

March 25
Lesson 4 (NIV)

KEEP MY STATUTES AND ORDINANCES

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 58:6-12

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 7:12-22

2 CHRONICLES 7:12-22

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 forever. 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.’

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 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, worshiping and serving them—that is why he brought all this disaster on them.’”

KEY VERSE

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.—2 Chronicles 7:14

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the promises of both blessing and discipline that the Lord spoke to Solomon.
2. Tell how these promises serve to both encourage and warn Christians today.
3. Keep a journal during the coming week in which to record times of blessing and discipline from the Lord, along with lessons learned from these experiences.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Good House “Keeping”
- B. Lesson Background

I. Promised Blessings (2 CHRONICLES 7:12-18)

- A. For the Temple (v. 12)
Our Place of Sacrifice
- B. For the People (vv. 13-16)
- C. For Solomon (vv. 17, 18)

II. Promised Discipline (2 CHRONICLES 7:19-22)

- A. Against the People (vv. 19, 20a)
- B. Against the Temple (vv. 20b-22)
Cause and Effect

Conclusion

- A. Words for Today?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Good House “Keeping”

My wife is a big fan of the TV programs that feature homes undergoing a major renovation. Some use the term *makeover* to describe the sweeping changes made to a house. When the project is complete, the “before and after” contrasts are amazing to see.

The previous two lessons covered the dedication ceremony of the newly completed temple in Jerusalem. Today’s lesson follows with a solemn warning from the Lord to Solomon that disobedience would result in what we might call a reverse makeover to that structure. The “before and after” contrast would be amazing in a bewildering way. How could something so unthinkable happen? A structure dedicated to God meant nothing if the people themselves were not dedicated to being God’s people. What was true in Solomon’s time is no less true today.

B. Lesson Background

Between the final verse of last week’s lesson treatment and the first verse of this week’s is the single verse [2 Chronicles 7:11](#): “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.” Yes, Solomon’s accomplishment was indeed impressive (see the temple dimensions in [chapter 3](#) and the temple furnishings in [chapter 4](#)). Further, the people whom he ruled were “joyful and glad in heart for the good things the Lord had done for David and Solomon and for his people Israel” ([7:10](#)).

Perhaps the king was tempted to rest on his laurels at that point, satisfied with his record. But God desired far more from Solomon and from the Israelites than the mere construction of a building. God wanted what he has always wanted from his people, be they kings or commoners: obedience. Not even a temple as magnificent as the one Solomon had just completed could substitute for that.

As today’s text opens, the year would have been sometime after 950 BC. Parallel in content to today’s lesson text is [1 Kings 9:1-9](#).

I. Promised Blessings

([2 CHRONICLES 7:12-18](#))

A. For the Temple (v. 12)

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.

This is the second time *the Lord* has *appeared to [Solomon] at night*. Perhaps God does this deliberately in order to call Solomon’s mind back to the first time, when the Lord said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you” ([2 Chronicles 1:7](#)). In response, Solomon had requested “wisdom and knowledge” for governing ([1:10](#)). The Lord was pleased with this response and promised Solomon that and much more ([1:11, 12](#)).

The Lord deems it important to affirm that he has *heard Solomon’s prayer* (see [lesson 2](#)). Even so, the first decision that the Lord says he has made was not in Solomon’s prayer requests: to choose *this place* (the temple) *as a temple for sacrifices*. Solomon indeed sacrificed many animals during the dedication ceremony ([2 Chronicles 7:5](#)) and made many requests in his prayer of dedication ([6:12-42](#)). But for the temple to be known as a temple for sacrifices was not explicitly one of those requests. God’s declaration calls to mind Moses’ words in [Deuteronomy 12:5, 6](#) regarding a chosen place of sacrifice. Now, some five centuries later, the Lord is announcing that such a chosen site exists, and it is Solomon’s temple.

What Do You Think?

How did an experience of God’s answer to a prayer shape your attitude toward future prayers?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- When the answer was a long time coming
- When the answer came quickly

OUR PLACE OF SACRIFICE

Most religions have their holy places. For Hindus, it’s the Ganges River in India. Japan’s Mount Fuji is sacred to the Shinto and Buddhist religions. Muslims consider the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, a holy site. Jews think of Jerusalem as their holy city, since it’s the place where Solomon dedicated the first temple to God.

Within the wider scope of the Christian faith, there is no consensus. Some think of Jerusalem as a special place, “more holy” than others. Others focus on Rome and the Vatican. Still others think of the church building where they worship each Sunday as a place in which God is especially near. Some even refer to the room where they worship as a “sanctuary.”

We must keep in mind that the New Testament affirms that God does not live in temples made with human hands ([Acts 7:48, 49](#) [quoting [Isaiah 66:1, 2](#)]; [17:24](#)). Christians are themselves God’s temple, individually and collectively as the body of Christ—the church. His Spirit lives within us ([Romans 8:9](#); [1 Corinthians 3:16, 17](#); [6:19](#)). It’s even fair to say that the “temple for sacrifices” of which Solomon was told has transferred in concept to Christians personally. As you read [Romans 12:1](#) in this regard, how will you apply it in the week ahead?

—C. R. B.

B. For His People (vv. 13-16)

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,

By contrast, the language of the three negative situations here are all reflected in the language of Solomon's dedicatory prayer ([2 Chronicles 6:26-28](#)). Solomon has noted the cause for God's needing to take such action: sin ([6:26](#)). The outcomes of famine (due to *no rain* or *locusts*) and *plague* are mentioned within the curses pronounced by Moses when he warned the Israelites of how they would be disciplined should they turn away from God ([Deuteronomy 11:17; 28:21, 38](#)).

HOW TO SAY IT

Assyrians Uh-sear-e-unz.

Babylonians Bab-ih-low-nee-unz.

Buddhist Boo-dist.

Deuteronomy Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.

Ganges Gan-jeez.

Jerusalem Juh-roo-suh-lem.

Nineveh Nin-uh-vuh.

Shinto Shin-toe.

What Do You Think?

Thinking of a time when God seemed to be disciplining you, how do you know it was not merely natural consequences at work?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Considering the nature of your actions
- Considering the eventual result
- Considering scriptural precedent (or lack thereof)

^{14a.} “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways,

The conditional *if* statement here introduces reasons why the deadly conditions of [verse 13](#) need not be permanent. With the Lord there is and will be hope! Again, this reflects the contents of Solomon's earlier prayer. After describing the withholding of rain because of the people's sin, Solomon prayed, “When they pray toward this place and give praise to 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” ([2 Chronicles 6:26, 27](#)).

God's disciplinary action must be recognized as such by his people, and they must respond to it in the way directed by the Lord in the verse before us. The steps of repentance are four in number:

First, the wayward people are to *humble themselves*. Scripture contains ample warnings and examples about the danger of pride ([Proverbs 16:18; Daniel 4:28-33; James 4:6](#)). Humility acknowledges one's need for God and dependence on him ([2 Chronicles 12:6; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Peter 5:6](#)).

Second is to *pray*. Prayer is a must, especially when turning away from sin, as is the case here. One may consider David's earnest prayer of repentance in [Psalm 51](#) and the simple yet heartfelt plea of the tax collector in Jesus' parable: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” ([Luke 18:13](#)).

To *seek* the Lord's *face* implies a desire for the closest kind of relationship. David expressed such a longing in [Psalm 27:8](#). Jeremiah gave this promise to God's wayward people: “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” ([Jeremiah 29:13](#)).

It will do no good to take the first three steps without taking the fourth: sinners must *turn from their wicked ways*. Words of contrition must be followed up by actions that match. To turn from one's sinful ways is precisely what the biblical teaching about repentance means: to do an “about face,” reversing the course of one's conduct. The process embodied by the terms used in this verse indicates a total surrender to God.

What Do You Think?

How should evidence of genuine repentance manifest itself in the twenty-first century?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In terms of how humility is manifested
- In terms of prayers offered
- In terms of attitudes toward God
- In terms of behaviors abandoned
- Other

^{14b.} “then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

God's response to such determination is total as well. Forgiveness of *sin* will go hand in hand with healing of the *land*. This suggests a reversal of whatever conditions have been part of God's disciplinary action. If rain has been withheld, it will now fall freely. The effects of any locust plague or any pestilence will be replaced by the provision of God's blessings (compare [Exodus 15:26](#)).

^{15.} “Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

As Solomon neared the end of his dedicatory prayer, he implored, “Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place” ([2 Chronicles 6:40](#)). The Lord indicates his intention to do just that!

^{16.} “I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart

will always be there.

The language of this verse indicates the fullness of God's identification with the temple. The fact that the Lord has *consecrated this temple* implies its being set apart for a divine purpose. In further accordance with Solomon's request, the Lord also promises to attach his *Name* in the temple ([2 Chronicles 6:20](#); compare [Deuteronomy 12:11](#)). Although God states that his *Name, eyes, and heart* will be there *forever* and *always*, the promise is not unconditional, as we shall see.

C. For Solomon (vv. 17, 18)

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,

Now the Lord's message transitions from a focus on temple and people to Solomon himself. The message begins with another conditional if-statement that focuses on behavior. That behavior is stated in terms of David's walk as an example for Solomon to follow. The evidence of a right walk will be seen in obedience to God's *decrees and laws*. Clearly, Solomon's responsibility before the Lord is not fulfilled simply because the temple is completed!

To *walk* as David *did* does not imply perfection, for David was certainly no perfect man. But the overall direction of his life was pleasing to God, who calls him "a man after my own heart" ([Acts 13:22](#)). When David was confronted about his sinful behavior, he acknowledged his guilt without reservation ([2 Samuel 12:13](#); [Psalm 51](#)).

What Do You Think?

Do the requirements for walking before God differ from person to person? Why, or why not?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In terms of spiritual disciplines (personal Bible study, prayer, etc.)
- In terms of personality characteristics (extravert vs. introvert, etc.)
- In terms of age
- Other

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.'

We expect an if-statement to be followed by a then-statement, and that is certainly the case here. The promise made to David in [2 Samuel 7:13, 16](#) can be Solomon's as well. As David lay dying, he had voiced this same promise, along with the challenge of the previous verse, to Solomon ([1 Kings 2:1-4](#)).

II. Promised Discipline

([2 CHRONICLES 7:19-22](#))

A. Against the People (vv. 19, 20a)

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,

The pronouns *you* in this verse are plural in the Hebrew text. Thus the warnings in the verses that follow apply to the "my people" of [2 Chronicles 7:13, 14](#), above. But Solomon himself must still take these cautions personally; as the leader of God's people, he is responsible to set the example of observing the Lord's *decrees and commands*.

More specifically, the primary warning given in this segment of the text concerns idolatry—the decision to *go off to serve other gods and worship them*. This violates the very first of the Ten Commandments. The prohibition against other gods is first because it is foundational to keeping the other nine.

20a. "then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them,

The consequences of forsaking the Lord and following other gods will be disastrous. If God's people reverse their loyalty to him and turn from him, then he will reverse his loyalty to them and turn from them.

This eventually happens during the time of the divided monarchy. Israel (the northern kingdom) is conquered by the Assyrians, and later Judah (the southern kingdom) is conquered by the Babylonians ([2 Kings 17, 25](#)).

B. Against the Temple (vv. 20b-22)

20b. "and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

Disaster will also befall *this temple*, Solomon's temple. Instead of the Lord's eyes being on the temple ([2 Chronicles 7:16](#), above), he promises to *reject* it. This passage clearly shows (as does the entirety of Scripture) the two sides of God's promises. Yes, he will bless those who turn to him in sincere repentance (as described earlier in [7:14](#)); but those who turn from him and reject his commandments will experience his judgment.

Once the temple has been rejected by the Lord, it will become *a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples*. Such terms reflect the complete reversal in status that Solomon's temple will experience. Instead of being treated with reverence as a sacred place, it will be viewed with abject contempt.

As noted above in relation to [verse 13](#), the Israelites had been warned about the curses that would come upon them as a result of disobeying the Lord's commands and forsaking his covenant. [Deuteronomy 28:37](#) declares: "You will become a thing of horror, a byword and an object of ridicule among all the peoples where the Lord will drive you."

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?'

The temple in Jerusalem is intended to be a place where God's people can joyfully anticipate gathering for worship. This especially includes the annual pilgrimage festivals (see [Leviticus 23](#); [Deuteronomy 16](#); etc.).

But instead of being awestruck at the sight of the renowned temple, passers-by will be stunned to see it lying in ruins. Ancient peoples often think of deity as responsible for the condition of the local temple and of the surrounding territory where the worshippers live. Given that belief, the question *Why has the Lord*

done such a thing to this land and to this temple? is bound to arise.

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, worshiping and serving them—that is why he brought all this disaster on them.’”

In the case of Israel, the destruction of the temple will not reflect poorly on the Lord; it will reflect poorly on his people who will have forsaken him. The reference to the people’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt is important to note; it suggests that they will have forgotten their history, their roots. They will have forgotten that no other people have a history like theirs because no other people have a God who can do the wonders that only he is capable of.

The word *disaster* refers to the physical catastrophe that eventually befalls both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah as a result of God’s judgment. That will happen because the people will have been *worshiping and serving* some *other gods* instead of the God who delivered them from bondage and established his covenant with them. They will have no one but themselves to blame for their sad state.

What Do You Think?

What lessons did you learn from observing someone become a cautionary tale because of disobeying God?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding the personal impact of sin
- Regarding the impact of sin on others
- Regarding the character of God
- Regarding the response of God’s people
- Other

CAUSE AND EFFECT

We don’t travel very far down the pathway of life before we discover that our actions have consequences. Speaking scientifically, we call this *the law of cause and effect*. It is the responsibility of parents to see that children learn this lesson with the least possible damage to themselves, others, and the world about them.

Failure to learn this lesson can result in lifelong difficulties. For example, a child who is not taught the social grace of being unselfish will find it hard to make lasting friendships. More serious traits can turn into pathological antisocial behavior, causing grief (and worse) to many.

Societies and nations can also suffer from a failure to learn the law of cause and effect. America still feels the damaging societal effects of enslaving human beings as lessons of equal treatment are learned, forgotten, relearned, forgotten again, etc.

God repeatedly warned the Israelites that their actions would have consequences. In the excitement of dedicating the temple, the people reaffirmed their allegiance to God ([2 Chronicles 7:3-6](#)). But euphoria has a tendency to be fleeting, and then God’s warnings were eventually forgotten.

Even so, God was patient. He withheld his judgment for centuries. But his promise to destroy the temple because of the people’s idolatry eventually became reality.

It’s been said that there are two ways to learn: (1) by *wisdom* (which is learning from the mistakes of others) and (2) by *experience* (which is learning from our own mistakes). Which way will you choose? See [1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#).

—C. R. B.

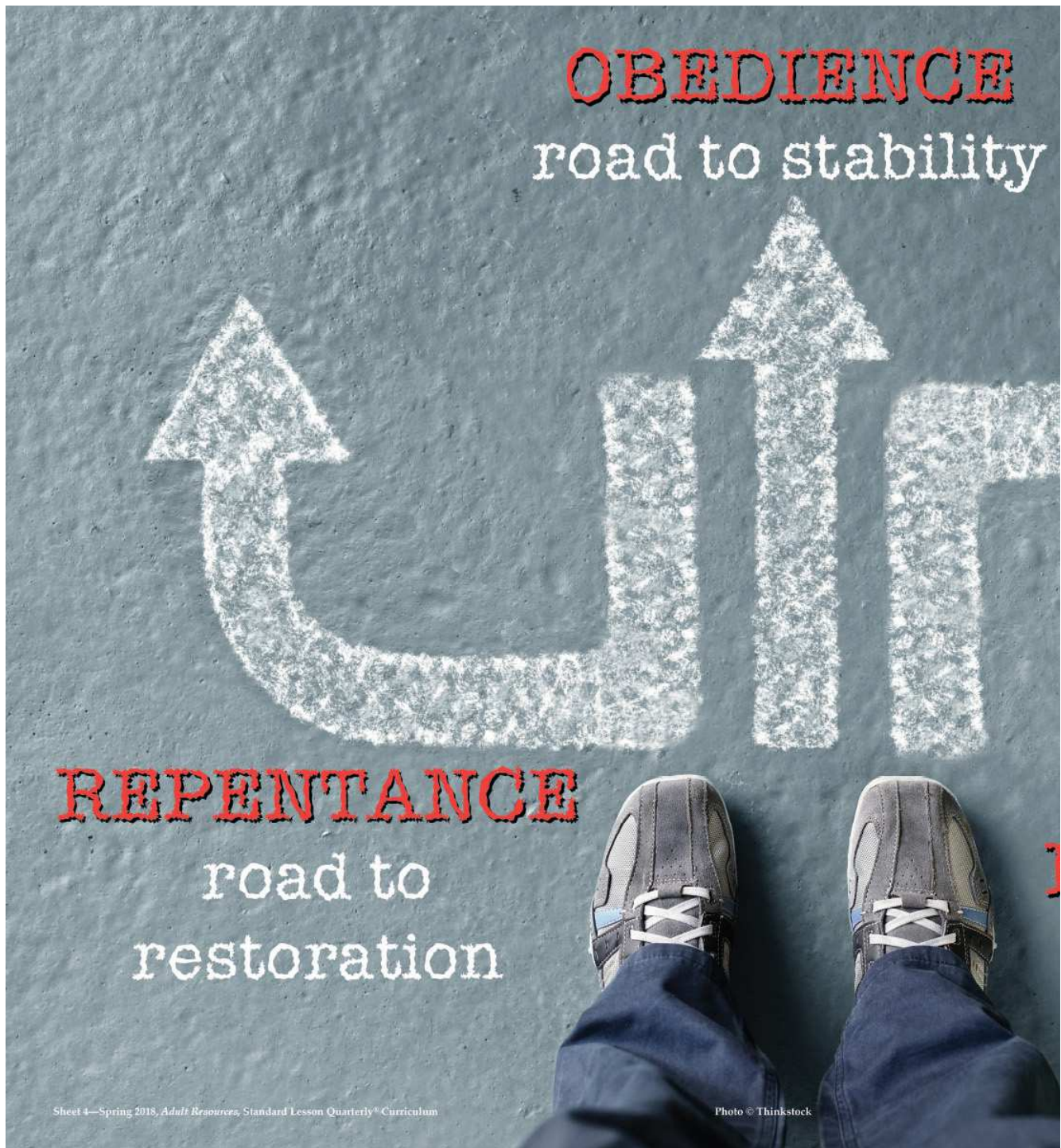
Conclusion

A. Words for Today?

The words of [2 Chronicles 7:14](#) include a very special promise from God to Solomon following the completion and dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. The verse reads, “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.”

Over the years many Christians, particularly in the United States, have quoted this verse in appealing for nationwide repentance and revival. Critics claim that such a view is taking the verse out of its original context since the term “my people” refers to Old Testament Israel, with which God had a special covenant relationship. No nation today, the critics claim, has the right to quote and apply this verse. Some say that it is a bit arrogant for any nation to claim to be “God’s people.”

While it is true that the words of this verse are addressed specifically to Old Testament Israel, does that mean it’s wrong to apply the principle and the promise of the verse to any other nation in history? One of the foundational teachings of Scripture is that God is willing to forgive any individual or nation turning to him in true repentance (compare [Luke 24:47](#); [Revelation 21:24](#); etc.).



Visual for Lesson 4. Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, “Are any important choices missing? If so, what are they?”

One of the lessons Jeremiah learned from his visit to the potter’s house was that God blesses or disciplines a nation or kingdom (implying any nation or kingdom) because of the choices its people make ([Jeremiah 18:1-10](#)). Jonah’s experience in Nineveh revealed that non-Israelites would be shown mercy if they demonstrated genuine repentance—and they did.

Rather than focus too closely on trying to identify “my people,” it is probably preferable to focus on bringing as many individuals as possible to the place where they can address the Lord as “my God.” That place is the forgiveness available only in Jesus.

B. Prayer

Father, we recognize that what you challenged your people to do in Solomon’s day is what you challenge us to do now: humble ourselves, pray, seek your face, and turn from evil ways. Help us to give heed to both your warning and your promise of blessing. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's law of harvest has not been revoked:
we still reap what we sow.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Open class by inviting students to recall funny videos they have seen of people trying to do or accomplish something but failing. (*Option.* Bring a video clip of you yourself enduring such an outcome.) Jot a brief note on the board about each situation mentioned. After you have several responses, go back through the list and discuss how each failure could have been avoided.

Alternative. Distribute pens and copies of the “Secret of My Success” activity, which you can download. Have students work individually or in small groups to match each quote with the correct celebrity.

After either activity say, “We want to live successful lives. But what lifestyle gives us the best chance of enjoying prosperity and avoiding catastrophe? God answered that very question during the reign of King Solomon.”

Into the Word

Option. Begin this segment by distributing handouts (you create) of a matching quiz. Down the left side have names of various household products; down the right side have brief instructions for using those products, instructions you have copied from the products' labels. Allow one minute for students to complete the quiz individually.

After you call time, go over the answers as a class; expect some intentionally humorous mismatches. Then say, “Solomon built a temple, and God kept his promise to dwell among his people there. But God had some clear instructions to help the Israelites be successful in their relationship with him.”

Divide students into three groups, assigning each group one of the following segments from [2 Chronicles 7: verses 12-16](#); [verses 17, 18](#); and [verses 19-22](#). Give each group several index cards and two pens or markers of different colors. Tell each group to read through its assigned passage, using one color of pen to write every if-statement on a separate index card (example: if my people humble themselves).

Following that, each group should use the other color of pen to write every then-statement on a separate index card (example: then I will hear from heaven).

When students have finished, read through the entire text together. As you do, have groups present their index cards, putting the if-statements into one pile and the then-statements into another. Afterward, count the cards in each pile. Say, “God was very clear about what he expected from Solomon and the rest of the Israelites. And God was very clear about how he would respond to their actions. There was no ‘secret’ to success. God gave clear instructions. The ‘secret’ was obedience. But it’s not always easy to obey. Is it?”

Invite students to talk about times in their lives when it was (or still is) difficult to obey God. Ask for volunteers to talk about the consequences of their disobedience or the rewards of their obedience, but don’t put anyone on the spot. Offer examples from your own life as well.

Into Life

Say, “Living a truly successful life requires people to sacrifice their own desires and thoughts. God told Solomon that if he did not follow the statutes and ordinances given to him, then calamity would come upon the people and the temple would be abandoned. But he also offered them hope and healing, as he also offers us.” Read aloud [2 Chronicles 7:14](#) and challenge students to summarize it (either aloud or silently) in reference to their own lives.

Alternative. Review the text together. Distribute copies of the “Sum Up Success” activity. Have students work individually to complete biblical formulas for success based on today’s lesson text.