

II Chronicles 7 v14 God's invitation to His people

Introduction

Many years ago when fountain pens and ink were used by children in school and desks were still issued with ink wells, the following incident took place in a classroom. It began with a question out of the blue from a child to the teacher: 'Is God everywhere?' asked the child. 'Yes dear' said the unsuspecting teacher keen to move on to the work in hand. 'Is he in my inkwell, then?' A significant pause occurred as the teacher sensed the conversation might be heading in an unprofitable direction. A less than convincing 'yes dear' was repeated by the teacher. The child then quickly blocked off the top of the inkwell and exclaimed triumphantly: 'Got him then!' What is your understanding of God –who He is and what He is like? It is easy to smile at this child's naivety, but how big is your view of God and mine? Do we try and fit God into a metaphorical 'box' of our own creation. Do we try and limit Him to work in ways that we have already determined? In effect simply using prayer as a means to get Him to confirm what we have already decided is going to take place already? Our vision of who God is will have a significant impact on how we pray and the passion with which we pray for Him to work. Solomon had at this time grasped something of who God is and this motivated his passion to pray for his nation. II Chronicles 6:18 states: ¹⁸ *'But will God really dwell on earth with humans? **The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain You.** How much less this temple that I have built! ¹⁹ Yet, Lord my God, give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in Your presence. Do you have a glimpse of this awesome God who reigns? Do you stand in awe of this majestic King who reigns over the universe? Do you bow with a sense of awe and wonder at the prospect of the return of the Lord of Lords who will come to reign for eternity? We serve an incredible being One who is too marvellous for human words to describe; too pure to tolerate iniquity; too holy to look upon sin, but too gracious to treat us as we deserve because of our sins. Instead showering His great love upon us in Jesus whose once-for-all-time sufficient sacrifice for sin took in full the punishment for our sins, so that instead of condemnation we might be welcomed into God's family. This is our God! Do you know Him? Do you love Him? Do you serve Him?*

II Chronicles 6-7, Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple, are central to the theology of the books of Chronicles and at the heart of the Jewish faith concerning the covenant between the children of Abraham and Yahweh, who made that agreement with their forefather Abraham roughly four thousand years ago. It is a powerful restatement of where these people and their nation stood in relation to the promises of the covenant with their Sovereign Lord. Solomon will plead the promises of God. He is determined to ask the Lord to honour His own name through deliverance of His people from a series of unwelcome situations. The culmination of this encounter with the Lord will come in II Chronicles 7:12-14: *the Lord appeared to him at night and said: 'I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for **Myself** as a temple for sacrifices.¹³ 'When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among **My people**, ¹⁴ 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. What a glorious promise! What an incredible invitation! What a solemn responsibility! God here invites His people on earth to participate in His glorious work through intercessory prayer. We are not called to say prayers, instead to pray from the heart crying out: 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. However, are we eligible to use this text as a basis for our prayers?*

1. Is this conditional promise applicable to Christians? (II Chronicles 6:32-33)

There have been Bible commentators and writers who have stated that these promises related to the land in the Old Testament only were applicable to Old Testament Israel. They say we cannot use these verses as the basis for our prayers in the New Testament era, in the post-Pentecost age when the Church of Jesus Christ began roughly 2,000 years ago. These words here in II Chronicles 6-7 are the inspired Word of God. Is there any encouragement in these verses to utilise these verses to motivate us in intercessory prayer? It is inevitable that the main focus will be on the Jewish people of Solomon's day. This day of dedication of the Temple complex was one of the greatest in Israel's short history. It would have been understandable had the entire day been a focus on the Jews and their relationship with the Lord. However, the Holy Spirit inspired Solomon to make reference to people like us – Gentiles – and our privilege or responsibility to seek the Lord in prayer. In II Chronicles 6:32-33 there are these words recorded: ³² 'As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of **Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm** – when they come and pray towards this temple, ³³ then hear from heaven, Your dwelling-place. **Do whatever the foreigner asks of You, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your own people Israel, and may know that this house that I have built bears Your Name** (II Chronicles 6:32-33). This is our God also; not instead of the Jews, but together we come in the name of Jesus, God's Son our Saviour. Do you take the opportunity to come before God in prayer? Hebrews 4:14-16 encourages us to come as we are before the Lord, not because we are special or good enough, but because we come in the name of the One who is perfect and who has invited us to come before Him. *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.* ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet He did not sin.* ¹⁶ **Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.** Has there been a time when you prayed and committed your life to Jesus? Do you need to do that today? The Lord invites us to take that step of faith if you have never done so before. As a Christian have you held back from reaching out in earnest prayer because you were holding back control of part of your life from Him? The old hymn says: 'All to Jesus I surrender... I surrender all, I surrender all; all to Thee my blessed Saviour, I surrender all'. Solomon has made plain that he believed under divine inspiration that all of us can truly seek God's face and plead His promises for Him to work again in our land.

2. The Prayer of Solomon (II Chronicles 6:12-42)

Let us look briefly at the prayer of Solomon to identify some of its features: (a) **The nature of his prayer** (II Chronicles 6:12-13) Notice: (i) **His posture** (6:12-13) He stood with his hands held out open and empty. The king the people normally saw as distinct from them was now identified with them as a suppliant in prayer. He was one of them, not someone who had everything he needed. At this time in his life Solomon had a sense of dependency on God. He could have this attitude because some time before in his life when God told him that he could have anything he wanted his choice of gifts from God was absolutely spot on. II Chronicles 1:7-10 recounts a dream the King had of God asking him to request anyone thing and it would be granted. What a temptation that might have been! What did Solomon ask for? II Chronicles 1:7-12a states: ⁷ *That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, 'Ask for whatever you want Me to give you.'* ⁸ *Solomon answered God, 'You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place.'* ⁹ *Now, Lord God, let Your promise to my father*

David be confirmed, for You have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. ¹⁰Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?¹¹ God said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your heart’s desire and you have not asked for wealth, possessions or honour, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, ¹²**therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you.** If tonight you were in that position and God spoke to you with a similar offer –what response would you give to Him? This is not a silly question, because God knows what is really important to us. We will not pray with a passion for God to work if our every waking thought is focussed on getting something else. Jesus challenged His disciples with these words in Matthew 6:20-21: *But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.* ²¹**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** What is your heart most set on this morning? This is an incredibly difficult question to ask –though I don’t apologise for doing so. It is all about priorities. Are your eyes fixed on Jesus? One of the leaders in the mass evangelism movement in North America in the middle of the twentieth century was a young man from Canada, Charles Templeton, born in 1915. He was generally acknowledged to be the most versatile of the new young evangelists. Templeton soon rose to prominence, even surpassing another dynamic young preacher, Billy Graham. In 1946, he was listed among those best used of God by the National Association of Evangelicals.

As the pastor of the rapidly growing Avenue Road Church in Toronto, which he had started with only his family and a few friends, Templeton also became one of three vice-presidents of the newly-formed Youth For Christ International organization in 1945. He then nominated his good friend, Billy Graham, to be field evangelist for the new ministry. Templeton, Graham, and a few others regularly spoke to thousands, winning many to Christ both in America and in Europe. Yet in the period 1947-48 Templeton warned Graham that it was ‘intellectual suicide’ to *not* question the Bible and to go on preaching God’s Word as authoritative. [www.answersingenesis.org website] The two men had various conversations and time in prayer. One came more clearly to the conviction of the need to trust God completely and declare the simple truth: ‘The Bible says...’ and the other ultimately died in total apostasy almost unknown and forgotten. Solomon knew whom to trust and stretched out his hand open to the God he had come to love and trust –do you love Him? Have you placed your faith and trust in Him? This is the most important decision you will ever take in your life. (ii) **His position** (6:12-13) *before the altar of the Lord ...* Solomon had allowed the Priests and Levites to carry out their appointed duties (II Chronicles 5:2-13a) and following their consecrated service –II Chronicles 5:13b-14 records: *Then the temple of the Lord was filled with the cloud,* ¹⁴*and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.* Each in turn had done what God had called them to do. Each needed the benefits of the blood shed on the altar to cover their sins. We today no longer need these kinds of sacrifices because of Jesus’ once-for-all time perfect sacrifice as the substitute for sinners. Hebrews 9:12-14 declares: *He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, so obtaining eternal redemption.* ¹³*The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.* ¹⁴*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!* (iii) **His nation** (6:12-13, 21) *in front of the whole assembly of Israel... Hear the supplications of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling-place; and when you hear, forgive.* We pray for ourselves, our families and our church family – yet here is an example of a man who earnestly prayed for his fellow citizens. Will you pray for your nation? Will you pray for the people of Scotland or UK to turn back to God? Isaiah 59:15-16 provided a most solemn challenge to the Old Testament people of God that was not taken up: In II Chronicles 7:14 we read: *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.* But what happened –Isaiah 59:15-16: *Truth is nowhere*

to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice.

¹⁶ **He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intercede;** so His own arm achieved salvation for Him, and His own righteousness sustained Him. Can God count on you? Can He count on me to intercede for our nation?

(b) **The Purpose of His Prayer** (6:14-21) (i) **The One addressed in prayer** (6:14-15) ¹⁴ He said: 'Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven or on earth – You who keep your covenant of love with Your servants who continue wholeheartedly in Your way. ¹⁵ You have kept Your promise to Your servant David my father; with Your mouth You have promised and with Your hand You have fulfilled it – as it is today. Do we have this confidence in God as he did that day? It is the basis of successful praying that we believe in the One to whom we bring our petitions. We can take prayer for granted or even our relationship with God, but to grasp the amazing honour that is ours in coming directly into the presence of the King of Kings is an amazing privilege. To keep before us what is truly the significance of prayer will keep us active in it when we are tempted to drift in our prayer life and neglect to safeguard its place in our daily routine. (ii) **The past relationship with God** (6:14-17) ¹⁷ And now, Lord, the God of Israel, let Your word that You promised Your servant David come true. On the basis of Your past promises I come with a sense of expectancy concerning what You will do in the present and into the future. God is unchanging. Psalm 90:1-2: *Lord, You have been our dwelling-place throughout all generations.² Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God.* Hebrews 13:8 reminds us: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today for ever.* Our time on earth is but a moment in the context of eternity, but we come to One who knows the end from the beginning before the world began. Therefore we come with confidence to Him. (iii) **The plea to God** (6:18-21) In Jesus' name we have free access to come to God in prayer (see Hebrews 4:16); ancient Israelites had to come through a human priest. (iv) **The special occasions when people will pray** (6:22-40) taking oaths in legal matters (6:22-23); after a defeat in war (6:24-25); in a time of drought (6:26-27); when natural disasters strike (6:28-31); when the country is going to war (6:33-34); when experiencing captivity and exile from the promised Land (6:36-40); each of these are seen as major collective crises where particular divine intervention is required. (v) **His concluding plea to God** (6:41-42) God will You glorify Your name, in accordance with what You have promised, which by definition must be for the collective good of Your people also. In effect, Lord align our heart's desires to seek that which is according to Your will – now that is powerful praying – how did God respond to that powerful plea?

3. **The Response from God** (II Chronicles 7)

(a) **God's visible response by fire** (II Chronicles 7:1-10) *When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.² The priests could not enter the temple of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled it.³ When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshipped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, 'He is good; His love endures for ever.'⁴ Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord.⁵ And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God.⁶ The priests took up their positions, as did the Levites with the Lord's musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the Lord and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, 'His love endures for ever.'⁷ Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.⁷ Solomon consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the Lord, and there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat portions.⁸ So Solomon observed the festival at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him – a*

vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. ⁹ On the eighth day they held an assembly, for they had celebrated the dedication of the altar for seven days and the festival for seven days more. ¹⁰ On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people to their homes, joyful and glad in heart for the good things the Lord had done for David and Solomon and for His people Israel. This was neither the first nor the last time when God manifested Himself to Israel with this particular visible sign. After the appointment of Aaron and those with him to their priestly and serving roles, and all the appropriate ceremonies and sacrifices had taken place, Leviticus 9:23-24 states: *Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.* ²⁴ **Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down.** Our God reigns! Another example of the same phenomena came in the time of David's rule after he had sinned by ordering a census of the armed forces. On the very place where God had directed David to purchase the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and offer a sacrifice as an atonement for his sin- and collectively that of the nation –something carried out in full. I Chronicles 21:26 records: *David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He called on the Lord, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering.* What is especially significant is that a generation later on that very spot Solomon stood praying for the nation and pleading with God: *When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple...* (II Chronicles 7:1). This was holy ground, because God was in that place. God had been exalted and His people - and visibly their king –had humbled themselves before Him, and seen their prayers answered. Does it matter enough to us to see God answer our prayers for His glory and consequently our good? Covenant blessings are conditional on covenant obedience by God's people Jew or Gentile in every generation.

(b) **God's answer to His praying people** (II Chronicles 7:11-18) ¹¹ *When Solomon had finished the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the Lord and in his own palace,* ¹² *the Lord appeared to him at night and said: 'I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.* ¹³ *'When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among My people,* ¹⁴ *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.* ¹⁵ *Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.* ¹⁶ *I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that My Name may be there for ever. My eyes and My heart will always be there.* ¹⁷ *'As for you, if you walk before Me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe My decrees and laws,* ¹⁸ *I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, "You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel."* Notice the key revelation from God was not dramatic or in public, but when Solomon was in bed one night **thirteen years later** (See I Kings 6:38-7:1, 9:10). Over the years in reading the Bible I have often failed to spot the lengthy time gaps between prayers for God to work by various people and the time it took to receive the answer to their prayers. How we need patience to wait God's timing on so many things, in so many situations in our lives. The length of time is not determined necessarily by the earnestness of our prayers or the holiness of our lives, though both are important aspects of Christian discipleship. God works on a much longer timescale than we do –failure to grasp this can cause us to become discouraged because of a lack of a visible response to the Gospel when we reach out to people, but when we do grasp it we can put into perspective current blessings and challenges. God is not like a heavenly version of Santa Claus who delivers his gifts because it is that date on the calendar again. *If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves-* what does that mean in practice here? it requires a changed attitude with respect to oneself, a renunciation of putting self on the throne where God alone should be honoured and adored. This is one of the hardest things you and I can ever do. Humility is despised in our

culture and taken advantage of –yet it was a characteristic of Moses [Numbers 12:3: *Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth*], who led a demoralised bunch of slaves and transformed them into a nation on the verge of inheriting a land God had promised to them. It was a characteristic of our Lord Himself that the apostle Paul highlights in that hymn of praise in Philippians 2:8: *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death –even death on a cross!* We sing: ‘Its all about You Jesus...When the music fades All is stripped away And I simply come Longing just to bring Something that's of worth That will bless Your heart I'll bring You more than a song For a song in itself Is not what You have required You search much deeper within Through the way things appear You're looking into my heart I'm coming back to the heart of worship And it's all about You, It's all about You, Jesus I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it When it's all about You, It's all about You, Jesus –Michael W Smith [CMP1016] This is so easy to say but so hard to practise. Why? because there are key moments in our lives when we so desperately want a particular outcome to our prayers that we cannot conceive of an acceptable alternative outcome. Do you /do I need the help of the Holy Spirit to come to this place in our lives? Undoubtedly on some occasions more than others –what about today? This is not something we can do in our own strength –only in His! If there have not been any times in your life when you have not seriously struggled with either accepting God’s will or finding it as a Christian then you are an exceptional person, as it is the norm. It was for Jesus in the wilderness before He started His earthly ministry and endured the temptations of the evil one and as His ministry drew to its climax on the cross in Gethsemane and probably on a number of occasions in between. Wrestling with injustice, wrestling with tough choices for ourselves or other people is part of our human experience. Anyone who thinks following Jesus means your problems are over has been seriously misled. What He promises is to stand with us in the storms of life and in humble dependence on Him be overcomers in Jesus’ name. Humility, that is a conscious heartfelt desire to put God and His will first in our lives, in whatever circumstances, is the position with which we come to the other requirements from God in this verse. **and pray...** this is the opposite of self assertion, acknowledging God’s right to make decisions and ‘judge’ our life choices. The word in Hebrew here rendered *pray* is related to a verb meaning ‘judge’ in Hebrew. **and seek My face** this is a single-minded determination to find out as best we can what the Lord wants us to do with our lives, sometimes in more general terms and on other occasions in very specific terms. **and turn from their wicked ways..** this points to a conscious act of will; after discerning what God would have us do, the decision is made to follow that course of action, not just for a day but for the rest of our days, as far as we are able with His help. This is what the human author of these words was inspired by God to write for our instruction and walk with God. The theory of being a Christian is the easy bit. The hard bit is living it in real situations with flesh and blood human beings in daily life.

(c) **God’s warning to His people** (II Chronicles 7:19-22) ¹⁹ *‘But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰ then I will uproot Israel from My land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple which I have consecrated for My Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. ²¹ This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, “Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this temple?” ²² People will answer, “Because they have forsaken the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshipping and serving them – that is why He brought all this disaster on them.”’* Covenant blessings in Abraham, or New Covenant in Christ are two-sided God’s part and ours; both parties must be faithful in fulfilling their obligations for blessing to follow. God has not changed. He will keep His promises. *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain* (I Corinthians 15:58).

