

## 2 Chronicles 7: 12-16: (ESV) – National Day of Prayer



**Main point:** Seek God’s presence, forgiveness, and direction.

**Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.**

**Background:** This week is the National Day of Prayer.

*Question: I wonder how you think a national day of prayer is different than simply a day of prayer?*

- The focus is on us *as a nation*, as a united people, seeking God. We ask together: How does God want to lead us right now?

*[optional background:]* The National Day of Prayer is celebrated by Americans of many religions, including Christian Protestants and Catholics, as well as Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, and Jews. Held in the spring, the National Day of Prayer shares common roots with Thanksgiving in the fall. Our earliest presidents, including George Washington and John Adams, called for national days of prayer from 1775 until 1799. President Harry S. Truman established the National Day of Prayer in 1952.<sup>1</sup>

*Background to the Old Testament passage we’re using today:* This section tells part of the history of the Jewish people. This passage describes the time when King Solomon, who was King David’s son, had just finished constructing the temple, the building where the ark of the covenant would live. The ark of the covenant symbolized God’s commitment to and presence with the nation of Israel.

At the dedication of the new temple, Solomon prays that God would be with him and with God’s people, that God would hear their prayers, that God would forgive them when they need forgiveness. When the celebration is over (2 Chronicles 7:10f), “<sup>10</sup> [Solomon sends] the people away to their homes, joyful and glad of heart for the goodness that the Lord had shown to David and to Solomon *and to Israel his people.*”

### **Focus of the study:**

<sup>12</sup> Then the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night and said to Solomon: “I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. <sup>13</sup> When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. <sup>16</sup> For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time.”

### **Questions:**

1. *After the temple is built and dedicated and the people have gone home, the Lord speaks to King Solomon. At what time of day does God speak to Solomon?*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Day\\_of\\_Prayer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Day_of_Prayer)

- a. v. 12: in the night – *I wonder why that detail is included? If it's night, where is Solomon? What kind of conversation might happen at night? Public or private? Grand or quiet?*
  - b. Solomon is probably by himself, alone, in the quiet after the party. God speaks intimately and directly to him, as the leader and representative of the people.
2. *What does the Lord say to Solomon?*
  - a. v. 12: "I have heard your prayer." Earlier, Solomon prayed that God would be with him and with God's people, that God would hear their prayers, that God would forgive them when they needed forgiveness. *And what is God's answer?* "I have heard you! And I choose to be with you."
3. *In verse 13, what are the three things that God says may happen to the nation over time?*
  - a. No rain
  - b. Locusts devour the land
  - c. Pestilence
4. *How do those things sound?? (Yikes!) What would happen to a country where there's no rain, where locusts eat all the crops (in the Bible, "locusts" also indicates armies that could overrun a nation), where disease is unchecked? How would it feel to the nation?*
  - a. Disaster! Lost jobs, famine, illness, death, destruction
  - b. It would feel hopeless: fear, no safety, unsure future
5. *But those bad things aren't the end of the nation, are they? God tells Solomon what they, as a people, need to do when bad things happen. In verse 14, what are the IFs that God lays out? "IF my people..." do what?*
  - a. Humble themselves
  - b. Pray
  - c. Seek my face
  - d. Turn from their wicked ways
6. *What does God say will result when the people do these things?*
  - a. v. 14: God will hear from heaven
  - b. v. 14: God will forgive their sin
  - c. v. 14: God will heal their land
  - d. v. 15: God's eyes will be open and ears attentive to their prayers
  - e. v. 16: God's eyes and heart will be with them for all time
7. *Wow! How do those results sound to you? If our nation had the promises of [repeat 6a-e above] how would you feel?*
8. *So what the people do as a nation matters. Let's look at each instruction, each "IF," in verse 14 in turn.*
  - a. *"Humble themselves": What do you think it means to humble yourself? What does it mean for a nation to be humble?*
    - i. Not proud; not looking down on others; considering others' needs and interests before your own
  - b. *"Pray": Why do we pray? What does it mean for a nation to pray?*
    - i. Not full of self-wisdom or self-sufficiency; intentionally seeking wisdom and provision from God
  - c. *"Seek my face": What does it mean for a person to seek God's face? What does it mean for a nation to seek God's face?*
    - i. Looking for God's direction in all ways, in all decisions; seeing things with God's eyes; putting God's will above our own

- d. *“Turn from their wicked ways”*: What does it mean for a person to turn away from wickedness? What does it mean for a nation to turn away from wickedness?
    - i. Admitting fault – and changing, going the other way, not continuing in wickedness; seeking justice
  9. *On the National Day of Prayer, these instructions seem solid and helpful*:
    - a. Pray that our nation would be humble, not full of pride and self-wisdom.
    - b. Pray that our nation would consider not only our needs but the needs of others. (Who do we as a nation particularly need to take care of today?)
    - c. Pray that our nation would ask God for direction and for God’s will to be done.
    - d. Pray that our nation would admit our mistakes and seek healing for those mistakes.
  10. *And what is God’s promise to his people if we do these things?*
    - a. [reread v. 14-15:] ...Then I, God, will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. <sup>15</sup> Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made *in this place*.
  11. *I wonder why God says “in this place” twice (v. 12 and 15)? What place is God talking about? Is God being general or specific?*
    - a. God’s presence and promises are specific. Solomon asked for God’s provision and protection for his people, the nation of Israel, where they were living *at that time and place*. We can and should pray the same!
    - b. The promise is this: IF we seek God with humility and turn from selfishness and pride, God will listen and respond *in this place*, in this nation.
    - c. We don’t necessarily know what the answer or direction will look like – but we trust in God’s goodness *for us, right now, here*.
  12. *Verse 16: for how long does God promise his presence? How steadfast is God’s presence when we humbly seek him?*
    - a. “forever ... for all time.” Amen!
- Ask for prayer requests, especially for our nation. If helpful, follow the categories of:
    - a. humility
    - b. seeking God’s will
    - c. repentance
  - Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
  - End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

## 2 Chronicles 7: 12-16

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