



# “Patriotic” pretexting

**It's an American disease  
but the rest of the world isn't immune**

by Larry Wilson

I've come to think that perhaps the Scripture text that I've most often heard taken out of context and rendered into a pretext may be 2 Chronicles 7:14:

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.

How often have you heard this verse quoted as if it applied *directly* to American Christians, *directly* to the United States of America? Is not America a “Christian nation”?

A better question might be, Is there even such a thing as a Christian nation in the new covenant era? According to God's Word, the answer is yes. So what is it? Is it a geographical area, or a specific form of civil government, or a certain group of citizens? No, the only Christian nation that exists in the new covenant era is the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” To her alone does God say, “You are ... a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). The church consists of those who have been called out of darkness and into his marvelous light from many different tongues, tribes, and nations. God graciously makes them citizens of the heavenly country whose

king is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because this is so, it is wrong to apply 2 Chronicles 7:14 directly in our era to any particular earthly country – including the United States. That promise did apply directly to the church in its old covenant form, the theocratic church-state of Israel in the Promised Land. But that old covenant form of his church was a temporary arrangement. It was designed to prepare the way for, and to bring about, the coming of Christ and the promised salvation (Gal. 3:23–26).

Our Lord Jesus made it clear that, on account of his saving work and the outpouring of his Spirit, the church would take a very different form in the new covenant. It would become international, rather than national; its power would be spiritual, rather than temporal; it would be spread by gospel witnesses, rather than by soldiers (Acts 1:6–8). Accordingly, rather than inviting the nations to come to the Holy Land in order to become part of the holy nation, the holy nation is instead to go out into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20).

This new arrangement means that God's people hold a dual citizenship in this life. Our Lord makes us at the same time citizens of the church – the one and only “Christian nation” – and citizens of an earthly nation, subject to an earthly

government.

Surely the United States has many Christians, and surely that has been a blessing to her. But it is unbiblical to say that any nation, including the United States—as a nation—enjoys special favor from God over and above the other nations of the earth. If the United States has enjoyed God's favor, it has done so for the sake of his church (Rom. 8:28).

Is it unpatriotic to say that 2 Chronicles 7:14 does not apply directly to the United States? If we do say that, then does it mean that we should not love our country? No! In a real sense, the Old Testament passage that applies more directly to new covenant saints is Jeremiah 29:4–7:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.



Under the new covenant gospel arrangement, we believers are “elect exiles of the dispersion” (1 Peter 1:1). We are “sojourners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:11). We are scattered throughout the nations. And in that setting, the Lord commands us to be patriotic. We are to love the land in which he has placed us and to seek its welfare.

The overarching reason why we are to do so, however, is not because it is a Christian nation, but rather for the sake of our even higher allegiance to the kingdom of heaven and its King. This higher allegiance to the church and her Head should lead us diligently to pursue our vocation as citizens in the country where our Lord has placed us.

This higher allegiance should lead us to pray “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tim. 2:2). It should also lead us to respect and submit to civil authority

because the leaders of the nations rule by God’s authority (Rom. 13:1–7). William Still’s counsel to pastors was:

The church ... has to be as neutral to it as loyal citizens can be. She is called to gather and build the church of Jesus Christ under any system whatsoever. Her members are to submit to the powers that be, as far as this does not conflict with the individual conscience, and they are to let the state do as it will.... What Peter and Paul are saying in Romans 13:1–17 and 1 Peter 2 is that we are to submit to whatever regime we happen to be under—submit to it, not sponsor, or oppose it. (*The Work of the Pastor* [2010], pp. 65–66)

The United States is a great nation. She was founded on good principles, and she has enjoyed great blessings. But she is not a Christian nation. The church – whether she is found in the United States, Canada,

England, France, Russia, China, Eritrea, Uganda, Israel, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, or wherever – is the one and only Christian nation of the new covenant era.

All the kingdoms of this world will perish. That includes the United States. But the church—made up of people from every tongue, tribe, and nation—will go on forever. Let us never forget that we have received “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28). At the same time, let us also be active in our vocation as citizens, loving our neighbors and therefore seeking the welfare of our country, of our state (or province), and of our community—wherever the Lord has put us to live and serve.

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## Context vs. pretext

by Jon Dykstra

Professor D.A. Carson has often quoted his father as saying that “a text without a context becomes a pretext for a proof text.”

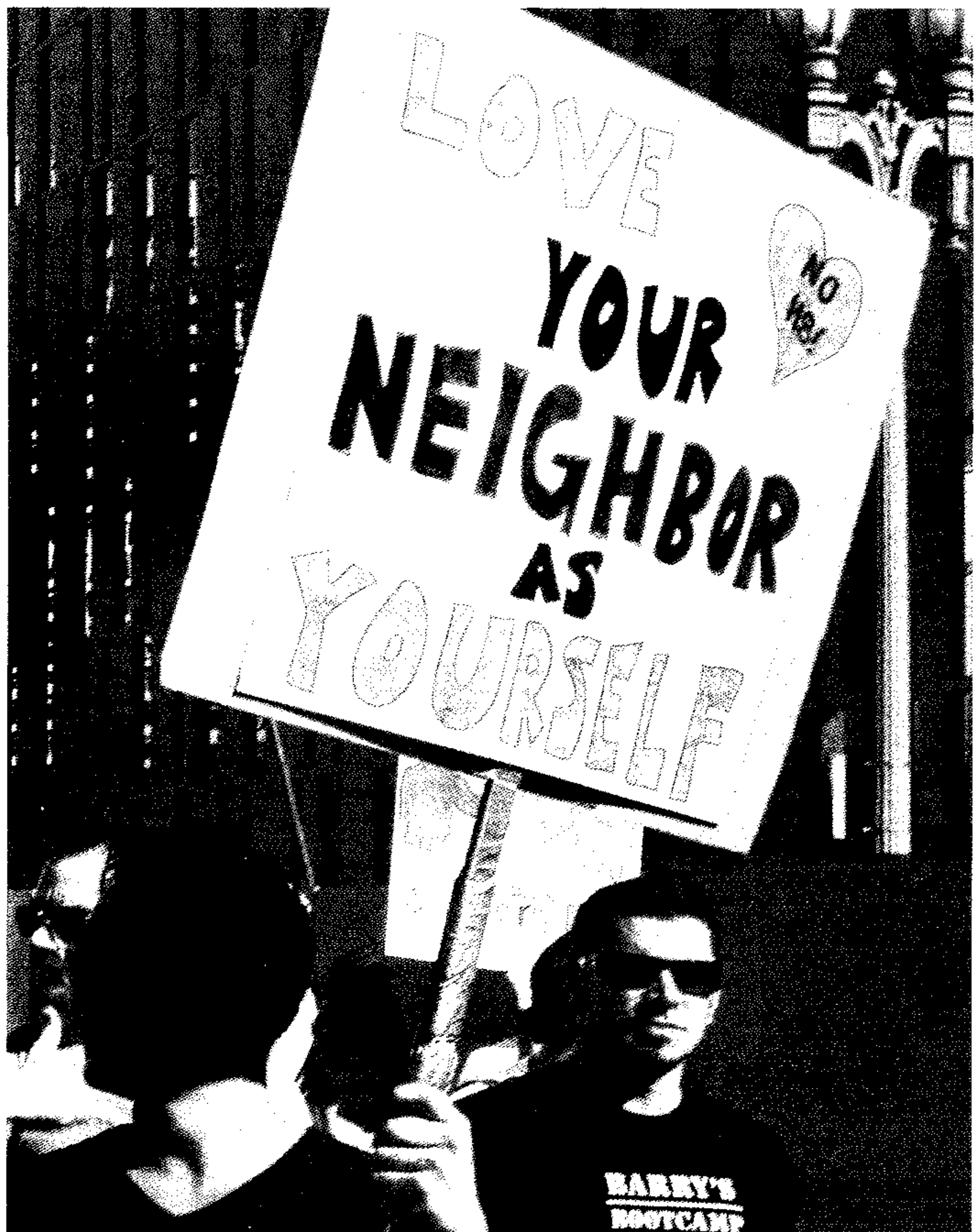
The text here is any section of Scripture we want to study.

Context is, in the first place, the verses that immediately precede and follow our passage, but, secondly, includes the Bible book, and finally, the entire Bible.

A pretext is anything a person might say or do that masks their true intentions. Carson is noting here (or rather, his father is) that if a person won’t study a Scripture text in its context, then they are only pretending to study God’s Word. Instead of getting the real meaning out of the text, this “text without context” approach will allow them to read in their own perspective. They can use

isolated verses as proof texts to back up their favorite political and moral positions, no matter how aberrant those positions might be.

However, if we are genuinely interested in learning what God is telling us in His Word, then we need to heed the wisdom of Professor Carson’s father, and study each passage in the framework of the whole Bible.



**Mark 12:31, used to justify gay marriage** on Nov. 15, 2008, in Los Angeles where marchers protested the passing of California’s Proposition 8 banning gay marriage. Gerry Boughan / Shutterstock.com