

National Day of Prayer

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[0 : 00] 2 Chronicles chapter 7, the oft-quoted and well-known verse 14, which you might often see stuck up on notice boards or identified perhaps in isolation by a lot of people.

It's a favourite verse of many. It's a comfort that if we turn to the Lord, then he has promised to heal us and to heal our land. And if my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

In this context here, what the Lord is answering to Solomon, what he is giving him by way of response, is in following up to what Solomon himself has prayed.

When he dedicated the temple that he had built, he says in chapter 6, for example, in verse 20, he prays that thine eyes may be opened upon this house day and night, upon the place where all thou hast said.

Thou wouldst put thy name there. And of course, every house of prayer, every church of the Lord Jesus Christ, it's not the building itself, although the Lord is mindful of his people as they gather in it, but the church is the people of God and he is mindful of them, his eyes upon them day and night.

[1 : 22] And also in verse 21 of 2 Chronicles 6, hearken therefore unto the supplications of thy servants and thy people. Hear thou from thy dwelling place, even from heaven, and when thou healest, forgive, for we all have need of the forgiveness of the Lord.

Verse 24, if thy people Israel be put to the worst before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and they shall return and confess thy name and pray, and make supplication before thee in this house, then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel.

Verse 26, when the heaven is shut up, there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee, yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name. And so on further down in verse 30, whatsoever prayer or supplication, soever shall be made of any man of all thy people Israel, when everyone shall know his own soul, and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house, then hear thou from heaven, thy dwelling place, and forgive.

And it's not just what is to the lights, but rather as we see in verses 32 and 33 of 2 Chronicles 6, moreover, concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country, for thy great name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and I stretch thy arm, if they come and pray in this house, then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for him, that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee as death thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name. Now there's a little sort of encouragement there for us, that it's not only, Solomon is not only talking about racial Israelites, he's talking about all the nations of the world, if they come and approach the true and living God, then there is this plea for the Lord to hear them.

[3 : 14] And also we see here in chapter 7, the verse that we read, if my people which are called by my name, you might think, ah yeah, but now you're talking about Israelites again, aren't you? You're talking about just Jews. It doesn't apply to us Gentiles, it doesn't apply to us, you know, Scottish people, or English, or Irish, or whatever, but it doesn't say my people which are called by the name of Israel.

It doesn't say my people which are called after Jacob. It says my people which are called by my name. Now remember how, whenever we have us, we had a couple of weeks ago, baptismal service, and we quote from Numbers chapter 6, where it says in verse 27, they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

They are not blessed and owned of the Lord, because of their descent from Jacob, or because they bear the name of Israel, but because they bear the name of the Lord. They have his name upon

them.

And everyone who is within the covenant fellowship of the Lord's people has the name of the Holy Trinity put upon them. If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

So many things in this, we haven't got all night to deal with it, but a few things we should notice here. First of all, apart from the fact, that if we are within the covenant fellowship, if we are within the Lord's covenant, we are called by his name, this then applies to us, regardless of our racial descent, regardless of which country we may be physically dwelling in.

[4 : 52] If we have the name of the Lord upon us, take the name of the Lord upon our lips, and into our hearts, then we are owned of him, as having his name upon us.

Humble themselves and pray. Notice that in the chapter that we read, Solomon is offering so many hundreds of thousands of sacrifices, you know, 22,000 oxen, 120,000 sheep, and all the people dedicated the house of God.

Now there's so much in the way of sacrifices, so much slaughter of beasts, and the place must have been reeking with the blood of all the sacrifices, but they have to dedicate the whole central courtyard, because the altars themselves aren't able to cope with the sheer volume of sacrifices, and yet, God does not say, if my people which are called by my name will bring sacrifices, will shed blood, will offer up a bull and an oxen and five rams, or whatever, he doesn't require anything of them by way of sacrifice.

He doesn't require anything of them by way of bloodshed. He knows they could never offer enough. He knows ultimately there is only going to be one sacrifice, which will avail for them. There is nothing that they can bring, except their petitions, except their prayers, and that is what we find throughout 2 Chronicles 6 there, that thine eyes may be open upon this house, day and night, and thou hear from thy dwelling place, hear the prayers of thy people.

If thy people Israel be put to the worst, and shall return and confess, and pray, and make supplication, yet if they pray toward this place, and if they make their prayer to the Lord, again and again and again throughout that chapter, then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render out to every man, according to his ways, and again concerning the stranger, what is not of thy people, that comes because of the great name of the Lord, and it's that thy stretched out arm, if they come and pray in this house, then hear thou from the heaven.

[6 : 55] It is that which the poor man, the rich man, the wayfaring man, whatever our condition, whatever our position, geographically or spiritually, there is not a one who cannot look to the Lord, and pray, if they are trusting in him.

So we have to recognize, God does not require costly offerings in our hand. He doesn't require, he doesn't require bullets, and goats, and sheep, and bloodshed, as once he may have done, for those who could afford it, from Solomon down to his nobles, and the dedication of the temple, but it is ultimately, as Jesus himself said, when he cleansed the temple of the money changers, my father's house, this temple is to be called a house of prayer, for all nations, and therefore, if we would seek the good, the blessing of our nation, amongst all the nations, it is to prayer that we must turn.

If they will turn to their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin. But there is more to it here also, it says, I will heal their land.

Now, there is ample evidence, you know, if it could be, if it were marshaled, and documented, and so on, that would indicate, that when a people, when a nation, is at odds with the Lord, when they are drifting from the Lord, when they are steeped in the ways of the world, or of rebellion against the Lord, and are not seeking Him, then it is not just their lives that go down the path.

It is not just the social fabric, or the relationships, or the work, the man hours, or work that are lost, or all the other things, that happen when things began to go bad, and began to go wrong, because we have forsaken the Lord.

[8 : 41] But the very land itself, begins to bear the scars. The very ecology of the whole land, begins to be affected. The crops do not grow, in such abundance, that the seas do not fill with fish, as once they did.

All the elements of the world, almost as it were, conspire. Like it said, when the Israelites were fighting, against the Midianites, the stars in their courses, fought against Cicera.

And so likewise, the stars in their courses, seem to combine, against those, and that land, which turns away, from the Lord.

And time and again, one finds both historically, and it's documented, that when people, turn back to the Lord, the land literally, yields its increase.

There is blessing, upon the land itself, there is blessing, on the nation, and on the people, but also, the physical land, the land itself. And the Lord, promises to heal, the land of such a people, that will turn back to him.

[9 : 49] And there is need, for us to turn back to him. We know ourselves, a little perhaps, of the history of our land. We know, how at one time, we were a covenanted nation.

We know how, at one time, every school, dealt with the Bible, and the catechism. And we became, such an educated nation, that Scottish people, were desired, in all corners of the world, and all corners, of the then empire.

They were used, in administration, they were used, in medicine, they were used, in research, they were used, in science, and engineering. And people, educated in our, in our land, and mission system, were used, all over the world, and became, the sort of, lifeblood, of all, so much of what was achieved.

Because the system, of education, in this land, not because it was, more learned, than saying, Cambridge, or Oxford, or America, or anywhere else, but it was grounded, upon the foundation, of the word of God, and his catechism.

And so, even the youngest, of children, knew the basic truths, about the Lord, feared the Lord, recognized the Lord, even if they turned, away from him, in later life.

[11 : 02] We were grounded, our foundations, were upon a rock. And of course, since then, we have sought, to chip away, at that rock. We have sought, to replace it, with sand.

And we have, reaped the whirlwind, having sown the wind. And we have, reaped the bitter fruit, of turning away, from the Lord. If, my people, and notice that, there is an if, throughout, we can't just, expect to sit, in our hands, sin our little lives away, and expect the Lord, to bless that.

We can't expect, our nation, to be blessed, by the Lord, if it makes no attempt, to turn to him. And of course, the nation, as a whole, shows very little, interest, in the things of the Lord.

We are a godless nation, by and large. But within this nation, just as within, by now, every nation, in the world, the Lord, the Lord, has his people.

The Lord, has a few, little burning lights, in the depth, of the darkness. The Lord, has those, who will call upon him, and cry out, for this land, because, do we love our nation?

[12 : 08] Do we love it enough, to cry out, for its good, for its welfare? Or is it just ourselves, and our own little lives, that we have a concern for? Part of the recognition, we have to understand, is that just as, for the Israelites of old, when Solomon is talking, about their need, for prayer, it's always in the context, of repentance.

It's always in the context, of recognizing their sin, turning from their sin, and repenting of it. Ezra is the same, when he makes his prayer, to the Lord. Daniel, likewise, in chapter 9, a famous prayer, of Daniel there.

It's worth, touching on, some of the points in it. I set my face, unto the Lord, God, to seek by prayer, and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.

And I prayed, unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great, and dreadful God, keeping the covenant, and mercy to them, that love him, and to them, that keep his commandments, we have sinned, and have committed, iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing, from thy precepts, and from thy judgments.

Verse 7, O Lord, righteousness, belongeth unto thee, but unto us, confusion of faces, as of this day. I say, O Lord, to us, belong confusion of face, to our kings, our princes, our fathers, because we have sinned, against thee.

[13 : 31] Neither we obeyed, the voice of the Lord, our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us, his servants, the prophets. Verse 12, he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges, that judged us, by bringing upon us, a great evil, for unto the whole heaven, hath not been done, as hath been done, upon Jerusalem.

As it is written, in the law of Moses, all this evil, has come upon us, yet made we not, our prayer, before the Lord, our God, that we might, turn from our iniquities, and understand, thy truth.

And then in verse 16, remember how we spoke, about prayer, and how the Lord, doesn't require sacrifice, and blood, and so on. And then we have Daniel, at verse 16, in chapter 19, saying, O Lord, according to all, thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger, and thy fury, be turned

away, from thy city, Jerusalem, thy holy mountain, because for our sins, and for our iniquities, of our fathers, Jerusalem, and thy people, I become an approach, to all that are about us.

And I'd like to stop there, pause there, and say, well, okay, he says, turn away your anger, but why should the Lord, what has changed, what has changed, in the condition of Israel, what has changed, in terms of their righteousness, or their timing, nothing, there's no sacrifice, that's been made, there's no payment, that's been made, on their behalf, why should the Lord, suddenly change?

And he goes on, well now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer, of thy servant, and his supplications, cause thy face, to shine upon thy sanctuary, and be desperate, for the Lord's sake, O God, incline thine ear, and hear, open thine eyes, behold our desolations, well the Lord, knows their desolations, he's the one, that visited the punishment, and the chastisement, of the Father, he knows their desolations, so when he says, see our desolations, open your eyes, O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, hearken and do, be fair not, for thine own sake, O my God, for thy city, and thy people, are called, by thy name, and yet, Daniel doesn't come up, with anything, saying, Lord, if you do this, then we promise, to do that, and if you do such and such, then we promise, to bring this, this great offering, this great sacrifice, we promise, to pay a price, but of course, there is no price, there is salt, and the only thing, Daniel has to plead, is the fact, that he, is beginning, on behalf of his people, to turn, back to the Lord, in prayer, in fasting, in saccoth and ashes, to plead, for his nation, to plead, for the Lord, to do, as he himself, has promised, and there was always, this if, if, if, if, if my people, will turn, if my people, will come back, to me in prayer, they don't have, to pay some great price, they don't have, to come up with, thousands of rams, of sacrifice, or ten thousands, of rivers of oil, as Michael says, because, as Job, which as you know, often suggested, in the past, is probably, the oldest book, of the Bible, in verse, chapter 33, we read, verse 23, verse 23, if there be a messenger, with them, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show up to man, his uprightness, then he is gracious, unto him, and saith, deliver him, from going down, to the pit, [16:47] I have found, a ransom, I have found, a ransom, in other words, in what is probably, the oldest book, of the Bible, there is already, this little nugget, of gold, that a ransom, has already been found, a ransom, is already known about, the land slain, from the foundation, of the world, is already known about, the price, is already paid, if we will turn, back to the Lord, and receive him, we don't have to come, with great blood sacrifices, we don't have to, pay huge prices, the Lord wants, our hearts, to be turned, and he wants, our hearts, to turn, on behalf, of our mission, now we are not, the first, denomination, to have come up, with this idea, three Presbyterians, have been doing it, for years, every year, they have a, a day of humiliation, and prayer, and fasting, in December, of each year, but they are few, and we are few, as well, but we are a little bit, less few, and one of the things, I personally find, encouraging about this, that our own,

General Assembly, is now, advocating, this national day, of prayer, and fasting, and turning to the Lord, on behalf of our nation, is that yes, others have been doing it, in their fewness, we are a little bit, less few, adding perhaps, our prayers to theirs, and who knows, as the years pass, perhaps the number, will increase, perhaps, snowball is too, perhaps optimistic, a word, but as the number, increases, and perhaps, we reach a critical mass, or a critical, volume, or intensity, or depth, of prayer, Daniel is only one man, and yet, with him, he knows, he is making a beginning, he knows, he is making a beginning, because he is turning, to the Lord, and seeking him, to fulfill, his own word, that's what he says, there, in Daniel 9, how it begins, he understood, from books, the prophecy, of Jeremiah, in the first year, of the reign, of Darius, of the seed of the need, I, Daniel, understood by books, the number of the years, when of the word, of the Lord, came to Jeremiah, the prophet, that he would accomplish, 70 years, from the desolations, of Jerusalem, and I set my face, unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer, and fasting, with sacral, and ajus, in other words, he's asking God, to fulfill, what he has already, promised to do, he's not asking, for something novel, or something different, or something, way off the beam, he's asking, for God, to do now, what he has promised, to do, and that encourages him, his word, encourages him, to hold fast, to that, and to trust, and believe, that God has a desire, to do it, if his people, will turn to him, and pray, Daniel is only one man, praying on behalf, of the nation, I don't know, how many people, will be engaged, in joint prayer meetings, or individual prayers, on behalf of the nation, today, we know, that we ourselves, have done a little bit, and it's a very little, that we are able to do, but the one, to whom we go, is mightier, than all of us,

I don't want us, to get unduly, overconfident, or optimistic, but you can rest assured, that in coming to the Lord, and pleading for our nation, we have gone, to the right source, we have made, the right start, we have made, the right beginning, and it is, barely a beginning, but it is, good, as far as it goes, you know, like when Jesus said, to the disciples, will you also go away, and Peter says, Lord, to whom else shall we go, now is the words, of eternal life, and we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the son of the living God, there is nowhere else, for us to go, but to the Lord, and one time, in the days of my youth, I remember, there was always, the big cry, of oh, I've only made self-government, I've only made devolution, now we've got devolution, now we've got self-government, we've got our own parliament, we've got our own MSPs, we've got our own budgets, and so on, the country is not, morally, or spiritually, better than me, economically improved, you can discuss the politics, backwards and forwards, but we've got, what so many people asked for, for so long, but, what is the state of our nation, now, not saying we better, if we're all room from Westminster, that's not what I'm saying at all, whether we're in Europe, or out of Europe, political answers, are only shallow answers, they do not address, the deepest need, of the human soul, they do not change, the soul of the nation, they may change, the direction, in which budgets, are directed, they may change, and affect, where money is spent, or what projects, get supported, or don't, or where things, get directed, or addressed, but they don't actually, address, the greatest need, of our nation, which is for Christ, if we were, as a nation, rooted in Christ, it would not mean, that we were, intolerant, of all other religions, as the atheists, would have us believe, it would rather mean, that those following us, we would see, false religions, were respected, and given their space, but they weren't treated, as though they were, on the same level, as the true gospel, if our school children, were taught, the word of God, again, from the ground up, do you think, that would make them, better, or worse, if the sanctity, of marriage, was honoured, across the nation, and so much less, in the way of breakdown, and divorce, and divorce lawyers, and courts, and the thousands, and millions, that are spent, on family breakdown, and everybody having, separate homes, and so on, and all these things, that happen, because of all this, breakdown, in our society, if all of that, was healed, because people, focused upon, Christ-centered families, husbands, and wives, gave space, and time, to love each other, support each other, turn the other cheek, forgive each other, raise their children, and love, and fear, and nurture, and admonition, of the Lord, do you think, our nation, would be better, or worse, if we were focused, on the Lord, and satisfied, in Him, so that we didn't, have to seek, cheap heights, and drugs, and alcohol, addiction, do you think, addiction, do you think, our nation, would be better, at once, do you think, it would cost us, more, or less, all the public, resources, that are poured, into endlessly, trying to patch up, the brokenness, that we insist, on keeping, on breaking, it's like, somebody, who keeps on, smashing a window, and then spending, ages, taping it all, back together again, and then smashing, it up again, and then taping, it all back together again, eventually gets, barely worth sitting, at all, now, we love our nation, or we ought to love, our nation, and one of the things, that we ought, to be motivated, to do, if we love them, is to be like,

[23 : 40] Paul was for this, from Romans chapter 10, Paul wrote, brethren, my heart's desire, and prayer to God, for Israel, is that they might be saved, he identified himself, as an Israelite, even though he'd grown up, in Cilicia, in Tarsus there, even though he had, he had been taught, in Jerusalem, ultimately he regarded himself, as an Israelite, a Jew, and a desire, for the salvation, of Israelites, across the whole world, chapter 9, I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also, bearing me witness, in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow, in my heart, for I can wish, that myself, will appear, from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh, in other words, he's saying, if it were possible, to save them, by damning me, I could, almost wish, almost, that the Lord, would just do it, and send me to hell, and save them, but he can't quite, bring himself, to do that, almost it is, because he cannot, bear to be separated, from Christ, and nor should any of us, be able to bear, being separated, from Christ, our desire, however, for our nation, for our fellow countrymen, and women, should be just as intense, as Paul's, that we could, almost wish, that if we ourselves, were to be lost, but they were to be saved, we would count it, as almost worth it, but, we cannot call it, worth it, if we lose Christ, for all things, are to mean less, to us, than Christ does, he is the be all, and end all, and our great desire, our great burden, for our nation, for our fellow countrymen, as God to be, that they may come, to know him, as we do, that their lives, their marriages, their employment, relationships, their opportunities, their fulfillment, in life, all that they do, would be, enriched, improved, transformed, by Christ, in the midst of them,

Christ, in the midst of their hearts, in the midst of their lives, some of them, would come to be saved, and that would be, eternal joy, but even if, here was the only place, even if this world, was the only place, they felt the benefit, it would be, benefit, indeed, do we have, such a burden, for our land, if my people, which are called, by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn, from their wicked ways, then will I hear, from heaven, and will forgive, their sin, and will heal, their land, we are called, by his name, well we're told, that it's at Antioch, that the disciples, first began, to be called, Christians, Acts 11, verse 26, the disciples, were called, Christians, first, in Antioch, but there came, to be Christians, not just in Antioch, but not just in Jerusalem, but throughout all Asia, and throughout Europe, and then to our own land, and to our own islands, hundreds of years ago, when the gospel, continued, to be blessed, and to flourish, despite it sometimes, waxing, and sometimes waning, and certainly on a wane, just now, certainly on a downer, just now, but, if we look to ourselves, at our own numbers, at our own strength, we're going to be so downcast, but if we go, to the right source, we go, to the true, that means, of identity, and salvation, and of transforming, of our land, then we have reason, to hope, and as I say, that's one reason, why I am so, encouraged, by this national day, of prayer, not because I expect, it to wave a magic wand, not because I expect, it will be the only one, of its kind, I would hope, that in the future, we might be able, to make this, a regular, perhaps an annual event, but the fact, that just by, deciding, to do it, just by deciding, to turn, to the Lord, not in any kind, of multi-faith circus, not pretending, other gods, are the same, as our gods, not pretending, other faiths, are the same, as the faith, of Jesus Christ, alone, but by seeking, the Lord, the Holy Trinity, by turning, to Christ, in all humility, in fasting, and prayer, as we have been, invited to do this day, then we have, at the very least, begun to go, in the right direction, begun to go, to the right place, and to the right source, and to the right person, and our nation, at last, might begin, to have hope, because there are, those within it, who care enough, to plead, the throne of grace, for all, the rest of us, it is not, that suddenly, it's the new time, of the day, but perhaps, the darkness, the blackness, before the dawn, has perhaps, begun, to turn, from black, to gray, perhaps, there is a little light, dawning, in the east, perhaps, there is a little hope, a little ray, whereby, the light of the world, might enter, at last, into our nation, again, the Lord, promises, Daniel, asks the Lord, to keep his promise, and this is what, the Lord says, again, and again, throughout, these sections, of Chronicles, if my people, who are called, by my name, in the name of Christ, Christians, if they will turn, to me, if they will confess, their sin, if they will plead, for the light, if they will come, again to me, if they will make, their prayer, toward me, if my people, which are called, by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn, from their wicked ways, then, will I hear, from heaven, and will forgive, their sin, and will, heal, their land, may the Lord, bring it to pass, and receive, and accept, all that is offered, to him, on this national, day of prayer, let us pray.