

God Will Heal Our Land If We Humble Ourselves And Pray – 2Chronicles 7:14

Scripture Reading: 2Chronicles 7:11-18

Introduction

This morning, our Bumper Sticker series brings us to a verse that is very popular within Christian circles – particularly in the United States – 2Chronicles 7:14

It's likely the only verse most Christians are even aware of in 2Chronicles, and it's often referred to as "the recipe for revival."

2Chronicles 7:14 is a frequent sermon topic – especially around the 4th of July – and if you tune into a National Day of Prayer broadcast, you will almost certainly hear it quoted

If you browse through a Christian bookstore, you'll likely find the verse printed on T-shirts, pens, coffee mugs, plaques, and on actual bumper stickers [sticker]

The Christian group Casting Crowns even wrote a popular song based on it

Without a doubt, the state of affairs in our country is lamentable

Biblical morality is widely scoffed at in the media and entertainment and many forms of evil seem to be not merely tolerated but are gaining broad acceptance and even affirmation in society at large and even in many churches

Almost 1,800 years ago, Isaiah spoke of people who "call evil good and good evil" [Isaiah 5:20] as God pronounced woe upon them – and yet those people seem to be more prevalent and prosperous now than ever

Support for true, biblical Christianity is at an all-time low and appears to be picking up speed on its decline

It's no surprise that good people, godly people, are looking for a solution to the problems that face us

Most certainly, our land is in serious need of revival, and when we see and feel our nation's spiritual decline, we properly and passionately desire that God would heal our land

And when we read the words of **2Chronicles 7:14** –

...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 and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

We take note of the formula and the promise we see in it, and we sincerely take possession of it for ourselves in the belief that God has promised us that if we follow the steps outlined in it he will heal our land

As I was studying for this sermon, I came across an article that suggested perhaps even Covid-19 could be eliminated from our midst if we would follow the prescription found in 2Chronicles 7:14

But, as we saw two weeks ago, God's Word can be dangerous when mishandled like a sharp, two-edged sword

So we need to be careful that we understand what it says and what it means before we attempt to apply it to our lives

And we need to be especially careful when misunderstanding some portion of the Bible could lead us to try to force God to keep a promise that he never made to us because that only leads to disappointment and disillusionment on our part

As we endeavor to understand this particular verse, we do so with the knowledge that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for his church so let's dig in and see what 2Chronicles 7:14 has to say to us

There is an old axiom about real estate that says the three most important things to consider when evaluating a property are location, location, and location

That's a good thing to remember because the one thing you can't change about a piece of property is its location

There is likewise an axiom concerning our understanding of the Bible that we must keep in the forefront of our minds: the three most important things to consider when evaluating a passage are context, context, and context

Pulling a verse out of context is quite dangerous because a verse out of context can be made to say things it was never meant to say – and it can cause us to appropriate for ourselves a promise made to someone else

Simply put, when it comes to understanding and applying a passage in the Bible, **context is key**

I. Context is Key

Suppose you were to read the following instruction: “Take hold of the trunk” [Trunk]

I doubt if you read that instruction in isolation you would have any clue what was intended

You couldn’t know if the instructions concerned an elephant, a tree, a shipping container, or a human torso – all of those things are also called a “trunk” and you would need context in order to decipher the meaning

For our Scripture reading this morning, we read the entire paragraph in which we find our focus verse – verses 11-16

Reading at least the surrounding paragraph is a good practice when studying the Bible because the paragraph is the minimum immediate context that needs to be considered for proper interpretation

And when we begin in verse 11 [**2Chr 7:11**], we see that this passage deals with Solomon on the occasion of the successful completion of the construction of the first temple in Jerusalem

That would be the immediate historical context of our passage

Then in verse 12 [**2Chr 7:12**], we see that the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him, *“I have heard your prayer...”*

Reading a statement like that should automatically make a serious student of the Bible ask, “What prayer?”

And it should lead to a search for the prayer to see what it says

Turning back a page in our Bible, we see that Solomon’s prayer is recorded for us in **2Chronicles 6:12-42**

Actually, verses 12 and 13 are a bit of a preamble to set up the prayer and the prayer itself begins in verse 14

But the part that most concerns our study this morning is found in verses 26-40 because it’s in those verses that we find the requests that Solomon made that the Lord specifically addresses in 2Chronicles 7:13-14

Look with me at **2Chronicles 6:26** which says: *“When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them”*

Also look at **2Chronicles 6:28** which says: *“If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence or blight or mildew or locust or caterpillar...”*

After those statements we read that Solomon goes on to ask God to forgive his people and remove their affliction if they pray to him in repentance

And that is the exact thing God says he will do in **2Chronicles 7:13-14** listing the same examples: drought, locusts, and pestilence

That makes it plain to see that what God says in 2Chronicles 7:13-14 is a direct, point by point answer to Solomon’s prayer concerning the people of Israel

It is inextricably connected to the people of Israel and proper temple worship and the fact that God might, from time to time, send judgment upon the land in the form of drought, locusts and pestilence

And God encouraged Solomon by making the promise that if Israel’s sin should bring about God’s judgment by drought, locusts, or plague they would need only to turn back to God in earnest humility and repentance in order to find forgiveness and restoration

We see this covenant theme continue in verses 17-18 [**2Chr 7:17-18**] as God directs his promise to Solomon himself promising the continuation of Solomon’s rule in return for his obedience

And in verses 19-22 we see God state what would happen if Solomon and the people of Israel failed in their obedience which we know took place when Israel ultimately turned away from God

Actually, this entire section of 2Chronicles is a condensed restatement of the blessings and curses God spelled out to Israel regarding their obedience to the covenant stipulations in **Deuteronomy 28** – the long-term historical context

It's important for us to remember that since Israel was under the covenant relationship with God, there was a direct correspondence between their obedience and their prosperity and their disobedience and their suffering

It was all conditional and, in the Lord's answer to Solomon's prayer in 2Chronicles 7, he simply reminds Solomon of the previous agreement that is still in force

And we have to believe that is exactly how Solomon would have understood God's words

Therefore, context tells us that 2Chronicles 7:14 is a promise made by God to ancient Israel – Israel is the “my people” of the verse

Having looked at context, let's turn our attention to some other **interpretive insights** that help us understand the passage before us

II. Interpretive Insights

We have already seen that God is addressing Solomon and the “this place” that God has chosen for himself is the temple that Solomon had built in Jerusalem [**2Chr 7:12**]

And since we have seen that this entire passage deals with Israel, the “my people” found in verses 13 and 14 has to refer specifically to the nation of Israel at the time the words were spoken

Therefore, we can deduce that the “land” spoken of has to be the promised land of Israel – the land Israel was presently living in and the land from which they would be removed if they were to disobey

Really, when you stop to think about it, there is no earthly “land” for God's people today

Under the New Covenant, our home is in heaven and we long for the heavenly country that God has prepared for us as we read in **Hebrew 11:16**

But what precisely is meant by the promise to “heal their land”?

There are many people who equate this healing with some kind of spiritual revival and that's certainly the way people who try to apply the passage to present day America interpret it

However, to interpret it that way we have to ignore what God said in verse 13 about causing drought to come and sending locusts to devour the land and the sending of pestilence among his people

Notice that those are all *physical* afflictions and not spiritual

Therefore it only makes sense to interpret this as a physical restoration and not a spiritual revival if God is talking about remedying the physical calamities and ailments that he has sent to bring the people back to himself

Next, we've already noted the covenant specific language used in the passage pointing back to Deuteronomy 28 but I want you to notice something I skipped over

Look with me at verses 19-20 [**2Chr 7:19-20**] where we read the following curse –

But if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will pluck you up from my land that I have given you, and this house that I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

It seems a little strange that those who see direct application of verse 14 to America don't equally claim these verses

Because, if verse 14 applies to America why wouldn't verses 19-20?

Given the state of the United States, shouldn't God have uprooted us and sent us to a foreign land long ago?

Of course, readily recognize that verses 19-20 don't apply to us today but we know that they fit perfectly with what we know of Israel's history

Israel turned away from God and the Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC and the Southern Kingdom was likewise conquered and exiled by the Babylonians in 586 BC

And in this we see God fulfilling his promise to punish Israel if they broke their part of the covenant

Since sound biblical interpretation necessitates that all of the passage would have to apply to the object of the passage we have to deduce that 2Chronicles 7:14 cannot apply directly to the United States of America no matter how much we might desire spiritual revival in our country

Let's consider one more interpretive insight before we move on

Whenever we see Israel repent and turn back to God in the Old Testament they do so as a nation

Now, we know that it's highly unlikely that every single Israelite repented and prayed each of those times, but we can say that it was typically a national repentance that took place each time we see Israel repent

What we don't see anywhere is a small, righteous remnant that repented and prayed and changed the course of the nation

Even in the case of Nineveh, as we read in the book of Jonah, the city as a whole from the king to the lowest servant repented and put on sackcloth in order to convince God to restrain from destroying them – they even draped their animals in sackcloth!

My point is that we have no reason to believe that if only the true followers of Jesus Christ would humble themselves, pray, seek God, and repent from all wickedness that God would bless their nation

And yet that's the understanding those who seek to apply 2Chronicles 7:14 to the church and America today must adopt

But that the fact that the *promise* of 2Chronicles 7:14 doesn't apply to the church today doesn't mean that there is nothing in this passage for us because there are plenty of lessons here that do apply to us

III. Lessons for Us

First, we learn a great deal about God from this passage

God, especially in the Old Testament, is generally thought of as mean and judgmental – just waiting for people to step out of line so he can smite them

But in this passage we see that God is nothing like that

The God of 2Chronicles 7:14 is a God of grace and forgiveness – the God of second chances

We see this revealed about God also in **Psalm 103:8-14**

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

For he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust.

I encourage you to spend some time with that passage and commit to memory what the psalmist reveals about God so you are prepared the next time someone tries to tell you how mean God is

God is clearly a God of long-suffering and while he must occasionally punish, that typically comes only after he has demonstrated great patience with no repentance forthcoming

Because, as we see from 2Chronicles 7:14 and other passages like **Proverbs 18:13** which says:

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy
and **1John 1:9** which says:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,

we learn that we can fail before God and still find acceptance when we humbly turn back to him and repent of our sins

God isn't surprised when we fail

Psalm 103:14 tells us he remembers how he made us from the dust of the earth so he knows our limitations

And he stands ready to pick us back up, dust us off, and send us on our way again whenever we fall as long as we come to him in true repentance

But that doesn't mean that God is some kind of benevolent pushover

God has very clear expectations of his children which we see reflected in 2Chronicles 7:14

God expects his children to behave with humility both toward him and toward each other

1Peter 5:5-6 tells us:

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...

And **Philippians 2:3** says:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

God also expects us to have an ongoing, personal relationship with him which involves, among other things, talking with him in prayer

Prayer is the primary way that we communicate with God to share our feelings, our needs, and our desires and just generally fellowship with him

Specifically, in 2Chronicles 7:14 we see that God expects us to turn to him with prayers of confession and repentance

God expects us to come to him admitting when we have done wrong and for us to take steps to overcome and forsake our sin

I find it interesting that 2Chronicles 7:14 begins with the need for humility before it gets to the part about coming before God in confession and repentance because the number one factor that prevents confession and repentance is pride

God has a moral standard and he demands that people adhere to it in order to have a relationship with him – we dare not forget that

But he also understands when we fail and stands ready to forgive and to renew our relationship with him as soon as we come to him humbly confessing, repenting, and seeking forgiveness

Conclusion

While we can't look to 2Chronicles 7:14 as a promise from God to fix the problems in our nation we still must still follow the command found in **1Timothy 2:1-6** to pray for our nation and our neighbors

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

God hasn't promised to "heal our land" but it's clear that God expects us to pray expecting our prayers to make a difference in the world around us

And we should always be conducting ourselves before a watching world in such a way that they see a difference in us

I think it could be amazing to see what God might do if every Christ-follower were to actually humble themselves before God and man and fully turn to God in confession and repentance of sin

It would be interesting to see what God might do if every believer were humble, hungry for God, and seeking to be holy because I would imagine that could have significant social impact even though God hasn't promised to heal our nation because of it

But every Christ-follower should live that way even if nothing more comes of it because that is the way of the kingdom of heaven – our true home – and that is where our focus should lie

Let's pray

2Chronicles 7:11-18 (page 364)

Thus Solomon finished the house of the Lord and the king's house. All that Solomon had planned to do in the house of the Lord and in his own house he successfully accomplished. Then the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, 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 and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. And as for you, if you will walk before me as David your father walked, doing according to all that I have commanded you and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to rule Israel.'"