

If My People

May 16, 2021

Today's sermon is the second in a series about misunderstood or misapplied Bible passages. These are Bible passages which are taken out of their context and given meanings they were not meant to have. It is important for Christians to know how to read the Bible properly. We must learn to see what it says as well as what it does not say.

Let me set the context for today's focus passage. The book of Exodus opens with the Israelites enslaved in Egypt. Exodus records how God rescued them and moved them towards the land of Canaan. On the way, He promised to prosper them. This prosperity is spelled out in detail in Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 (NIV) If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock--the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.

You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity--in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground--in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you.

The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.

In summary, God was going to make Israel the richest, most prosperous, most powerful nation on earth.

But this promised prosperity depended on the Israelites' obedience to God. If they were disobedient things would be very different. And God told them up front what the specific consequences would be. We pick up in the same chapter at verse 15.

Deuteronomy 28:15-24 (NIV) However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. The LORD will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. The LORD will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The LORD will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed. The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth.

It goes on like that for another 43 verses. God used more words to describe his promised punishment than he did his promised blessings. And the contrast is stark. There would be such a contrast that no one would miss the point. When such disastrous events began occurring, it was time to go to God and find out what sins the nation was guilty of.

But even in the curses there was the promise of mercy and grace from God. We hear that in the following verses.

Deuteronomy 30:1-5 (NIV) When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

God is rich in mercy, rich in grace. **Mercy and grace are a part of God's character.** God never changes. God has not changed over time. He has not become less merciful in our day than he was in their day. Those God loves he pursues with mercy and grace. **No matter what sins you are guilty of, you are not beyond the mercy and grace of God.** Whatever you have done, come to him today, humbly, confessing your sin. Forgiveness is available through Jesus.

Now, on to today's misapplied passage. In 2 Chronicles 6 & 7 we read an account of Solomon dedicating the first temple of Yahweh. In chapter 6 he prayed a prayer of dedication. Basically,

he requested that when God punishes that nation as promised for disobedience, that when they repent of their sin, that God heal them and restore them like he promised to do in Deuteronomy 30. Let's read a bit of his prayer.

2 Chronicles 6:24-27 (NIV) "When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you and when they turn back and confess your name, praying and making supplication before you in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to them and their fathers.

"When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.

These are just two of the subjects Solomon mentions in his prayer. He paints a picture of a nation that has become sick with sin. Then they wake up to their sinfulness, turn to Yahweh in repentance, and he heals them. That is what Solomon prayed for.

And guess what? God gave a specific answer to that prayer. We pick up in chapter 7, verse 11.

2 Chronicles 7:11-14 (NIV) 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, 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. "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, 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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Let's look at the specifics of this word from God.

God spoke about a specific group of people, the Israelites.

God spoke about a specific geographic place, the land of Canaan.

God spoke about a return to a specific previous condition, material prosperity.

Let's read that promise again. I'll read just the last part, the part often quoted by people today.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV) ... 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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

God made this specific promise to the Israelites about their land, Israel, promising to restore their material prosperity. That is what the promise is.

This is not a promise from God to Christians about whatever country they live in. God has not made this a promise to us about America.

It is a misapplication of this passage to make it a promise to a different people and a different country.

God has made better promises to us.

God only promised the Israelites a prosperous life on earth. He did not promise anything for after that. They did not believe in an afterlife. They did not believe in eternal life in heaven after death. All God promised them was a prosperous life for the few years they lived on earth.

While we have not been promised material prosperity for our limited time on earth, we have been promised eternal life with Jesus.

That is better than any life you can imagine on earth even if you lived 200 years.

Come to God today, believing that Jesus died for your sins and you too will inherit eternal life, a new, forever body, and glory. All this will be yours when he returns to earth.

Today, receive Jesus as your savior and turn your life over to him as your Lord, and these better promises God made will extend to you as well.