do its job of cleansing us?'

Well it works like this. If I have sinned and my conscience is still working (I haven't bashed it out of operation), it witnesses that I have done wrong and broken God's law, and begins to get worried because there is a penalty attached to breaking God's law. Holy Scripture says 'the wages of sin is death' (Rom 6:23). I shall never get rid of the burden of guilt by brushing it under the carpet and trying to forget it, and promising that I shall turn over a new leaf tomorrow. My conscience will agree with God's word, that to have broken his law is to deserve its penalty.

'How then shall I ever be free?'

Oh listen, friend, 'the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin' in this sense, when the Saviour died and shed that blood, he was dying—paying the penalty that God's law demanded—because of our sin. The penalty was death under the wrath of God. In love for our souls Christ died to pay that penalty and shed his blood, so that all might see, 'He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed' (Isa 53:5). It is a blessed moment when I discover that the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for sin and has so satisfied God's holy law that it can cleanse my conscience from all its guilt and set me free.

### **Cleansing by water**

Well then, why do I need this further cleansing of water, and what is it? We need it because forgiveness of sins is not by itself enough. What would be the use of God forgiving me my sin if he then left me to go on sinning? My sins may be forgiven; but how should I ever be admitted into the holy presence of God, if I were merely forgiven but still the ugly, unclean, impure character that I always was? I need more than forgiveness of my guilt; I need more than the cleansing of my conscience; I need cleansing of my character. How can that be done? Paul tells us in his letter to Titus:

We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. (3:3)

With stark realism, Paul paints his character as once it was, in all its gnarled nastiness. Of course, Saul of Tarsus before he got converted wouldn't have thought of himself in any way like that. But when he got converted to Christ, and had another look at himself, he then saw himself as he really was and as God saw him—a twisted, malicious, envious, hating, hated,

perverted man, desperately in need of being cleansed in his character and personality. 'But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared,' says Paul, 'he saved us,' (vv. 4–5).

How did he save us? How did he transform that persecuting blasphemer, Saul of Tarsus, into the saint of God, an apostle of love, into Paul the servant of Christ? Well, here it comes: 'he saved us,' says Paul.

You say, 'Yes, by the blood of Jesus'.

But that is not what Paul is saying just here, is it? For Paul is not now thinking of deliverance from guilt, but deliverance from the power of sin. 'He saved us . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly' (vv. 5–6).

Do you get the metaphor? The Holy Spirit is like that water poured out on the believer to effect the cleansing of new birth. God's ways of cleansing are nothing if they're not enough. God is not content just to polish up our old lives a little bit. God demands a cleansing that is utterly radical: the cleansing of a new birth and a new life. So that, when a person comes to God's word and by God's Spirit is convicted of his sin, his evil ways, and his impure character, he is brought first of all to repentance, to see himself as God sees him. That's the beginning. The Holy Spirit then leads him to put his faith in Christ; and when he does that, Christ works in him a new life and a new start, a veritable new birth: the washing of regeneration, the renewing performed by the Holy Spirit.

I trust we have all had that experience, and know ourselves cleansed by the blood of Christ from the guilt of sin. But also, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, 'born again . . . through the living and abiding word of God' (1 Pet 1:23). And of course, once a person is born again and cleansed in that fundamental sense, as life goes on he will need that other kind of cleansing—that constant rinsing of hands and feet at the laver of God's word.

As our Lord Jesus said to Peter, when he gave him that illustration and washed the disciples' feet, 'You do not need to be bathed all over again, Peter, once you have been bathed. But you will need to let me rinse your feet, for if I don't you cannot have practical fellowship with me' (see John 13:8–10). What's the good of me standing preaching the gospel on Sunday, and then be so out of touch with the Lord on Monday that when a member of the congregation bumps my car I proceed to savage him with my tongue and my uncontrollable temper?

Standing for God's objective truth is our plain duty and privilege. But if we're going to have fellowship with Christ in standing for his objective truth, then we shall need to allow his Holy Spirit and the laver of his word to cleanse our personalities.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:25–27)

If a good wife were to burn her husband's potatoes, I could conceive that the husband would say, 'I forgive you my dear for this lamentable mistake!' But if the good lady were to develop a pimple or two on her face, you would think he was a stupid husband if he said, 'I forgive you for having that pimple!' Pimples aren't things you forgive. He would still love her

just the same, of course; but by that same simple token he would want her to look her best, and he'd say, 'that pimple's got to go!'

Do you have any pimples? I don't mean literal pimples or literal wrinkles. But as you look in the mirror of God's word as you retire to rest tonight, will you be saying, 'I wasn't as pretty today as I ought to have been, my old tongue ran away with me. I was selfish, I was critical, I was slovenly in the Lord's work.' I don't know what your pimples and wrinkles are, but I know a good many about myself; and my friends know even more about me.

This I do know: if we're going to have revival in the church, we shall have to stand not only for God's objective truth, we shall have to make use of the laver, the subjective truth; to allow God's Spirit to cleanse us by the washing of water through the word, so that the wrinkles, spots and blemishes may be removed from our behaviour.

### **King Ahaz**

You say to me, 'What on earth has all that got to do with Josiah?' Well, let me tell you about Josiah's great-great-great-grandfather. I don't know if I've got the right number of *greats* in, but allow me to tell you a little bit about a king in Judah called Ahaz.

Ahaz was called away at one stage on a diplomatic mission up to Damascus, to meet the king of Assyria. In between the sessions at the conference he had a look around, and of course he toured the local cathedral. In there he saw an altar and thought to himself, 'that's a smashing altar!' Presently he got back to his hotel and wrote a postcard and sent it to his chief minister, the high priest, down in Jerusalem. Said he on the postcard, 'Here is a sketch of a new altar I have seen in Damascus, so I'd like you to put aside that rather old-fashioned altar we've got down there in Jerusalem and put this new model in its place.'

Can you imagine the man's fantastic cheek—to put aside what God himself had commanded and, if you please, put his own innovations into the house of the Lord! Not content with that, when he came home his eye lighted on that vast laver on the backs of the oxen. He said, 'You know, that has always seemed an ugly brute of a thing to me, standing up there on the backs of those oxen. I think it would improve it a bit if we cut it down off the oxen.'

So Ahaz proceeded to do just that. He had the workmen cut it down and he put it on the ground, and didn't seem to have the slightest pang of conscience about doing it, as he mumbled through his beard something about being old-fashioned and you have to move with the times. That sacred laver, a symbol of the washing of water through the word—and here is Ahaz reducing its power and the force of the water by putting it down on the ground.

We've got to watch that, haven't we, lest we get infected with the spirit of the world and start telling ourselves, 'Ah yes, that's what Paul said, but he was only Paul. Does the New Testament say that? Well, fancy that now! But it was written a long, long time ago.' Does the fact that it was inspired of God a long time ago mean that it has now gone out of fashion and is no longer relevant? There are some who would tell us that nowadays you don't go to the Bible for an authoritative answer. The Bible, perhaps, is one among those many books you might possibly think of consulting if you had a problem. But of course you wouldn't necessarily do what it says.

### **How is that relevant to Josiah?**

With the poor old laver now demoted and standing on the ground, the symbol had been robbed of a lot of its meaning and power. But let's leave the symbol, 'the washing of water through the word', God is more interested in realities than in symbols.

And so it came to pass, when Josiah started out in his good intention to lead a revival and repair the breaches in the house of the Lord, God directed his servants to a cupboard where there was a book. If you please, it was part of the word of God! They didn't know that it existed before, so long had it been forgotten. When they first read it they were appalled, for it was so different from what they were doing. But they went to consult Huldah the prophetess, and God had to send back a very stern message to them.

He said, 'Now you'll understand, won't you, the seriousness of people disobeying my word? For centuries my word has been saying that you are to do this, and if you disobey there will be calamitous results. Generations of kings in Judah have forgotten my word years without number and not done it—indeed, quite contrary to it.'

And what we sow we reap. Christendom has often neglected and forgotten God's word; disobeyed it over centuries and put in its place all sorts of things that are but the inventions of men. It will reap the inevitable harvest, and Christendom (formal and outward) will end in *Babylon*, as sure as the disobedient kings of Judah ended in Babylon. But that's no reason why the true believing people of God, wherever they find themselves, should lose heart; God will bless those who make an honest attempt to discover his word and obey it, however late the day.

So Josiah set about it, and when they went round the temple with the word of God in their hands, you never saw such a motley collection of things as they discovered. There were chariots to the sun and pillars to Ashdod—you never saw such nonsense and bunkum and mediaeval superstitions in the temple, when they went round it with the word of the Lord. Thank God they determined to obey holy Scripture and out went the old nonsense. Then they discovered the joy of the positive side. They found you ought to keep the Passover, and they said, 'Let's keep it'.

'But our fathers always did it this way,' said somebody.

'Yes,' said somebody else, 'but that's not what the Bible says, is it?'

'What shall we do?'

And they had to decide whether or not they were going to obey Scripture and carry it out as it is said.

### **How is it relevant to us?**

What about us? Scripture says that we ought to be born again. Are you born again? Scripture says that, if we're born again, we ought to be baptised. Are you baptised? You say, 'I don't need it.' God wasn't asking you whether you needed it! His word says it; the question is, are you going to obey his word, or not? If you're born again and baptised, the Bible says you ought to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Do you? The Bible says many things that we Christians ought to do in church, in the home and at our work. May God give us the grace to do those

things, and daily and yearly give ourselves to read his word in a spirit that says, 'Lord, teach me what your word says so that I may run to do your commandments.'

If that is our attitude of heart, God will bring us his blessing, however late the times are in which we live.

Let us pray.

Father, bless thy holy word now to us all we beseech thee, that we may learn to live in the light thereof. Give us grace to stand firm for thy objective truth. But Lord, give us the grace likewise to search thy word and to apply it to our hearts, so that we may in all practical senses obey it and prove what is thy good and acceptable will and, sowing thus to thy Spirit, reap of the Spirit eternal life. Through that same Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.