

The Baton of Godliness

Today In Your Reading...

We watched the first and only Queen, Athaliah, seize the throne of Judah after her son Ahaziah died. Although she ordered the death of the entire royal family (which was an unfortunate but common practice for those securing their rule), a little boy named Joash was hidden from her in the Temple. The boy grew up in the Temple under the watch of a godly priest named Jehoiada.

When the time was right, Jehoiada overthrew the evil Queen Athaliah, ordered her death, and established the seven-year-old Joash on the throne of Judah. The people rejoiced. Under Jehoiada's leadership, the people of Judah renewed their covenant with the Lord and vowed to be His people. As a result, they cleared out the temple of Baal, demolished the altars, and killed Mattan the idolatrous priest. Joash even ordered that the Temple of the Lord be repaired. Much good was done under Jehoiada's influence.

However, as Jehoiada neared the end of his life (a ripe old 130), his influence waned and King Joash and the people of Judah abandoned God and His Temple and, instead, reestablished the worship of Baal and Asherah. The anger of the Lord burned against them, so much that he sent the prophet Zechariah to admonish them; but, King Joash did not listen, and he even went so far as to order Zechariah's death.

Not only is Satan timeless, he is relentless.

I do not mean to say that Satan is eternal, as God is, but he is certainly not bound by the restraints of time on earth, as men are. What that means is that while men come and go, Satan remains throughout history, in the background, patiently waiting for the right moment to strike. Though one priest or king may establish righteousness for a spell, Satan knows that, in time, their influence will wane and the next generation will not be as dedicated to godliness.

While King Joash had done some good things, he was under the direction of a great priest; and, when that priest was gone, Joash's true colors began to show. Though he started well, he finished poorly. Though the baton of godliness had been handed to him, he dropped it.

Daily Reflection

It is difficult for men to keep the momentum of obedience and righteousness from one generation to the next, especially when a timeless enemy is working against them. Consider America, for example, once a godly nation with tremendous momentum now turning its back on God. How difficult it is for one generation to pass the baton of godliness to the next.

How would you describe the momentum of godliness in your family? Has it been consistently handed down from generation to generation or has the baton been dropped?

What about you, are you carrying the baton of godliness in your family today? What must you do to pass it on to the next generation?

Our enemy is timeless and relentless. What does that mean for us who are temporal and weak? **The battle is never over. We can never let down our guard. We must rely upon God for help.** Still, keep up the good fight!

Victory Over Vomit

June 19 — 2 Kings 13:1-25

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Day 170 — 195 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We covered a short passage that included the reign of Jehoahaz, King of Israel, the end of the reign of Joash, King of Judah, and, finally, the death of Elisha, the great prophet. While we didn't read many verses, the events that we covered were significant nonetheless. For example, we were told that Joash was held accountable for the murder of the prophet Zechariah, when his advisers assassinated him. Once again, while God's justice may not be swift, it is sure.

Also, we saw that Elisha's ministry continued right up to his very last breath, as he promised Israel victory over the Arameans. Even after his death, the power of God emanated from his body, as a dead man was resurrected after being thrown into Elisha's grave. Israel will not witness another prophet with such power until the Messiah arrives.

The story that caught my attention today was that of Jehoahaz, King of Israel, who led God's people to worship false gods, as did those who had come before him. This idolatry, of course, angered the Lord, who punished Israel by allowing its enemy from Aram to defeat them time after time. It finally dawned on Jehoahaz that their oppression was due to their disrespect of the Lord and the worship of false gods. Thus, he prayed to God for help and the Lord heard him.

Because of His love for Israel, God, who honors those who honor Him, sent a deliverer to rescue Israel from the Arameans. Because of His help, God's people were allowed to live in safety once again. However, as we have seen many times before, after a brief time without distress, the people continued in their sin (2 Kings 13:6).

I get so frustrated with the Israelites! Why couldn't they see that obedience to God brought His blessing and disobedience to God invited His

wrath? Why couldn't they learn from their mistakes?

Here is the problem. These people were living before Christ, meaning that they *were trapped in their fallen flesh and incapable of overcoming their sinful nature*. They did not have the Holy Spirit indwelling them and, thus, they were doing only what they were naturally bent to do — sin. "Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly" (Proverbs 26:11). Any moral reformation in those days would have been short-lived because no one, as of yet, was truly freed by salvation in Christ.

Daily Reflection

The people of the Old Testament had an excuse for their repetitious sins. **You, who have been set free by Christ, do not have this excuse.** You no longer have to be trapped in the cycle of setbacks, for the Spirit of Christ has set you free from the law of sin (Romans 8:2). You are no longer a dog who returns to his vomit or a clean pig who returns to the mud (2 Peter 2:22).

This truth does not mean that you won't struggle with temptation or occasionally give in to it. While you have a new nature in Christ, you are still trapped in your body of sin. It will be a constant battle, but **be encouraged; with God's help you can win.**

How are you doing in your battle with sin? Are you relying on the Holy Spirit to give you strength to overcome, or have you given in and made excuses for yourself?

In Christ, you can have victory over your vomit and grow to master your mud!

The Plant or the People?

Today In Your Reading...

We covered a lot of ground that focused primarily on three figures — Kings Amaziah and Uzziah in Judah, then Jonah, the prophet of Israel. All three of them did things that were frustrating and painful to read. Here's a summary of each of their stories.

First, King Amaziah ruled the nation of Judah for 29 years. "He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight," at first, "but not wholeheartedly" (2 Chronicles 25:2). After God had blessed him with success, he turned his back on the Lord, worshiped idols, refused to listen to His prophet, and provoked Israel to war. As a result, God embarrassed Amaziah by allowing Israel to rout his army, destroy part of Jerusalem, pillage the palace and Temple, and carry off exiles.

Second, King Uzziah ruled for 52 years. He also did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, and "as long as the king sought the Lord, God gave him success" (2 Chronicles 26:5). "His fame spread far and wide, for the Lord helped him wonderfully until he became very powerful. But when he had become powerful, he also became proud, which led to his downfall. He sinned against the Lord by entering the sanctuary of the Temple and personally burning incense on the altar" (26:15, 16). God struck Uzziah with leprosy and forced him to live in isolation.

Finally, we read the familiar story of Jonah, who was assigned to pronounce judgment on the city of Nineveh but who, instead, traveled as far as he could in the opposite direction in hopes of getting out of the assignment. He could not, of course, escape the Lord, who compelled him with storm and fish to fulfill his duty. When the people of Nineveh listened to Jonah and repented of their sins, God relented His wrath and spared the city. Then, the petulant prophet had the gall to complain about the Lord's mercy.

The problem with these men was that they lost sight of the bigger picture and, instead, focused only on their own story. Whether it was their pride, their ambition, or their ignorance, **they fell for the lie that life is all about them**, their success, their desires, their plans and purposes, when, really, life was not about them at all. **We exist for the Lord's purposes; He does not exist to fulfill ours.**

Daily Reflection

The best illustration to support this truth was when Jonah complained about the worm eating the plant that gave him shade from the sun. At that moment, he was so caught up in his own well-being, his own comfort, that he had a pity party and wished for death. The Lord quickly admonished him, "You feel sorry about the plant (really yourself)... but Nineveh has 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?" (Jonah 4:10, 11).

Restate, in your own words, what God is saying to Jonah here.

Have you ever complained about "the plant" and missed the bigger picture? Sure we all have. Why is it so easy to fall into this trap, and how exactly do you avoid it?

Life is not about your plant but God's purposes.

I Hate All Your Show

June 21 — Amos 1:1-6:14

Today In Your Reading...

The Lord delivered some terrible news through His servant Amos. It was an announcement of His impending judgment for the sins of His people and their neighbors. All that Moses had warned would happen (if the people rejected the Lord) was about to come true.

Two centuries have passed since the split of Israel. Kings for both Israel and Judah had forsaken God to worship the deities of other nations. Every immorality that accompanies idolatry had invaded their borders. While both nations were guilty of apostasy, Judah had a few notable leaders who tried to please the Lord. Israel, on the other hand, had no one who did right in the sight of God. In fact, they consistently invited, even initiated, evil; consequently, God began to hasten Israel's destruction.

Israel was on the run from God and on the run to ruin. The people's sin snowballed with each king. They ignored God; and since they did not repent, the Lord did not relent, rather He slowly began to dismantle the nation. Bit by bit, God tore Israel apart. The end was near.

Though these events are in the distant past, I believe there are some applicable truths for us today. First, **while God is slow to anger, He still gets angry**. His holy nature demands that He punish sin; His patience gives way to justice.

Second, did you notice that Amos prophesied judgment against other countries? **Every nation is accountable to God; He is the Judge of them all**. Even our country cannot do whatever it pleases without experiencing the consequences of our actions. Our choice to reject Him and despise His Word will not go unpunished.

Third, **before God judges, He warns** by sending prophets (3:3) and allowing disasters (4:6-

13). It is a common misconception that God is heartless, that He is quick to judge; yet, Scripture tells us that *He is quick to show mercy*.

Fourth, **when people repent of sin, God relents of His wrath**. God hates sin, but He loves to forgive. He told His people, "Come back to Me and live! Do what is good and run from evil, that you may live!" (5:6, 14).

Daily Reflection

God was most offended by the people whom He had loved and protected and provided for. While they gave Him lip-service, they did not love Him with their hearts. **"I hate all your show,"** He said, **"and your pretense**, the hypocrisy of your festivals and assemblies... Away with your hymns of praise! They are only noise to My ears! Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, a river of righteous living" (5:21-24).

Is their hypocrisy in your life? Are you pretending to love Him with your words and actions while your heart is far from Him? Are you putting on a show for others? Examine your attitude, your motives, your religious routines. What do they reveal about your true love?

"Prepare to meet your God as He comes in judgment" (4:12). These might be the most frightening words in the Bible. God is not out to get you. He desires a relationship with you, but *He cannot ignore continual defiance and sin*. Are you on the run to God or away from Him? Make sure that when you meet the Lord, He says to you, "Well done," instead of "What have you done?"

The Plumb Line

Today In Your Reading...

God's patience had reached its end. He was tired of warning His people of their sins; now, He moved to destroy them. Both Amos and Isaiah prophesied that it would happen. Still, neither the kings nor the people would repent of their idolatry and so they hastened their destruction.

We also got a glimpse of the nation that God would use to punish His people — the wicked Assyrians. The Assyrians were perhaps the most feared people of that day, known for their cruelty and violence. Take, for example, their capital city of Nineveh; it was not called the "City of Blood" for nothing. It was the fear of these people that caused Jonah to run in the opposite direction when God called him to preach to them.

The Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser invaded the land the first time, but relented when the King of Israel paid him off with 37 tons of silver. However, with his second invasion, he took several cities and thousands of captives away from Israel. The invasions will only get worse, as we will soon see the dismantling of the Northern Kingdom of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians.

A few other noteworthy items happened in our reading today. First, did you notice that both Amos and Isaiah prophesied that Israel, after being devastated, would be restored at some point. Isaiah wrote, "Israel will remain a stump, like a tree that is cut down, but the stump will be a holy seed that will grow again" (6:13). Amos wrote that a day would come when God would "restore the fallen kingdom of David. Though it is a house of ruins, I will rebuild its walls and restore it to its former glory" (9:11-15). Here is a look ahead at the return of Israel from exile in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

A second notable prophecy is that of a great famine in the land, "not a famine of bread or

water but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11, 12). God's Word had been rejected by His people to such a degree that He decided not to say anything for a while. Scholars believe this prophecy to relate to the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments.

The last item I'd like to mention is the prophecy of the Lord standing beside a wall that had been built using a plumb line (Amos 7:7-9). A plumb line is a weight on the end of a string; builders used it to measure the height of a structure, the depth of a river, and the straightness of a wall. When God's Word was being collected and made into a book (around 400 AD), the Church fathers chose to call the book the "Canon," which is Greek for "plumb line."

Daily Reflection

God's Word, which reflects God's nature and character, is our plumb line. With it, we are to measure all things. It is to be our guide, to help us filter and discern truth from error, to gauge godly wisdom from worldly foolishness. By obeying the Lord's statutes, we keep our feet on a straight path.

Praise God that we do not live in a famine of hearing God's Word. We have access to His wisdom at all times. How is this both a positive and negative truth?

How does your life measure up to the Plumb Line of God's Word? Are you following the Lord's instructions and walking the straight path? **It was by ignoring this plumb line that led to Israel's downfall.**

God Is With Us

Today In Your Reading...

Both Israel and Judah are in the throes of judgment. Not only were they being invaded by foreign nations, they were at war with each other. Jerusalem itself was under attack; thousands of people were being taken captive. The prophets Micah, Obed, and Isaiah were delivering messages of doom and gloom. It seemed that the wheels were coming off and both nations were headed for disaster.

After the good King Uzziah died, he was followed by Jotham, who did what was right in the eyes of God, then Ahaz, who was wicked. It was during the reign of Ahaz, King of Judah, that Israel and the Arameans attacked Jerusalem. Rather than turn to the Lord for help, Ahaz reached out to the King of Assyria, in essence enslaving the people of Judah to this mad man.

It was in the midst of the siege of Jerusalem that Isaiah approached King Ahaz with wonderful news, that one day a virgin would conceive a child and give birth to a son and call His name Immanuel, meaning "God is with us" (7:10-16). While we are not told if this prophecy had an immediate fulfillment in the days of Ahaz or Isaiah, we do know, of course, that it was ultimately fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, the promised Messiah (Matthew 1:22, 23).

I've often wondered exactly how this prophecy would have been an encouragement to Ahaz and his family when it would not be fulfilled for another 500 years. What does this news have to do with the armies outside of Jerusalem's walls? These questions warrant a closer look at the prophecy and to whom it was given.

The key to understanding the significance of this prophecy is found in Isaiah's opening, "Listen, you royal family of David!" The news of the Messiah would have been a reminder to Ahaz and

his family of God's promises — that David's family would always have a king on the throne and that someday a Chosen One would come from their descendants to bless the nations of the world. Therefore, even though things looked bad at the moment, as Jerusalem was under attack, **God would keep His promises**. Because of His love for Abraham and David, He would preserve a remnant of His people despite their sins.

Daily Reflection

Oftentimes, especially during days of distress, you need to be reminded that God is with you and that He is for you. **Though the enemy may surround you and try to destroy you, though you are pressed from every side, you can trust that God is there**, protecting you, providing for you, and purposefully working all things for your good and His glory.

When is it that you need most to be reminded of this truth? Why then?

You may be like me and get yourself into all kinds of messes. How can this truth, that God is with you, be an encouragement when you have sinned or done something to displease the Lord?

The Messiah not only came to save you from your sins, He came to save you from yourself. **Don't allow trouble, fear, or failure rob you of this wonderful news — God is with you!**

A Light and a Banner

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June 24 — *Isaiah 8:1-11:16*

Day 175 — 190 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We camped out in the book of *Isaiah*, which has been called by some “The Fifth Gospel,” because there are so many references to Christ. Isaiah was privileged to share many of the Messianic prophecies with which we are so familiar today. However, before considering the prophecies of the distant future, let’s consider the prophecies of the near future.

The Lord continued to warn His people of the impending invasion of the Assyrian army. Both the nations of Israel and Judah were threatened by this enemy; though Judah will survive, Israel will not. “With bared fangs, the Assyrians will devour Israel. In a single day the Lord will destroy both the head and the tail... The leaders are the head and the lying prophets the tail. For the leaders of the people have led them down the path of destruction... For they are all hypocrites, speaking wickedness with lies. But even then, the Lord’s anger will not be satisfied. His fist will be poised to strike, for after all of this punishment, the people will still not repent and turn to the Lord Almighty” (9:12-18).

However, once the Lord used Assyria to judge His people, He promised to destroy it as well. “Destruction is certain for Assyria. Though it will enslave My people, plunder them, and trample them like dirt beneath its feet..., the Lord will turn against the King of Assyria and punish him, for he is proud and arrogant... The Lord will completely destroy Assyria’s warriors, and they will waste away like sick people in a plague... The Lord Almighty will chop down the mighty tree! The Mighty One will cut down the enemy as an ax cuts down the forest trees in Lebanon” (10:5, 6, 12, 18, 33, 34).

Through all of this destruction and despair, God’s grace is still evident. He reminded everyone that His promised Messiah was coming.

“There will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles will be filled with glory. **The people who walk in darkness will see a great light** — a light that will live in the land where death casts its shadow... For a child is born to us; a son is given to us, and the government will rest on His shoulders. These will be His royal titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace... He will rule forever with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David” (9:1-7).

Here is another look into the future, “Out of the stump of David’s family will grow a shoot, yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root; and the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord... In that day, **the heir to David’s throne will be a banner of salvation to all the world...**” (11:1, 2, 10).

Daily Reflection

A light to those who walk in darkness, a banner of salvation to all the world — praise God for sending His Son Jesus Christ to be the light and salvation of all. In the midst of Israel’s darkness and depression, these words must have brought comfort and hope. They still do today.

How have you found Christ to be a light in the midst of your darkness, a banner of hope in the midst of your distress?

“Do not fear anything except the Lord Almighty... **If you fear Him, you need to fear nothing else.** He will keep you safe” (8:11-14).