

Tornadoes, 1884-1885

by Martin Knapp

The Evangelist's revivals brought numerous conversions and spiritual growth to various communities.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 51:10, Matthew 9:35, Luke 15:10, Acts 3:19

Topics: "Revival Movement", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Martin Knapp preaches about the powerful revivals led by Evangelist J.H. Weber in various cities, where souls were saved, conversions happened, and miraculous healings and transformations took place. Despite opposition and doubts, the revivals were marked by overflowing houses, reconciliations, restitutions, prayer, fasting, clear conversions, and intense enthusiasm. The impact of these revivals extended to the entire community, leading to strengthened faith, moral upliftment, and significant conversions, even among skeptics and hardened sinners.

Transcript

"Began this year," writes the Evangelist, "as the previous one, on my knees in the house of God. My prayer was that this year might eclipse all others in soul-saving."

The general features of the following revivals have already been described in those that have gone before. The opposition of the devil and his agents, the diverse criticisms, the overflowing houses, the general agitation, the reconciliations, the restitutions, the prayer, personal work and fasting, intense enthusiasm, the clear conversions, the plain preaching, the thrilling songs, the tearful "farewell meetings," and other general features with some variety, as already mentioned, attend the revivals about to be noticed. Let the reader bear this in mind, not thinking that because not mentioned they did not exist.

At Fort Wayne, Ind., where the new year finds him, the spiritual temperature was like the atmospheric many days that month, away down below zero. Brother Weber had, in God's name, defied July heat and conquered, and now January ice must meet a similar fate.

Catholics claim about two-thirds of the population of this city, and many of them were among the number converted.

"Impossible to have a great revival here," was the encouragement the Evangelist got from many, "which proves to us," he says, "that nothing is too hard for God."

The meeting lasted five weeks, and was one of the most successful of Mr. Weber's works.

Fort Wayne College shared largely in the results.

A Presbyterian elder, who had been a member of the church for twenty-five years, but never converted, under the Spirit's power, was brought to see his need of salvation, kneeled penitently at the altar, and was saved.

Another church member believed it impossible for one to know his sins forgiven. She firmly refused to go to the altar. So intense was her resistance that she thus became sick "fighting against God." At last she yielded; and, after meeting at a store the "witness of the Spirit," came and she exclaimed of her own accord, "I know I am saved!"

A young lady who had determined to enter a convent came to the altar, was saved, and is now a teacher in a Methodist Sunday School.

Mr. Weber received a postal from a person who sarcastically "wanted him to go on the stage." He wrote him "that his Father had hired him for life."

As victory followed victory, Satan tried his old trick of defeating the Evangelist by spiritual inflation. Referring to this, he wrote: "The devil tries to get me puffed up, but God keeps me down. I triumph, because I let Jesus have his way."

THE GREAT REVIVAL AT BEREA -- FIVE HUNDRED CONVERSIONS

Concerning this wonderful tornado, Rev. A. J. Lyon, who then was pastor, writes as follows, --

"In the winter of 1884, the church at Berea, including the faculty of Baldwin University, united in inviting Rev. J. H. Weber to assist in holding a series of revival meetings, and promised hearty support in the work. The attendance from the first was large. While some were disposed to question the methods of Brother Weber, God owned him, and we were soon in the midst of a great awakening, -- a revival of marvelous power, such as seldom comes in the history of any church.

"The audiences soon increased to such an extent, and so eager were the people to hear, that the church would often be filled hours before the start of service. Excellent singing, done by home talent, was of great service. The preaching by Brother Weber was most earnest and stirring, holding attention and arousing the deepest religious interest with both saint and sinner.

"While there was very little of wild excitement in any of the meetings, there often came upon the audience a wave of divine power and glory of indescribable effect. Sometimes during the preaching, then in the prayer, and then in the singing, a rapture of glory filled the house, and it seemed as though the angels came down in our midst to hear the shouts of new-born souls, witness the cries of the penitent, and join in the triumphs of the church. The altars were crowded from night to night, for nearly four weeks. And often a score or more would be converted at a single meeting.

"All classes were reached, young and old, including the mayor of the place, and many other excellent citizens. Skeptics scoffed, and many hardened sinners were saved; and some from other places were converted and went home rejoicing. About five hundred professed conversion. Over three hundred united with churches in Berea, and others united with churches in the vicinity.

"The strengthened faith of the church, the effect of the manifest power of God on the whole community, the advance of public Sentiment on all moral questions, these are some of the secondary results which came.

"Brother Weber labored hard, kept himself close to God, and accomplished incalculable good. The whole community appreciated his labors, and joined heartily in compensation. Of those received on trial nearly all were taken into full membership. Over one hundred were baptized at one time, eighty of whom were adults."

As Berea was a very intelligent and moral town, the seat of two colleges, and the spiritual condition of the church much above the average, there was but little of the opposition, such as the evangelist had met in towns of the baser sort.

From the beginning Mr. Weber predicted a "big time." He had "never met so many people who would take hold and work as here." A special day of fasting and prayer was held, and daily the tornado grew in intensity and power.

"The pastor had for months been laying the foundation of an extensive revival. For over three weeks there were from twenty to one hundred and twenty-five at the altar crying for mercy. There would be a banker or shop-keeper, here a student, there a Sunday School scholar, there a mechanic, there a drunkard.

"The weather was unusually wet, but the surging crowds that would wend their way to hear the Gospel indicated that God was there to save the multitudes.

"The congregation was alive, workers beseeching their friends to come and be saved.

"Neighbors who had been at enmity with each other for years became friends, and old men said, 'We never saw it on this wise before. It must be God, for man could not do such a work.'

"Ministers from other charges came, caught the fire, and went home to spread it."

The College faculty worked very hard, Dr. Cuyler and Dr. Nast leading by their example.

Nearly all the unconverted students were saved.

It was thought that there would have been a thousand conversions, could the Evangelist have remained. Salvation was not confined to the sanctuary. Some were converted in Mr. Weber's room; one man, while he was in his shop, sawing meat. People came miles in the mud and the rain on purpose to be saved.

One night the altar and ten seats were filled with seekers.

A student was asked to come and seek Jesus, but refused by saying, "I am afraid I can't hold." Brother Weber said, "Maybe you will not have a long time to hold out." He came, and the third night was gloriously saved. In a few weeks after his conversion, he received a letter asking him to come to Dakota. He came to the pastor, sorrowful, and took his letter, and one day while out on the farm and seeing a black cloud coming he ran for shelter under a tree, but, while there, e lightnings did their awful work, and he was found a corpse. We know not what a day may bring forth!

A woman, with a disease which was pronounced incurable, was here healed in answer to prayer.

Death speedily claimed another convert, a young lady, but in Jesus she trusted and entered eternity triumphant through his grace.

Brother Weber continued to be pressed with calls from many places, and now felt that he must hasten to other fields which already were "white with the harvest."

God has given marvelous victory in the past; he will continue to keep his trust in him, feeling that, "Surely, O God, through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee.

His next place of labor was Niles, Mich., where he aided Rev. A. M. Gould in a blessed victory for God and souls. Great success, but many adversaries. When the church was full at this place they "closed the doors," and many were turned away. Insults were hurled at the Evangelist on the streets, and boys would come to his window and belch their rage. Two hundred and sixty-five gave their names as saved.

His next point of attack was Harrison, O., a town contaminated with saloons, distilleries, and a Campbellite church, whose pastor indignantly refused to pray when invited at the revival meetings. Why is it that the devil and Campbellites often seem to equal each other in their opposition to Holy-Ghost revivals?

About the time the meeting was to close, they invited forty ministers to come and help destroy what the Methodists had done. Like the Indian that tried to stop a train by throwing his lasso over the smoke-stack of the engine: the Indian was crushed, but the train moved on.

The pastor was Rev. J. L. Glasscock, a college chum of the Evangelist's. He says that "the church was at the lowest ebb," that the prayer and class meetings were increased many hundred per cent. in numbers and spirituality, and that the pastor's salary was increased one hundred per cent.

Mr. Weber's father and mother were present, on one occasion, at this meeting, and for the first time heard their son speak. "Lou, Ida, Laura, George, and Cliff," all members of his family, "came to the altar and were saved by the power of God."

Several pastors, including him who now is Bishop Joyce, came out one night to help, but the Evangelist records what is usually true on such occasions, that, "instead of helping us, it did us harm, as the people looked at them instead of looking to God."

At the close of this meeting he worked a few days at Madison, In About fifty had professed conversion when he abruptly closed the meeting, because the church "would not hold up his hands or do as they promised."

His next place of labor was Springfield, O. Dr. J. W. Bushong was pastor, and, under his labors, there had been a large ingathering of souls only a short time before. But, not satisfied, he, with his official board, invited Mr. Weber, and claimed, through God, another great victory. Between two hundred and three hundred professed conversion.

During this meeting, a man, eighty-four years old, felt strongly impressed to come from Indiana to Springfield. He knew not what for, but the desire grew so strong that he came. He was prayed for and converted, and now he says, "he knows why he came," as God saved him.

A young man in an after meeting said, "He hated the Methodists, and would not go to the altar if it would save him." In less than half an hour he was there, and soon converted.

A murderer in jail was visited during the meeting, prayed with, and professed conversion. Truly Jesus came to "seek and to save the lost."

"NOT TONIGHT" A FEARFUL WARNING!

A lady came to the meeting in the middle of the week, and was urged to yield at once and be saved. She said, "Not tonight."

The next Sabbath she was buried. She died walling, without God, her "not tonight" having driven his Spirit away forever.

Closing this meeting, June 1, Mr. Weber improved the next six weeks in taking needed rest. He revisited the scenes of past revival victories, and a part of the time was with his people at Preston, O., where he was building a house for his parents. Here he writes, "I am having joyous times with my dear ones," and "I talk to the men around me about this Jesus."

His soul, however, soon gets anxious for the activities of his calling, and he writes, "Glad the time is coming when I will leave to begin work again."

The campmeeting season has again come, and the Evangelist prepares to meet his engagements under the azure dome.

July 10 found him on the campground at Clear Lake, Ia. The meeting continued until the 20th, and was said by the managers to have been the best campmeeting ever held on the ground. Between two hundred and fifty and three hundred professed conversion. Bishop Foss had been advertised for Sunday, but in his absence Brother Weber preached in his stead, and "fairly outdid himself in this effort, and produced a powerful effect on the audience."

When spoken to about his soul, a wag said to Mr. Weber, "I came to see the monkey show." The Evangelist replied, "Here's the monkey, and he will pray for you." The wag ran away as fast as his feet could carry him.

Our storm center of cyclone power in those reason of manifold tornadoes passed from this meeting to another at Big Stone, Dak., where several nationalities mingled. The following entrance, made in his journal when here, speaks for itself.

"Bishop Foss came today. I had to preach before him tonight. How hard it was to do that. But the Lord did help me. I shrank so much, it seemed I could not, but God helped me." This was a new ground, but between fifty and seventy-five were saved.

CRYSTAL SPRINGS, MICH. -- ONE HUNDRED SAVED IN A DAY

Crystal Springs is one of Michigan's oldest and most honored campgrounds.

Here Brother Weber had been engaged to labor from July 5 to 14. How God set his seal upon his labors at this memorable meeting, may be seen by the following report of the services by Rev. I. Wilson, which was published in the Michigan Christian Advocate, --

"The meeting was conducted by our faithful and worthy Presiding Elder, I. Taylor, assisted by the devoted and successful Evangelist Rev. J. H. Weber.

"The labors of the Evangelist were highly appreciated and greatly blessed to the people. He had charge of the morning prayermeetings, followed nearly all the sermons with powerful exhortations, and preached every evening. His prayers, exhortations, and sermons made a deep impression upon all present. At first some were disposed to criticize, but the tide of holy feeling rose so high, and the spiritual power accompanying his services was so evident, that all inclination to criticize was quickly swept away. Brother Weber's secret of success and power for good cannot be understood, nor his work fairly judged, by attending one service ... If at first you are not impressed, go again. Notice his intense enthusiasm. See how he flies through the congregation like an angel of love, urging sinners to flee from the wrath to come. Look how penitents press to the altar and cry for mercy. Hear the shout of redeemed souls, and you will be constrained to cry, 'It is the Lord's doings and marvellous in our eyes.'

"The Evangelist fearlessly lifts up his voice like a trumpet against all manner of sin. Lukewarm Christians and careless sinners receive their portion in due season. He tells the ungodly that unless they repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the wrath of God is upon them, and he will banish them to hell forever. He sings and shouts to the great congregation, "Ye must be born again," until scores of souls feel the words of the Lord Jesus penetrating their hearts, and they are led to weep and cry for mercy.

"Sin, and salvation through Christ, hell and heaven, are realities to him. These fundamental doctrines he preaches in the demonstration and power of the Spirit, and hundreds are converted to God.

"The glorious results of Crystal Springs campmeeting this year demonstrate the above statements. Not less than two hundred and fifty souls justified or sanctified to God ... At every altar service each day there were from twenty-five to seventy-five seeking pardon or purity. Niles district received a mighty spiritual uplift. The central idea of Christianity and the central doctrine of Methodism, 'holiness unto the Lord,' was kept prominently before the church, and we had a real Pentecost. Brother Weber led the people along the line of victory, from the beginning ... Glory to God for the great work done at Crystal Springs in 1884."

A PENTECOSTAL SUNDAY

The Evangelist had never before seen such a day as the Sabbath at this meeting. At least one hundred were saved that day. Was there not joy on earth! And in heaven

Brother Weber went from Crystal Springs to aid in a campmeeting at De Witt, Ia., where converting grace and sanctifying power went hand in hand.

This meeting, like some passed and others to come, receives but passing mention, as full particulars are not in our possession.

His next appointment was Decatur Ill. campmeeting. This was a remarkable meeting, two hundred and fifty professing pardon, and as many more entire sanctification.

That Mr. Weber can receive blows as well as give them is seen from the following allusion to the pulpit utterance of a prominent preacher "He struck me very hard, but it will make me a better man."

Tuesday, September 2, finds Mr. Weber again with his loved ones at home. He had been there but a few days, however, when he wrote: "It seems I'm getting so restless that I do not know what to do, I must go out and work for Jesus. The fire burns in my bones!"

So we find him with fresh strength again bearing the Gospel message to the famishing multitudes. During the balance of the year, he held meetings in Michigan, at Muskegon, Buchanan, and St. Joseph, closing the year in the midst of a sweeping cyclone at Geneva, O. Hundreds were saved in these meetings.

The following, from the pen of Rev. G. L. Cole, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church at St. Joseph during the revival there, gives some idea of the nature of Brother Weber's work at that time.

"Rev. J. H. Weber of Preston, O., visited St. Joseph in the fall of 1884. His coming was attended with precious results. Over two hundred gave their hearts to Jesus, nearly all of whom united with some brands of the Christian church. We opened our meetings under what seemed to be very inauspicious circumstances, being just on the eve of the presidential election, but God was with us in mighty power, and we soon forgot all temporal matters in view of the weightier interests of seeking and caring for lost souls. Brother Weber is a workman chosen of God. His methods are peculiar to himself, yet mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin.

"His work at St. Joseph was not confined to the immediate results, but reached out to mouths and even years to come. His visits at intervals during my three-years pastorate proved a benediction to the church and whole community. May the dear Lord detain him here for many years to proclaim the terrors of the law and the unsearchable riches of Christ."

The dying moments of the old year, and the flying ones of the new, found Mr. Weber, as usual, upon his knees. The keynote of the success of his past life has been prayer. He will seek no better for the future. The first day of the New Year closed with twenty souls converted, the first fruits of another abundant harvest. The Geneva tornado continued to sweep on until between three hundred and four hundred were saved. "Jesus is doing the work, it would be a queer work if I did," writes the Evangelist. Rev. H. Webb, now Presiding Elder of Steubenville District, East Ohio Conference, was pastor. Referring to this revival, he says, --

"The revival reached nearly all classes and ages in the town. The young men were reached, and gathered into the church in great numbers. The work was generally regarded as thorough and genuine from first to last. Brother Weber having some peculiarities, both of address and methods, served on one hand to attract those who had not linen church-goers, and on the other to rebuke sin, in all its types and forms, with such boldness and plainness that the people were moved and brought to decision. His kindly manner, mingled with intense earnestness, made his services attractive and aggressive. He was loyal to the Methodist Episcopal Church, and pleasant in all his relations to the pastor, assuming no responsibility without full, frank counsel ... I believe that fully the average number that were received on probation graduated into full membership.

"I cherish nothing but pleasant recollections of Brother Weber's labor among us. I believe the divine approval was unmistakably upon it. My knowledge of his labor elsewhere served only to increase my respect and esteem. I shall continue to pray that added years maybe given him, and similar victories attend his labors."

From Geneva he turned a deaf ear to many other urgent invitations, and, led by God, entered upon another campaign of warfare and victory at Bedford, O. Romanism was one of Satan's most active agents of tornado opposition here, but the cyclone might of divine power defied opposition, and caused the truth to triumph. From there he went to Cleveland, where, laboring in the different churches, he improved the balance of the winter. While here he was seriously sick, which crippled his public work, but,

notwithstanding, when possible he labored on, and many during the winter professed conversion. To God be the glory!

For some time the Evangelist had felt a drawing westward, and, in response to an official invitation May 5, we find him at Rock Rapids, Ia., when he writes: "I am looking for a most wonderful time. It will come as sure as light is light." He was not disappointed.

On his way to Rock Rapids he had been detained over Sunday. Unexpectedly he met an old friend on entering the church Sunday morning, who insisted that he should preach. He did so, and "God did the work," and twenty-seven seekers came to the altar, twenty-four saved. He was pressed to remain, but must hasten on to Rock Rapids. Here the tide rose until the mayor, several county officials, and many business men were converted. One employee, when seeking, said to his employer: "I want to be a Christian, and if I cannot sell machines without lying and misrepresenting your goods, I give you thirty days to get another man." "Go on, Handy," was the manly answer, "and we will give you more wages.

Another said: "I was determined not to be converted under Weber, but I had to come and I am glad."

Writing of this revival, March 26, 1889, about four years after it occurred, Mr. I. K. Thompson, a business man, who was converted in his revival, says of it: "It was a work of love, and the effects of it truly have been wonderful, and are as visible now after all these years as then; with few or two exceptions, all are living up to their profession."

He attributes Mr. Weber's great success to his "private life and upright walk before God to man." The farewell service here was as enthusiastic as any that had greeted him in his own State, "several hundred people with a band of music escorting him to the depot," where he took the train to Sioux Falls, his next place of labor. While here the converts from Rock Rapids chartered a car, and came over en masse, "marched from the public square to the church, singing. Went down after the meeting, singing, and held an outdoor meeting." A sore-headed editor, who had been struck by revival lightning, sarcastically criticized this act, but as many of the most influential citizens of the place were among the number, his words were like leaves before a gale. Brother Weber was compelled prematurely to leave this place to meet another engagement, but not until over fifty had professed conversion.

At Sibley, Ia., the engagement just mentioned, about one hundred and fifty aimed salvation, among whom was one who had "been the champion among infidels of the town," and thus God gave his servant another midsummer revival. While here he "celebrated" July "Fourth" by attending a campmeeting at Spirit Lake, where he was invited to speak, and "forty-three came forward," "fifteen saved." "It was God, not Weber," writes the Evangelist. The campmeeting season having rolled around again, Mr. Weber is at his post. Invited again, as on the year before, to Crystal Springs, he is compelled to leave the West, and after a short visit home hastens to fulfill his promise.

"Not less than one hundred and twenty-five were converted and reclaimed, and at least one hundred and fifty were cleansed from all unrighteousness," making the number converted and sanctified the two years that he was there, five hundred and twenty-five. So writes Rev. I. Wilson.

Brother Weber's next field of labor was the campground at Wilton, Ia., where he saw people moved on as never before. And between one hundred and fifty and two hundred were saved.

Closing his campmeeting engagements, he again begins work in the churches August 24, when he labors for the balance of the year at Strongville, Cleveland, Royalton, O., and St. John's, Mich., where success crowns his efforts. The following are some of the incidents which occurred during this time, Wrongs made right. -- At Strongville a man sought salvation but to no avail until he had gone and paid for a suit of clothes he had stolen from a storekeeper and confessed to another man wherein he had cheated him, and refunded the money.

Lost fifteen pounds of flesh. -- Another man while under conviction lost fifteen pounds of flesh.

One man was converted who had said he "would cut his throat from ear to ear" before he would yield.

A number who accompanied Mr. Weber on his recreative hunting tours were saved.

While at Strongville Mr. Weber went over to Berea and was ordained deacon.

At Royalton a man sought in vain for a number of nights, but "no light came." He "forgave a man whom he hated" and all was well. Truly "If we forgive not men their trespasses neither will our Heavenly Father forgive ours."

At St. John's a "well-dressed" woman, when Mr. Weber knelt to pray for her, slapped him in the face and also spat in his face. He prayed, "Jesus, forgive her." That night thirty were at the altar, and soon after this woman, "under the greatest conviction," writes Mr. Weber, "wanted me to come and have a talk."

Truly said Jesus, "There is no man that hath left home or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life."

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