

A Text [often] used Out of Context: 2 Chronicles 7:14

*Written by Aaron Brake**

2 Chronicles 7:14 is a frequently quoted verse which is often given a modern-day application for the United States of America. The verse states,

“If my people who are called by my name will 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.” [KJV]

[A better translation reads:

...”when My People, upon whom My Name is invoked, kneel and pray, and seek My Presence, and turn from their wicked courses, then I will listen and forgive their sins, and will restore health to their land.” FFV]

[A literal translation reads:

...*and the* people who call out *My* Name upon them, and bend *the* knee and pray, and seek *My* Presence, and turn from their wicked path, I will hear from high and forgive *their* sin, and mend their soil (land).]

You may hear this verse quoted or see it posted especially around the *National Day of Prayer*. Accompanying this verse, it is often pointed out that America is in spiritual and moral decline, and if we as a nation would only humble ourselves, pray, seek the face of God, [Yahweh] and turn from wickedness, then God, [Yahweh] would hear from heaven, forgive our sin, and heal our land. Sometimes the verse is applied more specifically to *Christians* living in America since God [Yahweh] refers to “my people.” [Note: Most Christians claim to be Yahweh’s people.] Regardless, notice that God [Yahweh] is making a promise: *If you do this, then* God [Yahweh] will do that.

Is this a correct interpretation and application of 2 Chronicles 7:14? It seems to me this takes the passage out of context and leads to misapplication.

What Is the Context?

What is the broader context of this passage? This is always an important question to start with whenever we are seeking to correctly interpret and apply a biblical passage.

Very briefly, as we read the beginning chapters of 2 Chronicles we discover that Solomon is preparing to build a temple for Yahweh in Jerusalem (chapters 2-5). He completes the temple and dedicates it with a prayer before all the assembly of [Ancient] Israel (chapter 6). Yahweh responds by filling the temple with His glory and making His dwelling there (chapter 7). After sacrifices are offered and the Feast of Dedication is observed, Yahweh appears to Solomon with both a promise and a warning:

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...* 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” (7:12-14, 19-20).

Interpretive Issues

Reading this passage in context brings up several important interpretive issues.

First, notice who is being addressed. God [Yahweh] is speaking directly to Solomon, though [Ancient] Israel as a nation is clearly in view. In fact, God [Yahweh] is giving Solomon a point-by-point response regarding his prayer for [Ancient] Israel in 2 Chronicles 6. Therefore, the promise of blessing and the warning regarding disobedience was given to [Ancient] Israel, *not* America or Christians living in America.

Second, what is “this place” that God, [Yahweh] has chosen in verse 12? Clearly it refers to the temple Solomon built in Jerusalem, *not* America.

Third, who is the group of “my people” that God [Yahweh] is referring to in verse 14? It is certainly not Christians under the new covenant. That is an anachronistic reading which would be completely foreign to the original author and audience. Clearly this is referring to the [Ancient] Israelite nation. The nation of [Ancient] Israel was God’s, [Yahweh’s] chosen people in the Old Testament, *not* America or Christians living in America.

Fourth, what “land” is God, [Yahweh] promising to heal in verse 14? Again, clearly this is referring to the promised land of [Ancient] Israel, *not* America.

Fifth, what exactly is meant by “heal their land” in verse 14? Many assume this refers to some sort of spiritual healing, a spiritual revival of sorts. This is the way it is often applied today. But notice what verse 13 states, a verse that is frequently skipped over to get to verse 14:

“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...”

The consequences of disobedience mentioned here is how God, [Yahweh] dealt with [Ancient] [Ancient] Israel under the [old] covenant when they were unfaithful to Him. It is with respect to these calamities that God, [Yahweh] promises to “heal their land.” In other words, “heal their land” has nothing to do with *spiritual* revival but rather a *physical* restoration of the land and people. God, [Yahweh] is promising [Ancient] Israel He will restore them to prosperity and “heal their land” if they return to Him. This is a promise of physical restoration for [Ancient] Israel, *not* a promise of *spiritual* revival for America.

Sixth, notice the language that is being used in this passage. This is *covenant specific language* reflective of Deuteronomy 28. Yahweh is reminding [Ancient] Israel of the covenant He has established with them, specifically the blessings that come with obedience and the curses that come with disobedience. God [Yahweh] established this covenant with [Ancient] Israel, *not* America or Christians living in America.

Seventh, notice what verse 19 states:

“But if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments...I will pluck you up from My land that I have given you.”

Why don't Christians in America claim this part of the passage for themselves? And if we do claim this for ourselves, are we to believe that God [Yahweh] is warning us that we will be uprooted from America and taken to a foreign land if we forsake the Lord? Of course, this passage makes perfect sense when applied to the history of [Ancient] Israel as a nation. [Ancient] Israel forsook Yahweh and the northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in 721-722 BC and the southern kingdom was conquered and exiled by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Again, this is exactly what we should expect given the fact that this warning was for [Ancient] Israel, *not* America or Christians living in America.

Furthermore, in verses 17-18 God, [Yahweh] tells Solomon,

“...if you walk before Me as your father David walked... then I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David.”

Should Christians claim this promise for themselves as well? After all, if Christians in America are going to claim the promises made to [Ancient] Israel, why not claim the promises made to Solomon also? Why not just claim every promise made in Scripture for ourselves and adopt a “name it and claim it” approach? Perhaps we find 2 Chronicles 7:14 emotionally appealing and so we are more willing to claim it as our own. At the same time we disregard other verses that would equally apply to us given this method of hermeneutics. This seems inconsistent at best and can lead to dangerous misapplication.

In sum, it seems presumptuous for Christians in America to quote a verse such as this and claim the promise for themselves. America is *not* God's [Yahweh's] chosen nation or land. Americans are *not* God's [Yahweh's] chosen people. America is nowhere to be found in this passage nor is any other nation besides [Ancient Scriptural] Israel.

The context clearly relates the promise to “this place” (the temple in Jerusalem) and “their land” ([Ancient] Israel, the land of Solomon and the [Ancient] Israelites). Yet because modern Christians yearn for it to be true of *their* land—wherever they live in the modern world—they tend to ignore the fact that God's [Yahweh's] promise that he “will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land” was about the only earthly land God's [Yahweh's] people could ever claim as “theirs,” the Old Testament land of [Ancient] Israel. In the new

[Renewed] covenant, God's [Yahweh's] people have no [physical] earthly country that is “their land.” The country they belong to is a heavenly one (Heb. 11:16).

But It Can Still Apply to America, Right?

Despite the clear context of this passage there have been interesting attempts to make 2 Chronicles 7:14 still apply to Christians in America. One speaker made reference to 2 Chronicles 6:32-33 where Solomon is offering his prayer of dedication:

Also concerning the foreigner who is not from Your people [Ancient] Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your great name's sake and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, when they come and pray toward this house, then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, and fear You as do Your people [Ancient] Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name.

The speaker stated that the "foreigner" in this passage could refer to Americans. Does this work? I don't think it does for at least two reasons.

First, notice the context again. Solomon refers to the foreigner coming "from a far country" and praying toward "this house." In other words, there are stipulations in Solomon's request. The foreigner must fulfill two conditions: he must come to the land of [Ancient] Israel and he must pray toward the temple Solomon built. No foreigner could fulfill these conditions today for the simple fact that Solomon's temple is no longer in existence. [There is no unified Theocratic Nation of "True" Ancient Israel today.]

Second, notice that one of the reasons Solomon makes the request regarding foreigners is so that "they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name." But again, since the temple is no longer in existence this means that at least one of the reasons Solomon makes the request regarding foreigners is null and void. This could not be fulfilled in our day and age.

It would seem then that we would be forced to take 2 Chronicles 6:32-33 out of context in order to make 2 Chronicles 7:14 apply to America or Christians living in America.

So what is the Point of This Passage?

We need to remember that *not everything in the Bible is about us*. When we approach the text of Scripture with "What does this say about me?" as a primary interpretive question we take a *me-centered* approach that is inherently narcissistic and individualistic. This does not mean the Bible does not apply to us. It certainly does. But before we move to application we need to first discover the correct meaning by using legitimate interpretive principles.

The Bible is about *God [Yahweh]* first and foremost. The Bible is God's [Yahweh's] *self-revelation*. God [Yahweh] is the hero! Therefore, a good interpretive question applicable to many passages is, "What does this teach about the nature and character of God [Yahweh]?" Looking at 2 Chronicles 7:11-22 with this question in mind I think we learn several important things.

First, we learn about the tremendous mercy, love, and graciousness of God [Yahweh]. Yahweh would have been completely justified in breaking covenant with [Ancient] Israel and forsaking them in light of their persistent rebellion. But instead Yahweh is constantly faithful. He keeps

His promises and the covenant He established with [Ancient] Israel despite their continued unfaithfulness toward Him. Regarding application, this means that we as Christians can be confident that God [Yahweh] will keep His promises to us. It should also cause us to reflect on the tremendous mercy, love, and grace God [Yahweh] has given us despite our own rebellion.

Second, we learn about God's [Yahweh's] desire to be in communion with His people. In response to Solomon's prayer we are told "the glory of the Lord filled the house" and Yahweh states, "For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever [age-lasting], and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually" (2 Chronicles 7:1, 16). In Yahweh's covenant relationship with [Ancient] Israel and His presence among them we see His desire to overturn the effects of the fall and reestablish shalom between Creator and creation. This of course applies to us as Christians [believers] just as well. As members of the New [Renewed] Covenant we have peace with God, [Yahweh] (Rom. 5:1). Furthermore, God [Yahweh] desires to be in continual communion with us and to further our sanctification.

Finally, we can even learn that God [Yahweh] desires us to humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, [presence] and turn from wickedness. These prescriptions for [Ancient] Israel in the Old Testament are even repeated for Christians in the New Testament. This should not surprise us since God [Yahweh] is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But what we *cannot* do is take a promise out of context, claim it for ourselves when it was never given to us, and assume that if we do these things God [Yahweh] is bound and obligated to spiritually renew America. While we should continue to pray for our nation and seek God's [Yahweh's] mercy and grace, the continued prosperity of our nation is dependent on exactly that: God's [Yahweh's] mercy and grace, *not* a promise He has made *us*. 2 Chronicles 7:14 is not a magic formula for spiritual revival.

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***Note:** *The words shown above in brackets "[- - -]" are additions to this well written original document. They have been inserted by A.O.Y., Cascade, to clarify the definition of several words.*

1. *The word "God" has become a very generic term; we have added the proper Hebrew name of the Almighty Sovereign Creator Power of the Hebrew Scriptures "God" to [Yahweh].*

2. *The name "Israel" where used in this document is a reference to [Ancient] Israel, the Biblical Hebrew people (referenced as His people) that descended from the 12 sons of Jacob (renamed Israel). It does NOT refer to Jews or the people that use the Talmud-Kabala (i.e. Judaism) for their religious belief or to the people dwelling in the modern Country deceptively called Israel.*

3. *God's [Yahweh's] Covenant as found in Exodus 20, and Deut. 5:2-22, has not and will never change. There is no "Old" or "New" Covenant. It is a "renewed Covenant." The Covenant in ancient times that was administered externally by the Priesthood is now available "internally" to all Covenant keepers by Yahweh's indwelling Spirit. This is The Kingdom (Counsel) of Yahweh.*

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Assembly of Yahweh, Cascade

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