

## July Answers

- 1) [July 1] The conflict between Syria and Israel continued throughout the reign of Ahab's son Joram (aka. Jehoram). Joram got rid of his father's **pillar** to Baal, but he clung to Jeroboam's golden calves. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit led Elisha to help Joram in his struggle against Syria, and every time the Syrians laid a trap for Joram, Elisha warned him. Eventually the Syrians realized what was happening, and they surrounded the city where Elisha was staying. Elisha told his servant, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are **more** than those who are with them" (2 Kgs 6:16). Aren't you glad that we serve the God who commands the **armies** of heaven! God knows the dangers we face, and He is right there, surrounding us with His love and **protection**. Elisha struck the Syrians with blindness, and then led them five miles south to Samaria where he turned them over to Joram. Joram wanted to kill them, but Elisha insisted they "heap burning **coals**" on the Syrians by feeding them (cf. Prov 25:21–22). Once again, God was showing Joram and the people of Israel that He was the one true God. A few years later, Ben-Hadad II besieged Samaria, and Joram complained to Elisha, "All this misery is from the Lord! Why should I **wait** for the Lord any longer?" Joram was happy as long as God was **prospering** him, but when trouble came because of his sin, he was angry just like his father Ahab. Instead of repenting, Joram was ready to **kill** Elisha.
  
- 2) [July 2] Elisha anointed Jehu king of Israel. Jehu was sitting around with his fellow army captains at Ramoth-gilead when Elisha's man arrived and asked him for a private word. The next thing Jehu knew, he was being anointed king and told to destroy the entire house of Ahab. God said, "I will **avenge** the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the Lord's servants shed by Jezebel" (2 Kgs 9:7b). This teaches us that no one can lay a hand on one of God's servants and get **away** with it. God allows the wicked to make their own choices, but He also makes sure that **justice** is done in the end (cf. Luke 18:7–8). Jehu was only too eager to carry out God's desire for vengeance against Ahab's house. Indeed, he **remembered** when Elijah had rebuked Ahab for killing Naboth (2 Kgs 9:25–26), and he made sure that Naboth's field was soaked with the **blood** of Ahab's son Joram. Jezebel fared no better. She was thrown from her window and trampled under Jehu's "madly-driven" chariot. Her life of luxury and wickedness ended in a muddy street, and the dogs devoured her mangled body: only her skull, feet and the palms of her hands remained. What a fitting end to a fiendish woman. This reminds us that we want to be on God's side when His **wrath** falls on the wicked, for rest assured, it will come! Jehu was willing to be God's fearful **sword** of vengeance, but he wasn't willing to be God's faithful **servant**. He continued in Jeroboam's sin and refused to get rid of the golden **calves** (2 Kgs 10:31). This teaches us that an active and **zealous** ministry cannot make up for disobedience. If we refuse to obey God in **all** things, we're no better than Saul or Jehu.
  
- 3) [July 3] The overthrow of Athaliah. When Jehu killed Ahaziah, Athaliah (Ahaziah's **mother** and Ahab's **daughter**) made a grab for power. She killed all the royal offspring of the house of Judah and set herself up as queen. Only one of Ahaziah's sons escaped her bloody purge: **Joash**. He remained hidden in the temple for six years while Athaliah ruled over the land. When Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada the priest approached the army, the Levites, and the elders of Judah, and revealed Joash to them. They joined with him to remove Athaliah and restore the king to the throne. Jehoiada is an example of **courage** and **wisdom**. He was willing to **risk** his life to do what was right, but he **waited** patiently for the right time to take action. This teaches us the importance of careful **planning** when taking a stand against evil. Joel's prophecy to Judah. Judah had recently been the victim of a vast swarm of **locusts**, and Joel used this disaster to illustrate the coming "**day** of the LORD," a reference to the time when God's wrath will be **poured** out on the wicked and Jesus Christ will **return** to earth. Joel called on the people to **repent**, for if they did, God might still relent and "leave a blessing behind" (Joel 2:14). This teaches us that God's judgment can be transformed into

**salvation** if people will accept His offer of grace and turn to His in genuine repentance (Joel 2:13). Paul recognized a glorious truth in Joel: God is “Lord” of Jew and **Gentile**, and He saves **all** those who call on His name (Rom 10:12–13).

- 4) [July 4] Joash became king at the age of **seven**, and he grew up taking his cues from Jehoiada, the godly priest who had saved him from his grandmother Athaliah’s bloody purge. Some **sixteen** years later, at the age of 23, Joash began to restore the temple which had fallen into **disrepair** during the idolatrous reign of his forefathers. He urged the priests to act quickly, but the Levites dragged their feet, and **six** years later, things were at a standstill. Joash called for Jehoiada and the other priests, and he held them **accountable** for the lack of work (2 Kgs 12:7). He personally involved himself in the collection of money, and he and Jehoiada gave it to those who did the repairs. With his dedication and perseverance, the temple was soon restored and strengthened. About fourteen years passed by and Jehoiada died at the ripe old age of **130**. Soon afterward, the **officials** of Judah came and advised Joash to abandon God and serve idols. He listened to them and led Judah back into apostasy. *Joash had repaired the temple, but he had neglected to repair his people’s hearts.* Restoring the temple was a good thing, but its condition was a **symptom** of a deeper problem—a lack of **love** for God. This is the mistake we so often make in ministry. We spend so much time and money focusing on improving the work, that we miss the need for a **revival** of love in our people’s hearts. God sent prophets to warn Joash, but he wouldn’t listen, and eventually, he gave the approval to kill Jehoiada’s **son**, Zechariah. This teaches us that the moment we stop listening to God’s word, we’re headed for trouble. A **hardening** begins, and if we don’t repent, our hearts can become like stone. As Zechariah died, he said, “May the LORD see and **avenge!**” (2 Chr 24:22)—and God did. God sent the Syrians (Arameans) against Joash, and all the **money** he had spent repairing the temple was lost to Hazael (2 Kgs 12:17–18). Not long afterward, his servants **conspired** against him and murdered him in his bed. Joash died at the age of 47, a tragic reminder of the destruction that comes when we turn away from God.
- 5) [July 5] The death of Elisha and the reign of Joash’s son Amaziah. Elisha, the man of faith who had raised a boy from the dead, “had fallen sick with the **illness** of which he was to **die**” (2 Kgs 13:14). This teaches us that **healing** is not always God’s will, even in the case of a truly righteous man, and that a name-it-and-claim-it attitude when it comes to healing can actually be **contrary** to God’s plan. Joash’s son Amaziah followed in his father’s footsteps: “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet not like **David** his father. He did in all things as Joash his father had done” (2 Kgs 14:3). Amaziah was definitely a mixed bag. He avenged his father’s death according to the **law**, and he obeyed God when he was told to get rid of the Israelite mercenaries he had hired. Yet he also brutally conquered the Edomites, foolishly **worshipped** their gods, proudly **rejected** God’s reproof of his idolatry, and rashly challenged Jehoash to a war. How could he obey God one minute and disobey Him the next? Such are the actions of a man whose heart is not **perfect** toward God. Amaziah **hardened** his heart against God’s rebuke, and he threatened the prophet who warned him of his folly. Mark the man who will not **listen**, for as the prophet said, “I know that God has determined to **destroy** you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel” (2 Chr 25:16b). Sure enough, Amaziah was killed by his own officials at the age of 54. He had followed his father’s example in life, and it led him to the same bloody **death** (2 Chr 25:27–28).
- 6) [July 6] The story of Jonah begins with him rebelling against God’s will, but it’s not until the end of the book that we learn what motivated him to flee to Tarshish. It was because he knew that God is **merciful** (Jon 4:2). Jonah was afraid the Assyrians would repent and God would **forgive** them. Thus it was no accident that God chose Jonah to be his messenger. God knew he **hated** the Assyrians, and God deliberately called him in order to **expose** his sinful attitude. This teaches us that God’s call on our lives will bring us face to face with the true **condition** of our hearts. If we find ourselves wanting

to run away, it's a sure sign that our will is not **surrendered** to God. The question God asked Jonah comes down the ages to us: 'Do you share my **love** for a lost and dying world?' (Jon 4:11). What will our answer be? Do we care enough about our neighbor to reach out in love and share the **gospel**? The book of Amos begins with a series of **oracles** (prophetic statements of **judgment**) against eight nations. The first six were the **pagan** neighbors of Judah and Israel, and Amos' listeners were probably nodding their heads in **excitement** as they heard of God's coming judgment. But then Amos spoke out against Israel and Judah—what a shock that must have been! He condemned the **Jews** right along with the idolatrous Moabites and Edomites! Amos' point is just as true today. Sin is **sin**, no matter who commits it, and **everyone** will be held accountable for their actions (cf. Rom 2:6–11).

- 7) [July 7] Amos' prophecy to the northern kingdom of Israel. Amos condemned Samaria's sinful women: "You **cows** of Bashan...who crush the needy" (Amos 4:1). These women selfishly urged their husbands to oppress the **poor** in order to support their lavish lifestyles. Amos condemned Israel's false worship: "Come to Bethel, and **transgress**; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression" (Amos 4:4). The people exceeded the requirements of the law (they tithed every three **days** instead of every three years; cf. Deut 14:28), but that only increased their sin because their hearts were not right with God. This teaches us that people will often substitute good **works** and religious **service** for genuine love and obedience. Amos condemned Israel's stubbornness: "I also withheld the rain from you...yet you did not return to me" (Amos 4:7–8). God sent disaster after disaster on the people, but they would not repent. This teaches us that God often uses **calamity** and misfortune to get the attention of sinners. How tragic when people ignore the very discipline that is designed to bring them to repentance! Amos warned the people that their rejection of God had sealed their fate. He even sang a **funeral** song for Israel and proclaimed a **woe** oracle against them. Yet as he pictured Israel's coming demise, Amos urged the people: "Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be **gracious** to the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15). This teaches us that even in judgment, God is reaching out to sinners, longing for them to repent and turn to Him. How wonderful is love like this!
- 8) [July 8] The conclusion of Amos' prophecy to the northern kingdom of Israel. Amos recorded five **visions** which pictured the results of God's coming judgment. The first two were especially **devastating**, and Amos persuaded God to turn aside from these methods of judgment. This teaches us that God's judgments are perfect. They are carefully **selected** from a myriad of possibilities to achieve exactly what God desires. In the third vision of the **plumb** line, God said that Israel would be destroyed by the sword, and this judgment stood firm. In the middle of his visions, Amos got Israel's first response to God's word. Sadly, it was not repentance. Instead, Amaziah, the **priest** of Bethel, complained to Jeroboam II about Amos, and the king banished him from Israel: "Go [back] to Judah and prophesy there!" How tragic that Israel refused to listen to God's words! Amos warned Israel that one day God would send a **famine** on the land: "Not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the **words** of the LORD" (Amos 8:11 NIV). This teaches us how important it is to **welcome** God's words, even if His message has the sting of rebuke. Notice that God seldom speaks of judgment without affirming the future **restoration** of Israel. God promised that He would "raise up the fallen **booth** of David," and that the **nations** would one day be called by His name (Amos 9:11–12). James later quoted Amos as evidence that the **Gentiles** would also be a part of the people of God (Acts 15:13–21). That's us!
- 9) [July 9] Hosea was the **last** prophet God sent to the northern kingdom of Israel before they were **exiled** to Assyria. God told Hosea to take a "wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom" (Hos 1:2). This meant that God wanted Hosea to marry someone who would eventually **reject** him, commit **adultery** and have children by other men. This experience would **mirror** the spiritual

adultery of Israel, who had forsaken God for the Baals. The **names** of Hosea's children were sovereignly chosen by God so that they would be living **testaments** to His grief and anger over Israel's sin. Yet those names also held the promise of the **gospel**, for God referenced them when He spoke of a day of future restoration (Hos 1:10; 2:23). Paul quoted Hosea when he explained God's plan to include the **Gentiles** in the people of God: "Even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call "my people," and her who was not beloved I will call "beloved.'" (Rom 9:24–25). Peter also cited Hosea in his message to the Gentile Christians: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were **not** a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received **mercy**, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:9–10). How marvelous to think that while Hosea was preaching God's message of judgment to Israel, God was looking forward to the day when He would call the **nations** of the world to His side! Gomer eventually left Hosea, but he was **kind** to her, in spite of her sin, and this illustrated the "last days" when God will be **reunited** with a repentant Israel (Hos 3:1–5). Hosea's marriage is a window into God's **heart**, for it shows us how hurt He is when His people reject His love and mercy.

- 10) [July 10] Hosea began his message by telling about the unfaithfulness of his wife Gomer, and he continued by recording God's **case** against Israel: "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" (Hos 4:1b–2 NLT). How had this happened? God pointed His finger first at the **priests**. They had rejected God and forgotten His law, and because of this, they no longer taught the people God's ways. The result: "My people are destroyed for **lack** of knowledge" (Hos 4:6). This shows us the importance of faithfully **teaching** God's word to those under our leadership and authority. God pointed His finger next at the **people**. They had abandoned God and joined themselves to idols. They enjoyed the **sensuality** and prostitution that was part of worshipping other gods, and the **men** were just as guilty as the women (Hos 4:14). This teaches us that the desires of the flesh are dangerous, and of all the sins that ensnared Israel, **sex** was the most deadly. What lay in store for Israel? "A people without understanding will come to ruin!" (Hos 4:14). They had sown the wind, and they would "reap the **whirlwind**" (Hos 8:7). Some **twenty** years later, they would be "swallowed up" by **Assyria**, the nation whom they had "paid for love" (Hos 8:8–9). As God looked with anger and frustration at the wretched state of Israel, His heart was **broken**. God urged them to say, "Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the **third** day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (Hos 6:1–2). What a wonderful display of God's mercy and grace! *God strikes us down for our own good.* He knows that if we're not disciplined for sin, we will continue down the path of destruction. If Israel had embraced God's desire for them to repent, how different their future would have been!
- 11) [July 11] To the very end, Hosea kept exposing the spiritual rotteness and decay that festered in the northern kingdom. During the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel prospered: "Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit." But the richer Israel became "the more **altars** he built; as his country improved, he improved his **pillars**" (Hos 10:1). Israel took the wealth God gave them and used it to pursue other gods. Instead of sowing righteousness, they had "plowed **iniquity**." Instead of reaping a harvest of faithful love, they had "eaten the fruit of **lies**." What was the solution to their plight? "**Break** up the fallow ground, for it is the time to **seek** the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you" (Hos 10:12–13). God wanted more than anything to be able to do good to Israel. Indeed, as God thought about the sword that was about to rage against Israel's cities, He cried out, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion

grows warm and tender” (Hos 11:8). Admah and Zeboiim were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut 29:23), and God recoiled from the thought of bringing such a devastating end to Israel. God would punish them, yes, but He would not destroy them completely. The time would come, in the distant future, when God would “roar like a lion.” Israel would “come trembling from the west,” and God would “return them to their homes” (Hos 11:10–11)! The last verse in Hosea serves as an epilogue to the entire prophecy: “Whoever is **wise**, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him **know** them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them” (Hos 14:9). This teaches us that God wants us to learn three things from reading Hosea. First, God’s “ways,” His covenant commands, are the “**right**” ways. Second, if we are wise and discerning, we will **walk** in His ways and **obey** His commands. Third, if we are **foolish**, we will reject God’s ways and ignore His commands. When we do this, God’s commands will become a stumbling block in our path. We will trip over them and fall to our own destruction.

- 12) [July 12] Isaiah prophesied to the southern kingdom of **Judah**. Judah had been prospering under the rule of **Uzziah**, a man who followed God faithfully for most of his 52-year reign. But just like Israel, the people of Judah had forsaken God. In grief and anger, God called the heavens and the earth to hear: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have **rebelled** against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him” (Isa 1:2b–4 NIV). The people were probably **shocked** by Isaiah’s words. After all, they were faithful to offer sacrifices and offerings. They attended the feasts and spread out their hands before God in prayer. God’s response? “I am **sick** of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings **disgusts** me! I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them!” (Isa 1:11–14 NLT). What then did God want from Judah? “**Wash** yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of **orphans**. Fight for the rights of **widows**” (Isa 1:16–17 NLT). Judah embraced the **rituals** of worship, but they rejected the heart of the covenant. Like the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day, they gave a tithe of even the smallest garden herbs, but they neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faith. As Jesus said, “You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former” (Matt 23:23 NIV). We should take heed, because the tendency to substitute religious **piety** for loving obedience is as prevalent today as it was in Isaiah’s time. What should Judah do? Was it too late? Not at all! “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like **scarlet**, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like **crimson**, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword” (Isa 1:18–20).
- 13) [July 13] In the year that Uzziah died, Isaiah had a vision of “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (Isa 6:1b). The king of Judah was **dead**, but the King of kings was **alive** and well, seated in glory on His heavenly throne! God is sovereign over all, yet He desires to dwell in the midst of His people: “The train of his robe **filled** the temple” (Isa 6:1c). God’s holiness made Isaiah aware of his sinful state, and he responded in humility and repentance. God took away his iniquity and atoned for his sin, and then He asked “Who will go for us?” Isaiah said eagerly, “Here I am! Send me,” and God gave him a message and a mission. Isaiah’s mission for God was not a joyous one, for his attempts to bring about repentance were destined to **fail** (cf. Isa 6:8–10). This reveals a fascinating yet disturbing aspect of preaching the truth: when we shine the light on a hardened heart, it does not melt—instead, it grows **harder**. In this way, Isaiah’s ministry prefigured the ministry of **Jesus**, who preached the Kingdom of God many years later. John said, “Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him...For again Isaiah [6:10] said, ‘He has blinded their eyes

and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them” (John 12:37, 39b–40). When Uzziah’s grandson **Ahaz** came to the throne, he had no difficulty leading Judah to worship other gods (cf. 2 Kgs 15:35; 2 Chr 27:2). God moved **Syria** and **Israel** against Judah to discipline Ahaz, but rather than trusting God, Ahaz turned to **Assyria**. Ahaz said, “I will not put the Lord to the test” (Isa 7:12), but his **actions** told quite a different tale (cf. 2 Kgs 16:8). God told Ahaz that he would give him a **sign** that Syria and Israel would not conquer Judah. Instead, it would be Assyria, whom Ahaz had trusted, that would harm them. The sign? “Behold, the **virgin** shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name **Immanuel**” (Isa 7:14). Matthew later said that this OT prophecy was “**filled up**” by Jesus (Matt 1:21–23). He is the full embodiment of the wonderful news: “God is with us!”

- 14) [July 14] In Ahaz’s time of trouble, he “became yet more **unfaithful** to the Lord” (2 Chr 28:22). This teaches us that trials can draw us **closer** to God or drive us **farther** down the path of sin. The choice is up to us. Not content with the false gods he already worshipped, Ahaz imported idolatry from **Syria**. His reasoning? Syria had defeated him, so he thought worshipping Syria’s gods might bring him the same victory. This ignored the fact that **Assyria** had just defeated Syria! Rather than trusting God, Ahaz trusted Assyria. The result? Judah became a vassal state to Assyria, and the **temple** was left in shambles (2 Chr 28:19–24). In the midst of Ahaz’s wickedness, Isaiah continued to prophesy. He foretold the coming of a righteous king, **Jesus** the Messiah, whose reign would stand in marked contrast to Ahaz. Jesus would bring light to the people who walked in **darkness**, and those who believed in his name would become his “**children**” (cf. Isa 8:18; John 1:12; Heb 2:11–13). Isaiah even predicted that Jesus would minister in the region of **Galilee** (Isa 9:1). This was fulfilled when Jesus went and lived in **Capernaum** in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali (cf. Matt 4:12–17). Isaiah also looked ahead to a distant future: the **millennial** reign of Christ. In that day, “the earth shall be **full** of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9b).
- 15) [July 15] The fall of **Samaria** and the **exile** of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria. This was Assyria’s **third** and final invasion. The first had been a warning, and to avoid further attack, Israel had to pay tribute and promise not to rebel (2 Kgs 15:19). The people should have learned their lesson and turned to God in repentance. When they didn’t, God allowed Assyria to invade again, this time carrying off the **Transjordan** tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh (1 Chr 5:26). Yet Israel still refused to forsake their idolatry, and Assyria invaded for the third and final time, destroying the capital city of Samaria and carrying away most of the people into exile. The Assyrians then resettled the land with **foreigners** from other nations whom they had conquered. The settlers brought in by the Assyrians are said to have “feared the Lord,” but they also worshipped other gods (2 Kgs 17:33). Thus the author of Kings said that they didn’t **truly** fear the Lord (2 Kgs 17:34–35). This teaches us that divided loyalty is no loyalty at all. God had warned Israel again and again, from **Moses** (Deut 28:63) to **Hosea** (Hos 10:6). They knew what was coming, but they still ignored God! Israel had shown itself to be no better (and sometimes worse) than the **pagan** nations it had conquered in the days of Joshua. Israel had also rejected its original purpose to honor God and to be a **light** to the surrounding peoples. How true the proverb: “He who is often reprov’d, yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be **broken** beyond healing” (Prov 29:1).
- 16) [July 16] The oracle against **Babylon**, the first of Isaiah’s oracles against the **nations** (Isa 13–23). At the time, Babylon was part of the **Assyrian** empire, and it did not rise to world dominance until about a century later. Isaiah’s prophecy about Babylon compresses events that are separated by time. Isaiah first spoke of the “**Day** of the LORD,” the time when God’s wrath will be poured out on the wicked during the Tribulation (Isa 13:1–16). Isaiah then used Babylon’s coming destruction by the **Medes** as an example of what that Day will be like (Isa 13:17–22). This was a common practice of the prophets. They used God’s judgments of Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations as

**miniatures** of His final judgment on the “Day of the LORD.” Micah was also prophesying at the time, and he indicted Judah’s wicked **leaders**, a fitting charge given that Ahaz was still on the throne. Micah predicted that Jerusalem would become “a heap of **ruins**” because of their sin (Mic 3:12). This chilling prophecy would be remembered almost 100 years later when **Jeremiah** warned Jehoiakim of the same fate (cf. Jer 26:18). Yet Micah also spoke of Zion’s future exaltation when **Jesus** would reign as King. Judah’s distress would turn to deliverance, and a righteous ruler would arise to shepherd his flock (Mic 5:4). Where would this King come from? From **Bethlehem**: “From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel” (Mic 5:2). This was fulfilled almost **700** years later at the birth of Christ. This reading shows us that God is in **control** of history. He knows the end from the beginning, and He is working all things to the glory of His perfect will!

- 17) [July 17] The death of Ahaz and the early reign of his son, Hezekiah. Hezekiah was the complete **opposite** of Ahaz. The first thing he did as king was gather the priests and Levites and tell them to **consecrate** themselves and the temple. He said, “Now it is in my heart to make a **covenant** with the LORD, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us” (2 Chr 29:10). Surely this was the result of Hezekiah listening to **Isaiah** and **Micah** and realizing that God was judging Judah for its sin. Hezekiah led the **princes** of the city to God’s house to worship, and they rededicated the temple. What an inspiring example of spiritual leadership! Hezekiah knew that reform begins at the **top**, and he made sure his officials set a godly example for the people (cf. 2 Chr 29:20a, 30a, 36). Hezekiah then celebrated the **Passover** in Jerusalem. There had been nothing like it since the days of Solomon, and the people enjoyed worshiping God so much that they decided to celebrate another seven days beyond the normal feast time. Several things stand out: (1) The priests and Levites were put to **shame** by the enthusiasm of the people, and they consecrated themselves so they could properly execute their duties. This shows how **zeal** for God can motivate others to live a holy life. (2) Many of the people, especially those from the northern tribes, were not purified before eating the Passover, yet Hezekiah prayed for them and God forgave them. This shows that God puts more weight on the attitude of the **heart** than on the strict observance of the letter of the law (2 Chr 30:18–30). (3) As soon as the celebration was over, the people went out and **destroyed** all their idols. This shows that when we draw close to God in repentance and worship, the result is a **transformed** life. Unlike Solomon who “clung” to his many wives (1 Kgs 11:2), Hezekiah “held fast” to God in love (2 Kgs 18:6). That’s what we want God to be able to say about us! Hezekiah motivates us to stand strong in the faith and run our race with endurance.
- 18) [July 18] More of Isaiah’s oracles to the nations. These oracles foretold **judgment** against the nations which surrounded Judah, beginning with Babylon (Isa 13–14) and ending with Tyre (Isa 23). Isaiah spoke these oracles to the people of Judah because he wanted them to realize how **foolish** it would be to make alliances with the very nations God had doomed to judgment. Instead, Judah should rely on God and wait for Him to deliver them from the threat of Assyria. Governments, institutions, and organizations may fail, but God never will! The tone of the oracle against **Moab** is very different from that against Babylon, and this shows us that it’s possible to **rejoice** at God’s victory over evil without taking pleasure in the death of any **individual** or nation. In this oracle, we see **tears** in God’s eyes as He executes judgment on Moab for its sin (Is 16:9–11). This is an important reminder that God has no pleasure in the death of the **wicked**, and if we truly **love** others, we will do all we can to turn them from the path of destruction. The oracle against **Egypt** is a fascinating revelation of God’s plans for this great nation, both in the near future and in the millennial reign of Christ. Judah regularly put their **trust** in Egypt rather than God when faced with political and military threats, and Isaiah made it clear that Egypt was going to be judged right along with the other nations. However, in the millennium, Egypt “will tremble with fear before the **hand** that the Lord of hosts shakes over them” (Isa 19:16). In that day, the Egyptians will turn to God and ally themselves with Judah. There will be an altar to God in Egypt, and God will be their god! A highway will stretch between Egypt and

**Assyria**, and the Egyptians will worship God along with the Assyrians and the Israelites! This teaches us that the gospel transcends national boundaries. We must go and make **disciples** of **all** nations, teaching them to love and serve God.

- 19) [July 19] The last of Isaiah’s oracles to the nations. The oracle against Babylon (Isa 21:1–10) echoed Isaiah’s earlier oracle, and it reminded Judah that although Babylon seemed like a strong **ally** against Assyria, its destruction was certain (Isa 21:9; cf. Rev 18:2). The oracle against Arabia revealed that within **one** year, the splendor of Kedar would be gone, and almost nothing would remain of her mighty bowmen. This teaches us that the strength and power of men cannot stand against God’s will. We must place our **trust** in God alone! Hezekiah was evidently listening closely to Isaiah’s oracles, and the realization that God was going to judge the surrounding nations seemed to **embolden** him. In 705 BC, he rebelled against **Assyria** and declared war on the **Philistines**, defeating them as far as **Gaza**. In preparation for an Assyrian reprisal, he stopped the **Gihon** spring and diverted the water into Jerusalem. As if to remind Judah that they were not exempt from judgment, Isaiah proclaimed an oracle against Jerusalem. He condemned the people for rejoicing in their military **strength** and defensive strategies rather than in God: “You made a **reservoir** between the walls for the waters of the ancient pool, but you did not look to the **One** who made it, or consider the **One** who created it long ago” (Isa 22:11 HCSB). The people could “see” the importance of strong **walls** and plenty of **water**, but they didn’t “see” the importance of honoring and trusting the **God** who made them!
- 20) [July 20] Isaiah 24–27 is known as “Isaiah’s **Apocalypse**.” This section of Isaiah describes the devastation and suffering that will take place during the **Tribulation** as well as the peace and blessing that will follow in Christ’s millennial **Kingdom**. Isaiah graphically depicted the ruin that will befall the earth during the Tribulation. The language is similar to that of Noah’s flood: “The Lord will empty the earth and make it desolate” (Isa 24:1a). Everyone will fall under God’s judgment—the master and the slave, the people and the priest, the buyer and the seller. The earth will be “utterly broken,” “split apart,” and “violently shaken” (Isa 24:19). Then Jesus will return to earth, and He will “punish the host of heaven, in heaven, [**demonic** forces] and the kings of the earth, on the earth” (Isa 24:21–22; cf. Rev 20:2–3). In that day God will “swallow up **death** forever; and the LORD GOD will wipe away **tears** from all faces” (Isa 25:8; cf. Rev 21:4). In that day, the people of Judah will sing this song: “You keep him in perfect **peace** whose mind is stayed on you, because he **trusts** in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock” (Isa 26:3–4). How should knowledge of Christ’s future Kingdom affect us today? Isaiah offered a prayer that speaks to this question: “Yes, Lord, **walking** in the way of your laws, we **wait** for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts” (Isa 26:8 NIV). The certainty of Christ’s coming Kingdom should encourage us to live a **righteous** life. We must be walking in the Spirit, waiting on God, and spreading the good news of the gospel. If we do, we will be there to witness the day when God punishes Leviathan (Satan) with his “hard and great and strong **sword**” (Isa 27:1)!
- 21) [July 21] Isaiah 28–33 is known as the “Book of **Woes**.” The historical context was the time of political turmoil which preceded Assyria’s invasion of Judah and the **siege** of Jerusalem in 701 BC. The revival led by Hezekiah in 715 had **cooled**, and by 705, the year of Hezekiah’s rebellion against Assyria, many in Judah had returned to their **sinful** ways. During this time of crisis, Isaiah pronounced a series of “woes” against the leaders and the people of Judah. A “woe” was a threatening cry of **lament**. It was an indictment of sin and an expression of sorrow at the certainty of God’s impending **judgment**. Isaiah warned Judah that they were trusting in their wealth and their foreign alliances (Egypt), but neither of these could help. Only God could save them from the coming wrath of the Assyrians. The leaders of Judah refused to listen and they **scoffed** at Isaiah’s message (Isa 28:14–15). God’s response to the scoffing was similar to his response to Ahaz when the king



refused to ask for a sign—God foretold the coming of the **Messiah**. Jesus would give sight to the **blind** and hearing to the **deaf** (Isa 29:18). His death on the cross would confound the **wisdom** of the wise and the **discernment** of the discerning (Isa 29:14). Jesus is the ultimate **answer** to the scoffers of this world. Those who are wise will build on His firm foundation, and they will never be shaken (Isa 28:16). **Paul** later quoted Isaiah in **Romans** 10:9–11, and **Peter** did the same (1 Pet 2:4–6). They confirm that Isaiah was speaking of **Christ**.

- 22) [July 22] The conclusion of Isaiah’s “Book of Woes” (Isa 28–33). Isaiah pronounced a woe on those who looked to **Egypt** for help. Why was it wrong for Judah to seek help from other nations? First, they were trusting in **men** rather than trusting God. The result would be disaster for both Judah and Egypt. Second, they were violating God’s command that they should never return to Egypt for **military** aid (cf. Deut 17:16). Third, and most importantly, they were rejecting God’s call for **repentance**. The people of Judah would not humble themselves and admit that their troubles were of their own making. **Assyria** did not go overlooked—Isaiah pronounced a woe on them as well. As soon as they were done destroying, they themselves would be destroyed (Isa 33:1). After the Book of Woes, Isaiah prophesied of the coming “Day of the **LORD**” and the millennial reign of Christ (Isa 34–35). Isaiah spoke of the heavens being dissolved and the sky being rolled up like a **scroll**, events connected with Christ’s second coming (cf. Matt 24:29). After God’s judgment on the nations is over, He will transform Zion into a **garden**. Isaiah said this truth should encourage us and give us the strength to **continue** in the faith (Isa 35:3; Heb 12:12). We can take comfort in the fact that there is coming a day when righteousness will reign and wickedness will be vanquished forever. In that day there will be a “Highway of Holiness” leading to God’s throne in Jerusalem. “The ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa 35:10). I look forward to singing God’s praises “in that day”! Hallelujah!
- 23) [July 23] The Assyrian invasion of Judah. When the Assyrian king Sargon II died (722–705 BC) and his son Sennacherib took the throne, **rebellion** broke out in several parts of the Assyrian Empire. In the east, Merodach-Baladan II retook the throne of **Babylon**, and in the west, Hezekiah seized the opportunity to gain Judean independence. He stopped paying **tribute** and even went so far as to attack Philistia, an Assyrian puppet state and an encroacher on Judean land (2 Kgs 18:7–8). It took some time for Assyria to respond, but in 701 BC, Sennacherib **invaded** Judah and attacked all the fortified cities (2 Kgs 18:13). At first Hezekiah tried to **buy** Sennacherib off, but when he realized Assyria could not be dissuaded, Hezekiah rallied the people and encouraged them to trust in God. He said, “There is a **greater** power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of **flesh**, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.” (2 Chr 32:7–8 NIV). Like the people of Judah, we should take encouragement from this. There’s no reason to fear the enemy when we are on God’s side! Sennacherib sent some of his officials, accompanied by a large army, to Jerusalem and told the people: ‘Don’t let Hezekiah deceive you! Your god cannot deliver you from my hand! Look at what I did to the **gods** of all the other nations! Surrender now and I’ll let you live!’ Hezekiah then did what we should do when we’re confronted by such an enemy. He **humbled** himself and cried out to God for help. God told him through Isaiah not to be afraid, and God promised to deal with Sennacherib personally.
- 24) [July 24] After Sennacherib defeated Lachish, he moved on to **Libnah**, a city around 15–20 miles from Jerusalem. While he was attacking it, he received word that **Tirhakah**, the Cushite king of Egypt, was marching in his direction. Worried that this news might embolden Hezekiah, Sennacherib sent a taunting **letter**, warning him not to trust in God (Isa 37:10–13). Sennacherib’s blasphemous letter was the last straw for Hezekiah. How dare this Assyrian king mock the living God! Hezekiah took the letter, spread it out before God and prayed (Isa 37:16–20). There are three lessons we can

learn from his prayer: (1) Hezekiah's **zeal** for God's name teaches us that our primary concern should be the vindication and **glory** of God, not our personal success. (2) Hezekiah's **supplication** teaches us to cast our cares on God and lay our heartaches at His feet. God is the answer to all our problems! (3) Hezekiah's **humility** teaches us to humble ourselves before God and wait for Him to deliver us. God knows the right time to act for our good and His glory. God replied with a letter of His own to Sennacherib: "The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises and **mocks** you. The Daughter of Jerusalem **tosses** her head as you flee" (Isa 37:22 NIV). God told him that all his conquests had been ordained long ago. God would put a **hook** in his nose and drag him back to Nineveh. Sure enough, God's angel killed the army that was surrounding Jerusalem—185,000 men! Sennacherib returned to Nineveh in shame and defeat.

- 25) [July 25] Not long after God delivered Jerusalem from Sennacherib's army, Hezekiah became deathly ill. He was only **39** years old at the time, and he again cried out to God for help. God heard his prayer and saw his **tears**, and God not only healed him, but performed a miracle to confirm his recovery. Truly, there is nothing too hard for God! Sadly, Hezekiah's story does not end on this note of triumph. Like his great-grandfather Uzziah, he had a problem with **pride**. Hezekiah had become immensely wealthy over the course of his reign, and the recent Assyrian invasion had not done any serious damage to his net worth. Indeed, after God's miraculous rescue of Jerusalem, "many were bringing gifts to the LORD...and choice presents to Hezekiah...so that he was **exalted** in the sight of the nations" (2 Chr 32:23). All the praise and attention went to Hezekiah's head, and it wasn't long until "his heart was **proud**" (2 Chr 32:25). So God decided to give him a **test**. When the ambassadors from **Babylon** came to inquire about his miraculous healing, God stepped back to see how Hezekiah would respond. Instead of giving the glory to God, he threw open the doors of his **treasuries** and bragged about his **wealth** and resources. This shows us that prosperity is far more dangerous than hardship, for acclaim can quickly lead to pride. God rebuked Hezekiah through Isaiah, and he repented (2 Chr 32:26), but God's promised wrath was only delayed. If Hezekiah had accepted his early death, he never would have fallen into pride. This leaves us with the impression that God's way is best, even if it means great **sacrifice** on our part. Better to submit to God's will than to have our own way and live to regret it.
- 26) [July 26] The book of Isaiah makes a dramatic shift at chapter forty, and the following chapters, Isaiah 40–48, are known as the "Book of **Comfort**." Rather than continuing to warn Judah of impending judgment, Isaiah offered them comfort, and his message turned from punishment for sin to **restoration** after exile. Judah's coming exile was over **100** years away, yet Isaiah addressed the people of that day as though he was present with them. Isaiah told the exiles of Judah that God still loved them. Yes, God had punished them "**double**" for their sin, but God had not cast them off forever. Indeed, Isaiah heard a voice calling out, "In the wilderness **prepare** the way of the Lord" (Isa 40:3). It was the voice of **John** the **Baptist** urging the people to prepare their hearts to receive the **Messiah**! Your faithful **Servant** was coming, and He would save His people from their **sins**. Isaiah announced the **call** of the Messiah: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my **chosen**, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations" (Isa 42:1). This is the first of Isaiah's "Servant Songs" which speak of the earthly ministry of Jesus. He would open the eyes of the **blind** and release those who dwell in darkness. He would be a **light** to the nations and a **covenant** to the people. We all want our strength to be renewed. We all want to mount up with wings like an eagle, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint (Isa 40:31). But are we willing to do what must come first? Are we willing to "wait for the LORD"?
- 27) [July 27] Conclusion of Isaiah's "Book of Comfort" (Isa 40–48). One of the key themes in this section of Isaiah is the **supremacy** of God: "I am the LORD, your Holy One, the **Creator** of Israel, your King. I am the **first** and I am the **last**; besides me there is no god. Is there a God besides me? There is no

**Rock**; I know not any” (Isa 43:15; 44:6, 8). Isaiah painted a compelling picture of the futility of **idolatry** (Isa 44:6–23). ‘Just think,’ Isaiah said, ‘the man who cuts down a tree uses half to make a fire and the other half to make an **idol**’ (Isa 44:19). What pathetic self-deception! God urged Judah, ‘Remember who made you, Israel. I formed you, you are my servant! **Return** to me, for I have redeemed you!’ (Isa 44:21–23). This teaches us that the proper response to the knowledge that God is our Creator is **worship**! Isaiah concluded by foretelling the coming of **Cyrus**, king of Persia, some **150** years before he came to power. Babylon would be destroyed and Judah would return from its exile. Cyrus would be God’s faithful **servant**. He would rebuild both Jerusalem and the temple (Isa 44:28; 45:13). What should Judah learn from all this? “I am the LORD your God”! (Isa 48:17). If they would pay attention to God’s words and obey His commands, their **peace** (*shalom*) would be like a river and their righteousness like the waves of the sea (Isa 48:18). So it is with us—Isaiah calls us to be faithful to our Redeemer. How blessed are those whose God is the LORD!

28) [July 28] In the “Book of Comfort,” Isaiah revealed that God would redeem Israel from their future **Babylonian** captivity by using his servant, **Cyrus** the Great. In chapters 49–55, Isaiah revealed that God would redeem Israel from a far greater captivity: the bondage of **sin**. God would accomplish this deliverance by using another Servant, the **Messiah**. This Servant would not only take care of Israel’s sin problem, but also that of the whole **world** (Isa 49:6; Acts 13:44–49). How would this be accomplished? Through the **suffering** and **death** of the Messiah! (Isa 53). He would have a humble beginning, and His appearance would not be stately or majestic. He would be despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He would remain obedient to God through persecution, and He would willingly allow Himself to be killed by His enemies. He would die among wicked men even though He had never done violence to anyone. Jesus offered his **back** to those who beat Him and His **cheeks** to those who plucked out His beard. He did not hide His face from **mocking** and **spitting**, but He set His face like **flint** (Isa 50:7). He did this because God helped Him, and the same **grace** that enabled Christ to endure to the end is available for **us**! God was pleased to crush Jesus for us, and when He gave His body as an offering for our sin, God was satisfied with His sacrifice. Yet Christ would not remain in the grave: “He will **see** his offspring and **prolong** his days...After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of **life** and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:10–11 NIV). Jesus Christ bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Praise the Lord! Glory to the Lamb of God!

29) [July 29] The people of Isaiah’s day lived double lives. They would go to the temple and act delighted to learn about God, but when they left, they would **fight** among themselves and **oppress** each other (Isa 58:1–3). Do we act one way on Sunday and another way on Monday? Do our daily lives testify that we’re Christians? Isaiah was faithful to condemn the people of Judah for their idolatry and hypocrisy, but he was also eager to show them how to **live** out God’s righteousness in their daily lives. ‘It’s not enough,’ Isaiah said, ‘to just go through the motions of serving God. You can fast and offer sacrifices and inquire of the Lord, but that’s not what it means to be **holy**. Holiness is keeping your hand from doing any **evil**, **humbling** yourself before God, **loosing** the chains of injustice, **setting** the oppressed free, **sharing** your food with the hungry, **giving** shelter to the homeless, and **clothing** the naked. Holiness is **practical** and down-to-earth. Holiness is concerned with setting things **right**. Holiness is doing what God would do if He lived in your neighborhood, attended your church and worked at your job.’ Isaiah was especially concerned with how the people treated God’s day of **rest**, the Sabbath (Isa 58:13–14; cf. Exod 31:12–17). Why the emphasis on keeping the Sabbath? Because in keeping the Sabbath, the people demonstrated their love for God (they respected and **honored** the day on which God rested) and their love for others (their obedience **encouraged** others to rest and refresh themselves). Perhaps no other commandment so beautifully weaves together the twin themes of the Law: loving **God** and loving **others**. That’s what **holiness** is all about: loving God by

obeying His commands (John 14:15) and loving others by treating them how we want to be treated (Matt 7:12).

30) [July 30] The stirring conclusion of Isaiah's prophecy to Judah. Isaiah began by describing the **glory** that would characterize millennial Jerusalem (Isa 60–62). God's **light** would shine on Israel, and the nations of the world would be drawn to that light. They would bring the Jews of the diaspora back to the land, and they would shower God's people with great **wealth**. God had called Israel to be a light to the nations, and in the Millennium, they would at last fulfill that great purpose. This should inspire each of us to be a **Jerusalem**-in-miniature: a shining light in a world of darkness and perversion. When we spread the gospel and bring people to Christ, we are **preparing** their hearts for the coming of God's glorious Kingdom! Before Israel's new day could dawn, God's Servant had to come and fulfill His ministry. Hundreds of years after Isaiah prophesied, Jesus stood in a synagogue in **Nazareth** and read Isaiah 61:1–2a. He omitted any reference to "the day of vengeance of our God," (second coming) and instead proclaimed "the year of the Lord's **favor**" (first coming). The Holy Spirit was upon Him and anointed Him to "bring good news to the poor...to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." When Jesus sat down and said, "Today this Scripture has been **fulfilled** in your hearing" (Luke 4:21), He was saying that the day of salvation had come! How wonderful to live in this time, a time when Christ is calling the nations of the world to be his disciples. We need to be working as hard as we can right now, for the night is coming when no man can work.

31) [July 31] The reign of Manasseh and Nahum's prophecy against the Assyrian city of Nineveh. Manasseh was crowned king at the age of twenty-two, and he quickly became the **worst** king Judah had ever seen. His wickedness was so great (greater than the **Amorites** who were before him) that God pronounced an irrevocable sentence of **doom** on Jerusalem and Judah. Not even the godly Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, could prevent the coming calamity. He could only delay the judgment (cf. 2 Kgs 24:3–4; Jer 15:4). This teaches us that there is a **limit** to God's patience with sin. Just as the Amorites filled up their "cup of iniquity" and then were destroyed, so our country is filling up its cup of iniquity, and someday God will say, "Enough!" Let's be among those who "build up the wall and **stand** in the breach" so that God's wrath may be delayed (Ezek 22:30). During Manasseh's bloody reign, Nahum of Elkosh prophesied against Nineveh. The repentance that had followed Jonah's preaching was in the distant past, and the city was now the capital of the mighty Assyrian empire. Judah was firmly in its iron grip, and Ashurbanipal forced Manasseh to aid his conquest of Egypt (cf. the sack of Thebes in Nah 3:8–10). It was no accident that God inspired Nahum to write of Nineveh's downfall when Assyria's power and domination were at their **height**. God had used Assyria to punish and discipline both Israel and Judah, and now the doom that Isaiah had foreseen was at hand (Isa 10:5–12). In only a few short decades, the city would be destroyed by the **Babylonians**: "There will the fire devour you; the sword will cut you off" (Nah 3:15). This teaches us that God holds the nations **accountable** for their actions, and although He may use them to accomplish His purposes, they will not go unpunished for their sin. Their power may appear invincible, but they cannot stand against the fury of God's wrath.