

A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir | Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge

Reviewed by Rev. Warren A. Coe in the February 2013 Philogian
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The Need

After the presidential election of 2012, a friend lamented that this is not my parents or grandparents country anymore. Somehow the election last November left us feeling that a tectonic-size shift in culture and politics had taken place.

Even more disconcerting is the theological and spiritual drift in the American church. A Canadian friend observed how secular culture is not only affecting the church of Jesus Christ but has found its way into the core of the church.

What once were theological certainties are being seen as interpretation matters in which “my truth” is the right truth. There is a new normal for morality and a softening to the biblical demands for holiness. The standards for true spirituality sometimes approximate eastern mysticism. Generally speaking, there has been a gradually down-grading of biblical Christianity. We have a great need in America for the reviving of true religion in the hearts of God’s people in churches across our great nation.

Starting Place

Let me recommend a starting place for each of us. Read A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir by Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge. Here is a sharply written book on revival. The authors write in the preface, “This book is not for those who have grown comfortable with the Christian life. Others, however, will feel the Spirit nudging them toward something more. They will begin to see ways they have been satiated by small things and lost the taste for big things. They may realize that if Jesus is truly Lord, then everything changes.” (pg12)

Woodbridge and Hansen note that everything changed when Revival came to ancient Israel. For example, in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the returning Jewish exiles were trying to rebuild their nation. What happened next? “Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. (Nehemiah 8:5) For all the people were weeping when they heard the Word of the law.” (Nehemiah 8:9). Revival swept through the nation. The authors of A God-Sized Vision comment, “They (the people in Ezra’s day) recalled his (God’s) mighty works of redemption.” According to Collin and Woodbridge this is part of the pattern of revival—remembering the great deeds of God.

Definition of Revival

Woodbridge and Hansen tell us that the word “Revive” is found in Habakkuk 3:2.

“Lord, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord.
Renew them in our day,
in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy.”

It “comes from the Hebrew word *chaya*, meaning ‘to bring back to life.’” (page 20). The people in Ezra’s day were brought back to spiritual life. This is what revival does for God’s people.

Pentecost and Beyond

The book traces the lines of revival fires through Acts 2. Citing D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, our authors write, "Every revival is a repetition of Pentecost, and it is the greatest need of the Christian church at this present time." (page 26)

Furthermore the book gives brief notations to the revivals that came to the church after the apostolic days like "In the late twelfth century, Peter Waldo, led a church-planting movement in Catholic Europe that advocated public preaching and Bible study. Other forerunners to the Protestant Reformation include the Brethren of the common Life in Germany and parts of Holland, John Wycliffe and the Lollards in England, and Jan Hus in Bohemia." (page 30)

Revival in America

The American reader will find that the author's treatment of the revivals in the United States refreshing and hopeful. Men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield take center stage as God revived his church in America.

They preached the new birth. Writing on the Great Awakening in 1730s to 1740s, these great preachers told their listeners, "It wasn't enough for them to sign an orthodox creed or live morally. They must be born again." (page 45)

Chapter four is a captivating account of the 1857-1859 revival began with a prayer meeting in New York city. According to historian Kathryn Long, "it was perhaps the closest thing to a truly national revival in American history." (page 77) A God-size Vision the amazing effects of this revival. "Every Protestant denomination was caught up in its wake. Lanphier's prayer meetings merely attracted the most media attention. The revival spread from coast to coast and even continued across the Atlantic after the fervor began to wane in America. Between 1856 and 1859, Protestant denominations added 474,000 members. Methodists and Baptist led the way, accounting for more than three-fourths of these new members."

A Fitting Last Word

The authors of A God-Sized Vision provide the reader with balanced thinking on all things revival. Revival is not magical but supernatural. In many ways life in the church—it's worship, preaching, prayers and evangelism continue on. "Only they do so with a heightened sense of God and greater capacity to embody and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for sinners." (page 186)

"In short, a true revival has erupted when the church together can see the Holy Spirit exalt God in his glory as revealed in Jesus Christ. We won't behold this scene in all its fullness until heaven. But every Christian can and should ask God to vindicate his name and demonstrate his glory by giving us a preview here and now." (page 186)

There is not a better primer on revival that I can commend to our readers than Hansen and Woodbridge's A God-Size Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch and Stir. Let's pray for revival.