

## 2 Chronicles 7:14 How to Experience Spiritual Renewal

The need for turning to God has never been more urgent than today.

Billy Graham asked, a year before the sabotage of the World Trade Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington,

What would you do if the cities in your country were leveled by missiles or enemy bombs? How would you react if an earthquake cut off all communication, water and electrical sources? What would you do if a group of terrorists held you hostage?"

Are we so used to the luxuries of freedom that we would be unable to stand up to persecution? Most of us would do no more, no less than we are doing now. Some of us who wear our Christianity on our sleeves probably would be first to surrender. Many others would be like the apostle Peter who declared, "Though all others deny Christ, yet I will never deny Him" (Matt. 26:34-35). But he did. Three times. (*Decision*, Nov. 2000, p. 1).

Most of us have never experienced persecution because of our faith in Jesus Christ. However, many Christians around the world do suffer because of His name. Gaiton Zimulinda was a pastor in Tanzania who moved his family there from Rwanda to escape tribal killings. Gaiton was murdered in front of his wife and six children when six men broke into their home. After the murders killed Gaiton, they took his blood and drew a cross on the wall of his home.

It is abnormal situation when Christians are not being persecuted for Christ's sake. The apostle Paul declared, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Not long thereafter he sealed his witness with his death.

### OUR GREATEST NEED IS FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

The need for turning to God has never been more urgent in America.

#### An urgent plea from the Scriptures

In Second Chronicles chapter seven the LORD God appeared to King Solomon and assured him of His presence and the renewal of the covenant with Israel. The temple and its dedication pleased the Lord.

Walvoord and Zuck in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* give a good summary of the events at the dedication of the temple.

God then encouraged Solomon by the promise that if His judgment (by drought, **locusts**, or a **plague**) should fall on the nation for **their sin**, they need only **turn** to the Lord in earnest humility and repentance and they would find forgiveness and restoration (vv. 13-15). This promise, in answer to Solomon's prayer (6:26-31), was given because God's presence among His people Israel is eternal, focused particularly on the **temple** (7:16). The covenant theme comes through clearly in the Lord's declaration that if Solomon would obey Him (v. 17) he could be assured of God's reciprocal blessing in the perpetuation of his dynastic **rule** (v. 18; cf. 1 Chron. 17:11-14). Conversely, if Solomon and the nation should fall **away** from the Lord and **serve other gods** they would be exiled and their magnificent **temple** destroyed (2 Chron. 7:19-20). This does not suggest that the Davidic Covenant is conditional from God's standpoint. He had said it would be forever (2 Sam. 7:13, 15-16). But Solomon's (or any king's) enjoyment of it would depend on his obedience to **God**.

Later Solomon did worship **other gods** (1 Kings 11:4-8), as did many of his successors, so the nation was exiled (2 Chron. 6:36; 36:17-18, 20) to Babylon and the temple destroyed (36:19). Everyone who would witness the desolation of the **land** and the **temple** would know that it was a mark of God's judgment on His people because of their sin (7:21-22).

Israel experienced a great revival at the dedication of the temple. The context was a time of confessing hidden sins and turning to God. God blessed His people with His presence (7:1-3). It was a costly dedication because Solomon sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. The king and the people took God seriously that day and the people worshipped for a week (v. 8).

Jehovah promised the people that day: "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:13-14).

The people of Israel were the people of God. They had entered into a covenant with Him. How much more you and I are His people because we have entered into a new covenant with Him through the blood of the covenant of Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter said, "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*" (1 Peter 1:18-19). Again he said, "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light . . ." (2:9). We are God's peculiar possession bought with His precious blood. We are called by His name; we are Christians.

Many Christians act as if now that they know Christ as their Savior God owes them something. No, He does not owe us anything; we are under obligation to Him. We are His unique possession, and we have new responsibilities. He is our Lord and Master because He purchased us. We have been redeemed. The promise for healing is in the context of crisis. The economy and life of the whole nation of Israel was based on agriculture. It would be dire consequences if God commanded the locust to devour the land, or if there was no rain on their crops. God still says to us, "If My people who are called by My name . . ."

#### We need to humble ourselves

By nature we are not a very humble nation, but God calls us to humble ourselves in His presence. The word means a poverty of spirit. We must see ourselves as God sees us. We need to strip off all the old layers of the varnish of pride and iniquity. To humble ourselves means to bend the knee, to humiliate, to humble oneself. It is to recognize our spiritual poverty, to sense our littleness. It is to see ourselves as God sees us. The Psalmist said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Psa. 51:17). The LORD God said through the Hebrew prophet Isaiah in 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool."

He said our sins are so glaring they are characterized as "scarlet." They almost defy erasure and cleansing. Our self-righteousness is dipped with blood of innocent people who have been taken advantage by society. Our sins are bright "red." They have the color of selfishness, covetousness, passionate life, self-seeking in nature. Isaiah describes sin as going out of the way to destroy, and wild-temptuous violence that ends in murder. We need grace! Though our "sins are like scarlet" and "red like crimson," the LORD God says He will make them "white as snow," and "like wool."

Isaiah saw his own sin and cried out, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (6:5).

What God said to Solomon is just as true for us. “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever” (1 Chron. 28:9).

A religious leader asked Jesus one day what was the greatest of the commandments and He responded, “and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

### **We need to pray and seek God’s face**

The root of “prayer” means to seek the face of God in prayer and worship. It is to intercede, to make supplication, to converse with God, to lay open your heart before God and to listen to His voice as you confess your sins and spiritual poverty. The word for “seek my face” means to seek out and find something lost or missing. To seek one’s face is to come before Him and have a favorable audience with Him.

This is what the Holy Spirit does for the believer in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:18 says, “for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.” He comes and takes us by the hand and leads us into the presence of the Father. We have the freedom to enter through the assistance or favor of another. The word “access” here is used of introducing a person into the presence of a king. It is used for the place where a ship docks, a harbor or haven. We have the haven of God’s grace. We have perfect access into His presence. We are given entrance into the presence of the King of Kings. We need to converse with God, laying open our hearts before Him and seriously listening to what He says to us in His Word. If we are to seriously seek God’s face we must come to Him in true repentance. We have been going in a direction opposite from God and His ways. We need to turn around and go with Him. That is true repentance. Instead of turning to new age movements, secular media and humanistic philosophies for the answers to our most important needs, we need to seek His face. We need spiritual renewal. The majority of members of our churches need to be saved, truly born again, and reconciled to God. Many of us who are Christians need to change our priorities so that we “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

### **We need to turn from wicked ways**

We need to turn around and change directions. There is a terrible tendency in our day to straddle the fence and want to be bound for heaven and hell at the same time. We want the assurance of eternal security like a spiritual fire insurance policy and to enjoy the world’s pleasures at the same time. God will not stand for it. He wants a holy people. The Psalmist tells us in 66:18, “If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear.” We rationalize and reason to ourselves that this must be for someone else. God calls us to repentance. He demands that we change, and for some of us it is a radical change of attitudes and behavior.

To “regard iniquity” means to aim at, design anything, to have it in one’s eye, to aim at evil in one’s heart. It is true that if we can see it in our imagination we can do it. The Psalmist says if I know there is something in my life (thoughts, actions, deeds, lusts, etc.) that shouldn’t be there and I continue to permit this object or this thought to be there and I cherish it, nourish it, cast approving glances of love and desire toward it, then I am regarding sin in my heart. It is to reflect on sin with pleasure. That is a powerful message to us in our day. But it is true, and we need it. God says repent. He says if “My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

It is then and only then that God will “hear from heaven,” and “will forgive their sins, and will heal their land.” That principle is just as true today for any modern nation as it was for Israel in her day.

Do we want spiritual restoration? Again the Psalmist in 51:8,10-15 tells us what will happen if we do what God tells us to do.

Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; *Then* my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise.

Are we willing to pay the personal price for God to do what He wants to do in our lives? Israel was not willing (2 Chron. 28:9), but the pagan city of Nineveh was (Jonah 3:1-10). What will we be like ten years from now? Many of us like Israel are not willing to confess our sins and repent. We want to rationalize and make excuses.

### **OUR GREAT SPIRITUAL PROVISION IN GOD’S GRACE**

Our God is the God of a second chance. He says, “If my people . . . then will I . . .” If we will humble ourselves and pray and seek God’s face we will know we are in His presence. We are in the need of a great spiritual healing. God is ready to mend, repair and restore us to normal spiritual health.

#### **God is always ready to receive us**

Psalm 51:8-13 is a great testimony to God’s marvelous grace. Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You.

Many in our own country have turned to Him this week in repentance and revival. We have come seeking His face. He has heard us and there is a great sense of peace and reconciliation with Him. My prayer is that our whole nation, and the every nation under the sun will turn to the LORD God and worship Him.

The difference is that what we are seeing is not man’s work or something that is worked up and promoted in the energy of the flesh. It is the work of God. You won’t go out saying what a great preacher, or what a great evangelist we heard. When God does it you will say, what an awesome God we worship! How wonderful is the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.

#### **God will forgive us our sins**

Jehovah promised Israel that He would hear, forgive and heal. He said, “then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14b).

Jesus Christ makes the same promise to us today. Because He went to the cross and died for us, He offers us forgiveness and cleansing of all our sins. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The conditions haven’t changed. They are still the same. “If My people who are called by My name . . .” “If we confess our sins . . .” He is always ready and willing to listen, forgive, cleanse and heal. Are we ready to confess and repent?

### **How do you know spiritual renewal is for real?**

Various studies on great times of spiritual renewal reveal several common characteristics including the following:

1. There will be a hunger for the knowledge of God as revealed in His written Word. God's Word will be exalted and authoritative over man's experience. We will not be confused by equating God's Word with man's experience. Our emotional experiences must always be subordinate to and subject to the absolute truth of God's Word.

2. There will be an intense conviction of sin, leading to repentance. When confronted with the holiness of God, conviction of sin follows and repentance will be real. There will be a forsaking of sinful habits and a walk in holiness with God.

3. Humility and brokenness will be evident. God's glory becomes so intense that no personal price is too great to pay. Humility and brokenness is the only way to encounter God's holiness.

4. There will be deliberate acts of reconciliation and restitution. We will become like Zacchaeus when he met Jesus. How completely the new birth was accomplished in Zacchaeus is testified by his vow to give half of his goods to the poor, and to make fourfold restitution where he had wrongfully exacted. No longer content to let "by gones be by gones" there will be a God-given zeal to obtain and maintain a clear conscience. We will become a people of integrity. No longer will we bring gifts of worship and service to God's altar while harboring hurt, anger and bitterness.

5. There will be a growing interest and practice of personal and corporate prayer. Prayer precedes and sustains a revival. When God is present He cannot be ignored. Do we hunger and thirst for an intimacy with Jesus? Being in His presence will be the delight of our life.

6. Joy will be untainted and pure. God will take center stage and the Lord Jesus Christ will reign as the sole object of our adoration and worship.

7. Evangelism will flourish. There will be renewed power and witness to the lost community. No longer will God's people be bound in fear of rejection, self-love, and indifference. God's people will find new freedom, desire, faith and boldness to share Christ everywhere and with everyone.

### **OUR GREAT SPIRITUAL RESOURCES**

When a day of disaster comes we need spiritual resources that will match and overcome every crisis. We have the same spirituals resources the early Church had. The apostle Paul realized that he had all he needed to live for Christ. Christ said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Things haven't changed. Paul was sure of his personal relationship with God. He was prepared to meet God at any moment. Every one of those thousands of people on the four airplanes, in the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon went to work on a normal day and had no idea they would meet God that day. They gave no thought that they would die before the day was over. The apostle Paul was prepared to meet God at any moment, just as those who knew Christ were in this tragedy. How tragic that we prepare for many situations in life except meeting God. I am not speaking of a casual acquaintance with God, but a deep, intimate, personal relationship with Him everyday of our lives. You know what is scary for some people? It is the idea that if they get serious with God they know they will have to change their way of thinking and behaving. They will have to make changes in their life-style, business dealings and personal relationships. It is not only true that our way of life has changed, but our spiritual way of life must also change. We cannot be the kind of anemic, half-hearted Christians of the past decade. Jesus calls us to, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

#### **We have God's Word**

We have even greater resources than the early believers had. They had the Old Testament, but we have the complete Bible. In His Word we learn that God does not always deliver us out of a crisis, but He does promise to go with us through it. He does not take us out of the deep waters of life; He gets into the waters with us and takes us through them. That is why He gave us His Word, the Bible. God has revealed Himself to man as the all sufficient God and Savior. Do you know His Word? Have you hidden it in your heart? If every Bible were suddenly taken away how much of it would you have stored away in your heart and mind? Are the Scriptures you have stores in your heart more precious to you than all of your material possessions? If you are storing God's Word away in your heart you will have a resource available to you at all times. Then the Holy Spirit can bring these into your conscious mind whenever you need to be strengthened spiritually. This is the way God gives us hope in a day of trouble.

#### **We have God's presence in prayer**

Are we a praying society? Or do we come to God only when we are in trouble? He longs for our fellowship every day. That is why He created us. What a tragic loss for us if we only go to Him when we are in trouble financially, or our family is facing a crisis, or our health fails us, or a friend turns on us. Have you formed the daily habit of turning from the world and dwelling in the presence of the LORD God in an intimate conversation with Him? Has Jesus Christ become your supreme passion in life? Why not? Do you love Him with all your heart, mind and soul? Has the glory of God become the one consuming passion of your life? Once you have witnessed the grandeur, majesty, and excellence of the Lord your life will never be the same again.

#### **We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us**

Have you learned how to deepen your spiritual life in dependence upon the Holy Spirit? It is our responsibility to be filled with the Holy Spirit in an on going experience. He longs to have an intimate relationship with us every day. *Are you filled with the Spirit?* God's presence in you will meet any emergency. When you allow Him to be in control of your life you can face any situation in life.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is like an ever-flowing spring gushing forth from within. You and I do not have to be controlled by the circumstances around us. We can depend upon God and the resources He has given us for a day such as this.

#### **How is your daily walk with Christ?**

Are you holding on to God's hand in your journey through this life? Are you letting Him set your priorities in life? The great missionary to Africa, David Livingston's daily prayer was threefold.

He prayed, *Lord, send me anywhere, only go with me.*" God took David Livingston to Africa and planted him there. Upon his death Livingston's body was returned to England, but his heart was buried in Africa. Are you willing to say, "Lord, send me anywhere, only go with me"?

***“Lay any burden on me, only sustain me.”*** It is in those opportunities we experience God’s grace. Our helplessness gives us opportunities to depend on God alone. In those times we learn to depend on God moment by moment for life’s greatest needs. God is faithful to sustain us in any and every situation no matter where we are.

***“Sever any tie, but the tie that binds me to Thyself.”*** Do you have a love for the Lord Jesus Christ and a submission to Him that will cause Him to master your life? Do you want God’s will done in your life regardless of inconvenience, personal pleasures, possessive relationships or economic advantages?

God still says to us if, “My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Does it work? Let give you an example.

On the corner of Fullton and William Street was located a Dutch Reformed Church in New York City. Things were not going well for the old church. It was located in down town New York City, and people were moving out to the suburbs and leaving the church. The neighborhood was becoming extremely blighted and poverty stricken. It was getting dangerous to go there.

A layman in the church, Jeremiah Landfear, made his rounds walking up and down the streets of the inner city of New York. As he passed businessmen on the street the marks of anxiety were written upon the faces of these businessmen. This nation was standing on the brink of economic disaster, and they knew it. A bubble of prosperity that had been building was about ready to burst. They knew it. They were frightened at the outcome. Landfear thought it would be a good idea to give these men an opportunity to pray. He circulated very widely in hundreds of offices publicity about a prayer meeting that would take place on the first Wednesday of September at 12 o'clock on the third floor assembly room in the North Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street. You did not have to stay the whole hour. You could come and pray and leave. You could come and stay just five minutes, but come and pray.

On that first Wednesday in September Landfear was in the room alone. He prayed for five, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, and twenty minutes alone. Would anybody come? Twenty-five minutes his butterfly was turning to buzzards. Is anybody coming?

At 12:30 he heard footsteps on the stairs. And then another, and another, and another and another. Finally, five men had joined him in prayer. The meeting was such an encouragement that they agreed to meet the next Wednesday. The next Wednesday 20 businessmen were there. It was such a heartening thing to be together in prayer that they met again. The next Wednesday thirty men were there. Then they agreed to meet everyday. On the first day 100 men were there. Many of these men were not Christians. Many of them were lost. In a matter of three months every room in that old North Dutch Reformed church were crowded out with praying men. There was no room. The auditorium, Sunday school rooms, basement, ever room and corner was filled with men praying. Men on the outside were kneeling together praying because they could not get inside the church.

They agreed to open the John's Street Methodist Church just around the corner. On the first day the John's Street Methodist Church was opened for prayer it too was filled with men praying. Again, it was so full that men simply could not get in.

These enterprising businessmen agreed to open Burton's Theater in down town New York City for prayer at noon. The first day it was opened one newspaper reporter said, "It was stuffed from pit to dome. From the orchestra pit to the third balcony." It so happened that the Fire Marshal was there and he would not let others come in, but hundreds of men were on the outside praying because they could not gain entrance. There was no room. Within six months there were 150 prayer meetings like this going on somewhere in New York City. Fifty thousand New Yorkers were gathered for prayer. With that kind of praying blessings began to fall on New York City in 1857.

Twenty-five thousand businessmen had been converted. That was a class of people who were thought to be almost unreachable. It was nothing to see a hundred people come down the aisle of a church at invitation time confessing their sin openly, and receiving Christ as their personal Savior. Great streams of revival flowed out from New York City. Up the Hudson River at Albany reported 1,200 conversions, Schednecty a like number. Across the Mohawk and virtually every city of any size in the state of New York experienced powerful revival. It moved across Long Island. In Rockaway Beach, Long Island you could not find one unconverted person. The revival moved into New England and quickly there were 147 centers of revival. One pastor in New England said that in one month there were over 1,000 people who had come to him to talk to him about their relationship with God. Wouldn't you like to spend a month like that?

When revival had swept through Simsbury, Conn. there was only one lost adult left in the entire city. In the city of Newark it began in First Baptist Church. The pastor was Henry C. Fish who got a little group together for prayer on Wednesday night. Just a half dozen, but soon the half-dozen became twenty. On one occasion he had such a burden for lost people that that he was totally incapacitated from conducting the prayer meeting. He just sat in his chair and groaned and sighs that he had such a deep burdened for lost people. First Baptist Church, Newark saw 300 conversions in a short period of time. Across to Philadelphia, down the Ohio, into the Deep South to Texas and as far west as California revival fires were burning. God took this nation and shook it in 1857.

There seemed to be a zone of heavenly influence around the East Coast of the U. S. Ships coming in from the high seas would report that just a few miles out at sea God got hold of the people on board the ships and the whole crew and captains would be converted. Thirty captains of vessels like this were converted. They did not know revival was going on in this country. Just hitting the heavenly zone of heavenly influence and being brought to God while they were yet away from the harbor. Within a year and a half well over a million people had been brought to an intimate personal love relationship with Jesus Christ. The population of the U. S. back then was 30 million. If we had that kind of revival today in the next eighteen months it would mean the conversion of between eight and nine million people.

What I am talking about is a mighty work of the Spirit of God. It is when God takes hold of a nation and shakes it. What God did in 1857 He can still do today. In fact, it is happening in many countries in our world. Will you join me in prayer and repentance asking God to do it again? The promise has not changed, and our God does not change. But He is willing that we have a change of heart and turn to Him.

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