

January 1 Lesson 5 (KJV)

God Promises to Hear and Forgive

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 30:1–10

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1–22

2 Chronicles 7:12–22

12 And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.

13 If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;

14 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.

15 Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.

16 For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

17 And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments;

18 Then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel.

19 But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them;

20 Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations.

21 And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house?

22 And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

KeyText

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. —2 Chronicles 7:14

From Darkness to Light

Unit 2: God's Promises

Lessons 5–9

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How to Say It

Chronicler *Krah-nih-kler*.

DavidicDuh-*vid*-ick.

Gibeon *Gib*-e-un (*G* as in *get*).

RehoboamRee-huh-*boe*-um.

Introduction

A. Forgiveness as a Lifestyle

Brian and Candy's 40th wedding anniversary was a hard-won victory. As their children, grandchildren, in-laws, and friends gathered, some people remembered another time, years earlier, when that marriage had almost ended. The family's spending had become so extravagant that Brian had involved himself in illegal business practices to cover the costs. When he was found out, he had faced possible jail time.

As a result, Brian and Candy spent time talking through the issues that had led the family to such overspending. They changed the spending habits that had led Brian to search for money in unethical ways. And over time, Brian and Candy rebuilt their marriage—they chose forgiveness as a lifestyle. Divine forgiveness is also a choice, requiring action from both God and His people.

B. Lesson Context

Ancient Jewish sources attribute much of 1 and 2 Chronicles (originally one document) to Ezra, with the events after his time being recorded by Nehemiah. These two men writing Chronicles would date the document between 539 and 515 BC. However, there are several pieces of evidence within the book that date its writing to a later time—425 BC or after. Because of this, the writer is just called “the Chronicler.”

One reason for a later dating of 1 and 2 Chronicles is that the text quite unapologetically used the earlier 1 and 2 Kings as source material. In places, the text has been changed very little or not at all. Second Chronicles 7:12–22 (today’s text) repeats 1 Kings 9:1–9 almost word for word. This makes differences between the texts more interesting.

One of the key differences between Kings and Chronicles concerns the Davidic dynasty (see discussion on 2 Chronicles 7:18, below). Our text today harkens back to the first temple and Solomon’s dedication prayer (6:21–39; compare 1 Kings 8:30–51). Solomon asked God to forgive Israel even when its sinfulness would lead God to carry out the curses of the covenant (see Deuteronomy 28). This prayer linked three important concepts: the Davidic monarchy, the temple, and the land (2 Chronicles 6:4–11). The Chronicler’s audience had returned from Babylonian captivity (538 BC) and the second temple had been built (516 BC). But the Davidic monarchy had not been reestablished. What this meant regarding God’s faithfulness to His people and His promises was a burning concern in Judah.

I. On Turning Back (2 Chronicles 7:12–16)

A. God’s Affirmation (v. 12)

12. And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.

God’s acknowledging that He *heard* Solomon’s *prayer* set up the expectation that God was about to act as Solomon had requested (2 Chronicles 6:14–42). While 1 Kings 9:2 refers to Solomon’s earlier dream at the high place Gibeon, 2 Chronicles 7 omits that reference entirely (see 1 Kings 3:4–15). And to the degree this incident is mentioned in 2 Chronicles, the Chronicler chose to clarify that the tabernacle was at Gibeon—Solomon was not simply visiting a high place (2 Chronicles 1:3–7). This is in keeping with the Chronicler’s emphasis on the temple itself as God’s *chosen* earthly home after the tabernacle (compare 5:7–14; 6:6, 34, 38). Given God’s promise to David that one of his sons would build the temple (1 Chronicles 17:11–13), it comes as no surprise that the Lord accepted *this place* as His own *house*.

God’s choosing a permanent home within Jerusalem cemented the promised land as the place He had chosen for Israel (Exodus 23:27–33). Until this point, God had been content with

the tabernacle (2 Samuel 7:5–7). The temple Solomon built replaced the tabernacle as the center of worship in Israel, signified by the relocation of the ark of the covenant to the temple (2 Chronicles 5:2–14).

The phrase *house of sacrifice* occurs only here in the Old Testament. All sacrifices to the Lord were to be made here, at the temple. Sacrifices reaffirmed the relationship between God and worshippers (example: Leviticus 16). And since the worshippers often ate the sacrificed animal together, the meal deepened the relationships among the people as well. Sacrifice could mark an apology for unintentional sins (chapters 4–5) or express gratitude for blessings received (7:11–15).

Later, for returned exiles, it was important to reinstate the priests in the rebuilt temple so that sacrifices could once again be offered (Ezra 6:14–18). Emphasizing the sacrifices offered in the temple assured the returned exiles that the Lord heard them. The temple was important, yes, but the Lord was not dependent on the people having a temple in their midst for *Him* to be present with them (compare Acts 17:24).

B. God’s Attention (vv. 13–16)

13. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people.

God named some punishments for apostasy. Drought is caused by extended periods without *rain*. At the opposite end of this spectrum, we might expect to find flooding, but *locusts* can also represent the devastation of very wet conditions. A subset of grasshoppers, these insects experience a drastic change when heavy rains fall. Instead of being solitary creatures of little impact in their “grasshopper phase,” the locusts enter a “gregarious phase,” finding each other and swarming crops in groups as large as tens of *billions* of the flying insects. They can destroy thousands of square miles of farmland, bringing famine in their wake (see lesson 9). *Pestilence* refers to a variety of infectious diseases that can ravage a population; the bubonic plague is one example.

We should note that hardships can and do occur without being punishment from God. For instance, several barren women named in the Bible (and countless nameless others) experienced their childlessness as a grave lack but with no indication that God was punishing them (examples: Genesis 16:1–2; 21:1–7; 1 Samuel 1:5–8, 20). When Jesus was speaking to a great crowd, He declared that neither the Galilaeans whom Pilate had killed nor the 18 people killed by the tower in Siloam were more or less guilty than all the people of the crowd (Luke 13:1–5a). We also do well to be wary of those who declare such and such a disaster to be what “those people” had coming to them. Instead, we all ought to heed Jesus’ warning and repent of our own sins (13:5b).

14a. If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways.

Using the phrase *my people* twice in quick succession (see 2 Chronicles 7:13, above) emphasizes the desired close relationship between Israel and the Lord. *Which are called by my name* adds weight to what it means to be God’s people. Names in the ancient Near East carried not only the importance we give them today but also a sense of the power of a person or the

honor due that person. To call the nation of Israel by God's own name was to assert that "I Am" was their protector and Lord (Exodus 3:14).

The actions listed are necessary for the people to be renewed as those called by God's own name. First, humility allows us to acknowledge when we have wronged God and one another. Its opposite, pride, "goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). Second, prayer can be specifically of repentance, but its true importance is in renewing the relationship with the Lord. It is one way to *seek* God's *face*, which in turn is a way to speak of knowing God's character. Interestingly, all of this comes (at least grammatically) *before* turning from *wicked ways* (contrast Isaiah 55:7). Too much can be made of this order of events, but as written it suggests that the process of owning one's sins, seeking to repair the relationship with God, and learning more of who God is prepares the person to repent fully of evil.

14b. Then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Only God can replace "the stony heart" with "an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). Everything we do in turning toward Him is simply what opens the door to our renewal. Once again God hears before acting—and that *from heaven*! Although the temple was later razed, seemingly indicating that God dwelt far from His people, in fact He still listened and heard from "the heavens of heavens" (Psalm 68:33; contrast Lamentations 3:44). God never literally resided in the temple. Solomon acknowledged as much when he dedicated the temple (2 Chronicles 6:18). The phrasing also draws on the image of God as king, since God's throne is in Heaven (18:18). Although the Chronicler's audience no longer had a king in the land, their true king had always been sovereign over their nation and their world.

God's response would be forgiveness of *sin* and healing for the *land*. Old Testament writings overtly acknowledge that the people's way of living affected not only themselves but also the land in which they lived (example: Deuteronomy 11:12–15; compare Romans 8:19–22). In this case, we assume that God would reverse the effects of disease, famine, and drought in order to *heal* both people and nonhuman creation.

15. Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.

The temple was always meant to be a "house of prayer" (Isaiah 56:7; Mark 11:15–17). For the postexilic returnees who were to rebuild the temple in the days of Ezra (see Lesson Context; 2 Chronicles 7:12, above), it would be especially reassuring that God had promised His attention.

16. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

The temple's sanctification did not come about by the human rituals of prayer and sacrifice but by God's own divine action. By choosing to meet Israel at the temple, God made it holy. And while God would not literally live in *this house* (Isaiah 66:1), allowing the temple to be associated with His *name* meant He was tying His reputation to the temple and to His people who worshipped there (see 2 Chronicles 7:14a, above). Adding that God's *heart* would be in the temple speaks both to the care and the attention that God would give His people.

We can think of this in the parallel way that Christians are God's chosen temple (1 Corinthians 3:16–17). Our mode of conduct reflects on our holy God who has chosen us as His people and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:14).

II. On Turning Away (2 Chronicles 7:17–22)

A. David's Blessing (vv. 17–18)

17. And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments.

Walk is a common biblical metaphor for a way of life (examples: Deuteronomy 5:33; Proverbs 2:13; Zechariah 3:7). *David thy father* was an apt role model for his heir Solomon. When David sinned, he humbled himself, prayed, sought God's face, and turned from his sinful ways (examples: 2 Samuel 12:13; 24:10, 14–17; Psalm 38; see 2 Chronicles 7:14a, above). For this reason, we see over and over again that God did not hold David's sins against him, even when the man experienced the effects of his failings (examples: 2 Samuel 13:21, 32–33; 24:15–16, 24b–25).

The phrase *my statutes and my judgments*, virtual synonyms (see 2 Chronicles 7:19, below), uses the terminology of Deuteronomy. First and 2 Kings constantly refer to Deuteronomy, and the Chronicler carried over that language here. The phrase in combination with being *all that* God *commanded* could be understood narrowly as laws to be obeyed. More likely, however, the entire Law of Moses—Genesis through Deuteronomy—was in mind, as a requirement for how to live a life pleasing to the Lord (see 2 Kings 22:8–13).

18. Then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel.

The promise to maintain David's family on *the throne* of Israel was paradoxically both conditional and unconditional (see 2 Samuel 7). It was unconditional in the sense that God would preserve the dynasty even when its rulers practiced idolatry and unjust behaviors. However, Solomon's own sins resulted in 10 of the 12 tribes being taken from his son Rehoboam (1 Kings 11:9–11; 12:1–24). And when Judah fell to Babylon in 586 BC, the monarchy was destroyed.

The Chronicler was keenly aware that the Davidic monarchy had fallen, and as he wrote Chronicles, there was no reason (from an earthly point of view) to believe the royal line would be restored. The writer correctly attributed the failure of the line to the kings' faithlessness. The land and people could be restored, but it would be many centuries before a new kind of king from David's line would take up the crown (John 18:33–37). How God chose to keep this promise to David was greater than anyone in the Chronicler's day could anticipate: Jesus would live as a man and be proclaimed in His rightful place as king over the entire world (12:12–16; Revelation 17:14).

B. People's Punishment (vv. 19–22)

19–20a. But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them.

Verse 19 shifts the addressee from Solomon himself to the people as a whole (the Hebrew word for *ye* is plural in verse 19, but singular in verses 17–18). While all sin severs the relationship

between Israel and God, the root of many sins is idolatry—allowing some non-god to take God’s place. False gods’ ways are never God’s ways, and in fact these imaginary gods often demand or condone wickedness (we think of human sacrifice as an extreme example). Worshipping any God but the Lord violates the first two commandments (Exodus 20:2–6) and ensures that a people will be led further to *forsake* God’s *statutes* and *commandments*.

The result of Judah’s continued idolatry was exile (2 Chronicles 36:15–20). There is a certain logic to this: if people desire to put something else in God’s place, they may find that God allows them to have what they desire, knowing it is not what is really needed. Plucking Israel *up by the roots out of God’s land* might bring to mind a gardener removing weeds or unfruitful plants (see Luke 13:6–9). The sins of Israel polluted the land, so God took the people away to allow healing to begin (example: 2 Chronicles 36:21).

20b. And this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight.

While people can be *cast out* into exile, surely God’s *house* could not. This is best understood as regarding the destruction of the temple that occurred in 586 BC alongside the final deportation of exiles into Babylon. The razing of the temple signified God’s presence leaving (compare Ezekiel 10:18–19; contrast 43:1–5).

20c–21. And will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations. And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house?

One consequence of exile would be finding that God’s people had become *a proverb and a byword*. Israel’s exile would serve as an example of how God disciplines sinful people. Even worse, their destruction would be so widely known that it would become a kind of shorthand to describe horrible misfortune. Foreigners rather surprisingly would assess correctly that *the Lord* had not been powerless to protect His people but instead had *done thus unto this land, and unto this house*.

22. And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

Answering *why* God had done this would be an opportunity for Israelites to rehearse their history and assert the fact of God’s holiness amid their own checkered past of serving Him.

This response emphasizes Israel’s ingratitude for their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 12:31–42; contrast 16:1–2). Israel’s core identity came from the Lord who chose them and liberated them from Egyptian bondage (12:14–20). Worshipping and serving *other gods* was a rejection of what God had done (example: 32:2–8). We do well to remember that the Lord does not do moral *evil* (James 1:13–14; 1 John 1:5). But the exiles experienced the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and later living in Babylon as *physical* evil (compare Joshua 23:15; 2 Samuel 24:16). Outsiders who saw what happened in Israel would explain it as evil from the Lord.

Conclusion

A. God’s Forgiveness

While sin has consequences, often dire, neither sin nor its consequences can utter the final word about the relationship between chosen people and the choosing God. Even when sin seems to have ruined God’s plans entirely—as with the apostasy of the Davidic line—we do well to remember that God’s promises and plans move forward. The loss of David’s kingdom led to the greatest gift of all: salvation through Jesus’ blood, bringing us out of our exile in sin and into God’s kingdom.

We cannot anticipate how God will choose to work through our “exilic” experiences (Romans 8:28). Still, when asking for God’s mercy, we must remember our own responsibility: to humble ourselves, to offer honest prayer, and to seek God’s face as we turn from evil. He honors our repentance when we honor Him.

B. Prayer

O God who hears and sees, to You we turn when our sins consume us. Please forgive and heal us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Repent to experience forgiveness and healing.¹

¹ Andrew Wood et al., [“God Promises to Hear and Forgive,”](#) in *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, 2022–2023*, ed. Jane Ann Kenney, Ronald L. Nickelson, and Taylor Z. Stamps, vol. 29, *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary* (Colorado Springs, CO: Standard Publishing, 2022–2023), 153–159.