

“Apostasy and Revival”
(Psalm 106:34-46)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we considered the Lord’s faithfulness to protect us in the world, if we are faithful to worship Him as He commands:
 - a. When He finally brought the Israelites into the Promised Land, He instituted certain aspects of worship that they couldn’t keep when they were wandering in the wilderness: specifically, those feasts that were connected to the harvest:
 - (i) The Feast of First-Fruits, or Pentecost, which was celebrated seven weeks after the second day of Passover.
 - (ii) And the Feast of Tabernacles, which was celebrated immediately at the end of harvest.
 - b. These feasts, along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, required that the Israelite men leave their homes unprotected for a period of time:
 - (i) The Feast of Unleavened Bread/Passover for seven days.
 - (ii) Pentecost for one day.
 - (iii) The Feast of Tabernacles for eight days, each not including travel time.
 - (iv) And yet, when they were faithful to observe these feasts, the Lord was faithful to protect their homes and land.
 - (v) Further, as long as they were faithful to keep all of God’s commandments – which they didn’t often do – He made sure that they were fully provided for and had nothing to fear from anyone.
2. This is a reminder to us that there is safety in worship:
 - a. Sometimes we think that the real danger lies in doing what God commands: If we do what’s right, if we stand out from the world, if we worship God with our lives, we’ll be singled out for persecution.
 - b. But the truth is we won’t be safe unless we do: the path of safety lies in obedience – which is important to understand, especially in the times in which we live when we are often tempted to compromise.
 - (i) Yes, we will suffer persecution for doing what’s right, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).
 - (ii) But it is far safer to be in God’s hands of protection – where He will cause all things to work for our good – rather than in the hands of the world having God as our enemy (Matt. 10:28).

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we see another way the Lord preserved His people once they were in the land: through revival.
 - a. Once Israel’s godly leadership died off, the people immediately fell away from the Lord.

- b. Each time they did, the Lord afflicted/disciplined them through other nations.
 - c. But each time He afflicted them, and they cried out, He raised up a leader through which He revived them and led them to victory.
2. Through this cycle of apostasy and revival, the Lord did two things to advance the work of redemption:
- a. He preserved that nation from destruction so that Messiah could come.
 - b. And in doing so, He preserved the true church.

II. Sermon.

- A. Let's consider first that the Lord preserved the nation of Israel from destruction by raising up leaders who were a means of reviving Israel.
1. Everything appeared to be going well – remember how the Lord revived that generation – until the death of Joshua and the other godly leaders of Israel.
 - a. “Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten. And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:8-10).
 - b. After they died, “ Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from *among* the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth” (vv. 11-13).
 - c. As a result, “The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around *them*, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies” (v. 14).
 - d. As our text also reminds us, “But they mingled with the nations and learned their practices, and served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with the blood. Thus they became unclean in their practices, and played the harlot in their deeds. Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against His people and He abhorred His inheritance. Then He gave them into the hand of the nations, and those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were subdued under their power” (Psalm 106:35-42).
 2. The Lord had left these people in the land in order to test Israel – to see whether they would obey:
 - a. Israel disobeyed God by not driving them out: “They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them” (v. 34).

- b. They also turned from His covenant, and so He allowed the nations to remain as a means of testing His people's obedience: "So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, 'Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not.' So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua" (Judges 2:20-23).
 - c. The book of Judges is a record of Israel's failure and God's subsequent discipline.
 - 3. But it is also a record of God's mercy: even though they were unfaithful, He was faithful – He miraculously preserved them through the Judges and didn't allow them to be destroyed as a nation.
 - a. When He brought them to the point where they couldn't bear up under their oppressors any longer and they were in danger of being destroyed, the Lord raised up a deliverer, "Nevertheless He looked upon their distress when He heard their cry; and He remembered His covenant for their sake, and relented according to the greatness of His lovingkindness. He also made them *objects* of compassion in the presence of all their captors" (Psalm 106:44-46).
 - b. This is something Moses prophesied the Lord would do in the song he taught Israel before he died, "For the LORD will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants, when He sees that *their* strength is gone, and there is none *remaining*, bond or free" (Deu. 32:36).
 - c. Each of these deliverers was a great leader endowed by God with the ability to lead His people out of their captivity to freedom (not to mention the fact that Christ was with them giving them this victory as the captain of the armies of the Lord): each was a picture of Christ overcoming the forces of darkness and leading His church to victory.
 - d. God revived and preserved His people through these Judges, and kept them in the land, so that He might eventually send the Messiah.
- B. Second, let's consider that in preserving the nation through these "revivals", He also preserved the true church.
- 1. The Lord did more than revive the armies of Israel, He also revived their religion.
 - a. Even though the people were so prone to leave Him and go after false gods/idols, He continued to preserve His worship: neither His tabernacle, His ark, the book of the Law, the priesthood, or the true religion failed.
 - b. Time after time, when it seemed as though the true religion was almost gone, the Lord granted a revival, sent an angel, or raised up a great leader to bring about reformation, which inevitably revived the people of God and His worship.
 - 2. This reminds us of what Jesus said, "I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18).

- a. In the Old Covenant, the Lord would not allow anything to stop His work of bringing His Son into the world to crush the head of the serpent.
- b. Now that Christ has come, He won't allow anything to keep Him from bringing His elect to faith, and so He will not allow the church to fail from the earth.

III. Application.

- A. The subsequent history of the church reminds us that she had her spiritual ups and downs much like Israel did.
 - 1. It is also a history of decline and revival:
 - a. She began with a pure belief and practice during the time of the apostles.
 - b. But she fell away from that purity afterwards, during the Ancient and Medieval Ages – though there were periodic glimpses of light.
 - c. She was revived again during the time of the Reformation, the English Puritans, and the New England Puritans and Non-Conformists – with the church falling into decay in between.
 - d. Since that time, there have been times of progress and times of declension.
 - e. This seems to be the pattern both in the inspired history of the Bible, as well as in church history: much like the time of the Judges, there are times of apostasy and of revival.
 - 2. How should we characterize the church of the present day?
 - a. Currently, the church seems to be in a time of declension.
 - (i) There seems to be a good deal of activity, but very little godliness.
 - (ii) Holiness, both personal and corporate, is the best indicator of the church's health, not numbers or knowledge.
 - (iii) Even though we may know more now about God's Word than we ever have before, and even though we may exist in greater numbers, the church is still lacking.
 - (iv) Like the church during the time of the Judges, she has imbibed the evils of the culture around her.
 - b. We are in desperate need of revival.
- B. And so what should we do? We should pray for revival: They are perhaps more integral to God's plan than we think.
 - 1. We should pray that the Lord would do something extraordinary:
 - a. That's what a revival is – when the Lord does something out of the ordinary, when He renews and strengthens the holiness of His people.
 - b. He typically does this when His people have fallen asleep or become lax in their obedience.
 - c. He begins by restoring Biblical truth to His church – you can't have true holiness without true knowledge.
 - d. But He also pours out of His Spirit to give His church a greater concern to walk in that truth.
 - 2. We should pray that the Lord would greatly advance His work.

- a. Again, that's what a revival does: It helps to promote the kingdom which He promised to give His Son.
 - b. Edwards writes, "When God manifests himself with such glorious power, in a work of this nature [such as with the revival He sent to New England], he appears especially determined to put honour upon his Son, and to fulfil his oath that he has sworn to him, that he would make every knee to bow . . . to him. God hath had it much on his heart, from all eternity, to glorify his dear and only-begotten son; and there are some special seasons that he appoints to that end, wherein he comes forth with omnipotent power to fulfil his promise . . . to him. Now these are times of remarkable pouring out of his Spirit, to advance his kingdom; such is a day of his power. . . ." (Packer, *Quest*, 323).
 - c. "From the fall of man, to our day, the work of redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable communications of the Spirit of God. Though there be a more constant influence of God's Spirit always in some degree attending his ordinances; yet the way in which the greatest things have been done towards carrying on this work, always have been by remarkable effusions, at special seasons of mercy. . . ." (*Quest*, 323).
3. We should pray that the Lord would cause His name to be glorified.
 - a. Salvation is the most glorious work He does, and when He works this with many at one time, He is greatly glorified.
 - b. "Such a work is, in its nature and kind, the most glorious of any work of God whatsoever. It is the work of redemption (the great end of all the other works of God, and of which the work of creation was but a shadow) . . . it is the work of the new creation, which is infinitely more glorious than the old. I am bold to say, that the work of God in the conversion of one soul . . . is a more glorious work of God than the creation of the whole material universe. . . ." (*Quest*, 323-24).
 - c. We should pray that the Lord would send revival and expect that He will in His appointed time: Certainly, our day is ripe for a genuine outpouring of God's Spirit.
 4. Do you desire revival? In your own life? In this nation? Throughout the earth? Pray that He would send it.
 5. Do you believe He will?
 - a. We have reason to believe that He will. Jesus teaches us to pray: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).
 - b. If we know that we have warrant from the Scripture to pray for this, we can also know He will send it: "Jesus said to His disciples at the withering of the fig tree, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matt. 21:21-22).
 - c. Let's cry out to the Lord for revival. Amen.