

Shepherd's Staff

July 2025

We gather to worship, we go to serve our Lord.

"You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth!"

Parkersburg Christian Reformed Church

Sunday Worship 9:30 a.m. ~ Church School 10:45 a.m



STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER?

Source: <https://www.morningsidecommunitychurch.com/pastors-blog/stars-and-stripes-forever-2-chronicles-714-twisters-series>

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There's a bit of symbolism at the front of our sanctuary that you may have never noticed before. If you'll look up here now, you'll notice that we have flags on either side of the platform—the Christian flag over on the left side, and the American flag on the right. These two flags are here to remind us of the “dual citizenship” that we have (so to speak) as children of God.

On the one hand, as the New Testament tells us, we are citizens of Heaven and the kingdom of God, and that kingdom is to receive our greatest allegiance. But on the other hand, as we live out our lives in this world, we are also citizens of a particular nation—the United States of America—and we are called to be good citizens of this nation as well.

Now, we know the Bible has a lot to say about the kingdom of God, but does it have anything to say about the United States? There is a statement in 2 Chronicles 7:14 that is frequently treated as a promise from God that can be applied directly to our nation. That verse says this: “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.”

A Common Interpretation

We hear this verse frequently around events like the National Day of Prayer and at other times when people are encouraging us to pray for our nation. It is very common for people to take this verse to mean that God has promised to bring spiritual revival to the United States if we, as Christians, will humble ourselves and ask God for it. But should we interpret the verse this way? Can we apply it to our nation so directly and say that God is duty-bound to send us revival if we as Christians will simply humble ourselves enough?

The Correct Interpretation

To answer those questions, let's take a closer look at the context of 2 Chronicles 7. This chapter records some events from the glory days of the ancient nation of Israel. At the time of those events, Israel was at its absolute peak in terms of wealth, expansion, peace with its neighbors, and political influence throughout the Middle East.

In chapter 5, King Solomon had just completed the building of the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem. The priests brought the Ark of the Covenant into the Temple, and Solomon entered the Temple courtyard to offer a sacrifice to God. He prayed a

long prayer of dedication for the Temple, and when he finished, God sent fire from Heaven to consume Solomon's sacrifice, and God's glory cloud that had led Moses through the wilderness came down into the Temple and filled it, and all the people fell to their knees in worship. What a magnificent moment!

During Solomon's prayer, he made one request that I'd like to highlight briefly, because it pertains to God's statement in 2 Chronicles 7:14. In 6:26-27, Solomon prayed, "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, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk, and grant rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance." Remember this request, because it forms an important background for 7:14.

Chapter 7 then tells us that after some time had passed, God appeared to Solomon one night with a reply to Solomon's prayer of dedication. (7:11-16).

With this context in mind, let's think about some observations that we can make about 2 Chronicles 7:14. First of all, notice that God says this promise is given to "my people who are called by my name." From the context, we can see that this phrase clearly refers to the people of Israel. What we have to ask ourselves, then, is if our relationship with God is similar enough to their relationship with God to allow us to apply this promise directly to ourselves. We'll touch on this thought a bit more in a moment, but I think the answer is no.

Next, we need to ask ourselves, "what's the problem with the land?" At the end of verse 14, God promises to heal their land, but heal it from what exactly? In the common interpretation, that phrase is often taken to refer to spiritual revival. It's understood as a promise that God will heal our country from the moral and spiritual chaos that we are experiencing.

But in the context, we learn that the problem with the land is a physical problem, not a spiritual one. In verse 13, God talks about withholding rain or sending plagues of insects on the people's crops as discipline for their sins. So in verse 14, the healing of the land refers to the end of the drought or the removal of pests. That statement is not a reference to spiritual revival. In fact, notice that the spiritual revival comes before the healing of the land. There's nothing in the context that would justify interpreting that phrase the way we often do—namely, that God will reverse the moral and spiritual decline in our nation.

So what is the correct interpretation of this verse? It is that God promised Solomon that if He ever had to discipline the people of Israel for disobedience, He would remove that discipline if they humbly repented and lived in obedience once again. There's really nothing in the context that would justify the way that we often interpret this verse.

What's the Danger?

Now you might be thinking, "Okay, Tim. It might be a bit of a stretch to apply this verse directly to the United States, but what's the danger? After all, isn't it good for us to humble ourselves and pray for revival in our nation?" Well, yes it is, but the danger in taking this verse as a promise is that we might end up living with unnecessary guilt. We might end up thinking that we are to blame for the continuing problems in our country because we just haven't humbled ourselves enough or prayed hard enough for revival.

If you think I'm joking about that, please understand that some people have already reached that conclusion. Back in June (2015), I received an e-mail from a Christian organization just a couple of days before the Supreme Court handed down their ruling legalizing gay marriage. Here is what it said: "Scripture tells us in 2 Chronicles 7:14 that the healing of a land is to be found in a right relationship between God and His people. God promises that if His people will humble themselves, pray, seek His face and turn from their wicked ways, that He will hear their prayers, forgive their sins, and heal their land. It is evident that America has not yet received God's healing promise—could that be because we have not yet met his conditions?"

Notice where they are placing the blame for the problems in our country. Never mind the people who are actually choosing evil lifestyles and are choosing to live by their own standards of morality. The problems in our country are still here because Christians just don't have our act together!

Now, is the church in America perfect? By no means! But the suggestion that the blame for our nation's moral slide lies at our feet is insulting and wrong! As you can imagine, the rest of this e-mail was a plea for me to make a donation to this organization. If I would just give them some money, they would get the church in America whipped into shape, and all of our problems would disappear. Needless to say, they received nothing from me except an e-mail asking them not to use Scripture like this ever again!

On a bit of a side note here, let me mention a helpful way to test an interpretation of Scripture—if the interpretation only seems to fit in the context of the United States, it’s probably not a good interpretation. Would anyone dare to blame Christians in Iraq and Syria for what’s happening to them right now? Would anyone have the gall to say, “Boy, I’m sorry that you’re getting murdered and run out of your homes, but you know, if you had just humbled yourselves a bit more and prayed harder, none of this would have happened because God would have sent a sweeping revival through your country!”

Do you see how ill-fitting that interpretation is in other parts of the world? So again, if an interpretation only seems to fit in the context of the United States, it’s probably not a good interpretation.

So how did we get to the point of twisting this passage in an inappropriate way?

Interpretive Errors

1. Taking a statement out of context

We mentioned this error last week in our study of Jeremiah 29:11, but it’s even more applicable here. Notice that 2 Chronicles 7:14 is not even a complete sentence—it’s just the second half of a sentence! So, when we take this verse all by itself, we’re only studying half of a sentence! Think how badly people would misunderstand you if they only thought about half of each sentence that you spoke!

To understand the Bible correctly, we have to keep its statements in context. In order to do that, one thing we have to learn to do is ignore chapter and verse divisions. It may surprise you to learn this, but the chapter and verse divisions that you see in your copy of the Bible were not in the original text. They were added centuries after the Bible was written as a tool to help people find a specific passage. The chapter divisions were added in 1227, and the verse divisions were added in 1555.

The chapter and verse numbers are very helpful for finding a statement in the Bible, but ironically, once we have found the statement we’re looking for, we need to forget about the chapter and verse numbers! There are many instances in which a single verse of Scripture does not contain a complete sentence, so if you look only at that single verse, you’ll miss the bigger picture.

So here’s one great piece of advice for Bible study—never read a Bible verse! Don’t do it! Never read a Bible verse! If you want to make sure that you understand a statement, you need to read at least the whole paragraph in which the statement is found. Beyond that, the more you read, the better!

2. Failing to maintain a proper distinction between Israel and The Church

As I alluded to earlier, there are some differences between our relationship with God and the kind of relationship that Israel had with God. These differences are significant enough that they make it illegitimate to apply promises given to Israel directly to ourselves today. Consider a few of these differences:

They were a *gathered* people—they all lived in the same area, and their worship revolved around a holy site, the Temple in Jerusalem. We are a *scattered* people—we live all over the world, and our worship does not revolve around a holy site.

They were an *organized nation*, with a king, an army, a tax code, and a specific kingdom with boundaries. We are a *spiritual fellowship* with none of those things.

They lived under *The Law of Moses*, with its specific blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. We live under *The Law of Liberty*, as James calls it (James 2:12), which does not have the same promises of blessing or threats of cursing.

That last distinction is very relevant for our study today. The reason that God promised to give the people good farming conditions in 2 Chronicles 7:14 is that when He first gave them the Law of Moses, that’s exactly what he promised to give them if they obeyed His laws. Notice these words from Deuteronomy 28:

“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God...blessed shall be...the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl...And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity...in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands (Deut 28:1, 4-5, 11-12).”

So when God told Solomon that He would heal the land when the people left behind wickedness and obeyed Him, this

was really nothing new. It was simply a re-statement of this promise from centuries before. This particular promise was attached to the Law of Moses, and so it is no longer directly applicable to us today since we no longer live under that Law.

My friends, let me say this clearly—we have no promise from God that the United States will continue to exist as a nation, or that our moral decline will ever be turned around. That’s a bit of a jarring statement because so many of us—myself included—bleed red, white, and blue. We love our country, and we believe our country was built on godly, biblical foundations, and we believe that things could improve in our country if we could just embrace those foundations once again.

But we have no promise that that will ever happen, and that’s important to understand. Does that mean, then, that we should just say “good riddance” to our country? Should we NOT pray for revival? Certainly not! There are other passages of Scripture that give us strong commands to pray for our leaders and our nation. Let me close by reading one to you—1 Timothy 2:1-4:

“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.”



7/3 Janet Johnson
7/3 Darrell Druvenga
7/8 Clarence Karsjens
7/14 Curtis Kalkwarf
7/14 Michael Mulder
7/20 Frank Pott
7/20 Marcia Allspach
7/21 Marjorie Aswegan
7/22 Luke Edeker
7/25 Lola Stirling
7/26 Amy Swanson-Haan
7/28 Joy Kneppe



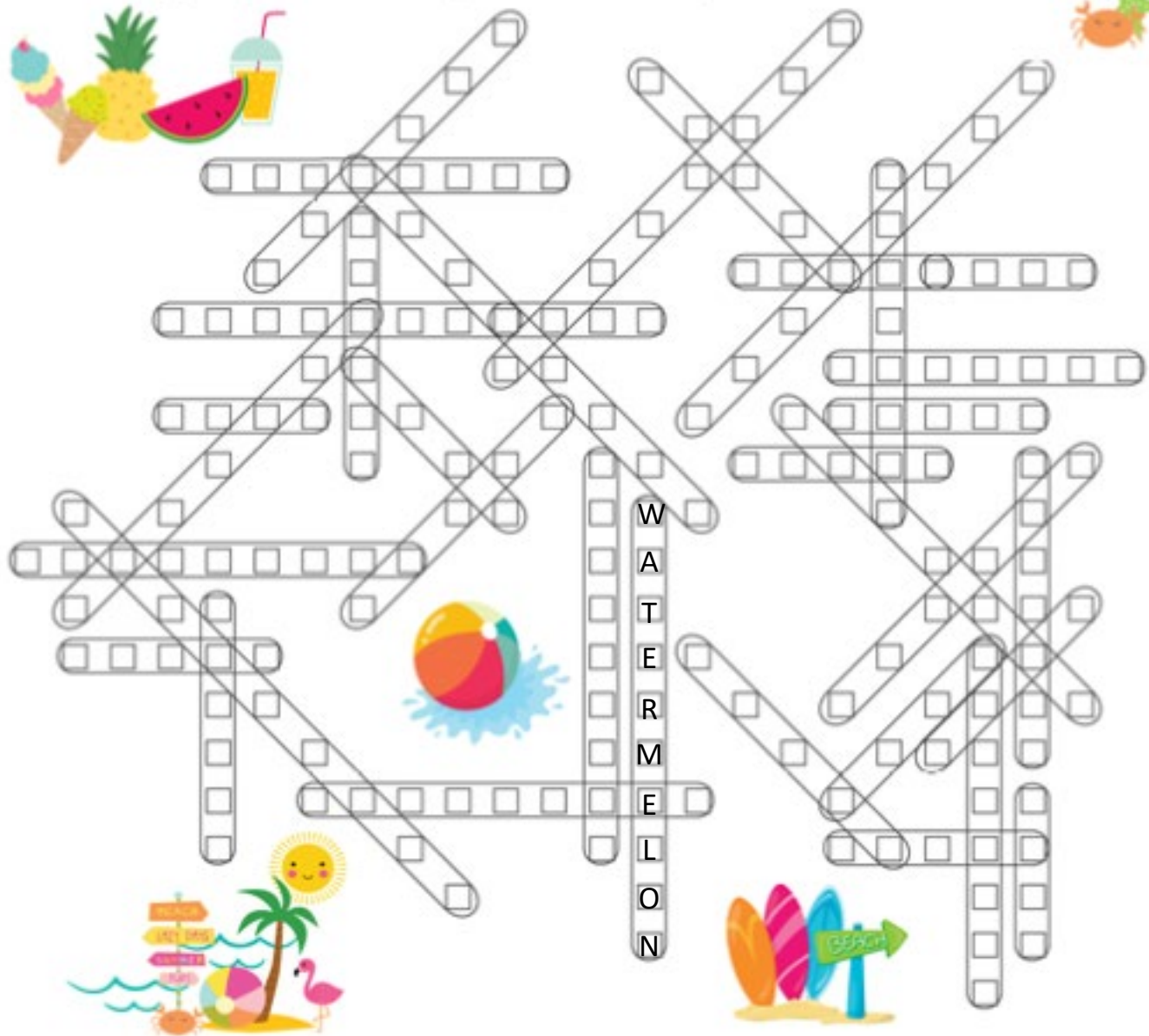
7/5 Dale & Angie Meester
7/23 Dennis & Sharon Schipper



Reminder: If you have anything you'd like included in the Shepherd's Staff, please try to have it to Wendy Armstrong by the 20th of the month. The goal is to have the newsletter in your mailboxes on the last Sunday of the month.

Colors Of Summer Word Fit

Fit the words in the list into the encircled squares. Words will read forward, backward, up, down, and diagonally and will normally cross other words. Spaces included in answers.



aqua
blueberry
campfire
charcoal
cherry
coconut
denim

fern
flamingo
grape
grass
jasmine
lavender
lemon

lime
linen
mango
moss
mustard
peach
relish

rose
sage
sand
seaglass
seasalt
seashell
straw

sunflower
sweetcorn
tomato
turquoise
watermelon
willow
wisteria

SUMMER

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