

In studying the scriptures, it is important to ask a few questions about the text you are examining. Some good questions being: Who wrote this book? When did they write this book? Who was the original recipients of the book? What was the circumstances surrounding both the author and the original recipients? What did the words we read in our modern English Bibles mean in the original text whether it be Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic? What was the point the original author was trying to get across to the original recipients?

In asking such questions you determine what the author was truly saying, allowing the text to speak for its self. Otherwise you might read the scriptures and make it say what you want it to say. This is not studying the Scriptures, but rather manipulating and twisting the scriptures for your benefit. Let's examine a popular text, that I believe most of us take out of context all of the time. How many times have you heard that you should pray 2 Chronicles 7:14, for our country to be restored to its former place of God's favor?

2 Chronicles 7:14 New International Version (NIV) "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 I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Let's ask the questions I mentioned above to see if we are allowing the Scriptures to speak for itself.

Who wrote the book: There is a great variety of opinion about who might have written this book of the Bible.

When did they write this book? Almost all views are that book was written during the Exilic and post-exilic time period (when the nation was carried off to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities). One commentator reasons, "The best view is that Chronicles as a whole was in place by 500 B.C., but that additions as late as the early fourth century continued to be added, especially genealogies, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

Who was the original recipients of the book? This is a history book of the Nation of Israel, during the time of exile and their return from exile. The book belongs to the Nation of Israel, making them the original recipients. Israel would be God's chosen people, who were in a covenant with Him. God had promised Abraham 3 things: Land (a specific piece of property), Seed (lots and lots of descendants), and Blessing (God's hand of abundant provisions). These promises are found in Genesis 12, 15, and 17. God also repeated these promises to Jacob and Moses. So the recipients of this book, had received a divine promise to receive a specific piece of property, have a lot of descendants in their nation, and receive God's divine favor.

The people had also received another covenant, a set of promises through Moses, called the Mosaic Covenant. This covenant includes a promise of exile being that God was going to allow

for Jerusalem to be conquered due to Israel's vast disobedience and idolatry. Israel was going to go through a time of Exile, with a future return. Why was God allowing the Nation to be taken out of the land, that they were promised? God promised in Deuteronomy 28-31 that if the people of Israel would listen, they would live long in the land, but if not, they would be carried off for a time of punishment. There was always a future return in mind.

What was the circumstances surrounding both the author and the original recipients?

2 Chronicles 7 records a piece of history from the reign of King Solomon, the son of David. He and the nation were held bound by the Mosaic Covenant, that in order to experience peace in the land, they must obey the Lord, otherwise God would punish them until they were spiritual fit to truly enjoy the benefits of the covenant God made with Abraham.

What did the words we read in our modern English Bibles mean in the original text whether it be Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic? There are no glaring differences between the Hebrew and the English texts.

What was the point the original author was trying to get across to the original recipients?

Solomon was speaking to a specific people group called, Israel. They had a specific piece of property deeded to them, which we refer to as the Holy Land. They had to remain faithful to God in order to use this land. If they chose to disobey, they would be moved out, but would not lose future ownership of the land. They would one day take possession again. They would also forfeit God's blessings if they chose to disobey.

So Solomon says in a moment of prophecy, "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 I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14 is speaking about Israel and their need for obedience in order to maintain the land promised to them. If they chose to repent and obey they would have their land and God would restore His divine favor upon them.

How do we take this verse out of context? How should we view this verse, what benefit is it to us?

When you and I say that America needs to humble ourselves and repent, in order that God would restore our land, and heal our nation, we are taking a specific promise God makes to another nation and we claim it for ourselves. This is like claiming our co-worker's promise of a raise given to them by the boss and applying it to our next paycheck. It doesn't work. We Americans haven't been promised a land, a nation of people, or God's divine blessing, except that if we bless Israel, we will be blessed.

What use is this verse to us? It shows us the faithfulness of God to carryout His promises. It demonstrates to us the love and grace of God, that he grants forgiveness. It also gives us a biblical principle that nations that honor God will generally be blessed by God. But even this principle doesn't mean that we name and claim God's specific promise to Israel upon the nation, though I wish I could.

We do need to pray for our nation. We do need to seek to start a revival in our nation. We do need to turn back to God, and who knows He might bless the America. Join us at the National Day of Prayer event in Delphos, Kansas at 6:30 pm on Thursday, May 2nd.

God Bless,
Pastor James