

# OpenTheo

## What is True Revival?

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### **Life and Books and Everything** - Clearly Reformed

True revival is marked by a rediscovery of the word of God, a restored sense of the fear of God, a return to God through confession and repentance, a renewed spiritual commitment as God's people, and, finally, a reformation if true piety.

What are Christians to make of the Asbury Revival? This episode outlines biblical examples of spiritual renewal through the ages.

## **Transcript**

(music) Greetings and salutations. This is Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung.

Here's an article that I posted on clearly reformed. So you can go there [clearlyreformed.org](http://clearlyreformed.org), formerly [KevinDeYoung.org](http://KevinDeYoung.org). You can also do [kdy.org](http://kdy.org). So as an article, I just posted there entitled, "What?" What is True Revival? What are we to make of the Asbury Revival? Given the fact that I have not attended or watched any of the services and that we have yet to determine the long-term fruit of these events, the only responsible answer is, "I don't know." Certainly we ought to hope that this is a powerful moving of the Holy Spirit and be grateful for every good report we hear. At the same time, it is not quenching the Spirit to ask clarifying questions and, in general, to wait and see what the Spirit is.

In the weather, in looking back months and years from now, sinners have been truly converted. Lives have been lastingly transformed and churches have been made fuller by the events of these days. The point of this post, however, is not to talk about Asbury, but to talk about the Bible.

While the Bible doesn't use the word "revival," it does detail instances in the lives of God's people where sudden and surprising change takes place. Whether we call it an awakening or renewal or reformation or revival, there have been times throughout history, including biblical history, where the God who normally works by ordinary days,

Zechariah 4-10, has chosen to work in extraordinary ways. Perhaps the clearest and most comprehensive example of a biblical revival came during the reign of King Josiah.

The year was 640 B.C. or thereabouts, and Judah was in bad shape. After some good years with King Hezekiah, the nation had declined with 55 years under the wicked King Manasseh. The next two years under King Ammon were hardly better.

"And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as Manasseh his father had done. He walked in all the way in which his father walked and served the idols that his father served and worshiped them." (2 Kings 21, 23, 21) The country looked bleak. God's people were languishing.

There wasn't much to cheer about. But God, by a sovereign surprising work of his spirit, brought reformation and breathed new life into his people. The God-given renewal in Judah, like all true revival, was marked by several distinguishing characteristics.

Let me mention five. The first and most important mark in revival is a rediscovery of the word of God. 2 Kings 22, 1 and 2, 8 through 10.

Can you imagine the scene? Someone on your church staff comes up from the boiler room, pastor. You're not going to believe this. I found a Bible down there.

Remember hundreds of years ago when we used to read the Bible? Well, I found one, and I have to tell you, I think we're in big trouble. I've been looking at God's commandments for us, and we are way off. That's essentially what happened in Josiah's day.

It was the rediscovery of the book of the law that sparked revival in the land. 2 Kings 22, 13. "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the Lord that has kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that has written concerning us." 2 Kings 23, 3. "And the kings stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart, and all his soul to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book." 2 Kings 23, 24 through 25.

"Moreover, Josiah put away the mediums and the necromancers and the household gods and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law of the Lord. "He might establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hylkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord, before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him." From start to finish, "God's mighty work in the land

was done according to the word." "What does it say? What do we need to do? Give it to me straight," Josiah said. "We are going to be people of the book." True revival will be Bible saturated.

Revival is not simply an intense longing for spiritual things. Tom Cruise has a hunger for spiritual things. Gen Z college students are generally interested in spiritual things.

God wrought revival, brings a fervor for the Bible, that we might live, feel, sing, pray, work, and worship according to the word of God. In our day, the Bible will not be found while repairing the temple, but when the spirit blows, the authority of the Bible will be rediscovered. Preachers will preach with greater function as they preach line upon line from the Bible.

The minister will plead with sinners as a dying man to dying men. Parents will instruct their children in the truth of God's word. At social settings, conversation will move from sports and the weather to discussion about the scriptures.

People of all ages will hunger to read, memorize, and study the Bible. They will love to hear good preaching. They will love to read good books.

There will be renewed confidence in, desire for, and obedience to every jot and tittle of scripture. That's how revival starts. And without this first mark, there is little chance the events in question will have lasting significance.

The second mark of true revival is a restored sense of the fear of God, 2 Kings 22, 11 through 17. We can hear Josiah's heart in verse 13. The wrath of God is kindled against us, and rightly so.

He will not look on sin lightly, and our sins have been very great. We have provoked his anger. Josiah is shaken to the core.

The book they found was Deuteronomy, the book of the law, with the Ten Commandments and all the rules codified for God's people. That's the scroll Josiah is just getting wind of coming across passages like these. Deuteronomy 17, 18 through 19.

And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life that he may learn to fear the Lord has gone by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes and doing them. Deuteronomy 4, 23 through 24.

Take care lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and made a carved image, the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you. The Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. Josiah takes God's words seriously because he takes God seriously.

He understands that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. When revival comes, God draws near, and the nearness of his presence produces profound reverence and awe. Whether converted for the first time or brought back to God again in a new way, in true revival sinners are made freshly aware of the holiness of God.

The third mark of true revival is a return to God through confession in repentance, 2 Kings 22, 18 through 20. A broken heart and a contrite spirit God will not despise. Repentance is not simply saying, "I'm sorry." True repentance is about turning away from the ugliness of sin and running to God for mercy.

True confession is standing before a holy God, humiliated and ashamed, and saying, "With David I am the man." Repentance means crying out from the heart, "My God, my God, why hast thou accepted me?" When the Spirit of God falls upon a people, consciences are pricked and convicted sinners confess their sins. Moreover, on the other side of the coin, Spirit prompted repentance leads to faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning work on the cross. The fourth mark of true revival is renewed spiritual commitment and accountability, 2 Kings 23, verses 1 through 3. This is what God's people did in the Old Testament.

They were always renewing the covenant in the desert in the Promised Land back from exile. When God brought revival, his people began to say to each other, "It's time to anti-up, time to recommit." There was more than an individual experience of refreshment. There was a public corporate commitment to godliness.

On March 16, 1742, for example, John of the Nedwards congregation entered into a covenant. Everyone in the Church, 15 and older made promises, aspirational promises to avoid sin, to love their neighbors, to devote their lives to the business of religion, and to walk uprightly before a holy god. Renewed corporate commitment is one mark of a genuine revival.

And finally, true revival is marked by a reformation of true piety, 2 Kings 23, 21 through 25. When revival comes to a church or community, piety is reformed. People start to live like they profess.

Instead of blending in with their cultural surroundings, God's people stand out. They return to God and reform their ways. They pursue faithfulness to the word, not the fashions of the world.

Reformation of true piety entails two things. A decisive break with the sinful ways of the past, and an eagerness to obey the word of God in the present. We see both under Josiah's reign.

The shrines, altars, high places, and false gods are destroyed, and the Passover is re-instituted. This is what God called for in Deuteronomy 18. And Josiah does it quickly.

No excuses, no delays, just swift obedience. In revival, God cultivates a new hatred for sin and a new hunger for righteousness. So what is true revival? It is not generic spirituality, mere emotionalism, or utopian idealism.

True revival is marked by a rediscovery of the word of God, a restored sense of the fear of God, a return to God through confession and repentance, a renewed spiritual commitment as God's people, and finally, a reformation of true piety. Whether we use the word revival or not, this is what we should pray for. And these are the marks we should use to assess every movement of religious fervor, past, present, or future.

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