

OUR STORY

GOD'S WORK. OUR HOPE.

Chronological Readings

June



NORTH FORT WORTH
BAPTIST CHURCH

PRACTICAL APPROACH TO OUR DAILY READINGS

Commit to a consistent time and place (allow 15-20 minutes).

Read each day's passage prayerfully. Don't ask the question, "What does today's reading mean to me?" Read each day, asking, "What truth is God revealing?" Focus especially upon:

What does the reading reveal about God?

What does the reading reveal about humanity (about me)?

What does the reading reveal about what is "relationally" appropriate or inappropriate toward God? God isn't supplying us with a list of rules to follow.

He's inviting us to relate to Him as God so we might walk with Him by faith.

What does the reading reveal about God's unfolding work of salvation?

Underline what stands out. We want to remember key ideas or verses.

Prayerfully identify one promise, insight, or action to carry with you into the day, and then commit it to the Lord in prayer.

Read each day's devotion for further perspective.

Keep in mind—the goal is NOT to read the Bible thru. The DAILY COMMITMENT is to draw near to God by faith and to experience the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

ENLIST A PERSON OR GROUP TO JOIN YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Agree to hold one another accountable.

Touch base consistently about your readings.

Exchange daily texts, emails, or social media posts to highlight the promise, insight, or action you seek to carry into the day.

Talk weekly or every other week by phone or in person. Discuss specific lessons or questions that especially stand out.

Adopt an approach that works best for you—consistency is the key.

Pray for one another by name for spiritual understanding and growth.

Encourage one another to press through the ups and downs of the journey.

June 1 Proverbs 17-19

It is safer to meet a bear robbed of her cubs
than to confront a fool caught in foolishness. (Proverbs 17:12)

Solomon frequently speaks of the would-be fool in the book of Proverbs (66 times in the NLT). Who does he have in mind? Don't think of someone who is intellectually dull or unaware. Instead, think of someone who is spiritually disinterested or rebellious. The "fool," from Solomon's point of view, rejects God and His influence. They live as if they know what's best and defy God accordingly. From their perspective, life is all about them and what they make of it. Sound like anyone we know? Is it potentially descriptive of you? Again, Solomon has much to say about the foolish. His descriptions include:

- 1) Fools despise God's wisdom and discipline. (Proverbs 1:7)
- 2) Fools think their way is right. (Proverbs 12:15)
- 3) Fools deceive themselves. (Proverbs 14:8)
- 4) Fools plunge ahead with reckless confidence. (Proverbs 14:16)
- 5) Fools feed on trash/folly. (Proverbs 15:14)
- 6) Fools have no desire to learn. (Proverbs 17:6)
- 7) Fools only want to express their opinions. (Proverbs 18:2)

Once more, does it sound like anyone we know? I raise the question because people increasingly live as if God and His wisdom are irrelevant. Even worse, they display little patience toward anyone who would suggest otherwise. Solomon warns, "*It is safer to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than to confront a fool caught in foolishness.*" (Proverbs 17:12) Have you encountered any angry bears lately? They are all over social media if you promote God's wisdom online. It's ironic. A culture that promotes tolerance will not tolerate those who espouse a biblical morality or worldview.

And Solomon's counsel? We must be discerning in what we say and when we say it. Understand that the "fool" will be unwilling to consider God's perspective or wisdom, so don't jump into an argument for argument's sake. Does that mean we become silent on moral and spiritual issues? Absolutely not! It means that we learn to be spiritually discerning. From our knees in prayer, we look for the right time and place to address our day's moral, social, and spiritual issues. We don't spout off or lose our cool. Instead, we look to speak the timely word in love so that Christ might work in and through our words and actions.

The key is spiritual discernment. As Jesus would teach, "*Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don't throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.*" (Matthew 7:6) So don't stir up the bear unnecessarily. May God teach us the appropriate discernment so we might respond in ways that make a lasting difference.

June 2
Proverbs 20:1-22:16

*The LORD directs our steps,
so why try to understand everything along the way? (Proverbs 20:24)*

There's much about life that we will not understand. Though we try to fit our circumstances together like a carefully crafted jigsaw puzzle, making sense of some situations will evade us—even frustrate us. So what do we do? Solomon recommends that we allow for the mystery. “Why,” Solomon asks, “try to understand everything along the way?” That’s a fair question. The English Standard Version translates the question more bluntly: “How can man understand his way?” That implies some level of inadequacy, even impossibility.

As that is true, the New Living Translation is helpful. “Why try to understand everything along the way?” In other words, “Relax. God is still working even when we are confounded and confused.” That is Solomon’s overall point. He reminds us that the LORD directs our steps when life becomes bewildering. God sees what we do not see. God knows what we do not know. And be assured, despite the unexpected, God will accomplish His purpose and plan. As Solomon attests, “the LORD directs our steps.”

I know. That’s not how we want it to be. We want our lives to be easily understood and explained. Quite frankly, life isn’t that simple. With a global population of 7.9 billion, our existence has a glorious complexity involving many variables and dynamics that our limited minds will not comprehend. But that’s part of the problem. We think it is only about us. We identify ourselves as the center of the universe, and we’re not. Our lives are intricately connected and influenced by factors far beyond our control and certainly beyond our understanding. That said, the complexity of life is not beyond the LORD’s understanding and will not thwart His larger work and plan.

So, as Solomon would advise, let’s allow for the mystery. Will we do so? I leave you with an appeal from a previous reading,

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on
your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5)*

May God help us to do so as we move toward the unknown.

June 3
Proverbs 22:17–24:34

Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul. (Proverbs 22:24–25)

Do you think the stress from the recent pandemic has caused people to be angrier and more short-tempered? I perceive that it has. The heightened fear and uncertainty of the past three years have taken a toll. Patience and goodwill have eroded. Sadly, the world appears angrier, making Solomon's warning more timely and relevant. He writes, *"Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul."*

People are known and formed by the company they keep. That's true in childhood. It remains true in adulthood. As Solomon suggests, we must take responsibility with whom we associate because it will make a positive or negative difference. Consider an earlier proverb, *"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble."* (Proverbs 13:20) Do you see the correlation?

We are influenced by the company we keep, which is especially true of angry people. Anger is an infectious and destructive emotion. It will spread throughout a situation and a group if unaddressed. We observed that first-hand during the pandemic. Though we cannot always control when we become angry (for it's an emotional reaction), we must avoid those who actively feed and justify their anger. Otherwise, we will become like them.

Will we do so? I recognize that this sounds easier said than done. We may find ourselves at work or other settings where dealing with angry people is unavoidable. In such cases, we should approach the interactions prayerfully to counteract the negative influence.

However, Solomon's concern is about our closer associations, where we relax and let our guard down. When angry people characterize our inner circle, we will soon become one of them. And that is not a good thing. *"People with understanding control their anger,"* Solomon explains, and *"a hot temper shows great foolishness."* (Proverbs 14:29)

Let's not prove foolish in our actions or our associations. What do you say?

June 4
Song of Songs 1-8

Kiss me and kiss me again, for your love is sweeter than wine. (Song of Solomon 1:2)

The Song of Songs (also known as the Song of Solomon) is unique among the biblical writings. It appears to be an anthology of love poetry, which has caused considerable discussion. What's a collection of love poems doing in the Bible? Some answer the question by suggesting that the poems are allegorical or symbolic. For example, some early Jewish scholars interpreted the romantic interaction to portray God's love for the nation of Israel. Later Christian writers, however, offered another possibility. They suggested that the love sonnets illustrate Christ's love for the Church. Though God's love for Israel and Christ's love for the Church are biblically true, that's likely not the book's point. The Song of Songs may be what it appears to be—a collection of Hebrew love poems.

Why, then, is it included in the Bible? The answer may not be as complicated as we think. Romantic love was not an accidental development on humanity's part. God fashioned Adam and Eve to discover the intimacy and goodness of a life-long romantic relationship. God declares as much when He says,

“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him”. . . So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man. “At last!” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’ This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” (Genesis 2:18, 21-24)

It was the Creator's doing, and the Song of Songs is a poetic celebration of the joy and desire of romantic love. There's no reason to allegorize it. Instead, allow the ancient poetry to remind us that romantic love is beautiful and good as we pursue it according to God's wisdom and plan. Though it's doubtful that we will romantically recite the poetry, it hopefully can move us to confess our love and affection in appropriate ways. Indeed, that would be my suggested application for today's reading. If married, celebrate the love that you share and compliment one another. We have an entire book of the Bible that points us in that direction.

Let's take the hint and do something about it. God will be honored as we do.

June 5

1 Kings 11:1-43; 2 Chronicles 9:29-31; Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. The LORD had clearly instructed the people of Israel, 'You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods.' Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. (1 Kings 11:1-2)

God blessed and prospered Solomon's reign in noticeable ways. God kept His promises to David and Solomon (2 Samuel 7:12-16; 1 Chronicles 22:9-10; 1 Kings 3:12-14). The nation had never experienced such a long period of peace and success. Yet, Solomon also benefitted from the wisdom that God directed through his life. The LORD enabled Solomon to rule with an understanding heart (1 Kings 3:12-14) to prosper the nation. We can fairly say that Solomon's reign was the high mark of Israel's history (2 Chronicles 9:22-23).

However, Solomon was not without sin. As today's reading exposed, he knowingly disobeys the LORD in a critical area. It's one thing for us to be familiar with God's wisdom. It's something else for us to act upon. Solomon allowed God's wisdom to influence his governance as king but disregarded God's commands for his personal life. He openly defies God by marrying countless foreign wives, eventually leading him to worship their pagan gods—turning Solomon's heart away from the LORD.

Solomon's actions are disgraceful and without excuse. He did the very thing God warned him not to do (1 Kings 11:10). God's appointed ruler compromised himself, and it would not be tolerated. The LORD announces that Solomon's spiritual adultery would result in most of the nation (ten tribes) being handed over to one of Solomon's servants. Interestingly, it was for David's sake that the nation would not be torn away. In retrospect, it was because of God's relationship with David that Solomon experienced much of his prosperity. And now, God's further loyalty to David would enable Solomon to complete his reign and leave the tribe of Judah for Solomon's descendants.

And what do we learn? Again, we are reminded that those God richly blesses can disappoint Him. Solomon knew better, but he sinned against the LORD anyway. His example should serve as a cautionary tale. Knowing what to do is not enough. We must act upon God's wisdom. It's troubling that the "wisest man in the world" behaves so foolishly. Yet, I'm also encouraged by God's faithfulness to His servant David. Solomon is the beneficiary of God's promises to his father. I highlight this because God's disposition toward us is based on our relationship with His Son, Jesus. We are the active beneficiaries of God's grace because of Him. Of course, that is not a license to sin, but we should be encouraged that Jesus will always influence God's actions toward us. That will never change, even on our worst days. Now, that is something that should lift the heart.

June 6
Ecclesiastes 1:12-6:12

I have seen the burden God has placed on us all. Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God. (Ecclesiastes 3:10-13)

Ecclesiastes is written to help make sense of life. Solomon (at the end of his life) scrutinizes much of what people elevate as important, exposing the inadequacy of education, work, pleasure, or wealth as ends unto themselves. Though we might discover some benefit or enjoyment from these pursuits, they fail to produce the lasting fulfillment or satisfaction one might expect. Indeed, Ecclesiastes' so-called "Teacher" testifies to the futility of life's common endeavors, and his conclusion is far-reaching. It's like chasing the wind (Ecclesiastes 1:17).

It's easy to become disheartened or disillusioned by Solomon's observations. He systematically discredits the very things upon which many build their lives. However, his purpose is not to discourage but to offer a better approach. In a recurring way, the "Teacher" recommends that we learn to embrace life's simple goodness and relate to God appropriately. For example, he writes,

"So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God. For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from Him?" (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25) And later adds, "So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God. And I know that whatever God does is final. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. God's purpose is that people should fear Him." (Ecclesiastes 3:12-14)

Do we hear his practical appeal? Far too many miss life altogether through their ardent pursuit of education, work, pleasure, or wealth. They become fixated on climbing perceived ladders of success that life races by, and they miss living. Even more seriously, they lose sight of God in the process. Will we take his appeal to heart?

I developed a helpful approach based on Solomon's insight some years ago. I began to watch for what I describe as "TIG" moments. What are they? They represent "THIS IS GOOD" moments in a typical day. We choose to appreciate life's simple goodness amid life's chaos and confusion. We celebrate a completed task, an enjoyable meal, or well-spent time with family or friends. We recognize that there are "TIG" moments to be acknowledged and enjoyed if we look for them. And here's the deal: by appreciating life's "TIG" moments, we learn to enjoy life in ways we might not have expected. Does it make life any less confounding? Probably not. However, it does help us view life in ways that enhance the journey and teach us to relate to God appropriately. So, will you recognize your "TIG" moments in the day ahead? It won't happen by accident. Commit yourself to do so, thank God as you recognize them, and see if it doesn't encourage you through the day.

June 7
Ecclesiastes 7:1-11:6

So I recommend having fun, because there is nothing better for people in this world than to eat, drink, and enjoy life. That way they will experience some happiness along with all the hard work God gives them under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 8:15)

Did you recognize your “This Is Good” moments yesterday? Did you pause and give thanks to the LORD? As I noted in yesterday’s devotion, the “Teacher” of Ecclesiastes repeatedly encourages us to enjoy life’s simple moments, so we don’t miss out on life altogether. Solomon learned through his experience that one could be so busy pursuing education, work, wealth, or pleasure that we miss out on living. He compares it to chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes 1:17). Solomon advises that we learn to appreciate life’s beauty, goodness, and relationships (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9). That doesn’t mean we don’t seek to be educated, work hard, or succeed. It means, instead, that we keep life in proper perspective. We choose to appreciate each day’s “TIG” moments and honor the LORD as we do.

It is all the more important as life’s unpredictability confronts us. Things don’t always turn out the way we expect. Solomon admits, *“The fastest runner doesn’t always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn’t always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skillful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don’t always lead successful lives. It is all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time.” (Ecclesiastes 9:11)*

Experiencing these inconsistencies can test our faith on some level. Based on Proverbs, we expect good things to happen to the wise and bad things to the foolish. Yet, life sometimes produces the opposite. We discover that the Book of Proverbs offers predictable patterns, not guarantees—the unexpected can still occur. Solomon adds, *“People can never predict when hard times might come. Like fish in a net or birds in a trap, people are caught by sudden tragedy.” (Ecclesiastes 9:12)*

And the solution? Resist overanalyzing life’s hardships and disappointments. Yes, learn what you can, but appreciate that some difficulties may prove beyond our comprehension. As Solomon appeals, *“Enjoy prosperity while you can, but when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. Remember that nothing is certain in this life.” (Ecclesiastes 7:14)*

That’s a helpful reminder. Life will include unpredictable elements. And our response? Resist taking the hardship personally. Focus instead on life’s “TIG” moments. Value the simple goodness of everyday activity, enjoy the people around you, and relate to God for who He is. That is Solomon’s advice, and I suggest we embrace it.

June 8

Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:14; 1 Kings 12:1-33; 2 Chronicles 10:1-11:17

So the king paid no attention to the people. This turn of events was the will of the LORD, for it fulfilled the LORD's message to Jeroboam son of Nebat through the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh. (1 Kings 12:15)

King Rehoboam chooses foolishly and follows his young advisors' counsel in today's reading. He adopts a heavy-handed approach toward the people, inciting the nation's revolt (1 Kings 12:1-20). His actions, however, would also contribute to the fulfillment of God's earlier pronouncement against Solomon (1 Kings 11:11-13). By worshipping the gods of his foreign wives, Solomon's sinful actions would have negative consequences on the reign of his son. The prophecy of Ahijah concerning Rehoboam would prove true. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel would be torn away from Solomon's heir and given to his servant instead. (1 Kings 11:31). Solomon's disobedience would produce a painful and disappointing outcome.

The unfolding events are also instructive. God's judgment against Solomon didn't require lightning bolts from above. It simply involved God removing His influence so that Rehoboam would choose foolishly. The decision to bear down on the people was the king's to make. In a sense, God gave Rehoboam over to his desire, and that desire would become the instrument of God's judgment.

Pay attention to this correlation. The discipline or judgment of the LORD doesn't always require an overt act on God's part. Sometimes, God lets us have our way, and we then experience the consequences of our making. The Apostle Paul describes the same pattern in the book of Romans when God hands the people over to their sinful desires, resulting in self-destruction (Romans 1:24-32). We should keep this in mind as we weigh our decisions and choices. Sinful choices can put into motion influences that have lasting effects. We should then relate to God appropriately.

Of course, that's the concluding emphasis in the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon appeals, "*Fear God and obey His commands, for this is everyone's duty. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.*" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) I'm convinced that Solomon comes to this realization toward the end of his life. Perhaps he pleads for us to respond to God appropriately because he is painfully aware of his failure and the pending consequences. If so, it only adds to the force of his appeal.

Let's take his words to heart and walk humbly before the LORD—for our sake and that of those who follow.

June 9

1 Kings 13:1-15:34; 2 Chronicles 12:13-15:19

Asa did what was pleasing and good in the sight of the LORD his God. (2 Chronicles 14:2)

In today's reading, the testimony concerning king Asa contrasts noticeably with the other rulers in Judah and Israel. Asa's faith in the LORD leads him to respond distinctively. What sets him apart? Unlike his predecessors (Rehoboam and Abijah), Asa *"removed the foreign altars and the pagan shrines. He smashed the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah poles."* (1 Chronicles 14:3)

Asa's faith is personal and real. He actively removes the defiling influences Solomon had introduced many years earlier. Just as significantly, Asa *"commanded the people of Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and to obey His law and His commands."* (1 Chronicles 14:4) Asa (by his words and actions) leads the people back into a right relationship with God. He even removes his grandmother, Maacah, from her position as queen mother because of her flagrant idolatry. Asa takes God's commands to heart and responds to the LORD appropriately.

And the results? It's worth noting that Asa's actions produced an extended period of peace for the southern nation of Judah (2 Chronicles 14:5). This allowed the people to rebuild, fortify, and flourish. It can fairly be said that the people benefited from Asa's godly influence over his 41-year reign. His actions are in contrast to the actions of his grandfather, Rehoboam, who led the nation in the opposite direction. With the example of these two rulers, we observe two men who adopt noticeably different approaches, which result in two recognizably different outcomes.

What might we learn from their two approaches? Our actions matter. Though the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that sometimes bad things happen despite the proper steps, our godly influence still matters. Our choices facilitate or diminish God's work among us. We open the way for God's favor or position obstacles that stand in the way. The question is: Which of the two will be descriptive of us?

I want to follow Asa's example. It is said about Asa that *"his heart remained completely faithful to the LORD throughout his life."* (1 Kings 15:14) What a beautiful summary of a person's life! And how is such a life achieved? Be assured. It isn't achieved by accident. It required a daily commitment on Asa's part to relate to God for who He is, resulting in a lifetime of faith. Let's then renew our focus for the day ahead. Let's enter the day (like Asa) as a person of faith and allow God to make a positive difference through us. What do you say?

June 10

1 Kings 15:16-17:7; 2 Chronicles 16:1-17:19

There was constant war between King Asa of Judah and King Baasha of Israel. (1 Kings 15:16)

Yesterday, we focused on the example of Asa and the positive difference he made during much of his reign as king of Judah. It was said of the noble king that *“his heart remained completely faithful to the LORD throughout his life.”* (1 Kings 15:14) Yet, today’s reading illustrates (like previous individuals of faith) that Asa would not prove perfect in his responses to God. Indeed, toward the end of Asa’s life, he displays a noticeable lapse of faith. What went wrong?

The aggressive actions of king Baasha of Israel threatened Asa and the nation. Instead of turning to the LORD, Asa turns to the king of Aram for a solution. Judah’s king empties the royal treasury and the treasury of the LORD to enter into a treaty with Ben-hadad—eliminating Aram’s political arrangement with Israel. The maneuver appears to work on the surface, but at what expense?

God sends Hanani to expose Asa’s lack of faith. He informs the king, *“Because you have put your trust in the king of Aram instead of in the LORD your God, you missed your chance to destroy the army of the king of Aram.”* (2 Chronicles 16:7) Asa should have known better. He had experienced God’s power and provision in the past (2 Chronicles 14:9-15). Why did he falter now? That’s a relevant question. It illustrates how quickly one can lose sight of God amid life’s problems. Asa did what came naturally, but God expected more of the great-great-grandson of David. As Hanani announced, *“The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. What a fool you have been!”* (2 Chronicles 16:9) Asa faltered when he should have trusted. His example reminds us that we can just as easily do the same.

What challenges currently test our hearts? Where will we focus? Do note: faith does not imply that we become passive spectators. God will often work through our efforts. The issue is our focus. Do we seek the LORD’s wisdom? Do we trust the LORD’s provision? Do we act according to His leadership or attempt what seems best? In this instance, Asa adopts a worldly solution when God has other plans. He should have asked the LORD, and so should we.

Let me make one final observation. Asa’s failure to trust the LORD is disappointing but not defining. It was costly but did not negate the overall testimony of his life. 1 Kings 15:14 says of Asa that *“his heart remained completely faithful to the LORD throughout his life.”* That’s instructive in light of today’s account. “Complete faithfulness” does not imply perfection. It portrays the general direction of Asa’s life. The imperfect king of Judah was committed to the LORD in a way that distinguished him from his predecessors and should still encourage us. In a sense, even his imperfection offers hope. Think about it. An embarrassing lapse of faith did not define his testimony, nor should it define ours. There is more to our story than a weak moment or two. Let’s remember that if we look over our shoulders with regret. Like Asa, may the larger telling of our story be one of renewed faith and determination to seek and follow the LORD—including today.

Come on! Let’s seek Him today!

June 11
1 Kings 17:8-20:22

“How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!” But the people were completely silent. (1 Kings 18:21)

One of the great scenes in biblical history is the spiritual showdown at Mount Carmel. Directed by the LORD, Elijah challenges Israel’s king Ahab, and a host of false prophets to a defining test. The issue is, who is the God of Israel? Would God’s covenant people bow their knees of devotion before the Great “I Am” who manifested His glory at Sinai? Or would the idolatrous children of Israel declare their continuing allegiance to the pagan gods of the land—Baal and Asherah?

The showdown involved the following: two bulls would be brought forward for sacrifice. The 450 prophets of Baal would prepare an altar and appeal to their God. Elijah, the lone prophet of the LORD, would prepare his altar and appeal to his God. Whichever sacrifice was consumed by a heavenly fire would be declared the winner—the God of Israel.

Elijah invites the prophets of Baal to go first. They prepare their altar, plead with their God for an extended period, and even become frantic—cutting themselves with knives and swords. But nothing happens. There’s not even a spark, much less a consuming fire. Do note: the size of their number, the sincerity of their hearts, and the zeal and length of their petitions are to no avail. I mention that because I fear we sometimes emulate their example more than Elijah’s.

We should learn from Elijah. First, Elijah repairs the altar (1 Kings 18:30). Don’t overlook the importance of this action. We will not see God’s power at work as long as the altar of the LORD is in disrepair. The altar, for us, represents the state of our lives—the condition of His Church. We cannot expect God to glorify His name when our lives are not as they should be. Elijah repairs the altar, and so must we. Second, Elijah steps toward the LORD in faith. Three times, he saturates the sacrifice with four jars of water. Elijah places his trust entirely in the LORD. Finally, Elijah submits to God’s purpose and plan. Without religious theatrics, he humbly prays, *“O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant. Prove that I have done all this at Your command. O LORD, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that You, O LORD, are God and that You have brought them back to Yourself.” (1 Kings 18:36–37)*

Elijah’s prayer is more about God than about himself. Can we always say the same? It’s more about God’s will than the prophet’s desires. Again, can we say the same? There’s nothing elaborate about Elijah’s prayer. He seeks what God seeks, and he does so for God’s glory.

And the result? The fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven, consuming Elijah’s sacrifice (1 Kings 18:38-39). Will we learn from the notable showdown at Carmel? Are we willing to repair the altar of our lives? Will we approach the LORD in faith? Will we submit ourselves to God’s will as we humble ourselves in prayer? Will we see the fire of God’s glory fall?

May it be so, O LORD, may it be so!

June 12

1 Kings 20:23-22:9; 2 Chronicles 18:1-8

But the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He will be at Naboth’s vineyard in Jezreel, claiming it for himself. Give him this message: ‘This is what the LORD says: Wasn’t it enough that you killed Naboth? Must you rob him, too? Because you have done this, dogs will lick your blood at the very place where they licked the blood of Naboth.’” (1 Kings 21:17–19)

Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, are two of the more villainous people in the Old Testament. They not only lead Israel toward the worship of Baal and Asherah but are also morally corrupt. They are two people you would not want to know, much less emulate. The tragic story of Naboth illustrates their sinful, self-indulgent ways. Naboth owned a vineyard adjoining Ahab’s palace, which the king of Israel coveted. Ahab offers to purchase the property or provide a fair exchange, but Naboth refuses. He did not want to be the descendant who sold the family’s ancestral land.

Ahab became visibly disappointed by Naboth’s refusal, so much so that his wife (Jezebel) intervened to secure the property. She implements a scheme in which Naboth is falsely accused of cursing God and the king. The allegation tragically results in Naboth being stoned to death outside the town. It was an evil plot, eliciting a pronouncement of judgment against the king and his family from the LORD.

It’s at that point the story takes an unexpected turn. Ahab repents. Based on prior behavior, we would not have expected the wayward king to humble himself in this way. Indeed, Ahab had been the vilest of Israel’s kings (1 Kings 16:30). Yet, Ahab now humbles himself before the LORD—tearing his clothing, dressing in burlap, and fasting. The king even sleeps in burlap as he mourns before the LORD (1 Kings 21:27). And the result? God responds in mercy to the most notorious of Israel’s kings. God announces, *“Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has done this, I will not do what I promised during his lifetime.”* (1 Kings 21:29)

Let’s think about this for an additional moment. Is anyone beyond the LORD’s compassion if Ahab can experience God’s mercy? Tomorrow’s reading will reveal that Ahab’s future decisions will still result in his military defeat and death. But for now, we should observe the scope of God’s mercy. God’s heart is merciful to the repentant, even to Ahab.

Let’s then be encouraged by that consideration. More importantly, let’s freely accept God’s mercy directed toward our lives as we humble ourselves before Him. Our God is a merciful, compassionate God. Let’s turn to Him in faith.

June 13

1 Kings 22:10-53; 2 Chronicles 18:9-20:30

But Micaiah replied, "As surely as the LORD lives, I will say only what the LORD tells me to say." (1 Kings 22:14)

Ahab, the king of Israel, is determined to reclaim Ramoth-Gilead from the Arameans. He enlists Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, to join him in his military campaign. Still, Jehoshaphat suggests they seek the LORD's counsel before proceeding (1 Kings 22:5). In response, Ahab summons 400 prophets to address the question, "Should I go to war with Ramoth-Gilead, or should I hold back?" They unanimously proclaim Ahab's future victory. Zedekiah, one of the king's prophets, later fashions iron horns to symbolize Ahab's victory and declares, "This is what the LORD says: With these horns you will gore the Arameans to death!" (1 Kings 22:11)

Jehoshaphat is not yet convinced. Perhaps he sensed the self-serving nature of Ahab's prophets, so he asks if there is still another who could be consulted (1 Kings 22:8). At this point, we're introduced to God's servant, Micaiah, whom Ahab distinguishes from the others. His counsel is described as troublesome to Israel's king.

What is Micaiah's response? He's urged by the king's messenger to agree with the other prophets. But Micaiah boldly declares, "As surely as the LORD lives, I will say only what the LORD tells me to say." (1 Kings 22:14) And what does the LORD have to say concerning this matter? Through a prophetic vision, Micaiah warns Ahab that proceeding with the campaign would result in his defeat and death. A second vision also warns the king that the counsel of the other prophets is intended to lead Ahab to his doom. Is Ahab grateful for the warning? Certainly not. He arrests and imprisons Micaiah and proceeds with the campaign to his demise.

What is the lesson for us to consider? We need more Micaiahs in our day. We need individuals more committed to delivering God's message than impressing the rich and powerful or being popular with the crowds. The Apostle Paul warns that a day will come when the Church will be weakened because God's people will stop seeking the truth. He writes, "For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths." (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Do we see a parallel with Ahab? Are we making the same mistake?

Pray for God to raise clear and courageous voices in our day. We desperately need to hear God's truth amid the confusion and the chaos. We need messengers more interested in moving us to God than satisfying our self-centered desires. Pray for a new generation of Micaiahs. Pray also for responsive hearts to the truth. God warned Ahab of his defeat, and Ahab proceeded anyway. Pray that God will not only send His messengers but that our hearts will respond appropriately. Pray for humble, receptive hearts.

Ahab's final days can be instructive if we learn from his mistake. I pray that we do!

June 14

1 Kings 22:41-50; 2 Kings 1:1-18; 2 Kings 3:1-27; 2 Chronicles 20:31-37

Jehoshaphat was a good king, following the ways of his father, Asa. He did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight. During his reign, however, he failed to remove all the pagan shrines, and the people never fully committed themselves to follow the God of their ancestors. (2 Chronicles 20:32-33)

The testimony of Jehoshaphat in Scripture is both good and bad. The son of Asa walked undeniably in the ways of the LORD. His faith moved him toward God in personal ways. Yet, Jehoshaphat also stopped short of what could have been—what should have been. Though the king of Judah drove out the shrine prostitutes that morally defiled the nation, he didn't remove the shrines themselves. He tolerated their presence, allowing their corrupting spiritual influence to persist. Jehoshaphat's story is perplexing. He represents a life full of promise but settling for less than God desired.

What went wrong? To me, Jehosophat was susceptible to cultural compromise. Don't misunderstand. Nothing about Jehoshaphat's life suggests that he faltered morally or spiritually. He lived a life of character and faith before the LORD, and that should be noted. However, there are instances where he enters into arrangements or partnerships that create instability. For example, he forges a political relationship with Israel's kings in ways that leave him vulnerable—first with Ahab (2 Kings 22) and then with Ahaziah, Ahab's son (2 Chronicles 20:37). Jehoshaphat exposes himself to harm and loss in ways that could have been avoided.

Perhaps the most devastating compromise on Jehoshaphat's part involved marrying his eldest son (Jehoram) to the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. This action would have far-reaching consequences. Instead of influencing Israel toward God, Jehoram would come under the destructive influence of an idolatrous culture and society. Here's a question: Did Jehoshaphat stop short of destroying the pagan shrines in Judah to accommodate the union between his son and Ahab's daughter? Whatever the motivation, this action on Jehosphat's part would begin a devastating downward spiritual spiral. As today's reading described, *"Jehoram followed the example of the kings of Israel and was as wicked as King Ahab, for he had married one of Ahab's daughters. So Jehoram did what was evil in the LORD's sight."* (2 Kings 8:18)

Jehoshaphat was a good, godly man, but he compromised his convictions in ways that put destructive effects into motion. I'm sure he thought he was doing the right thing at the time. His example, however, challenges me to look honestly at my actions and potential accommodations. And you?

How might things have been different had Jehoshaphat benefitted from Paul's counsel to the Corinthians? *"Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness?"* (2 Corinthians 6:14) Paul's words are timely and relevant. May God enable us to live godly in Christ Jesus and avoid partnerships that introduce forces beyond our control. When tempted to do so, may we remember the story of Jehoshaphat.

June 15

2 Kings 2:1-25; 2 Kings 4:1-44

As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. (2 Kings 2:11)

How do we comprehend what the writer of 2 Kings describes? Elijah and Elisha are walking in the wilderness when a fiery chariot dramatically separates God's two servants. Once separated, a whirlwind lifts Elijah from the ground, carrying the LORD's prophet into heaven. Just like that, Elijah transitions from his life on earth into the realm of God. How do we make sense of this?

My mind is flooded with questions. Why is Elijah permitted to escape death? What's the significance of the fiery chariot and horses? Why does a whirlwind lift Elijah to heaven? What does Elijah feel while all of this is happening? And finally, what does he experience when he enters the kingdom of God? The truth is, we will have more questions than answers regarding Elijah's experience. That said, let me highlight two considerations.

First, this extraordinary moment highlights the uniqueness of Elijah's life. There's a quality to his faith that commends him to God. A quick survey of the Bible indicates that only two people physically escape death—Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) and Enoch (Genesis 5:24). It is the quality of Enoch's faith that results in his heavenly promotion (Hebrews 11:5). We can also be sure that the quality of Elijah's faith results in the same. Though we may not be able to explain the significance of the whirlwind, we can appreciate the power and importance of Elijah's response to God. Faith is essential for those who please God (Hebrews 11:6). It enabled Elijah to pray in ways that affected the weather (James 5:17-18). It enabled Enoch to walk closely with God for 300 years. How does your faith affect you?

Second, when I read of Elijah's dramatic departure, my mind drifts to the events surrounding Jesus' glorious return. Paul describes the details (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18): Jesus appears, a shout and trumpet ring out, the dead in Christ are gloriously raised, and the believers in Jesus who are alive are dramatically caught up to meet the LORD in the air. There's no mention of a whirlwind. But like Elijah, these men and women of faith are lifted to glory without experiencing death. Like Enoch and Elijah, God welcomes them home.

Again, I probably have more questions than answers when I reflect upon Paul's description, but my heart is encouraged. Whether God raises me from the dead or lifts me up as one still alive, I'm confident I will meet the Lord in the air as He receives His own. And the basis of my confidence? It's not in myself but in the One who is coming. I place my faith in Jesus and all He has done on my behalf. And you?

As we marvel today over Elijah's departure, let's also daydream about our promised day when we will experience the dramatic! Now that's something to think about!

June 16
2 Kings 5:1-8:15

But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: “Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy.” (2 Kings 5:10)

There are many biblical accounts of Elisha’s miracles. God works through His prophet in undeniable ways. Yet, one of Elisha’s more instructive miracles involves the healing of an Aramean commander. Naaman was a warrior of considerable reputation who faithfully served the king of Aram—leading successful raids against Israel. As great as Naaman was, he was not immune to illness. Leprosy afflicted the soldier’s body. Interestingly, Naaman hears about God’s servant, Elisha, through a young Jewish girl who had been captured during a previous raid. As difficult as it must have been for the Aramean leader, Naaman travels to Israel searching for a miracle.

The proud commander eventually finds his way to the home of God’s prophet, but Elisha does not greet Naaman personally. He sends instructions through his servant, Gehazi. *“Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy.” (2 Kings 5:10)* Naaman reacts angrily to Elisha and his instructions. He feels insulted and initially turns away. His officers appeal to their commander, urging Naaman to reconsider and act upon the prophet’s instruction. Naaman finally concedes and humbly steps into the Jordan. He proceeds to dip his body into the water. Once, twice, three times, the great Aramean warrior obeys. He submits to what the man of God requires four, five, six, and seven times. And the result? *“And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child, and he was healed!” (2 Kings 5:14)* Behold the power of God.

This particular miracle is instructive. First, the power is with God, not with the prophet. Elisha delivers the Lord’s instruction, but the LORD cleanses Naaman’s body. Second, humility is required. Naaman’s hesitation could have cost the commander. It could have prevented him from experiencing God’s cleansing power. Thankfully, for his benefit, the appeals of his officers move Naaman into the water as he humbly acts upon Elisha’s instructions. Finally, Naaman had to embrace the promise fully. His cleansing did not occur with the first or second dip. Nor was it a gradual renewal with each additional plunge. Instead, it is a test of Naaman’s faith. The leprous man must act upon the promise. To his credit, he does, and Naaman experiences the power of God.

Let’s learn from his example. Think about it regarding our cleansing from sin. The power is God’s to forgive and cleanse. Through Jesus, His Son, God can remove the guilt and stain of the worst of sinners (John 1:29). Humility, however, is required. The problem remains unless we acknowledge our need and seek God’s provision (John 3:16-18). Pride has prevented many a sinner from experiencing God’s cleansing. Finally, we must embrace God’s promise fully. Our solution is not to dip into the Jordan. Our solution is to turn to Jesus, our Savior (Romans 10:9-10). We must embrace the promise of life He extends. As we do, forgiveness and cleansing are ours. Behold the power of God!

June 17

2 Chronicles 21:8-22:9; 2 Kings 8:23-10:17

But Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. No one was sorry when he died. They buried him in the City of David, but not in the royal cemetery (2 Chronicles 21:20).

Could there be a sadder obituary than Jehoram's? He reigned as king of Judah for eight years, and no one was sorry when he died. What did he do wrong? Why would no one grieve for their former king? An explanation is provided in Elijah's letter to Jehoram. He writes, *"This is what the LORD, the God of your ancestor David, says: You have not followed the good example of your father, Jehoshaphat, or your grandfather King Asa of Judah. Instead, you have been as evil as the kings of Israel. You have led the people of Jerusalem and Judah to worship idols, just as King Ahab did in Israel. And you have even killed your own brothers, men who were better than you. So now the LORD is about to strike you, your people, your children, your wives, and all that is yours with a heavy blow."* (2 Chronicles 21:12-14)

Jehoram's death represents a direct act of judgment on God's part. His sins are intolerably brazen, mirroring the wickedness of Ahab and the kings of Israel. Jehoram built pagan shrines in the hill country of Judah and led the people away from the LORD. God refused to ignore his defiance. The nation soon became vulnerable to outside invaders, and the king ultimately became afflicted with a terminal disease. God held Jehoram accountable. God's displeasure is also directed toward Ahab's son, Joram. Indeed, the whole of Ahab's family would experience the hand of God's judgment through the actions of Jehu (Israel's future king). Jehu's measures are brutal, leaving me personally uncomfortable. Yet, his actions remind us again that God's judgment is justifiable and unsettling.

And our lesson? We should consistently remind ourselves that idolatry is a serious matter before God. To pretend that God is unaffected by such defiance and sin is to cover our eyes to the truth. God consistently warned the children of Israel about the consequences of such behavior. At Sinai, God explained, *"You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands."* (Exodus 20:4-6)

Jehoram, Ahab, and Joram refused to trust and honor the LORD. They turned away from Him instead of turning to Him. They chose judgment instead of blessing. The consequences of their choices are troubling, but they are as God promised they would be. May their negative examples remind us of God's holiness and justice and move us to trust and honor the LORD appropriately.

June 18

2 Kings 10:32-12:16; 2 Chronicles 22:10-24:22

When Athaliah, the mother of King Ahaziah of Judah, learned that her son was dead, she began to destroy the rest of the royal family. (2 Kings 11:1)

Moral and spiritual darkness persists in Judah following the death of Jehoram, a wicked king. His son, Ahaziah, would perpetuate the darkness during his brief reign of one year. He would die due to God's actions against Joram, the king of Israel. It is a distressing time in Judah's history. Upon hearing about Ahaziah's death, his mother swiftly seizes power for herself. Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, systematically eliminates the remainder of the royal family. She would have no contenders as she claims the throne. For seven years, she leads Judah further into idolatry and spiritual darkness. However, all is not lost. Ahaziah's infant son, Joash, is shielded from his grandmother's evil scheme. The future king would remain protected for seven years within the safety and under the godly influence of the Temple. The high priest Jehoiada would not only preserve Joash's life. He would raise the would-be king in the teachings and admonitions of the LORD. There's a flicker of light in the darkness.

Jehoiada eventually acts to elevate Joash to the throne. He anoints the rightful heir to become the king of Judah at the young age of seven. Athaliah cannot prevent the transfer of power and is subsequently put to death. A descendant of David is again seated upon Jerusalem's throne. Jehoiada, recognizing the moment's significance, leads the people and the child king into a time of covenant renewal before God and with one another. It is a holy moment for the nation as they step toward the LORD. Joash's ascension to the throne ushers Judah into a period of blessing and spiritual light. God's people would again live as God's people.

It would be true for much of Joash's forty-year reign. Sadly, following the death of the chief priest Jehoiada, Joash would be swayed to reverse many of the priest's reforms. The king would again open the door for idolatry to reenter the land, provoking the LORD. I'm puzzled by Joash's actions. To no avail, the LORD appeals to Judah's king through His prophets and Zechariah, Jehoiada's son. Without Jehoiada's godly influence, Joash is susceptible to worldly influences.

And our lessons for the day? Be encouraged. God has a way of preserving the light in the darkest hours. Though we may not see how everything works together, the Athaliahs of our world do not have the upper hand. We can be assured that God positions people like Jehoiada at the right place and time. God is always working to introduce light in the darkness.

Today's reading also reminds us that a godly voice in our lives is crucial. The difference in Joash is undeniable. I don't understand why Joash was unwilling to listen to Zechariah or the prophetic voices the LORD directed his way. I know this: the absence of a godly influence in Joash's life ended badly. Nor is it healthy for us. Let's keep that in mind and allow God to speak in our lives through a godly voice or two. It makes a difference. I know who mine are. And you?

June 19

2 Kings 12:17-13:25; 2 Chronicles 24:23-27

Then Jehoahaz prayed for the LORD's help, and the LORD heard his prayer, for he could see how severely the king of Aram was oppressing Israel. (2 Kings 13:4)

Two lessons stand out from today's readings. First, sometimes God intervenes despite His people. The northern nation of Israel had been far from the LORD. The current king, Jehoahaz, followed the rebellious example of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. He did what was evil in the sight of God, leading the people to do the same. As a result, the nation suffered a series of military defeats. It is at this point that the story takes an encouraging turn. Jehoahaz calls out to the LORD in prayer, and God responds with mercy. He provides a deliverer to defeat the Arameans, and God's people are free—at least for a period.

God's response to Israel is instructive. The people's actions deserved judgment. However, God was predisposed to mercy. It's as if He was waiting for someone to call out to seek His help. In this case, the less than commendable Jehoahaz would call upon the LORD. Let's be encouraged by this. Sometimes, we assume that only the noblest, the holiest of individuals, will have sway with God. In actuality, the humble of heart are the ones who discover God's grace and provision. It's not a matter of earning God's favor. Instead, it is more about relating to God for who He is and receiving His favor. The New Testament writer James explains it this way: *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* (James 4:6) Be encouraged. We can and should turn to the LORD.

A second lesson might be observed from the interaction between Elisha and Jehoash. On this occasion, the king of Israel, Jehoash, appears to settle for less than what God was willing to do. Elisha instructs Jehoash to shoot an arrow out the east window. This would have been in the direction of Aram, Israel's enemy. Elisha proclaims, *"This is the LORD's arrow, an arrow of victory over Aram, for you will completely conquer the Arameans at Aphek."* (1 Kings 13:17) Elisha then instructs Jehoash to strike the ground with the remaining arrows. Whether that means Israel's king is to hit the ground with the arrows or shoot the arrows is not clear. The point, however, is that God is offering Jehoash the possibility of multiple victories. Each arrow represents a potential success.

Regrettably, instead of seizing five, even six arrows (victories), the king hits the ground with only three. He fails to open his eyes to what could be. Do we make the same mistake? Does God offer greater grace and activity toward our lives than we seek? Do we strike the ground with three arrows when six are available? I don't want to over-spiritualize the story. However, I do wonder if, like Jehoash, we settle for less.

Two lessons: Sometimes, God intervenes despite us as we humbly turn to Him. And sometimes, we settle for fewer victories than could have been. Which lesson challenges us the most today, and how will we respond?

June 20

2 Kings 13:12-13; 2 Kings 14:1-15:5; 2 Chronicles 25:1-26:21; Jonah 1-4

The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are.” (Jonah 1:1–2)

Are you familiar with the story of Jonah? God calls a Jewish man named Jonah to go to the Assyrian city of Ninevah to deliver a message of judgment. Jonah doesn't want to go, so he boards a ship for Tarshish in the opposite direction. Can a man run away from God? God causes a severe storm upon the sea. The sailors are terrified while Jonah sleeps on the ship below. The captain awakens Jonah, looking for answers, and Jonah informs him that he is the source of the problem. He recommends that they throw him overboard as the solution. Exhausting all other possibilities, the sailors cast Jonah into the sea, and the storm immediately ceases.

Yet, there's more to the story. God provides a great fish to swallow Jonah whole. Though Jonah assumed he would die, he now finds himself miraculously alive in the belly of the fish. The dire circumstances bring Jonah to his senses. He turns to God in prayer. After three days, God speaks to the fish that then vomits God's servant upon the shore. Jonah likely found himself back where he started. God calls his previously reluctant prophet to go to Ninevah to deliver his message. Not surprisingly, Jonah goes. He travels 500 miles to Ninevah and proclaims God's pronouncement of judgment—the Ninevites have 40 days.

Something extraordinary happens. The wicked Ninevites repent. Like Jonah, they, too, turn to God. Not just a few of them but the whole city. Even the king bows before God in repentance. God responds with mercy. His judgment is averted. End of the story? Not so quick. The story continues with Jonah becoming angry and frustrated that the Ninevites were spared. The book concludes with Jonah sulking, pouting over God's mercy toward the repentant people.

What do we learn from the 48 verses of this short book? First, the story is more about God than Jonah. We should focus our attention on the attitude and actions of the LORD. Second, by focusing on God, we learn He is the God of second chances. We see that miraculously toward Jonah and unexpectedly toward the worst of the worst—the wicked Ninevites. Be encouraged! Third, God expects His servants to obey and share His concern. The final chapter illustrates this vividly. The book could have ended on an up-note with the Ninevites experiencing God's mercy. But it doesn't. It concludes instead with Jonah frustrated and disappointed over the Ninevites' escape. The final verses of the book reflect God's appeal for Jonah to change his self-centered heart. *“You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?” (Jonah 4:10–11)*

God desires more than obedience from His servants. He wants us to reflect His heart, but do we? I close with three questions: Do we care more about people or things? Do we care more about people or comfort? Do we care more about people or ourselves? How we answer the questions will indicate whether we genuinely understand the book of Jonah. So do we?

June 21
Amos 1:1–6:14

This message was given to Amos, a shepherd from the town of Tekoa in Judah. He received this message in visions two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash, was king of Israel. (Amos 1:1)

Our reading today takes us through much of the book of Amos. It records the prophetic ministry of a Judean shepherd, Amos, who sends a warning message to the northern nation of Israel. God's appointed spokesperson is not a well-known prophet or priest. He is a layman—an ordinary shepherd and tender of sycamore trees in Tekoa (Amos 7:4). Yet, he is chosen by God to expose the sin of a nation. He calls Israel to repentance so they might escape God's judgment.

However, before God's prophet addresses Israel's sin, he announces that the LORD will also hold the surrounding nations responsible for their actions. Amos declares, *"This is what the LORD says: 'The people have sinned again and again, and I will not let them go unpunished!'"* This message is directed toward the people of Damascus (1:3), Gaza (1:6), Tyre (1:9), and Edom (1:11). The prophet also confronts the populations of Ammon (1:13), Moab (2:1), and Judah (2:4). Each nation is warned that God is not blind or indifferent to their sin—that a divine judgment is coming. Amos sounds the alarm.

The early warnings only set the stage for Amos' primary message against King Jeroboam II and the people of Israel. Amos proclaims, *"Listen to this message that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel—against the entire family I rescued from Egypt: 'From among all the families on the earth, I have been intimate with you alone. That is why I must punish you for all your sins.'" (Amos 3:1–2)* Amos' pronouncement must have startled the people. The nation had been experiencing a period of outward prosperity and peace. The people assumed all was well until God sent Amos to open their eyes.

What is the nature of their sin? God's covenant people are worshipping and serving pagan gods—provoking the LORD their God. They also are twisting and denigrating God's standard of justice—abusing the poor and vulnerable to their advantage. Though these practices have been present for generations, God's patience is ending. His judgment is coming. The warning, however, comes with an invitation. God appeals, *"Come back to Me and live!" (Amos 5:4)* And again, God pleads, *"Come back to the LORD and live!" (Amos 5:6)* We learned from the story of Jonah that God is merciful to the repentant. How will the people respond?

What about us? Do you think God is trying to get our attention? As with the nations in Amos' day, we can be sure that God will not allow our country's sins to go unpunished. He remains the God of justice and truth. Is the LORD trying to open our spiritual eyes? It's worth noting that it's not the religious professionals God uses to sound the alarm in today's reading. It's a layperson named Amos who responds to God's call.

What is God saying to your heart, and how will you respond?

June 22

Amos 7:1-9:15; 2 Kings 14:28-29; 2 Kings 15:6-29;
2 Chronicles 26:22-23; Isaiah 6:1-13

The Sovereign LORD showed me a vision. (Amos 7:1)

God calls His servant, Amos, to deliver a message of judgment against the nation of Israel. God's patience has reached an end. The people's persistent idolatry and cruel mistreatment of the poor have provoked the LORD to action. Israel's ruler (Jeroboam II) and the people at large will be held accountable for their defiance and sin. The Sovereign LORD has assessed their spiritual condition and pronounced His judgment against them. As Amos describes,

"I saw the Lord standing beside a wall that had been built using a plumb line. He was using a plumb line to see if it was still straight. And the LORD said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' I answered, 'A plumb line.' And the Lord replied, 'I will test My people with this plumb line. I will no longer ignore all their sins. The pagan shrines of your ancestors will be ruined, and the temples of Israel will be destroyed; I will bring the dynasty of King Jeroboam to a sudden end.'" (Amos 7:7-9)

The language of judgment is always unsettling. Yet, it is not without a glimmer of hope for the future. Though the nation will be overrun because of their sin, God points to a better day. The LORD announces, *"I will bring my exiled people of Israel back from distant lands, and they will rebuild their ruined cities and live in them again. They will plant vineyards and gardens; they will eat their crops and drink their wine. I will firmly plant them there in their own land. They will never again be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God.*" (Amos 9:14-15) All is not lost. Though the coming judgment is drawing near, God promises to restore His people in the future. His work of mercy and grace will prevail.

Of course, the closing portion of today's reading records the initial events leading toward the fulfillment of Amos' prophecies (2 Kings 14:28-15:29). The Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser, invades and conquers God's rebellious people—carrying many away into captivity. Israel has been evaluated by God's standard (the spiritual plumb line of His Law) and found lacking. The people will now suffer the consequences. And what about us? What would be revealed if God assessed our lives by His holy standard?

We are all grateful that our standing before the LORD ultimately rests upon Jesus' work on our behalf. Does that mean that our actions are no longer relevant? Is it possible we might reach the end of God's patience? That is not to suggest that our salvation is in jeopardy, for it is not. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Our actions, however, still have consequences. Read Jesus' letters to the churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 2:12-3:6). God is not blind or indifferent to what we say and do. May the LORD then give us ears to hear what the Spirit says to His churches. I pray we pay better attention than the people of Israel.

June 23

2 Kings 15:32-16:9; 2 Chronicles 27:1-28:15; Micah 1:1-16; Isaiah 7:1-25

When Ahaz, son of Jotham and grandson of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, set out to attack Jerusalem. However, they were unable to carry out their plan. The news had come to the royal court of Judah: “Syria is allied with Israel against us!” So the hearts of the king and his people trembled with fear, like trees shaking in a storm. (Isaiah 7:1-2)

It is an uncertain time for the nation of Judah. The Assyrian empire is beginning to assert its regional power and dominance. King Rezin of Syria and king Pekah of Israel forged a military alliance to strengthen their position, pressuring Judah to do the same. However, Ahaz resists. He pledges his loyalty to the king of Assyria instead (2 Kings 16:5-9). Judah’s king delivers his wealth and that of the Temple to Tiglath-pileser to seal the deal. Ahaz is playing politics instead of trusting the LORD.

God sends his prophet, Isaiah, to urge Judah’s young king to trust the LORD. Rezin and Pekah are two “burned-out embers” whose days are numbered (Isaiah 7:4-8). Indeed, both kings would die within two years. The need of the hour for Ahaz is one of faith, not political posturing. God appeals through His prophet, “Unless your faith is firm, I cannot make you stand firm.” (Isaiah 7:9) His trust in the LORD is essential, but the king appears slow to respond. Later, God invites Ahaz to ask for a sign to strengthen his faith. Ahaz refuses, claiming that he would not test the LORD. The truth is that the king would instead place his trust in his Assyrian alliance. God’s prophet responds,

“Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn’t it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well? All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’). By the time this child is old enough to choose what is right and reject what is wrong, he will be eating yogurt and honey. For before the child is that old, the lands of the two kings you fear so much will both be deserted.” (Isaiah 7:13-16)

God will demonstrate His faithfulness by providing a sign to Judah’s king but an even more dramatic sign for us. For Ahaz’s benefit, a virgin would marry, conceive, and bear a son named “Immanuel.” This child would be a symbolic reminder that God is with His people and would act on their behalf. The sign would also point us to the promised Messiah. Indeed, as an angel of the LORD revealed to Joseph—Mary’s betrothed. God’s “Anointed One” would be miraculously conceived and become the instrument of God’s ultimate deliverance (Matthew 1:20-23). He would save His people from their sins and become “Immanuel” (God with us) in the truest sense of the name.

God provides a sign to reassure the heart—for the king of Judah, but especially for us. Ahaz was slow to respond. Will we be the same? Will we place our faith in the LORD and His ability to deliver? Or will we direct our attention and confidence elsewhere? I trust the “Promised One” of God, Immanuel. And you?

June 24
Isaiah 8:1-11:16

Look to God's instructions and teachings! People who contradict His word are completely in the dark. They will go from one place to another, weary and hungry. And because they are hungry, they will rage and curse their king and their God. They will look up to heaven and down at the earth, but wherever they look, there will be trouble and anguish and dark despair. They will be thrown out into the darkness. (Isaiah 8:20-22)

People who turn away from God and His Word wander in the dark. God is the source of light. To reject Him is to choose confusion and darkness. Sadly, far too many in Isaiah's day preferred the darkness over the light, and they will suffer the consequences of their choices. Isaiah, however, points to a better day—a promised day that stretches seven centuries into the future. God's prophet declares,

“Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.” (Isaiah 9:1-2)

Isaiah points to the promised Messiah—Jesus, the Son of God (Matthew 4:12-16). He will do that often through His prophetic messages. Indeed, Isaiah is directly quoted 66 times in the New Testament. In other words, Jesus did not accidentally come onto the scene. He is the fulfillment of God's long-foretold promises. Jesus is the illuminating light that would alter human history. As Zechariah (the father of John) prophesied, *“Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.” (Luke 1:78-79)*

Of course, this indicates that Jesus is far more than a man. As we noted yesterday, the promised One of God would be called *“Immanuel,”* which means *“God is with us.” (Isaiah 7:14)* In today's reading, the prophet further describes the uniqueness of the promised One when he also announces, *“For a child is born to us, a Son is given to us. The government will rest on His shoulders. And He will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!” (Isaiah 9:6-7)*

Let's pause momentarily and reflect upon the significance of Isaiah's testimony. Remember when you respond to Jesus that this is who you are following. He is the promised One who leads us out of darkness into light. He is the *“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* My heart is encouraged by this thought. May your heart be lifted as well.

June 25

Isaiah 12:1-6; 17:1-14; 2 Chronicles 28:16-29:2;
2 Kings 15:30-31; 16:10-18; 17:1-4; 18:1-8; Hosea 1:1-2:13

Even during this time of trouble, King Ahaz continued to reject the LORD. He offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus who had defeated him, for he said, "Since these gods helped the kings of Aram, they will help me, too, if I sacrifice to them." But instead, they led to his ruin and the ruin of all Judah." (2 Chronicles 28:22–23)

Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time. He remained faithful to the LORD in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the LORD had given Moses. So the LORD was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did. He revolted against the king of Assyria and refused to pay him tribute. (2 Kings 18:5–7)

Today's reading contrasts two kings—a father and a son. As we have noted previously, King Ahaz struggled to trust the LORD. He responds to Assyria's emerging power by seeking to appease Tiglath-pileser, their king. God appealed to Ahaz through His prophet, Isaiah, to place his trust and confidence in the LORD. Foolishly, Judah's king refuses to do so. Even worse, Ahaz turns to foreign gods to secure his future. He envied Tiglath-pileser's increasing power and began to imitate his worship practices. His decision was shortsighted on Ahaz's part, provoking the LORD's anger against him and the nation (2 Chronicles 28:22). In contrast, Hezekiah (Ahaz's son) displays a faith worth noting. It is said of him, *"There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time."* (2 Kings 18:5) There is nothing mediocre or half-hearted in Hezekiah's response to God. He trusted in the LORD fully and consistently did so.

What made the difference? Had Hezekiah been positively affected by hearing stories about his godly great-grandfather Uzziah? Never underestimate the influence of a godly grandparent or great-grandparent. Or did Hezekiah recognize the emptiness and ineffectiveness of his father Ahaz's pursuits? Sometimes, we are moved toward God by the spiritual failures of others. Or perhaps it was the continuing influence of God's servant, Isaiah. He called Ahaz to faith. Would it be a surprise for Isaiah to also appeal to Hezekiah? What made the difference? We cannot say for sure. What is evident, however, is that Hezekiah trusted in the LORD and lived his life accordingly.

And the results? *"So the LORD was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did."* (2 Kings 18:7) Hezekiah experiences God's activity and blessing in ways his father never knew. The opportunity was there for Ahaz. Sadly, he chose to turn away and suffered the consequences. The question is: who do we resemble more? Like Ahaz, do we imitate the world's approaches? Do we bow our knees of devotion to something other than the God who saves? Or, like Hezekiah, do we actively seek the LORD in all we do? Hezekiah's faith shone brightly and was more than confessional. His trust in God ordered his steps, positioning the king to experience God's activity and blessing. The contrast between the two kings is stark.

Whose example will we follow?

June 26
Hosea 2:14-8:14

Its people don't realize that I am watching them. Their sinful deeds are all around them, and I see them all. (Hosea 7:2)

Every time I read the book of Hosea, sadness descends. It's a book that illustrates the nature of Israel's sin against God in a way that disturbs the heart. It parallels the worst of human betrayals—the adulterous betrayal of an unfaithful spouse. Hosea communicates this message to God's covenant people in word and deed.

Consider first Hosea's actions (Hosea 1-3). His marriage and family become a symbolic message against Israel's spiritual infidelity. Directed by God to marry a promiscuous woman (Gomer), Hosea experiences God's pain first-hand as he witnesses his wife's flagrant adultery. The shock and pain that Hosea experiences testify to the depth of God's emotions toward Israel's actions. We deceive ourselves if we imagine God is emotionally unaffected by our behavior. Consider Hosea's emotions as Gomer makes a mockery of their marriage. With the birth of each child, we slowly begin to understand the level of offense that God has suffered and the national consequences that result.

What is illustrated by Hosea's marriage is also communicated by the messages he delivers (Hosea 4-14). Hosea exposes the nation's sin and highlights the LORD's heartache and disappointment. The prophet exclaims, *"There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land. You make vows and break them; you kill and steal and commit adultery. There is violence everywhere—one murder after another."* (Hosea 4:1-2) Israel's society is deteriorating morally and spiritually. Adding to the problem is a lack of spiritual leadership that might reverse the trend. God attests, *"My people are being destroyed because they don't know Me. Since you priests refuse to know Me, I refuse to recognize you as my priests."* (Hosea 4:6) The situation is dire, and the consequences will prove severe. Is there no hope?

Spurned and rejected, God remains faithful when Israel is not. Though the nation will suffer the consequences of its actions, God is committed to reclaiming and restoring His covenant people. The LORD pledges to pursue them with steadfast love and compassion. Indeed, God declares through His prophet, *"But then I will win her back once again. I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there. I will return her vineyards to her and transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope."* God adds, *"I will make you My wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unflinching love and compassion. I will be faithful to you and make you Mine, and you will finally know Me as the LORD."*

Yes, there's a sense of sadness whenever I read the book of Hosea. I'm reminded how God is affected by the unfaithfulness of His people. Yet, there's also a message of hope as I recognize the nature of God's covenant love. The LORD will remain faithful when we are not. What was true in His relationship with Israel is even more true as God relates to us as Christ's bride, the Church. Think about that and be encouraged. God's heart consistently seeks to move us from *"the valley of trouble into a gateway of hope."* (Hosea 2:15) Let's step into the gateway of hope!

June 27
Hosea 9-14

I said, "Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD, that He may come and shower righteousness upon you." (Hosea 10:12)

God's covenant people have broken His heart. They have spurned the LORD like an adulterous spouse. The nation has defiled itself by chasing after other gods, and the consequences will be severe. Even so, God still appeals to His wayward people. He urges them to respond in ways that result in blessing instead of judgment and hope instead of fear. He encourages them to plant good seeds to experience an uplifting harvest.

Before the seeds of righteousness can be planted, they must turn over the hard soil. In other words, plowing is required. That's the language of repentance. The people must admit they are wrong so they may change direction and return to the LORD. The problem with repeated sin is that it hardens the heart. It causes the individual to be less sensitive to one's activity, perpetuating the behavior. Even worse, repeated sin can make the person susceptible to greater sin and self-destructive behavior. Hosea's wife, Gomer, experienced this first-hand. Her unfaithfulness ultimately leads to her enslavement. Gomer physically became a slave because of her actions. For most, concerning their sin, captivity isn't literal but painfully dominating. Their thoughts and actions are dictated by a self-centered, self-satisfying craving that is never satisfied. The only way to break the pattern is to break up the hard soil of the heart. It requires repentance when the person finally admits the wrong and returns wholeheartedly to the LORD.

The good news is that it's God's heart for His people to return. Through His prophet, the LORD cries out, *"Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for your sins have brought you down. Bring your confessions, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, 'Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us, so that we may offer You our praises.'" (Hosea 14:1-3)* Though rejected and offended, God still invites His covenant people to return. He desires to restore the repentant, forgive, and lift up those whose actions have cast them down. I marvel at God's love and His willingness to restore.

Is this a lesson we need to hear? Have we been moving in a direction that needs to stop? May God open our ears to His appeal. God desires to shower our lives with goodness and righteousness, but we must first seek the LORD. Will we do so today? Will we do so, even if we must turn over the hard soil? By faith, let's step toward the LORD and enjoy the harvest of His love.

June 28

Isaiah 28:1-29; 2 Kings 17:5-41; 2 Kings 18:9-12; Isaiah 1:1-20

Then the king of Assyria invaded the entire land, and for three years he besieged the city of Samaria. Finally, in the ninth year of King Hoshea's reign, Samaria fell, and the people of Israel were exiled to Assyria. They were settled in colonies in Halah, along the banks of the Habor River in Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. (2 Kings 17:5-6)

Most of our recent readings have focused on Israel's self-destructive spiritual decline. Sadly, the northern nation began its downward trajectory rather quickly. Their initial king, Jeroboam, led them astray as they began to worship the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. Yet that would only be the start. God's covenant people would soon embrace the false gods of the surrounding nations, and they would continue to do so. God appeals to them through His prophets—Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea. However, the people (along with their rulers) refuse to listen. They remain determined to do things their way. As today's reading describes,

"They were as stubborn as their ancestors who had refused to believe in the LORD their God. They rejected His decrees and the covenant He had made with their ancestors, and they despised all His warnings. They worshiped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves." (2 Kings 17:14-15)

God warned that such actions would be their undoing, but they did not take His repeated warning to heart. They chose to suffer the consequences of their disbelief and sin. And suffer they did. The king of Assyria overran the nation, and the population was carried away into exile. Everything God predicted was fulfilled. Every opportunity to avoid God's judgment was tragically ignored. The nation of Israel experiences a total loss.

Are there any lessons to be considered? Let's not lose sight of God's patience. For over two hundred years, God appealed to His covenant people. They had the opportunity to turn to the LORD again and again. God was more than patient with Israel, but His patience reached a tragic end. That, too, is a lesson to remember. Did the people presume upon the LORD's mercy and grace? They assumed God would always look beyond their disobedience and sin. They were wrong.

May God help us look honestly at our hearts and teach us accordingly. May we likewise learn from God's continuing interaction with Judah. I leave you with God's appeal on Judah's behalf. *"Come now, let's settle this," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)* How will they respond?

And our response to the LORD?

June 29
Isaiah 1:21-5:30

Now I will sing for the One I love a song about His vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a rich and fertile hill. He plowed the land, cleared its stones, and planted it with the best vines. In the middle He built a watchtower and carved a winepress in the nearby rocks. Then He waited for a harvest of sweet grapes, but the grapes that grew were bitter. (Isaiah 5:1-2)

The northern nation of Israel (Ephraim) suffers the consequences of its sin. The people reject the LORD and are forced into exile. Will the southern nation of Judah learn from Israel's mistakes? Isaiah, God's prophet, appeals to the southern kingdom. He calls for them to repent to escape the LORD's judgment. Will they listen? Today's reading includes a series of Isaiah's messages representing a mixture of warning and hope. Let's focus on Isaiah's messages in chapter 5.

God planted His people in the land so they would thrive. He expects them to relate faithfully to Him so they might reflect His influence and character. God did everything necessary: plowed the land, cleared the stones, and planted the best vines. And the results? Instead of producing a harvest consistent with the LORD's activity, the grapes are bitter and unusable. As Isaiah describes, *"He expected a crop of justice, but instead He found oppression. He expected to find righteousness, but instead He heard cries of violence."* (Isaiah 5:7)

God is disappointed with His people and will respond accordingly. The LORD announces, *"Now let me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will tear down its hedges and let it be destroyed. I will break down its walls and let the animals trample it. I will make it a wild place where the vines are not pruned and the ground is not hoed, a place overgrown with briars and thorns. I will command the clouds to drop no rain on it."* (Isaiah 5:5-6) The nation's refusal to relate to God appropriately would have serious consequences. God, however, would not give up on His vineyard. His solution would be to plant a fruitful, life-giving vine in the future. Consider the future testimony of God's promised Messiah and be encouraged.

"I am the TRUE GRAPEVINE, and My Father is the gardener . . . Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:1, 5)

What God's old covenant people were incapable of doing, Jesus enables His new covenant disciples to fulfill. And what makes the difference? Of course, the difference is Jesus—the LIFE-GIVING VINE. As His disciples actively relate to Jesus for who He is, they will produce an increasing fruit that pleases the Gardener. Their fruit will not be characterized as bitter or wild. Instead, their harvest will be consistent with the One who grants them life.

Let's focus then on the fruit Jesus desires to produce. We read about God's disappointment with Judah. Let's not make that mistake. May we choose instead to renew our focus on Jesus, admitting our dependence on Him. May we actively seek His daily influence and power. There should be a sweetness to our lives that draws attention to Jesus. Join me as we renew our faith in the Lord so we might bear the appropriate fruit. Will you do so?

June 30

2 Kings 16:19-20; 2 Chronicles 28:26-27; Isaiah 13:1-16:14

Scream in terror, for the day of the LORD has arrived— the time for the Almighty to destroy. Every arm is paralyzed with fear. Every heart melts, and people are terrified. Pangs of anguish grip them, like those of a woman in labor. They look helplessly at one another, their faces aflame with fear. (Isaiah 13:6-8)

The ruler of Babylon likely felt invincible. Babylon's power and dominance were under his control. Who could stand in the way of his desires or ambition? The prophet Isaiah reminds us that the greatest global powers are no match against the LORD of heaven's armies. When God acts against a nation or a people, there is considerable cause for alarm. "*Scream in terror,*" Isaiah exclaims. The day of the LORD will overwhelm the strongest of hearts. The people will look helplessly at one another, with their faces marked by fear. Who can stand against God's fury and fierce anger? The answer is, "No one!" When God acts in judgment, the most powerful people and nations are brought humbly to their knees.

Do we understand this? We are blessed as Jesus' followers to approach the God of the Ages as a loving Father (Matthew 6:7-13). However, we are shortsighted if we lose sight of God's sovereign authority and power. Our reading today highlights the supremacy of His reign. No nation can defy the LORD of heaven's armies. Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, and Moab are helpless before Him and are subject to His authority and judgment. The same is true of China, Russia, and the United States. Though various nations and leaders flaunt their perceived power and might, a single word from the LORD will bring all such endeavors to an end. Consider John's dramatic testimony in the book of Revelation.

"Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for He judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on His head were many crowns. A name was written on Him that no one understood except Himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and His title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed Him on white horses. From His mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations ... Then I saw the beast and the kings of the world and their armies gathered together to fight against the One sitting on the horse and His army ... Their entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came from the mouth of the One riding the white horse." (Revelation 19:11-15, 19, 21)

May today's reading remind us who we should trust and follow. We serve the LORD of heaven's armies. Let's commit to following His lead and yield ourselves to His larger purpose and plan. For Jesus taught us to pray, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

Do I hear an "Amen"?

Devotions written and prepared by Stephen Lowrie
All references unless noted: New Living Translation