

FOREWORD BY JACK HAYFORD

**TAKING
OUR
CITIES
FOR
GOD**

*How to
Break
Spiritual
Strongholds*

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The History of God's People/Covenants

*"Now therefore, let us make a covenant with
our God...."* *Ezra 10:3*

Look into the history of God's people in your city, particularly at times of revival. God is a covenant-keeping God, and you may be amazed at the promises received by past generations as your spiritual forebears engaged in the same battle.

When we acknowledge and honor those who have gone before, we are applying the principle of humility. This process also inspires our faith.

Because of God's covenant with David, Josiah's generation lived in a time of revival rather than judgment. If you live in Los Angeles, for example, a study of the Azusa Street

revival might give you insight into today's battle.

During times of revival, the supernatural realm is seen with great clarity. Often records are kept and books written that contain important insights. The battle is not new, and we ourselves are the fruit of the powerful labor of past generations. Before we were born, the saints of the past cried out to God for a revelation of Jesus in our generation.

We owe a great debt to people like Wilber Chapman, a Presbyterian evangelist who so stirred the city of Denver to prayer that all business was practically suspended during several busy weekdays in 1905. If you are a Christian in modern Denver, you need to be reminded that in 1921, ten thousand penitents openly sought Jesus as their Savior during a three-week meeting featuring Aimee Semple McPherson. The whole city was shaken. The mayor and many prominent citizens attended the meetings.

In both cases it was united pastors who supported these evangelists. What did those pastors say to God? More important, what did God say to them? Like Josiah of old, we may be surprised to find our names written in a book: "Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David" (1 Kin. 13:2). Imagine Josiah's shock when the book of the Law was found during the restoration of the temple and he discovered his own destiny.

Josiah also discovered that his people were under judgment because they had not kept their covenant with God.

Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes....

For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book (2 Chr. 34:19,21).

In many ways this generation is like Josiah's. We are living in a time of certain, but postponed, judgment. Judgment has already been declared and is inevitable but we can turn to God in humility and He will revive us and our children with us.

“Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you,” says the Lord (2 Chr. 34:27).

It is a dangerous thing to lose the knowledge of the past. “When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:10).

One of the greatest needs of the church of the 1990s is a sense of her history and destiny. Have you ever wondered why some cities have repeatedly experienced revival while others have not? Revival by definition is the return of life to that which has died. It means to resuscitate that which was once alive.

The church in many cities has experienced periods of apparent death. What kept it from dying out completely was God, who kept His covenants. In the past whole generations have lost the knowledge of God, but God kept His promise to their forebears. He sovereignly renewed His kingdom again when He found willing hearts.

God kept His covenant with David during the disintegration of Israel, even though his foolish grandson did not deserve the throne. “But he shall have one tribe for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city

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which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel” (1 Kin. 11:32). Note that God had a covenant with the city of Jerusalem as well as with David.

In this regard we need to acknowledge humbly that the Jesus movement of the 1970s was an outpouring of God’s mercy on one of the most unworthy generations that has ever existed. We owe a great debt to the saints of the past who founded America in righteousness when they made a covenant on the deck of a little ship named the *Mayflower*.

But the Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them or cast them from His presence (2 Kin. 13:23).

When I visited England in 1971, I was impressed by the dark paganism of the place. Cities like London and Bristol contained architectural reminders of past revivals, but I could find only embers of once great fires of the Spirit. In the years since then I have witnessed a steady rekindling of the flame. God is again visiting Britain to the point where I long for such things in America.

No wonder that God has compassion on that land. The vacant-eyed punkers and young urban professionals of British cities are the great grandchildren of Livingstone, Wesley, Whitefield, Booth, Wycliffe, Fox, Studd and Taylor. The lives of these great heroes of the faith were intercessory acts. Their prayers still ascend before the throne of God. When God weighs Britain in the balance, the scales are heavy with missionary martyrs who gave their lives in Africa and China.

One of the most moving experiences in my life was standing in the room where David Livingstone was born. His early years were spent in poverty in the textile towns of Scotland

during the industrial revolution. As I looked through the relics of his life and read of his struggle for Africa, I thought, Surely God will always bless Scotland because of this man. Even as I write these words, I am overtaken with weeping because my own ancestors come from this land. Oh, what a heritage undergirds my life as a missionary.

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them (Ps. 103:17-18).

There are five areas of essential knowledge in which today's Christian worker must walk.

1) *Know the history of the church in your nation.* It may not be possible to know exhaustively the complex history of the American church but we should possess a basic overview. We should be familiar with such things as the values of the pilgrim fathers, the effect of the great awakenings and the lives of personalities like Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney. If you are a spiritual leader, it is your responsibility to be a steward of our corporate memory, to teach this generation its heritage.

2) *Know the history of the church in your city.* It is possible to be quite familiar with the work of your particular denomination or movement while being appallingly ignorant of the contribution of other groups that are equally important in the sight of God.

3) *Know the history of ministry to your target subculture or ethnic group.* If you are working among children, you need to be aware of the American Sunday school movement. Or if your concern is for American Indians, you have forefathers like the great intercessor David Brainerd, who,

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in spite of terminal tuberculosis, prayed down revival in 1745.

4) *Know the history of the type of ministry in which you are involved.* If you are in missions, you are walking on a path pioneered by William Carey, Hudson Taylor and Adoniram Judson. If your ministry is theological training, you stand on the shoulders of Wycliffe, Hus and Calvin.

The father of urban missions is undoubtedly William Booth, 1829-1912. He and his Salvation Army pioneered ministry to almost every category of city dweller. They transformed the life of the cities of their day through compassionate attention to the poor, and they boldly confronted evil institutions until they crumbled.

In London the age of consent was only thirteen, and eighty thousand prostitutes, many as young as ten, were sold in the streets or kept in brothels. Booth and his army confronted this evil with holy ferocity and fought until it was outlawed. They lifted a standard of blood and fire which is still the greatest challenge to the life of any urban missionary.

5) *Know the history of your movement.* Do not despise your roots. Every Israelite had a tribe. There were no independent Jews. Sectarian attitudes are wrong, but denominations are biblical. God sets us in families in His kingdom. If you do not know your inheritance, how can you enter into it? How can you rejoice in it?

“The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance” (Ps. 16:6).

Just like the Old Testament tribes, your movement has a corporate past, present and future. Your part of God’s family has a gift, a promise and a territory to take. It is essential for me to understand what God has called Youth With a Mission to do if I am to complete successfully the work God has given me to do personally.

I need to be attentive to the original vision of our founder,

Loren Cunningham. It is equally important for me to pass on to my staff the promises that God gave to my wife and me when we pioneered this branch of Youth With a Mission many years ago.

“Set up signposts, make landmarks; set your heart toward the highway, the way in which you went” (Jer. 31:21).

A knowledge of history can put everything in perspective. In 1976 I was wandering around the Roman Coliseum on a hot summer day. I glimpsed an ice cream vendor through the ancient stone pillars and walked toward him. When I arrived at the place I first saw him, he had vanished. I searched through the hot ruins, becoming more irritated by the minute. I wanted ice cream!

All of a sudden I saw myself in the sight of God. “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past” (Ps. 90:4).

Here I was, a twentieth-century believer, moaning about ice cream in the very place where thousands of first-century believers shed their blood for the gospel, and in God's sight it was only yesterday. I was deeply ashamed.

What are you complaining about? It may be something far more difficult than the absence of ice cream, but in the light of history, it may be just as trivial.

The Old Testament prophets, like Ezra, had a sense of the timeless, a sense of time, and a sense of the times in which they lived. Consider the depth of emotion expressed by God's people when they saw God's promise for their city come to pass. Ask yourself if God's purpose for your city means as much to you.

But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, who were old men, who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes;

yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off (Ezra 3:12-13).

Finally, a question that can apply to all five categories: *Where are the walls of my city broken down?*

Your forefathers may have obtained promises from God for the city, but perhaps they have never come to pass, because conditions for complete victory have not been met.

Have there ever been strong ministries in the city that rose to a certain point and then failed? What caused that failure? Is there a pattern of defeat in the life of the church?

I know of one city where a strong church emerged that almost took the city for God. Out of this church flowed a stream of life into the other churches of the city. This fountainhead church was loved and respected by all and was like a great shade tree under which many found shelter.

In order to enter the next stage of its inheritance this church needed to be purified and tested. Sadly, the pastor and people were weighed in the balance and found to be unable to enter in. The pastor fell into adultery, and the flock was scattered into bickering factions.

For many years there was no great work of God in that city, then one day a young man came to town as the new pastor of the little church that had once been great. It was a season of harvest. The Jesus movement was just breaking into the youth culture. The church grew until their congregation numbered in the thousands. Once again it became the lead church of the city. Blessing flowed like a river. Large Christian clubs emerged on local high school campuses. A Bible school was established. Missionaries were sent out to the ends of the earth. The churches of the city walked together

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in harmony, and Christians were admired by the unchurched.

Then it happened. Thirty years after the first failure, the exact same pattern was repeated. The pastor fell into adultery, and the people indulged themselves in an orgy of bitterness and contention. The gospel was mocked in the newspapers, and most congregations lost members until only a remnant was left in the city.

Last year a young man came to town. He came to pastor the church that had once been great. His eyes shine with hope as he looks over the prosperous new suburbs. The town has now grown to a population of a hundred thousand. The future looks bright because the huge metroplex to the south is expanding toward it. Does he know that the walls have been broken down?

O God, help that young man!