

"Prayer – Experiencing God's Goodness"

2 Chronicles 7:14

2 Chron. 7:14 has been a go to verse to use to pray for our countries for their spiritual revival or awakening. Unfortunately, when we quote the verse we are only quoting part of what God said. And it's always dangerous to quote only part of what someone says because when we do, we often end up misunderstanding what they said or making them say something they never really said. We know she shouldn't do it with people, so why do we do it with God and His words? Do we want to understand what God actually said or do we just want to use the Bible for spiritual clichés to make us sound like we know what the Bible is saying?

One example from a few weeks ago. Often, we have used Phil. 4:13 ('For I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me') to encourage people to do something new or difficult with faith [even if we're not gifted for it!]. But when we studied what Paul said it in its context, we discovered that what Paul meant was 'I can handle all circumstances [wealth or poverty] through Christ who helps me in all circumstances. No Bible verse is an island. It does not exist in a vacuum. It was given in a context of a sentence in a paragraph in a chapter in a book.

Here in 2 Chronicles 7:14 we need to understand the context of this verse runs from Ch. 2 to Ch. 7. This is all about when Solomon built the temple to the Lord. Chronicles gives us more information than Kings because Chronicles was written to the returned exiles who were going to rebuild the temple after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it in 586 BC, taking most Israelites as exiles to Babylon. They needed to be reminded how God worked when the temple functioned properly and what God expected from His people when they strayed. But Chronicles is less interested in dates and time so we have to go to 1 Kings to learn how long it took Solomon to build the temple. According to 1 Kings 6:1 he began in the second month in the 4th year of his reign and according to 6:38 he completed it with all its details in the eighth month of his eleventh year – so 7 years & 6 months. That's a long time. Here in 2 Chronicles Solomon is dedicating the temple "at the time of the festival in the seventh month (5:3) and all what takes place in 5, 6, and 7 is during the eight day festival that happens every 7th month, known as the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths/Sukkoth (7:8-9). Tabernacles came in the fall at the end of the harvest season when the Israelites celebrated God's rescue from Egyptian exile where God led them into the promised land through the wilderness where they lived in Sukkah's/booths. So, it was a remembrance of past salvation and celebration of God's provision from the land.

I believe this is one month before all the finishing touches were completed in the eighth month and not 11 months later when he did this. The temple was basically done and Tabernacles was the perfect time to celebrate what God had done for Israel. As Solomon speaks to the thousands of people gathered on this special occasion, he says this in 6:4,

"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to my father David and has fulfilled it with His hands, saying, ⁵'Since the day that I brought My people from the land of Egypt, I did not choose a city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man for a leader over My people Israel; ⁶but I have chosen Jerusalem that My name might be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.'

Solomon mentions that while it was in David's heart to make a house/temple for God, God said it would be David's son who would build it. And now that it was finished it was a fulfillment of what God

promised. Solomon knows his father's history with the tabernacle in the past when he, in his enthusiasm to restore the Ark to its rightful place in the holy of holies, did not follow the Word and people died because of it. Solomon goes out of his way in his speech to give all glory and acknowledgement to God that this was his doing and that they were doing it right.

He then prays a lengthy prayer from 6:14-42 praying that God's Word would continue to come true for Israel and, most importantly for 2 Chron. 7:14 he prays the blessings and cursings of Deut. 28-29 asking God numerous times that if Israel sins and turns away from God and God judges them by fulfilling His Word in Deut. 28-29 that He would withhold rain, send famine or even send them into exile, that if they turn back to God asking forgiveness of their sins that God would hear from heaven, forgive their sins and heal their land by sending rain again. This is what 7:14 is all about. 7:14

Was God's Promise to a Repentant Israel that He Would Fulfil His Word to Forgive Their Sins and Heal their Land through Rain (6:12-7:22)

God's promises are always,

Based on God's goodness and lovingkindness
(5:13; 6:14, 42; 7:3)

When we look at the overall context of this entire section, we see that God's goodness and lovingkindness permeate the entire dedication of the temple. Back in Ch. 5 all the temple furnishings had just been brought in to the holy place and holy of holies. A 120-trumpet worship team with who knows how many singing Levites sang,

The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the LORD was filled with the cloud, ¹⁴ and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God.

In 6:14 Solomon begins his prayer

"LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.

Out of his goodness and lovingkindness He keeps His covenant with Israel. He ends the prayer in v.42 with,

⁴¹ *"Now arise, LORD God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests, LORD God, be clothed with salvation, may your faithful people rejoice in your goodness.*

⁴² *LORD God, do not reject your anointed one. Remember the great love promised to David your servant."*

And when Solomon is finished praying (remember just because the chapter ends and a new one begins means we have left the scene for even a minute. Instead we read,

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ² The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. ³ When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."

⁴ Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. ⁵ And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God. ⁶ The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD's musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, "His love endures forever." Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.

He prayed that the people would rejoice in God's goodness and remember His great love. This is why they could pray to God because of His faithfulness to His covenant promises made to Israel. He is good and faithful and desires the best from His people. That's why in Solomon's prayer and God's answer

God assures them of His continual presence

(6:20-21, 26, 34-35; 7:12, 14-16)

The temple was the symbolic dwelling place of God. When God made His glory appear it was to assure Israel that He was there. Over and over Solomon prays that when Israel prays toward 'this place' that God would hear from His true dwelling place in heaven. 6:20-21 is a clear example,

²⁰ May your eyes be open toward this temple day and night, this place of which you said you would put your Name there. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. ²¹ Hear the supplications of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive.

God's true home is in heaven but He symbolically allowed Solomon to build a place that would remind them that he always sees and hears them. When they go to war and pray towards Jerusalem, He hears them because they are doing what He asked and realize -even geographically far away – God still hears them because He actually dwells in heaven. Even should they go into exile – hint, hint for future reference – Solomon asks in 6:37-39 that God would hear and forgive should they confess and repent. We see the prophet Daniel doing this very thing in Dan. 9, asking God's forgiveness for the nation as he prays towards Jerusalem and in Ch. 6 when he is charged with praying to another God other than Darius, he is praying toward Jerusalem from his window.

And what is the purpose of this prayer of repentance and confession? Two-fold;

So that He would be glorified (6:14, 32; 7:3, 19-22)

Solomon wants this place to be about God. He made that clear when He opened his prayer in 6:14

"LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.

Solomon also prayed for non-Israelites to come to know God through hearing about Him and wanting to see this temple made for His glory. He prayed in v.32,

³² "As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when they come and pray toward this temple, ³³ then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name

Solomon prays that God would answer the prayers of Gentiles who want to know Him so that more Gentiles would know how great He is.

And then of course God gave them a visible taste of His glory when He reigned fire from heaven and made His glory appear at the dedication of the temple. And when God Himself spoke to Solomon saying in 7:13-22 He warned Israel that should they follow other gods He would destroy His temple, yet even then as a way to reveal Himself to the nations. He said in 7:21,

²¹ *This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?'²² People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why he brought all this disaster on them.'*"

So if – and when Israel lost their temple – that too exalted God as all-powerful and to be feared among the nations. So then why does God in His goodness and lovingkindness desire to hear and forgive sins and answer the prayers of His repentant people?

So they would live holy lives (6:31, 33; 7:17-19)

Holiness and obedience are always God's desire for His people. The reason why He is good and full of lovingkindness is He wants people to know Him and grow in becoming more like Him. That brings them the most joy and stress-free lives.

Solomon prayed to God that if His people are suffering famines or plagues on their land and recognize its because of their sin, and they ask God's forgiveness that He would in 6:30

Forgive, and deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know the human heart), ³¹ so that they will fear you and walk in obedience to you all the time they live in the land you gave our ancestors.

And as well to the Gentiles so that they would fear Him (6:33) and even for Solomon himself God promised ...

¹⁷ "As for you, if you walk before me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, ¹⁸ I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel.'

Sadly, we know Solomon would waffle in his walk with God and the result was a split kingdom. And 200 years later the temple would be destroyed and Israel scattered. So then, the promise of 7:14 was for the nation of Israel to repent of their sins so that they would continue to walk with God and enjoy the blessings that the land would produce. We have to be careful how we use this prayer today because this is for God's people, not the nation of Canada or the USA or any other country because God did not enter into a covenant with any other nation nor did He promise any other nation He would withhold rain on their land. So then, what are the spiritual principles for God's people in this prayer?

We can't sever v.13 from v.14. God say to Israel that when they are experiencing a lack of rain, locust plagues or pestilence it is because they have sinned against God. Sin always results in damage. Since God is talking to His covenant people, I believe there is a spiritual application for the disciples of Jesus who re called by God's Name today. 2 Chron. 7:14

Is God's Assurance to Us who Repent that He Will Fulfil His Word to Forgive for Our Sins and Repair the Damage that our Sin Causes

The goodness and love of God continues for us who re in a covenant relationship with God. Paul said God is rich in mercy and grace in Christ. So, we re in a covenant relationship with God when we place our faith in the true King of Israel, Jesus. Only Jesus offers forgiveness of sin because He became the one sacrifice. The temple is no longer needed and the presence of God now dwells in us. So we can pray anywhere at any time knowing that God in heaven sees and hears our prayers and wants to forgive our sins.

1 John 1: 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Access to God is always available and He is waiting for us to come and pray and seek forgiveness, humility and repentance.

James 4 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

He will come near. He will lift you up. And He wants to heal the damage our sin causes others and to ourself. Perhaps a good illustration of this is in the letter to Philemon. Philemon was the leader of a church, who had a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus stole something from Philemon and ran away to Rome. While in Rome Onesimus came upon Paul. Paul led him to Christ and now in the letter asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus and to welcome now as a brother in Christ and a fellow worker in the gospel. Paul even promised to pay for any damages incurred so that nothing would hinder restoration of the relationship.

God wants to hear from heaven, forgive our sins and heal the damage our sin has caused. But He won't do that until we, His people who are called by His name humble ourselves [agree with God about who we are], pray, seek His face [look intently at who He is and desires from us] and turn from our wicked ways. All sin is wicked and God wants to see spiritual maturity, a turning away from sin and a turning toward Him.

If you think I am misapplying this answer to prayer from God to Solomon, go back and read 6:28-31,

8 "When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when enemies besiege them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, 29 and when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel—being aware of their afflictions and pains, and spreading out their hands toward this temple— 30 then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive, and deal with everyone according to all they do, since

you know their hearts (for you alone know the human heart), ³¹ so that they will fear you and walk in obedience to you all the time they live in the land you gave our ancestors.

Only God knows your heart and mine. It's not as pretty as we make it look to others, yet because of His goodness and love to us – His covenant people – He waits for us to humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways. And when we as individuals get right with God and attract others to Jesus because we model His love to them, only then will our countries gradually turn to God in repentance.

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