

## RULING BY PRAYER

(a teaching by Derek Prince, compiled by Albert Chipps)

### PRAYING ACCORDING TO GODS WORD

I'm going to open up for you some of the limitless possibilities of believing prayer. To begin with, let me remind you of three main truths:

1. God has made us a kingdom of priests.

As such, our responsibility is to rule by prayer. The Bible reveals that this world is not really ruled by kings and presidents and governors and dictators. They only *seem* to rule. The people who *really* rule the world are *those who know how to pray*.

2. To be effective, our prayers must be both directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Without the help of the Holy Spirit we cannot pray effectively.

3. The Spirit of God and the Word of God *always work together*.

The power of the Holy Spirit only works through our prayers in so far as they are in line with the Word of God, that is, the Bible. This means that to pray effectively we must know what the Bible says. For an example I'm going to go to one of Elijah. This is what the Bible says about Elijah in the first epistle of James chapter 5 verses 17–18, ***"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. . . (That's emphasized right at the beginning. Elijah was not a different kind of person. He had the same nature, the same problems, the same weaknesses we do) "...and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit."*** (NASB) There was a man with a nature like ours, and yet for three and a half years Elijah controlled the rainfall over the land of Israel. If there's one thing that normally is not under the control of man, it's rainfall. Scripture indicates again and again that God keeps the rainfall under *His* sovereign control. But at this point in the history of Israel, Elijah took over the control of the rainfall for three and a half years! What was his secret? His secret was that he *knew* and *applied* the truths of God's Word. His prayer had that amount of power and effectiveness because in his prayer he was applying the truths of God's Word.

Let's look briefly at the truths of God's Word on which Elijah's prayer was based. In the book of Deuteronomy chapter 11 verses 16–17, before Israel ever entered the land of their inheritance, Moses warned them that they were not to turn aside after other gods and become idolatrous. And he warned them that if they did God would shut up the heavens and there would be no rain. Here is what Moses actually said to them before they actually entered the land, ***"Beware, lest your hearts be deceived and you turn away and serve other gods and worship them. "Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you."*** (NASB) Notice the warning. If you turn aside after other gods, God will shut up the heavens and there will be no rain. That's just what Israel had done. They had turned aside after other gods and so on the authority of God's Word, Elijah shut the heavens so that there was no more rain. But then when Israel turned *back* to God there was another promise in the Word of God that Elijah was able to claim. This was something that was said by Solomon at the dedication of his temple. In 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 35–36, Solomon says this, ***"When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain, because they [that's Israel] have sinned against Thee, and they pray toward this place and confess Thy name and turn from their sin when Thou didst afflict them, then hear Thou in heaven and forgive the sin of Thy servants and of Thy people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Thy land, which Thou has given Thy people for an inheritance."*** (NASB) So there's the opposite side, that's God's mercy when His people turn and repent. His Word declares that He will then send rain again. So when there was evidence that Israel was turning back to God, Elijah had the right, based on the promises of God's Word, to claim that God would send rain again upon the land, so that the effectiveness of Elijah's prayer was due to the fact that it was based directly on the *clear promises of Scripture*. That's the secret that we need to bear in mind, that our prayers are effective when they're right in line with the statements and the promises of God's Word, the Bible. Remember what I said last week, in Psalm 33 verse 6, ***"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath [or the Spirit] of His mouth all their host."*** (NASB) In other words, the entire created universe was brought into

being by two things working together, the Word of the Lord and the spirit of His mouth. When God's Word and God's Spirit work together, all His creative power and effectiveness is in them, and that applies to our praying. When God's Word and God's Spirit work together in our prayers, then *the same power that brought the universe into being is flowing through us*. Let me say that once more. I want you to lay hold of it. ***When God's Word and God's Spirit work together in our prayers, then the same power that brought the universe into being is flowing through us.***

Now I want to take an example of the power of prayer from the New Testament. In this case that I'm going to speak about just now, it was not the prayer of a single individual, but it was the corporate prayer of the Church in Jerusalem. And that's a thing that we need to bear in mind. Sometimes God will not work merely through the prayer of an individual. It takes the *corporate* prayer of a group of committed believers praying together. This is an incident in Acts chapter 12. King Herod who ruled in that area at that time had James executed and then he had Peter imprisoned and he was proposing to put Peter to death, but he was waiting until after the Passover season was over. This is what it says in Acts chapter 12 verses 1–11, ***"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, (the Passover) After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. (That's what we would call maximum security prison, four groups of four soldiers each watching one man in the inner prison.) So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. (Notice that 'but', but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. That 'but' changed the course of events.) The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening, he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating. (NIV) So you see there that the united corporate prayer of the church opened the way for the intervention of an angel who came from God and delivered Peter out of the prison. We need to understand something about the ministry of angels. This is explained for us in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 14, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (NIV) That's a tremendous thought. The angels are to be our servants. They're to come help us, we who are the heirs of salvation. But, the thing we need to bear in mind is it takes our prayers to bring angelic intervention. But that's not the end of the story. Right at the end of the 12th chapter of Acts, we read this, ***"On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to increase and spread."*** (NIV) See again the *outworking of the prayer of the church*. Everything that had been resisting the word and the purpose of God was overthrown and Herod died a very miserable and agonizing and shameful death and he has again been struck by an angel. Notice, it was the intervention of the angel that terminated the career of Herod. What brought the intervention of the angel? The *prayer of the church*. So we ask ourselves in light of all that, who was really ruling? Was it Herod or the church? The answer is Herod sat on the throne, but the *church ruled by prayer*.***

Do you believe that kind of thing can happen today? One problem of many of us Christians is we are too self-centered. Somebody once quoted this as the typical prayer of the average church member, ***"God bless me and my wife, my son John, and his wife; us four, no more. Amen."*** That kind of prayer is not going to get the kind of results that we're talking about.

I want to ask you this. Will you let God enlarge your horizons in this theme of “Praying According to God’s Word”?

## PART TWO: PRAYING FOR OUR GOVERNMENT

Now today I’m going to develop this theme of “Ruling by Prayer” in a very practical way. I’m going to speak about our obligation to pray for our government. It’s an unfortunate fact that multitudes of Christians are not aware of this obligation that is directly placed upon us by the New Testament. The passage I’m going to look at first is in the first epistle of Timothy chapter 2 verses 1–4. This is what Paul says, ***“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*** (NASB) This is one of the most logical passages that I know of in the Bible. It unfolds a series of thoughts and obligations upon us and it gives us the most sound and logical reasons for what it is saying. Let me explain it to you in the following steps. First of all, the first public ministry of the church coming together in assembly is prayer. Paul says, *“First of all, I urge that entreaties, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men.”* If we sum up those four words in one, the one word would be **prayer**. So the first public ministry of the church coming together in assembly is prayer. This agrees with Isaiah 56:7 where God says, ***“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.”*** The first particular thing that we are required to pray for is *all men*. In other words, our prayers are to be as wide in their outreach as the love and the mercy of God and the offer of the gospel to all men. I pointed out yesterday that so many Christians are so very self-centered in their praying. I gave you the old example of the church member’s prayer: *“God bless me and my wife, my son John, and his wife; us four, no more! Amen.”* Obviously that’s not at all in line with what Paul says that we’re to pray for all men. The first particular category of men that we are to pray for, according to Paul’s word, is *“kings and all who are in authority.”* Of course, in this western side of the Atlantic there are not many kings. So let’s just leave out that and just say all who are in authority: rulers, the government. Do you realize that, that the first particular topic that we are to pray for when we come together as Christians in church is our government, those in authority over us? My observation is that in multitudes of churches they never think about that, even once a month. And yet Paul puts it first. What are we to ask God to do for and through the government? Paul says, *“That we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and dignity.”*

Let’s ask ourselves this simple question. Does the government we live under affect the life we lead? Obviously it affects it in many ways continually. So if we want to lead a good life, logic and self-interest alone would indicate that we should *pray for our government*. What are we to ask that the government will achieve? It will achieve a situation in which we who are under the government may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. I believe that’s the *primary function of government clearly described*. In other words, what we are really to pray for is that the government will do its job properly. Or more simply still, we’re to pray for good government.

Now in the next verse, Paul goes on to say, *“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.”* What’s the “this” refer to? The thing in the previous verse that we’ve just analyzed which is good government. So Paul is saying, and this is *tremendously important*, good government is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.

I wonder how many Christians realize that God *approves* of good government. Good government is the *will of God*. Now, the next verse tells us one great basic reason why God approves of good government, why it’s His will. It says, *“God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* I pointed out already that God’s mercy and love are outstretched to the whole human race. God wants *all men* to be saved, but they cannot be saved without coming to the knowledge of the truth. And they cannot come to the knowledge of the truth unless the truth, the truth of the gospel, is presented to them, is *preached* to them. So for that very simple and logical reason, God wants the truth of the gospel proclaimed to *all men everywhere*. All we have to do then is ask ourselves one more question. Which makes it easier to proclaim the gospel, good government or bad government? I think the answer is too obvious to need a lot of

explanation. Bad government hinders the preaching of the gospel. Good government, in many different ways, facilitates the preaching of the gospel. *So good government is the revealed will of God.*

To sum up what I have just been saying, I'm going to read to you now a brief passage from my book, *Shaping History through Prayer and Fasting*. This is what I say on page 42 of the book, We are now in a position to present the teaching of 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 1–4 in a series of simple logical steps,

1. The first ministry and outreach of believers meeting together in regular fellowship is prayer.
2. The first specific topic for prayer is the government.
3. We are to pray for good government.
4. God desires all men to have the truth of the gospel preached to them.
5. Good government *facilitates* the preaching of the gospel, while bad government *hinders* it.
6. Therefore good government is the will of God.

Let me read that conclusion once more, it's one of the most important conclusions in the whole of the Scriptures. It affects our whole lives. "*Good government is the will of God.*" Now let me relate to that a passage in the first epistle of John chapter 5 verses 14–15 where John tells us a simple, basic requirement for receiving the answer to our prayers. This is what he says, "***And this is the confidence which we have before Him, [that is before God] that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.***"

(NASB) You see the basis of successful praying is knowing that you're praying according to the will of God. And the will of God is revealed primarily in the Bible. Let's apply this principle of praying according to the will of God and *knowing* that God hears us and *knowing* that we have what we've prayed for to the particular theme we're dealing with, that is praying for our government. I'll sum it up this way, If we pray according to God's will He hears us. If we know that He hears us, we know that we have what we asked for. We know that good government is according to God's will. Therefore, if we pray for good government, we know that God hears us. And if we know that God hears us, we know that we have what we asked for. What are we talking about? We're talking about good government.

So, let's give it a very practical application. If we do not have good government, and I am only saying an "if", each one of us has to decide how far we consider our government good or ineffective or inefficient or whatever estimate we make of the government, but *if* we do not have good government, what is the reason? There are only two possible reasons if we believe what the Bible teaches. The first reason is *we have not prayed as we ought to*. And I suppose that applies to well over half the professing Christians. They never really pray intelligently and with real concern for the government. They shrug their shoulders and criticize the government but they do not pray for it. Let me point out to you that there's no authority in Scripture to criticize the government but there is an obligation to pray for it. And if you're one of those who criticize let me suggest that if you spent less time criticizing and more time praying, you might have less to criticize. All right. The first possible reason, which is the commonest, is that we have not prayed. But there's another possible reason which is that we have prayed, but without knowing that good government is the will of God. Because it's only if we pray, knowing what is God's will, that we can say we have what we've prayed for, that is, good government.

Now why do we Christians find it so hard to believe that so much depends on our praying? We take the attitude the government's outside our control, there's nothing we can do about it. We shrug our shoulders and we criticize, we complain, but we don't pray. I believe the real reason why we don't pray is because *we have not understood the limitless possibilities of praying according to God's Word.*

### PART THREE - I HAVE SEEN HISTORY SHAPED BY PRAYER

God waits for us to pray! Our prayers have a great deal to do with the kind of government we live under, much more than most Christians have ever realized. Today I'm going to speak about this out of my own personal experience. I'm going to tell you of cases in which I myself have seen history shaped by prayer.

For my first example I'm going to go back to the early years of my Christian experience. In 1940 I was called from a position as a professor of philosophy at Cambridge University into the British Forces in World War II. In July 1941, I had a dramatic personal encounter with the Lord in an Army barrack room. I can't go into the details of that right now, but it completely transformed me and changed the whole course of

my life. Sometime later that year my unit was sent out to North Africa, and I found myself serving as a hospital attendant with the British Forces in North Africa. In the course of that experience I was granted the rather doubtful privilege of taking part in the longest retreat in the history of the British Army, 700 miles of continuous retreating, from a place named Alagalah in Libya to the very gates of Cairo. And let me say, to retreat for 700 miles is a very wearisome and demoralizing experience, especially in a barren desert. At that point the fate of the whole Middle East hung in the balance. If the Axis forces could press through and capture Cairo, they would command the Suez Canal, cut one of the main lifelines of the British Empire and ultimately the land of Israel, and the oil resources of the entire Middle East would be at their mercy. So it was a critical moment. Now, doubtless there were many factors that caused that retreat which I could not properly analyze, but the one that impressed me was that the officers did not have the confidence of the men under them. The morale was bad, there was poor communication, and our impression of the officers was that they were much more concerned with their own comforts and selfish needs than with the needs of the men under them, or even the need to prosecute the war successfully. For example, there was the question of water. Water was tremendously scarce and the ration of water was one military water bottle every two days per man, which had to be used for everything drinking, washing, cooking. But it was very obvious to us that while we were living on that ration of water, the officers were using more water each day just to put with their whiskey than we had for all other purposes. Obviously that didn't work for a good relationship between the officers and the men under them.

Now as a Christian who had come to know the Lord and had a very definite relationship with him and believed in the Bible, I felt I ought to pray, but I just didn't know *how* to pray. And so I more or less waited for God to give me a prayer, the kind of prayer He wanted prayed. And after a while God gave me this specific prayer, "*Lord, give us leaders such that it will be for your glory to give us victory through them.*" Once I started praying that prayer, I prayed it every day regularly. Now I didn't know what was happening but God began to move swiftly. The British government appointed a new commander for their forces in the Middle East in North Africa, a man who was an officer who was serving up in the desert. He was flown back to Cairo to take command but his plane crashed on landing and he was killed. So at this very important moment in the most active theatre of the war, the British Forces were left without a commander. In that situation, Winston Churchill, who was Prime Minister of Britain at the time, acted more or less on his own initiative and appointed an unknown officer who was flown out from Britain. His name was Bernard Montgomery. Now I have to say on the basis of observation that Montgomery was a committed Christian and a God-fearing man. He was also a very fine commander and a man of great discipline. And he went to work reorganizing the British Forces. He restored discipline and morale, he changed the whole attitude and bearing and conduct of the officers, and then there was fought the well-known battle of El Alamein, which was the first major Allied victory in the whole of that theatre of war. In fact, in the whole war. And it reversed the whole course of war in North Africa in favor of the Allies. So that was the battle of El Alamein.

Now I was serving with a military ambulance up in the desert, a little way behind the advancing British forces, and on the tailboard of the truck there was a little portable radio and a news commentator was describing the preparations at Montgomery's headquarters just before the Battle of El Alamein was fought. And he described how Montgomery came out and assembled his officers and men and said, "*Let us ask the Lord, mighty in battle, to give us the victory.*" And as I listened to those words, what I call "heaven's electricity" went through me from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, and God spoke very quietly but very firmly to my spirit and said, "*That is the answer to your prayer!*"

So early in my Christian experience I learned that prayer can change the course of history. Now this is right in line with Scripture. For instance, in Psalm 75 verses 6–7, the psalmist says this: "***For not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the desert comes exaltation;*** [or promotion. And notice it says "and not from the desert" which was particularly appropriate to my situation. Then it goes on to say,] ***But God is the Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another.***" (NASB) And that's exactly what happened in that situation. The human leaders had chosen one commander, but God put him down and raised up another man who was a man that would give God the glory. And so I want you to understand that it pays to pray for leadership.

The second example I'm going to give you of history being shaped by prayer happened in the country of Kenya in East Africa in 1960 when I was serving there in educational work with African students and teachers. At that time Kenya was scheduled to receive independence from British Empire within just a couple of years and the country had gone through a tremendous political crisis. The Mau-Mau emergency which had torn the country in two created enmity and suspicion, not only between blacks and whites, but between the different African tribes. Just at that time the Belgian Congo to the west had received

independence from Belgium and had immediately been plunged into bitter Civil War. All the political experts predicted that Kenya would go the same way as the Belgian Congo, only worse. Now in August of that year, I was one of the speakers at a Bible convention for African young people. The convention lasted a week and we had come to the closing night. And somehow the Spirit of God moved in in a rather sovereign and unique way, and at a certain point I felt that we had tapped the resources of God's Almightyness and that it was our responsibility to use them aright. So I went up to the platform and silenced the young people who were praying and I challenged them to pray for their nation's future. I pointed out to them that Christians have a responsibility to pray for their government and that their country was facing a major crisis, and that probably their prayers were the only thing that could save their country from disaster. Well, they united in prayer and for about ten minutes everybody, something like two or three hundred people, were just praying, laying hold of God, one of the most dramatic experiences I've ever been in. Then when they became silent, the young man, the young African who'd been standing beside me on the platform, quietly spoke to his fellow Africans and said, *"I want to tell you that while we were praying I had a vision. I saw a man on a red horse, and the horse was very fierce and very cruel, it was coming toward Kenya from the east. And behind it were other red horses, also fierce and cruel. But,"* he said, *"While we were praying I saw these red horses turn around and move away from Kenya toward the north."* And he said, *"As I was meditating on this, God spoke to me and said this, 'Only the supernatural power of the prayer of my people can turn away the troubles that are coming upon Kenya.'"* Let me quote those words to you again. *"Only the supernatural power of the prayer of My people can turn away the troubles that are coming upon Kenya."*

Now I cannot go in full length into the history of the years that follow, but I have to say that that vision granted to that young African was *exactly* fulfilled. About three or four years later there was a serious Communist attempt to move into Kenya and take the country over from the east, but it was foiled by the wise and the prompt action of Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, and the Communists never have made any real advance in Kenya. But they moved away to the north, occupied Somalia and today Somalia is basically an armed Communist camp. But, from that time onwards until now, Kenya has been one of the most stable and progressive of more than 50 new African nations that have emerged on the continent since World War II. Certainly that was not what the political experts predicted. It was brought about by prayer, by concerted, corporate, believing prayer at a crisis in the nation's destiny.

Now, as I close I want to ask you this question. Could the same be true of the United States? Could it be true of the United States, what God said to that young African in 1960 about Kenya? *"Only the supernatural power of the prayer of My people can turn away the troubles that are coming upon the United States."*

## PART FOUR - The Healing of Our Land

In my talk yesterday I gave examples of how I myself have seen history shaped by prayer. Today I'm going to deal with the situation that arises where God's people have failed to pray as they should for the government of their nation and, as a result, the course of events in the government, and in the nation at large, has not been in line with the will of God. Rather, there has been moral and ethical decline, both in the nation's leadership and in the whole national culture, and many evil and destructive forces have been let loose, that are in opposition to both the purposes and the people of God.

Let me state my subject in the form of a question: Suppose we acknowledge that we Christians have failed, through prayerlessness and in other ways, to exercise our potential influence for good in our nation. Is there anything that we can do to remedy this situation? My reply is, Yes! The Bible has a clear and practical answer to this question, but before we turn to the Bible's answer, let us first face up to the full extent of our responsibility as Christians to exercise a unique and decisive influence on the society in which we live. Jesus states this for us in the Sermon on the Mount. He uses in succession three vivid metaphors, Salt, Light, A City on a hill. Here is what He says in Matthew 5 verses 13-14, ***"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."*** (NASB) So there are the three metaphors: Salt, Light, A City set on a hill. Let's look at the particular significance of each metaphor, and I'll deal with them in the reverse order to which Jesus mentioned them. First of all, we Christians are a *city set on a hill*. What does that mean? I think the word that sums it up is

we're *conspicuous*. We can be seen from all angles at all times. And we're *always being watched*. That's true. The moment you let people know that you believe in Jesus Christ, that you're a committed follower of His, that you attend such and such a church, people begin to look at you in a special way. They analyze your life, your conduct, your behavior. What they're saying is, "Is it real or is it just a religious act that he's putting on?" They won't look at you in the church, but they'll look at you in places like the office, or the factory, or the kitchen, or wherever it may be. Remember then, all of us who profess faith in Jesus, we are collectively a *city on a hill*. We're *being watched all the time*.

Secondly, Jesus says, "We are the light of the world." There's one important thing about light, there's no substitute for it. Nothing else can take the place of light. And that's true of us as Christians in this world, there's no substitute for us, no one else can take our place or do our job. Also, another fact about light, it's the *only answer to darkness*. There's no other way to deal with darkness but by light. And where light comes, really you don't have much more of a problem with darkness. The light automatically takes care of the darkness and that is how God expects us to be in the world, to be a light that automatically takes care of darkness.

And then the third picture that Jesus uses is that of the *salt of the earth*. Now salt is very familiar, of course, in our daily lives and there's much that could be said about salt, but I would just point out to you two main functions of salt.

1. To give flavor
2. to hold back corruption.

For instance, if food is not very tasty, maybe it's an egg that you're eating, what do you do? You sprinkle salt on it, and the salt gives flavor to that which otherwise might be flavorless. And so we're the salt of the earth. We're like the little grains of salt sprinkled across the earth's surface. Our responsibility is to give the earth flavor. Flavor for whom? The answer of course, is for God. Our presence should make the earth acceptable to God in a way that it would not be acceptable to God if we were not here as Christians, living out our lives in the grace of God and the love of God, worshiping and praying and praising God. Our presence makes all the difference to how God views the earth. In fact, I believe the earth will discover that one day when God takes us all out, but that day hasn't come yet, and meanwhile we're responsible to be the salt.

And then the second function of salt is to *hold back corruption*. In the days before refrigeration, when sailors took meat on a long voyage, how did they preserve it? How did they prevent it going bad too soon? By salting it. And so our responsibility in the earth is to salt it, to hold back the forces of corruption, moral corruption, social corruption, political corruption, until God's purposes of mercy and grace have been worked out for this world of ours.

Now, suppose we fail in our function as salt, to give flavor and to hold back corruption. Listen to what Jesus says, "*If the salt doesn't do it's job, it is thenceforth good for nothing anymore.*" Do you realize that applies to us if we're not doing what we should? We're good for nothing anymore! Except one thing, "*To be thrown out and trampled underfoot of men.*" How would you feel if that happened? God is not going to come down and trample us under foot Himself. He's going to turn us over to those who hate Christianity and all that it stands for. And the most bitter reflection of such a moment would be, "We deserved it. Jesus warned us. We didn't listen. He said that if we didn't serve as salt, we'd be thrown out and trampled underfoot of men." Is there a remedy? Is there a way out? Or is it just inevitable that we will be thrown out and trampled under the foot of men. I believe God offers us an alternative, an alternative of mercy, a way to change the situation for the better.

There's one key verse in 2 Chronicles chapter 7 verse 14, where God says this, "***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***" (NIV) Let's consider for a moment of whom that is spoken. God says, "*My people who are called by my name...*" The Hebrew says "*Upon whom my name is called.*" That describes you and me as Christians exactly. We are Christians because the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is called upon us. We are His people, so that promise applies to us. God says that he requires us to do four things. Then, if we do four things, He will do three things. Let's look first at the three things that God says He will do, He says, "I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Notice God is not committed to hear all prayers in the sense of responding to them and answering them. But God says if we'll meet His condition, then He will hear and respond to our prayer, He will forgive our sin. Notice it's the sin of His people. We need to understand that. What stands between God

and the intervention of God in this land is not the sin of the unbelievers, it's the sin of God's people. The third thing that God says He will do is heal our land. Let's look at our land for a moment and see does it need healing. What would you say? God says there's a way that He will heal our land. Surely that's a promise for us today. But remember, it's a conditional promise. God says we have to do certain things first before He'll do those three things, hear, forgive our sin and heal our land. So what does God require us to do? What are the four things God asks of us? Here they are:

1. To humble ourselves.
2. To pray.
3. To seek God's face.
4. To turn from our wicked ways.

You see, the first thing we have to do is humble ourselves. The Scripture says, "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" We can pray, but if we pray out of pride and arrogance and self-righteousness, God does not hear our prayer. So we have to humble ourselves, and God places upon us the responsibility. I don't think it's scriptural to pray, "God, make me humble," because God says, "*You humble yourself.*" Secondly, when we've humbled ourselves, then we pray. Thirdly, we seek God's face. What does that mean? I think it means more than just a prayer meeting. Prayer meeting begins at 7:30 and ends at 9:00, but seeking God's face means we pray until we know we've met God and the answer is on the way. And fourthly, we have to turn from our wicked ways. Let's face the fact it's *our* wicked ways that have caused the problem in our land. *Our* prayerlessness, *our* lack of witnessing, *our* lack of forthright open righteousness that challenges the ungodly and the unbeliever, *the responsibility is upon us.*

## PART FIVE - How to Humble Ourselves

1 Chronicles 7 verse 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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.***" (NIV) I pointed out that there are seven things involved in that verse, three things that God says He will do for us, and four things that God requires us to do for Him. The three things that God says He will do come last. He says He will hear from heaven, forgive our sin and heal our land. But He requires four things of us. What are those four things? First of all, that we humble ourselves. Second, that we pray. Third, that we seek His face, and fourth that we turn from our wicked ways.

The first thing that God requires us to do is to humble ourselves. And all through Scripture where God talks about humility, He places the responsibility upon us. God does not make us humble - We have to humble ourselves. Humility is not an emotion, it's not a religious façade, it's a decision of the will that has to be carried out in action. God says, "*You humble yourselves!*" Furthermore, the Bible gives us a very specific and practical way in which God expects us to humble ourselves. To me, this is good news. There was a time in my Christian experience when I wanted to humble myself, but I really didn't know how to do it. And then I stumbled on a secret, a secret that has been lost for many Christians, but I believe God is restoring to us today. The secret is that the appointed scriptural way for us to humble ourselves is by fasting. That's an unfamiliar word to many Christians today, yet it's one that occurs many, many times in the Bible. In fact, there are few of the great men in the Bible of whom we do not know for sure that they practiced fasting.

Let me begin by briefly defining fasting. As I understand it, fasting is deliberately abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Sometimes it's from food and water, but normally it's only from food. And I want to give you three examples from the Old Testament of how fasting is an appointed scriptural way for us to humble ourselves. The first example is the testimony of David. In Psalm 35 verse 13, he says, "***I humbled my soul with fasting; And my prayer kept returning to my bosom.***" (NASB) We see there that David combined fasting with prayer, and that through fasting he humbled his soul and this made his prayer more intense and more effective. I believe that's how it should be, that fasting *intensifies* prayer.

Why should we need to humble our soul? As I understand Scripture, the soul is the ego, it's the self-assertive, demanding part, the part that always says, "I want . . . This is what I need . . . Bless me . . . Pray for me . . . Help me." It's the thing in us that makes us self-centered. And I believe it's a tremendous barrier between us and the answer to our prayers, between us and the right relationship to God. We need to humble that soul, we need to bring it into subjection. Fasting is a way to do it.



Then listen to the ordinance that God gave Israel under the Old Covenant for the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur—the great sacred day of the Jewish people up to this time. Leviticus 16 verses 29–31 ***“And this shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls, and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you; for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you shall be clean from all your sins before the LORD. “It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute.”*** (NASB) Now God there says that He requires Israel to humble their souls. Interestingly enough, in one of the new versions, the New International Version, in the footnote they translate that “to fast.” And the fact is that historically, from that day unto this, almost 4,000 years, the Jewish people all over the world have always recognized that the Day of Atonement is to be kept by strict fasting. In other words, the Jewish people have always known that *fasting is God’s appointed way to humble our souls.*

Then we look at a third example, Ezra, and the returning exiles from the Babylonian captivity. Ezra 8:21 and 23: ***“Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.”***

(NASB) Ezra and the exiles were about to undertake a very dangerous, long journey through country infested by enemies and brigands, with all their wives and children and the sacred vessels of the temple that were being taken back to Jerusalem. And in order to obtain safe passage, they humbled themselves with fasting and besought God. And God heard them and granted them a safe journey.

So we see that all through the Old Testament, fasting is recognized as a scriptural way for us to humble ourselves. Fasting then is God’s appointed way for us to humble ourselves. What are the steps that follow from that in this promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14? The next step is that we pray, but we pray out of humility, out of a brokenness, out of a humble dependence upon God, out of an acknowledgement that we need God desperately, and if He does not come to our help there is no other source of help that can meet our need. I believe that’s why humbling ourselves comes first, because a prayer that’s prayed out of arrogance and self-righteousness and self-sufficiency will not move the arm of Almighty God.

Then the next thing that we have to do is to seek God, to seek His face. In Hosea chapter 10 verse 12, we read these words, ***“Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD until He comes to rain righteousness on you.”*** (NASB) It’s a different thing just to go to a prayer meeting and pray for an hour or so than it is to seek the Lord until He comes, until there’s a definite, specific response from God. I believe in 2 Chronicles 7:14 God is speaking about our seeking Him in prayer, until He comes, until we see His arms stretched forth and we see definite evidence that God is moving to answer our prayer. Hosea says, *“Break up your fallow ground . . .”* One of the ways that we can do that is by fasting. There are areas of our lives that have not been cultivated, that are not bringing forth fruit for God, they’re just areas that there’s no real results, there’s no real work of the Holy Spirit. And so God says, *“Break up your fallow ground and seek the Lord until He comes and rains righteousness on you.”* Frankly, I believe that’s the only hope for this nation of ours, that God will come and rain righteousness upon this land. But, He requires us to seek His face.

And then the last thing that He requires of us is that we *turn from our wicked ways*. Perhaps you may say, “Well, what wicked ways do I have? I go to church, I say my prayers, I read my Bible, I pay my taxes, I do nobody any harm.” Well, just wait a minute. Who’s right? You or God? Paul said, *“Nay, but O man who art thou that repliest against God.”* Are you arguing with God? Are you saying to God that you or I, we don’t have any wicked ways? God says it’s our wicked ways that brought the problem on our nation. Well, let me show to you just two possible forms of wickedness out of many. The first is sins of omission. Remember, it’s a sin not to do the right thing when you can. James 4:17 says, ***“Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*** (NASB) So it may not be just the things that you’re doing, but the things that you’re not doing that God is concerned about. For instance, if fasting is God’s appointed way to humble yourself and you know it and you’re not doing it, remember the “if” at the beginning, then that is sin in your life. God requires you to change that.

The other kind of wickedness that is so common amongst Christians and church-goers is *unforgiveness*. Do you remember the story of the servant who owed his master 10,000 talents and couldn’t pay, and was freely forgiven the whole debt? He went out and found a fellow servant who owed just 100 pence, a tiny fraction of what he’d owed his master, but he refused to forgive his fellow servant. And so the other servants complained to the master, and the master summoned the unforgiving servant and said this, ***“You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. ‘Should you not also have had***

*mercy on your fellow-slave, even as I had mercy on you?’ And the lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.* [Then Jesus concludes:] *So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from His heart.”* (NASB) Let me quickly make four points:

1. Unforgiveness is wickedness.
2. It makes the Lord angry.
3. The punishment is to be handed over to the torturers.
4. Jesus warns us specifically that if we do not forgive our fellow-believers, this is how God will deal with us.

He will become angry with us, he will hand us over to the torturers, and we will not come out of that situation until we’ve paid all that we owe God.