

LIFE from and with the LORD out of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Vital Insights from
the Lord's Word
to Solomon
in 1 Chronicles 7:13b-14

An Applicational Study
and Invitation from the Lord
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When the covid-19 pandemic was starting to emerge in force and the need for controls was becoming recognized, we began asking the Lord to give us insight to understand what He is doing, and more importantly, what He is calling us to do as believers.

2 Chronicles 7:13b-14 was His answer.

It was the Lord's response to Solomon's prayer of dedication of the newly completed temple to the Lord God in Jerusalem, expressing his desire that it be a house of prayer (2 Chronicles 6).

The Lord appeared to Solomon that night in a dream (2 Chronicles 7), granting his petition that the Lord would hear the prayers directed to Him whose glory filled that temple, that He would forgive their sins that were the cause of their particular distress that moved them to prayer and that He would relieve the distress as well.

We as new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) are temples of the living God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) whose glory resides in our bodies via the Holy Spirit living in the hearts of all whose trust for salvation and life are in Jesus (Romans 5:2b,5).

God intends every believer's body to be a house of prayer.

When Jesus found the temple in Jerusalem to be otherwise, He was incensed and exercised His righteous anger in casting out those who were using it to pursue selfish interests instead (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46).

The Lord's promise was not just for Solomon and his time, but for all who will call on His name at any time under any circumstances that make them aware of their need.

We have been greatly blessed as we have dug into these verses in depth over the last several months, both as we have gained additional insight into the message itself and as we have sought to apply it diligently in our own lives, discovering a number of areas in which the Lord has been calling us to turn our attention more closely to what He has been eager to show us, and then benefitting immensely from the growth resulting from addressing both new issues and old ones in greater depth.

We are eager to share these insights that the Lord has been opening up to us about:

- the Lord's wake-up call "If I shut up the heavens... / command... /send ..."
- our part "and my people who are called by My name..."
- His promise "then I will hear... forgive... heal..."

We pray that you will be blessed as we have been as you read on and join us in responding and partnering with Him as He brings life out of this pandemic.

NAS 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or **if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.**

if I send pestilence among My people,

and My people who are called by My name

- **humble themselves**
- **pray**
- **seek My face**
- **turn from their evil ways,**

then I will

- **hear from heaven,**
 - **forgive their sin,**
 - **heal their land.**
-

if I send pestilence among My people,

Wherever the cause of Covid-19 lies between the extreme theories of bat spit contaminated soup and an intentional leak from a germ warfare plant—the one paramount factor is the Lord God Himself—who alone is sovereign over the affairs of human life and who openly declares that He is the one who determines when, where and why epidemics occur—and when, why and how they end!

→ He entreats us therefore to turn to Him for relief !!!

and My people who are called by My name

True believers, knowing that we are loved by our Creator/Redeemer and that we are accountable to Him, hold the key to addressing a crisis such as the current pandemic.

humble themselves and pray

That key is prayer, and the vital prerequisite to effective prayer is humility. God created this world for human beings and created us “in His image” so He could bless us by letting us share in the divine privilege of blessing others as He does. He entrusted to us the privilege of making His divine attributes visibly and tangibly evident to our fellow human beings and the rest of the creation by our living them out in our earthly bodies as He expresses His loving care for all of His living creatures through us.

The inevitable, inherent risk in His making us like Himself is the ease with which we can become so enamored of and confident in our godlikeness that we forget that we are not gods who therefore don't need to depend on any other.

Becoming a believer necessarily involves coming to realize that I do actually need God, that we were never intended to handle life on our own, but in reliance on and partnership with our living God – Yet even seasoned, mature believers can and do readily lose sight of that in practice!

When God entrusted this world to our human management, He relegated to us the prerogative to decide for ourselves how much of His help we choose to welcome. As the perfect landlord He makes Himself ever available to serve our true needs, and though He offers to benefit us in various ways, He does not force His aid on us no matter how much He knows that His desires for us are far better than our own.

It is important for our hope of His answering our prayers to recognize that He is far more eager to provide us with the blessing we need than we are to welcome it. We have

already noted in 2Chr.7:14a the one major barrier of pride due to our natural but fallen inclination to self-confidence and determination to be autonomous and self-sufficient.

Because He waits for our invitation, we easily imagine that He is the reluctant one, when the opposite is true. **“You do not have because you do not ask.”** [James 4:2c]

And yet, even when we humble ourselves enough to ask, that may still not be effective because we do not humble ourselves enough to seek His perfect will rather than our own. **“You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives...”** [Jas. 4:3a] **“...so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”** [Jas.4:3b] It is natural for every one of us to ask God to do whatever it is that looks best to me, especially in times like the present when our needs seem so obvious. And yet there are times when even my very legitimate, urgent and even vital needs are not my greatest needs. And so I turn to God with my mouth open and my ears closed, oblivious to the fact that what I am praying is actually “Not Your will, but mine be done!”

And so James also calls for humility, quoting **“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble”** from Proverbs 3:34. The Hebrew reads literally **“God scoffs at the scoffers”** *i.e.* discredits those who discredit Him *or* brushes aside those who brush Him aside (actively resisting or passively ignoring what He is trying to say to us).

and seek My face

What we truly need is not to get God’s attention, but to pay attention.

Every true believer has already humbled him- or her-self by repenting of our natural sinfulness and choosing to trust in Jesus to save us from it. **“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God...[and]... stand in grace”** [Rom.5:1-2a]. The Old Testament explains how to get God to accept us, but that is now a done deal!

The Lord has already granted us the plea of the psalmist: **“One thing have I asked of the Lord, that I shall seek / That I shall dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, / To behold the delightfulness of the Lord, / And to inquire in His temple.”** [Psalm 27:4]

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?” [1Cor.6:19]... **“you know Him because he remains with you and... in you”** [John 14:17]... **“He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you”** [14:26b].

Seeking the Lord’s face is as simple as turning to someone standing beside you because Jesus is always with us wherever we are (though just not physically) and wherever our attention is! A close brother in Christ, solid believer and mutual encourager in the faith once asked Steve for prayer to draw closer to the Lord,

describing a recurrent vivid image of himself sitting across a table from Jesus who was staring lovingly and intently at him while he was staring intently out the window.

The wonderful reality that Jesus sought to teach the disciples after His resurrection by making His constant invisible presence with them evident to their physical sight at various times is as true for every believer now as it was for them then. He wanted them to realize that He was always available, whether obviously so or not, promising just before He left them, **“I am with you always, even to the end of the age”** [when Jesus returns to call all believers home]. [Matt.28:20b]

and turn from their evil ways,

Fortunately, for all of us who are **“new creatures in Christ”** [2 Corinthians 5:17], *i.e.* all who are the Lord’s people (“called by My name”, “Christians”) the uncertainty is not about whether or not we will turn back to Him, but only about when! – yet that timing is vitally important !!

We are to **“exult in hope of the glory of God”** *i.e.* expect that our lives will become Christlike in practice, for **“hope does not disappoint because the love of God has [already!] been poured out [completely] in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us”** [Romans 5:2b,5].

“You shall be holy for I am holy” [1 Peter 1:16, quoting the commandment = promise of Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7], **“confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will continue to mature it until the day of Christ Jesus.”** [Philippians 1:6].

Although the ultimate outcome for us is guaranteed in Christ, the Lord’s promise to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 is just as valid today – and also just as conditional !!

“If ... then ...

**“If my people... turn from their evil ways...
...then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.”**

Important and comforting note: Although many translations copy the familiar King James wording “wicked ways”, that was an error. The text of 2 Chronicles 7:14b does not use the Hebrew term for “wicked” indicating intent to commit harm, but rather the Hebrew term for “evil” indicating harmful in effect. This distinction is important for us into whose “hearts the Holy Spirit has been poured out (completely)” [Romans 5:5] because our ultimate will from the heart is now “to do the will of our Father in heaven” just the same as it was for Jesus – though we can and do still pursue much that is evil in practice and consequence whenever we are “walking according to the flesh” [Rom.8:4].

The vital imperative of turning from our evil ways is the object of many pleas to those who have come to faith in Jesus throughout the New Testament epistles, e.g. **“we urge**

you not to receive the grace of God in vain” [2 Corinthians 6:1] addressed not to unbelievers but to **“the church which is at Corinth with all the saints** [= holy ones, *i.e.* those in whose hearts the Holy Spirit already dwells]...” [2 Corinthians 1:1]. Paul’s concern in the letter is healing the painfully strained relations with them as they were offended by his previous efforts to call them to turn from certain of the evil ways in which they were continuing to walk and tolerate complacently in their midst.

I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.

It is truly wonderful that many talented people including top researchers at Stanford are using the natural human gifting and secular experience that God has given them (whether they give Him credit or not) to work hard to try to develop medications to prevent and cure Covid-19 – but the Lord loves us enough to reveal to us in His written word what most of the world does not recognize – namely (1) that He is ultimately behind both the pandemic and its end, and (2) He is indeed trying (with some success according to various reports we are hearing) to wake up the unbelieving world to its need to respond to Him and His love (as C.S. Lewis put it so well in *The Problem of Pain*, “We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”), but (3) His primary agenda is with the church which is to be his light to the world—but, like the seven churches of the Revelation to John (Rev.chs.2-3), is becoming more and more “conformed to this world” [Rom.12:2a].

He has communicated and entrusted the solution to us who have responded to His love.

Let us therefore join together (as is totally possible amid social distancing) in each of us being **“transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well-pleasing and mature.”** [Romans 12:2b]

Related passages for further consideration:

NAS **1 Corinthians 10:12-14**

¹² **let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**

¹³ **No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.**

¹⁴ **Therefore, my beloved, flee from [*lit.* the] idolatry.**

Verse 13 is most frequently quoted by itself, and usually as a presumed assurance that because God is sovereign, I can simply relax in the security of His loving care for me. But that is a naive and dangerous disregard of context since v.12 declares precisely the opposite. The preceding verses warn that the fatal judgments **“in the wilderness...**

happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things as they also craved, and not be idolaters [people seeking fulfillment in false concepts of “life”].

Verse 14 instructs us in the antidote: renounce the particular false conceptual image of “life” that is making me vulnerable to the particular temptation I am facing at this time.

In summary:

God’s part is done in providing the escape route – my part is now to flee by means of it!

^{NAS} **Philippians 2:12b-13**

again, my calling is to **work out** [my] **salvation** in practice **with fear and trembling**; by trusting **God who is at work in [me], both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.**

^{NAS} **Galatians 5:13** **For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.**

^{NAS} **Ezra 7:9-10**

The hand of the Lord was upon Ezra because he had established his heart to seek the law of the Lord, to do it, and to teach it [to the Lord’s people].

^{ELNT} **Joshua 1:5b,7-9**

1:5 As I was with Moses, I am with you; I will not slack off and I will not leave you.

1:7 Only be strong and very courageous; exercise diligent care to do according to all the law/instruction which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go.

1:8 This book of the law/instruction shall not depart from your mouth, you shall meditate in it day and night, so that you may exercise diligent care to do to all that is written in it; for then you will cause your way to thrive, and then you will have success.

1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed, for your God I AM is with you wherever you go."

Invitation

Please join us in these paths of impact!

If each of us

- meditates on this passage
- prays through and from it
- and walks it out in practice (*cf.* Joshua 1:7-9),

we will all

- get to know our Lord much more deeply (= enter further into the wondrous experience of eternal life here and now, *cf.* John 17:3)
- join Him in powerful intercessory prayer for believers and unbelievers, our society and leaders (*cf.* Romans 8:26,34; 1 Timothy 2:1-4)
- grow in practice out of old habitual ways that are at least a sad waste of time and effort (*cf.* 1 Peter 1:18b) and usually harmful to ourselves and others as well
- show the Lord forth much more on a daily basis (overcoming the universal failure to glorify God (Romans 3:23) by fulfilling the hope of glorifying Him by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5)
- bless those with whom we are sheltered in and in contact with us (family, friends, neighbors, work colleagues, store clerks, *et.al.*)
- give the Lord a powerful beachhead from which to work (*cf.* Matthew 5:16)
- encourage others to accept the gift of eternal life that God is offering to them and then to grow ever more deeply into knowing Him, serving Him and loving others into fellowship with Him and with us (*cf.* Joshua 1:6; John 13:34-35)

thus

- working in partnership with the Lord to help facilitate the accomplishment of His redemptive purposes in bringing the covid-19 pandemic upon the world at this time
- further the kingdom of God on earth to the blessing of many

“If my people...”

(...please join us)