

*Lenten devotional for Christians who wait for the King of Kings*



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**A Note from Rev. Franson (Nythrius):**

You will need your Bible! This devotional is a study on the kings of Israel & Judah, but we cannot possibly fit the entire reign of each king in this booklet. Some of the entries will have a selection from the Scripture reading printed, but others will not. With every devotional, there will be a selection from the books of Kings and Chronicles listed that contains the record of their rule. Please read those passages to get a full understanding of what the devotional writer is saying.

**Come quickly, O Jesus Christ, King of Kings. Amen.**

## **Ash Wednesday–Rehoboam: King of Judah**

1 Kings 11:42–14:31

2 Chronicles 9:31–12:16

2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 12:13a, 14. *So King Rehoboam grew strong in Jerusalem and reigned. ... And he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the Lord.*

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 14:22–24. *And Judah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their fathers had done. For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.*

Rehoboam was the son of Solomon, who inherited the Kingdom of Israel, but he wasn't Solomon. He was like his father in all the worst ways. He has Solomon's confidence without his wisdom. We could dwell on the many ways in which Rehoboam divided the kingdom, but God had already determined to take the kingdom from him before he was ever on the throne due to his father Solomon's turning away from the faith (1 Kings 11:11–13). But for all his political failures, none of them was his greatest folly.

His greatest folly was rejecting the faith of his father. His father was given divine wisdom from God, and he wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, and yet Rehoboam still turned away from the Lord. In a twisted sort of a way, we want to take some comfort in this by thinking, "See, if even the great Solomon can't get this parenting thing right, my failures as a parent don't look so bad." Unfortunately, regardless of what Solomon said and wrote, his actions spoke louder than his words, since in his later years Solomon abandoned the Lord. How often do we find ourselves in that same position? We claim that God is the most important thing in our lives, yet our Bibles gather dust on our shelves while our heads look nonstop at our phones. We can't find the book of Isaiah in the Bible without looking in the table of contents, but we can tell you the numbers associated with each channel on TV. This Lenten season, consider tearing down the high places in your land, in your life, and in your house, and return to the Lord. Return to the Lord for He is gracious and merciful, abounding in kindness and steadfast love, Amen.

## **Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>–Jeroboam: King of Israel**

1 Kings 11:26–14:20

2 Chronicles 9:29–13:22

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 12:26–28. *And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.” So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”*

Jeroboam could have been a great king. He had the heart of the people, and unlike Rehoboam, he listened to his people. God also gave him the Northern Kingdom of Israel as a punishment against Solomon’s worship of the false gods. God promised to be with Jeroboam if he would be faithful as David was, who followed God’s commands and walked in God’s ways. And just as the kingdom was taken from Saul and handed to David, and David’s house would be established forever, so would God take the ten tribes and give them to Jeroboam and establish his house forever.

But Jeroboam wasn’t another David; he was another Saul. He didn’t fear God, but he feared losing his power to God. While the kingdom itself was divided, both sides intended to remain united in their worship of the one true God. That scared Jeroboam, even beyond his faith in God’s promises to him. So he abandoned God’s teaching, just as his ancestors had done, and erected golden calves in his own kingdom. He didn’t want the 10 tribes crossing the border into Judah to go to the temple that Solomon had built for Jesus Christ.

That hits home after these last years. We’re too scared of this virus, so here’s this virtual temple that we’ve constructed to keep you safe. God’s Word clearly says to meet together, but surely He can’t mean that when it might be dangerous. The blood of the martyrs begs to differ. This Lenten season, confess your sins, repent of them, and receive the forgiveness of Jesus, not remotely through a screen, but from the called and ordained man God has placed in your midst. Don’t let God’s promises be ripped away from you like they were ripped away from Jeroboam, trust in all of God’s promises to you. Amen.

## **Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup>–Abijah (Abijam/Abia): King of Judah**

1 Kings 14:34–15:8

2 Chronicles 13:1–22

King Abijah was Rehoboam's son and the chief prince among his twenty-eight brothers. His three-year reign, like all the days of his life, was fraught with the war between his father and Jeroboam, Solomon's servant. Because the son of David turned his heart away from the Lord, the Lord raised up Jeroboam to afflict the offspring of David by taking the kingdom from Solomon and dividing the tribes of Israel. However, the Lord would not afflict David's offspring forever. Because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from His commandments, a lamp would be preserved in Jerusalem.

This lamp of David's kingship over Israel was preserved through King Abijah. Unlike Jeroboam, it is recorded that Abijah kept the charge of the Lord God and preserved the priestly service of Aaron and the Levites. Because they relied on the God their fathers, the Lord graciously preserved Judah by striking down Jeroboam and his 500,000 chosen men. Abijah, with his fourteen wives, twenty-two sons, and sixteen daughters, grew mighty until Asa his son reigned in his place.

Though the Lord granted victory to Abijah and temporary peace to his son, the Lord does not count these things as righteousness. Only God judges the hearts of men, and Abijah's heart was not found to be wholly true to the Lord his God. He did not depart from the sins of his father, but he walked in them and forsook the light of God's law. Now that the Light of David's Son and Lord has dawned in Christ Jesus, may the hearts of all men be found to be faithful and true, cleansed and redeemed by the King whose Word reigns as our Lamp and Light throughout all ages.

## **Saturday, March 5<sup>th</sup>–Nadab: King of Israel**

*1 Kings 15:25–28 Now Nadab the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin. Then Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him. And Baasha killed him at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, while Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. Baasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place.*

“When the wicked increase, transgression increases, but the righteous will look upon their downfall (Prov. 29:16).” With the passage of time, the increase of a wicked ruler and subsequent crime can become easily perceptible. With the passage of time, the errors and mistakes in your own life become more apparent, giving you the opportunity to distance yourself from them and confess them with less guilt and shame. It’s too easy to confess the mistakes you made two years ago. However, Wisdom’s call is the past *and* present discernment of evil that leads to a confession in the present time.

Wisdom’s call is the present discernment of evil. Nadab, in the two years he was given to reign over Israel, failed to discern the past evils of his father. He increased in evil by walking in the way of Jeroboam and causing Israel to stumble. Therefore, transgression increased during his two years of reign. Baasha conspired against him, struck him down during his siege of Gibbethon, and reigned over Israel in his place.

Two years seems like a short time, doesn’t it? Whether short or long, any passage of time can and will be used for the increase of evil. And yet, the righteous, who live every hour in the knowledge of their sin and their need for deliverance, will look upon the downfall of the wicked. Grow and increase, like the twelve-year-old Jesus, in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man. In Christ, the passage of time yields abundant fruit.

## **First Sunday in Lent—Parable of Wheat & Tares:**

Matthew 13:24b–30 The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’

What would you do if you heard that your work in progress had been ruined in secret by your enemy? A masterwork painting ruined by a generous splash of red paint? A magnificent house intentionally flooded with water and left to rot? An exquisite dish made inedible with the help of vinegar? Perhaps your first instinct would be to abandon the project and start from scratch. After all, it is only natural to feel frustrated and defeated when the effort and resources you have been seems wasted, and your vision is—to say the least—compromised.

Now consider the man of the parable. His servants were quick to suggest that the work of the enemy should immediately be undone. But the man would not let them. Why? Because they would inevitably undo some of his own work. He took so much pride in his own work that he would not let the sabotage of the enemy undo even a fraction of it. This would inevitably lead to much trouble and toil, but he was adamant that the good could be separated from the evil.

Such is the kingdom of heaven. The Lord is not fazed by the frenzied vandalism of the Devil. Instead, he lets the good grow with the bad, until both have matured and shown their fruits. He will not destroy the faithful souls in his Church with those of the wicked, but He will wait until the time of their harvest comes. Likewise, He is not disheartened with our daily shortcomings and sins, but He perseveres to finish the work that He has begun. The world might see His beloved masterwork as now blemished, he does not see it as such, for on the Last Day it will be purified, made clean, clear, and radiant.

## **Monday, March 7<sup>th</sup>—Asa: King of Judah**

1 Kings 15:8–24

2 Chronicles 14:1–16:14

At the beginning of his reign, King Asa of Judah did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord. His heart was wholly true to the Lord, for he removed the foreign altars and high places, broke down the pillars and Asherim, and commanded Judah to seek the Lord by keeping the law and the commandments. The Lord saw his faithfulness and rewarded him with ten years of peace and prosperity.

Even when there was the war against Zerah the Ethiopian, Asa interceded to the Lord on behalf of his men, pleading for help and relying solely upon God's mighty hand for deliverance. Once again, the Lord blessed Asa by defeating the Ethiopians and providing them with much spoil and plunder. It was through the godly encouragement of Azariah that Asa took courage and removed the idols from Judah and Benjamin. He repaired the altar of the Lord, offered up sacrifices with the spoil they received and made a covenant with his people to seek the Lord with all their heart and soul.

Near the end of his reign, Hanani the seer rebuked Asa for failing to rely on the Lord by relying on the king of Syria during his war with Baasha, and by relying on physicians when he had a disease in his feet. No man is blameless, not even King David. Thanks be to God for Asa's courage and faithfulness in restoring right worship among God's people. May God grant us the courage to strengthen our weak hands and seek the Lord and His Word in all circumstances, even in times of war and peace, in health and sickness, and in prosperity and famine. The Word of the Lord has proven true.

## **Tuesday, March 8<sup>th</sup>–Baasha: King of Israel**

1 Kings 15:27–16:7

2 Chronicles 16:1–6

Like a dog that returns to its vomit, Baasha was a foolish king of Israel who returned to the folly of Jeroboam. He forsook the Lord who raised him from the dust and made him leader over Israel. In his twenty-four-year reign, he killed all the house of Jeroboam, walked in the sins of Jeroboam, caused Israel to sin, and provoked the Lord to anger. Because of this, the Lord declared that this foolish dog would be swept away and thrown out to be devoured by the dogs and birds of the heavens.

In Exodus 22:31, the Lord declared that any unclean flesh (cf. Matt 7:6) was to be thrown to the unclean dogs. Thus, those who defiled God's holy name or murdered God's holy people would be devoured by the birds and thrown to the dogs who would lick their blood. This was the fate of Ahab (1 Kings 21:19; 22:38), Jezebel (2 Kings 9:10), and God's unfaithful people (Jer 15:3).

For the sake of His holy name, God redeemed Israel from all their uncleanness and restored their relationship to Him. He purified and consecrated them, thus foreshadowing the outpouring of Christ's blood from the cross for the salvation of mankind. Christ's holy body was not thrown to the dogs and devoured like unclean flesh, but it was placed in an unused tomb. Christ's body was pierced, and his holy blood was shed to appease the Father's anger and to sanctify mankind to be a people for His own possession.

## **Wednesday, March 9<sup>th</sup>—Jehoshaphat: King of Judah**

1 Kings 22:41–50

2 Chronicles 17:1–20:37

Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, was a righteous and courageous man, but also a man of compromise. He allied himself with the ungodly not once, but twice: First, with Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, to go to war against the Aramites. A throng of four hundred false prophets spurred them on, and only the prophet Micaiah gave the true word of the Lord—that they should abandon their plan. Unsurprisingly, they were defeated by the Aramites. Unlike Ahab, Jehoshaphat escaped with his life.

Later, he also allied with Ahaziah, another ungodly king of Judah, to build ships to trade with Ophir and Tarshish. Another prophet, Eliezer, rebuked him and foretold the destruction of that navy. This was the result of his willingness to compromise and to join forces with the wicked. But the prophets of the Lord recognized that Jehoshaphat was in other respects a very good king, much like his father before him: He did away with many forms of idolatry, including the shameful “sacred” boy prostitutes, and strove hard to organize the teaching of the Law in each city. He also appointed judges to mete out justice to his people.

His greatest triumph was against the overwhelming invading forces of Moabites, Ammonites and Mount Seir. He despaired of his own strength and brought all Judah to pray to the Lord. By the word of the Lord, they were promised a victory without battle. And indeed, as they stood on the field singing the psalms, the invaders turned against each other and tore each other apart, leaving more plunder than the men of Judah could carry.

Faith in the Lord was Jehoshaphat’s greatest strength—but his weakness was to seek the help of wicked men. Let us consider such strengths and weaknesses in ourselves in these days. Let us continue to pray to the Lord for good and righteous leaders, but not to place all our trust in the hands of those who claim to be on our side. Jesus Christ is on our side, and He will preserve His church, no matter who holds the reigns of our government in these days.

## **Thursday, March 10<sup>th</sup>—Elah: King of Israel**

1 Kings 16:6–14

1 Kings 16:8–12 *In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah the son of Baasha became king over Israel, and reigned two years in Tirzah. Now his servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, conspired against him as he was in Tirzah drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, steward of his house in Tirzah. And Zimri went in and struck him and killed him in the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place. Then it came to pass, when he began to reign, as soon as he was seated on his throne, that he killed all the household of Baasha; he did not leave him one male, neither of his relatives nor of his friends. Thus Zimri destroyed all the household of Baasha, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, for all the sins of Baasha and the sins of Elah his son, by which they had sinned and by which they had made Israel sin, in provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their idols.*

How does a great man continue his legacy? For that matter, how does any man set up a legacy that will continue long after he is dead? We have seen what Rehoboam did. He wanted to surpass his father's legacy, so he took counsel with his young friends and sought to rule harshly.

As we look at Elah, we see the opposite type of son: a lazy, drunken party animal. His father Baasha was a great but evil king. God raised him up to punish Jeroboam, and he did—completely ending his royal line. All that Baasha accomplished was overturned by the ineptitude of his son Elah. Zimri, a military commander, struck him down while he was “drinking himself drunk” (1 Kings 16:9). Zimri proceeded to destroy the whole house of Baasha.

We ought to learn from Rehoboam and Elah, not only as we are children of those who have gone before us, but also as we have children who will follow after us. We ought to pass on the faith that which will last through all ages. We should avoid being purely reactionary to our fathers. Our fathers certainly help us know who we are, but they have their strengths and weaknesses. Our Heavenly Father has given us His Name by which we are truly known. His legacy continues whenever and wherever the Word is preached, heard, and believed.

## **Friday, March 11<sup>th</sup>—Jehoram (Joram): King of Judah**

2 Kings 8:16–24

2 Chronicles 21:1–20

Joram, son of Jehoshaphat, ruled Judah while a man of the same name also ruled Israel—he in turn the son of Ahab. While Jehoshaphat was a godly king, his son brought to fruition the seeds of compromise that his father had sown during his reign. Despite the idolatry of Ahab and of all Israel, Joram son of Jehoshaphat had married Ahab's daughter. This led him to idolatry and wicked deeds in the eyes of the Lord.

Joram's first act as king was tremendously evil: He murdered all his brothers, whom his father had lavished with gifts of treasures and cities. Why? Perhaps jealousy, perhaps fear. It was not unprecedented, as Abimelech had done the same to his brothers (Judges 9). In this, Joram became a dark mirror image of Jesus Christ: Instead of laying down his own life for his brothers, he took theirs to seize their possessions. Joram's wickedness in murder was exacerbated by him leading the people of Jerusalem into fornication, and by him reinstating the "high places" where illicit sacrifices could be made.

The Lord was not blind to Joram's evil, and the prophet Elijah prophesied against him and his house. God raised up the Philistines and the Arabians to raid his castle, taking his treasures, his wife and all his children, save for one—Jehoahaz. Why did the Lord spare his youngest child? Because in his grace, He had promised to preserve the house of David. The wickedness of man cannot undo the promises of God. As for Joram himself, he suffered long as his intestines slowly burst through his stomach due to illness—just as Elijah had prophesied. Joram was not missed. While America or Canada or even Finland isn't the promised country of God, within these lands lie the promised land. Altars where Jesus Christ's body and blood are distributed to faithful believers. Pulpits where Jesus Christ crucified is proclaimed. God will remember His people and even the wickedness all around us will not undo His promises to us.

## **Saturday, March 12<sup>th</sup>–Zimri: King of Israel**

1 Kings 16:9–20

1 Kings 16:16–19. *Now the people who were encamped heard it said, “Zimri has conspired and also has killed the king.” So all Israel made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp. Then Omri and all Israel with him went up from Gibbethon, and they besieged Tirzah. And it happened, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the citadel of the king’s house and burned the king’s house down upon himself with fire, and died, because of the sins which he had sinned in doing evil in the sight of the Lord, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he had committed to make Israel sin.*

Haven’t you heard of the mighty King Zimri? You haven’t? Well, I don’t blame you. His reign was an amazingly long seven whole days. He had been the captain of King Elah’s chariots, leading as much as half of the king’s army. But while the bulk of the army was away besieging the town of Gibbethon in the country allotted to the tribe of Dan, Zimri saw his opportunity. The king was drunk, and so Zimri struck. After assuming the throne for himself, he wiped out the entire family of the king, according to God’s judgment on the house of Baasha.

But while Zimri was an agent of God’s justice, he certainly wasn’t a follower of our Lord. He was simply a greedy man who seized an opportunity when it presented itself. And he hung onto that greed to the bitter end. Rather than submit himself to his superior and the man chosen by the army to be king (Omri), he literally burned it all down. He took himself to the palace and burnt it down all around him.

I can empathize with that. There are times when I just want to watch the whole world burn, even if the flames take me too. The evil seems so pervasive that surely it would be worth my sacrifice to burn it all down with me. But just as Zimri’s death didn’t solve the problems that Israel faced, neither would our deaths solve the problems that we’re faced with. Evil will survive the fire and will scatter our ashes to the wind. But there is one whose death that evil cannot survive, one who overcomes death itself. He isn’t the unrighteous man who died for his greed; He is the righteous man who died for our greed, and all our other sins. And His reign won’t be short, it will be everlasting. So hold onto that hope in these dark days when the weight of your sins presses down upon you. Amen.

## **Second Sunday in Lent–Parable of the Mustard Seed**

*Matthew 13:31b–32 The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.*

The tiniest mustard seed grows into a great tree, giving shelter to the birds of the heavens. This is the Kingdom of Heaven, the dominion of Jesus Christ. This is not the only image of kingship in the Scriptures. Another one is in the book of Judges (ch. 9), of the murderous rule of Abimelech son of Jerubbaal, who conspired with the men of Shechem to be made king. He murdered all 70 of his brothers but the youngest, Jotham. The last survivor spoke a parable of his rule, comparing him not to the noble olive tree, the sweet fig tree, or the cheerful vine, but to the lowly bramble. The trees of the forest want to have a king, but all the good ones decline the honor. The spiteful bramble, however, is quick to seize the opportunity. The arrogance of the bramble knows no bounds. He even dares to invite the cedars of Lebanon to take shelter under his branches, only to light them on fire.

The Kingdom of Christ is not a kingdom of spiteful and impudent brambles, but of peaceful breezes among the green leaves. Even the gentlest of heavenly creatures find shelter in the branches. Is this not an image of the union of heaven and earth? In Christ, heaven and earth are united in kisses of peace.

This Kingdom is tiny and often concealed by all the other plants. It does not brag of itself. It does not care to overshadow the plants of the garden. But it will finally be elevated to a great stature there. The tiny and humble mustard seed will grow to be the great tree of Paradise. Such is the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, our beloved Lord and Savior.

## **Monday, March 14<sup>th</sup>—Ahaziah: King of Judah**

2 Kings 8:24–9:29

2 Chronicles 22:1–9

Ahaziah, king of Judah, was the only surviving son of Joram. All the others had been killed by Arabian raiders. His mother was Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri, a king of Israel. Ahaziah was also son-in-law to the house of Ahab. The alliance that the king's grandfather Jehoshaphat had forged with the house of Ahab was leading his house ever further into their sins, the sins of Jezebel.

Not much of Ahaziah's accomplishments are recorded. Together with Joram, king of Israel, he waged war against the Syrians. Joram retreated to Jezreel, wounded and sick, and Ahaziah came to see him. There they were confronted and slain by Jehu, who was anointed king of Israel by prophet Elisha. The evil of Ahaziah's mother Athaliah knew no bounds—she slew all the heirs of his son, save for one who was hidden, Joash.

The corruption that the house of David had contracted by allying with the kings of Israel was still growing and had not yet reached its peak. The fruits of idolatry had not yet matured. How much of this is true of our church bodies today? How long until the fruits of our idolatry mature? We've allied ourselves with this world thinking that we can do good and convince them if we're just nice enough, if we just give a little here and there on some less important points of doctrine. Meanwhile they have been busy slaughtering the heirs of the kingdom directly through evils such as abortion and more indirectly through the indoctrination they call public school. Jesus Christ will, like Jehu, come and put an end to it. May we cling to His promises to deliver us and keep us until that day. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

## **Tuesday, March 15<sup>th</sup>—Omri: King of Israel**

1 Kings 16:15–28

1 Kings 16:23–26 *In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over Israel, and reigned twelve years. Six years he reigned in Tirzah. And he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; then he built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, Samaria, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill. Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all who were before him. For he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their idols.*

Omri was the commander of the army in Israel. As his king had been betrayed, slain, and usurped by Zimri, he was called by the nation itself to be the new king. Omri besieged Zimri, and when the city was taken, the traitor committed suicide by fire.

As is often the case, the Lord used a wicked man to punish another. As far as idolatry goes, Omri was no better than Zimri. In fact, he was even worse! He ruled for 12 years and built the city of Samaria. Omri's legacy would continue in his son Ahab, who would marry Jezebel of Sidon.

Omri built a foundation that he hoped will endure, a foundation ultimately built on sand. Samaria did not endure and would eventually be destroyed and become a byword for apostate believers. Omri could have returned to the Lord; he had complete control of the army and quashed a rebellion against his rule, but he didn't. He followed the footsteps of Jeroboam and followed his own heart rather than God. He led his people further from God. Thank God for the abundance of His Word that we have before us today. May we recognize this treasure and use it. For when we are steeped in His Word, Christ is our leader, and He will not lead us astray.

## **Wednesday, March 16<sup>th</sup>–Athaliah: Queen of Judah**

2 Kings 11:1–20

2 Chronicles 22:1–23:21

Queen Athaliah was the first and last woman to rule over the Kingdom of Judah. Girl power! Right? However, this doesn't seem to be the way that YHWH would have women exhibit strength. Instead, Athaliah seems to be a continuation of Jezebel's negative example for faithful Christian women to avoid instead of emulate (being her daughter and all).

Athaliah is the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel (a match made in heaven), and then she was married off as part of a peace treaty deal to King Jehoram of Judah after he killed all six of his brothers (how about that for a season of The Bachelorette?). After Jehoram, her husband, and Ahaziah, her son, were both killed, she claimed the title of Queen of Judah for herself. This is where things get really bad.

She tries her best to kill all of the heirs of the Davidic line and to preserve the worship of Baal in Judah. (Baal was a Canaanite demon idol of fertility to which newborn children were sacrificed.) There is no end here to the amount of subversion that Queen Athaliah had done.

From the rebellion against YHWH's will in proclaiming herself queen, to her desire to mislead the nation in sexuality and worship in the Baal cult, to her direct attack on the line of David which would yield the Messiah, Athaliah is one of the worst so far of Eve's descendants.

But thanks be to God, He worked and still works against her and all like her. The one who "crushed the serpent's head" though Satan "snaps at His heel" (Gen 3:15). The Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David against all odds, lives and reigns eternally over sin, death, the devil, and the plans of (wo)man because of his death and resurrection. Amen.

## **Thursday, March 17<sup>th</sup>—Ahab: King of Israel**

1 Kings 16:28–22:40

2 Chronicles 18:1–34

When Ishmael first hears the name of the captain of the Pequod, he blurts out, “When that wicked king was slain, the dogs, did they not lick his blood?” This leads a fellow whaler to respond, “He did not name himself” (Moby Dick, ch. 16). Yes, sometimes our names precede us. Our reputation can invalidate any chance to prove our worth in another’s eyes.

Take for example King Ahab of Israel. Everyone remembers him as no good. His entire life can be summed up in one sentence, “There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of YHWH, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up” (1 Kings 21:25). He married a pagan, Jezebel, and she encouraged him to lead Israel into Baal worship. Whoops!

Due to his sin, YHWH declared a drought in the land through his prophet, Elijah. But Ahab persecuted Elijah among other prophets for speaking God’s Word against him. Despite this, Elijah was granted victory over the prophets of Baal, which brings many to repentance (2 Kings 18:17–40).

Ahab received his due reward by being killed in battle, though he was disguised as a charioteer to avoid being targeted (2 Chron 18:34). The dogs licked up his blood as he died.

Consider the opposite to many of these wicked kings: Jesus Christ, our true King. Even though he was surrounded by “dogs” at his crucifixion (Ps 22:16), yet His blood is saved for us who drink His blood of the New Covenant.

Neither did He name himself. The Father gave him his name, “YHWH saves” (Matt 1:21), beginning a lifetime of the Son’s earthly perfect obedience to the Father. His last will and testament was to forgive us, and to give us life in full by forgiving our sins. Amen.

## **Friday, March 18<sup>th</sup>—Joash (or Jehoash): King of Judah**

2 Kings 11:1–12:21

2 Chronicles 22:10–24:27

If there was one time when the royal line of David was almost cut off, it was in the destruction that Queen Athaliah brought to the palace after her husband and son were murdered. By God’s providence, Joash’s aunt saved him from her wrath. It would take the bravery of a priest, Jehoiada, to orchestrate a coup against Athaliah and restore Joash (or Jehoash) to his throne at age seven.

How many of us would trust a kingdom into the hands of a seven-year-old? How frightened could this seven-year-old have been at being entrusted by God with the rule of Israel? Yet God was with him, for “Jehoiada the priest instructed him” (2 Kings 12:2). He ruled for forty years.

Joash’s rule was mixed. He himself followed the Lord, and he worked to repair the temple, but he did nothing against the pagan high places. He also sent the temple gold as tribute to a foreign king. In the end, he was struck down by a coup against him.

We see in Joash a mix of faithfulness and sin—perhaps it reminds us of St. Paul’s conflict with his sinful nature in Romans 7. Where he is good, we see a picture of Christ building up and purifying the church. He is also an example for us. From childhood on, we ought to be trained by the Word of God in godly wisdom to navigate our own days. His errors are common to our sinful nature: fear of our enemies, internal and external. “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24–25a).

## **Saturday, March 19<sup>th</sup>–Ahaziah: King of Israel**

1 Kings 22:51–53

2 Kings 1:1–18

2 Chronicles 20:35–37

2 Kings 1:2 *Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured; so he sent messengers and said to them, “Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.”*

Ahaziah, the son of Ahab and Jezebel, certainly followed in the steps of his father and mother, chasing after other gods rather than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In him we see this unbelief powerfully at work. Elijah the prophet is active in the Northern Kingdom of Israel at this time, but Ahaziah does not turn to him. Elijah, whose prayers to Jesus Christ raised the widow’s son from the dead, is ignored. Instead, Ahaziah wants to know if the god of Ekron can heal him.

Ekron is a Philistine town that is roughly 40 miles away from Samaria. They worship a “god” called Baal-Zebul, which means “Baal is lofty/highest”. The writer of Kings instead renames this piece of wood and stone to “Baal-Zebub” which means “Lord/master of the flies.” This god was supposedly a god of healing, of restoring life. Yet he has no power over life; the only thing that he does is lead people to eternal death where the flies feast forever on the rotting flesh and souls of those who reject Jesus Christ. Yet it is to this false god that Ahaziah clings when he falls out of a window and wonders whether he will survive. God through the prophet Elijah tells him that he will not rise from the bed he is in. So Jezebel’s son, like her, dies from falling from a window, a sharp divine irony that certainly doesn’t go unnoticed.

Yet we often flee to our own false gods like Ahaziah. Luther exposes it quite well in his explanation of the first commandment, “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the [whole] heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. (LC I:2)” These gods don’t suffer for us. These gods don’t die for us. Jesus is the true God who turns it upside down. Abandon your false gods and cling to Him this Lenten season. Amen.

## **Third Sunday in Lent—Parable of the Wedding Feast**

Matthew 22:1–14

Matthew 22:11–12 *11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.”*

This parable gives us insight into the heart of the Father. Like a human father might today, God the Father takes great pleasure in honoring his Son at his wedding feast. He opens up the best wine, slaughters and cooks the fattest animals. (There’s no refrigeration, so you gotta eat it all in one day!)

But the people he invited “didn’t have time” . . . they were “busy”! This is a common refrain pastors hear when a family “can’t make it to worship this month,” even though they complain about their friends who “can’t make time for us to hang out anymore.”

This devotion could easily become about time management and individuals being too arrogant. But that would distract from the star of the show: Jesus Christ. This parable is about the Father glorifying His Son at His wedding feast. We know that the Lord “prepare[s] a table before [Jesus] in the presence of [His] enemies” (Ps 23:5), yet thanks be to God, though we are enemies of God because of our sinfulness, “while we were still sinners, God shows his love for us” through “Christ’s death” (Rom 5:8).

It glorifies both the Father and the Son to save even one lost sheep. The time is up for endless and pointless squabbles (2 Tim 2:23). Instead, focus on whether you are wearing your “wedding garment” (Matt 22:12) of faith so that you aren’t found speechless before the Father. Then, go and spread the Gospel message, first to your family, friends, enemies, neighbor. “Come to your senses and stop sinning; for some people still don’t know God. I say this to your shame” (1 Cor 15:34). Maybe the change in how you live will witness to the hope that you have in Christ Jesus our living King.

## **Monday, March 21<sup>st</sup>–Amaziah: King of Judah**

2 Kings 14:1–20

2 Chronicles 25:1–28

Proverbs 1:15–16 *My son, do not walk in the way with [evildoers],*

*Keep your foot from their path;*

*For their feet run to evil,*

*And they make haste to shed blood.*

“It’s not how you start, it’s how you finish,” or so the saying goes. So too, Amaziah of Judah, who started well enough like his father, left the door open to his own ruin by not destroying the high places of the false gods. Further, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12; see also 2 Pet 3:17).

About halfway through his reign, Amaziah ran into trouble with an Edomite insurrection. To bring them swiftly back to heel he hired 100,000 Israelite mercenaries. But he sent them home when a prophet came to court and rebuked him, reminding the king that God was not with Israel. Indeed, God would make Judah fall in battle no matter how mighty his army. There are consequences for actions taken without God’s wisdom sought. The mercenaries were angry at being denied spoils of war and raided cities of Judah on their way back to Israel.

It is when God gives us victories over our enemies that we must be the most careful of our souls. Satan attacks when our guard is down, like he did with Amaziah. The king, wanting to celebrate Judah’s victory (and forgetting God’s help), carried Edom’s idols back to Jerusalem and worshiped them. Amaziah grieved God by engaging in the very false belief that was unable to save Edom.

Then, perhaps remembering what the mercenaries had done, Amaziah challenged Jehoash. In judgment, God gave Amaziah over to his pride. God ironically used Jehoash and the idolatrous Israel to humble Amaziah in battle. Out of grace, for the sake of the One in whose kingly office he sat, Amaziah would live on, being given a chance by God to repent and return in faith.

## **Tuesday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>–Jehoram (or Joram): King of Israel**

2 Kings 3:1–9:25

2 Chronicles 22:5–7

*2 Kings 3:1–3 Now Jehoram the son of Ahab became king over Israel at Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father and mother; for he put away the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he persisted in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin; he did not depart from them.*

Jehoram of Israel was the son of Ahab and Jezebel and the brother of the previous king Ahaziah. That’s quite the pedigree of wicked idolatry. For all of that, he wasn’t as bad as his father and brother. He took down the sacred pillar of Baal that his mother had made Ahab erect for her. We’re not told why he did it, but we can know that he didn’t do it out of love for the Lord and His statutes. For he kept the twisted reforms that Jeroboam had introduced into the religion of the people, and so he was much more subtly leading his people into continued apostasy. Most of his reign is spent in battle, first with Moab and later with Syria. He would die at the hands of his successor, a man named Jehu who was chosen by God to reign after destroying the house of Ahab and Jezebel. Jehoram died a coward’s death by being shot in the back by Jehu when he attempted to flee.

In many ways, we look at Jehoram of Israel and see someone who “is on the right track.” He realized the wickedness of the kingdom and was reforming it, but he just kept getting caught up in war. The truth is, Jehoram had heard the prophet Elijah speak to his father and his brother and himself received the testimony of Elisha. Yet he never returned Israel to the proper worship that God had commanded. He didn’t fear and love the Lord our God; he feared and loved himself. How often does this reflect our own lives. The Psalmist often declares, “Oh, how I love Your law!” And we can agree with that, but the Psalmist continues, “It is my meditation all the day.” (Ps 119:97). Woah, hold up there, Sparky! All the day? Surely that’s a little excessive. How about instead of “all the day” we go with “one hour a week?” That’s a compromise we can live with, right? Lord, let our hearts turn to you this Lenten season, not in half measure, but in whole. Amen.

## **Wednesday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>—Uzziah (Azariah): King of Judah**

2 Kings 15:1–7

2 Chronicles 26:1–23

Psalm 2:7–12

2 Chronicles 26:18b *“It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the Lord God.”*

Uzziah was a mighty king of Judah. Like David, he was a warrior, going into battle against the enemies of Judah and returning victorious. He dashed to pieces those who opposed Judah, and the nations brought tribute to him. Uzziah fortified Jerusalem and Judah and brought agricultural and military advancements to the land. By all measures, he was a great king.

But being a good king was not enough for Uzziah. He entered one day into the Temple to burn incense—the responsibility of Aaron’s sons, the priests. Azariah the high priest, along with 80 priests, stopped him, warning him of God’s wrath.

Uzziah would not listen. In his anger he lifted up the censer of incense—and the Lord struck Uzziah with leprosy. For the rest of his days, Uzziah was a leper: excluded from the Temple, excluded from his palace, excluded even from burial in the tomb of his fathers. Here lies a mighty king, but a dreadful priest.

Yet, Christ was born of Uzziah’s line. The One sent to heal many lepers. The One sent to break the nations with His two-edged sword, and dash stone hearts to pieces. The One sent to offer up His own body at the altar and the pleasing aroma of His blood poured out upon the mercy seat. This One who is both King and Priest for your sake. To him be all glory and honor to all ages. Amen.

## **Thursday, March 24<sup>th</sup> –Jehu: King of Israel**

1 Kings 19:1–18

Psalm 37:1–11 (12–40)

Elijah despaired. None of his fellow Israelites trusted in YHWH. They offered sacrifices instead to Baal: murdering their children and visiting prostitutes, all in the hope of getting a little rain. YHWH had sent the drought to punish Israel for idolatry, but no one remembered that. For a moment, Elijah wished it was all over. Jezebel had won. Nothing could change the heart of Ahab, let alone Israel. “Take my life,” Elijah cried, “for I am no better than my fathers!” (1 Kings 19:4). No prophet could fix Israel.

God heard Elijah’s prayer, and He answered it, but not in the way that Elijah expected. The Angel of YHWH (the pre-incarnate Jesus!) visited Elijah and fed the weary prophet with bread and water. Then God sent Elijah to anoint three men: Hazael as king of Syria, Jehu as king of Israel, and Elisha as Elijah’s replacement. These men would bring an end to Jezebel and Ahab’s wickedness.

Elijah was delivered. Hazael would punish the people of Israel and Judah through military conquest. Jehu would slaughter the house of Ahab, including the Sidonian witch Jezebel. Through Jehu’s kingship, written about in 2 Kings 9–10 and 2 Chronicles 22, God brought the wicked into judgment. Elisha would continue to preach God’s Word to the next generation.

The wicked will not reign forever, and judgment won’t be long now. In the meantime, remember. Seven thousand had not bowed the knee to Baal. Neither are you alone. Gather with your flock, arise, and eat what your shepherd offers. The journey of this life is truly too great for you. It is not too great for Him.

“In my distress I cried to the Lord, and He heard me” (Ps. 120:1).

## **Friday, March 25<sup>th</sup>–Jotham: Regent & King of Judah**

2 Kings 15:32–38

Psalm 72:1–7 (8–20)

The kingly office wields a two-edged sword. He can do two actions: protect and destroy. Many kings protected iniquity and destroyed the righteous. Some kings destroy iniquity and protect the righteous. King Jotham of Judah built great defenses for Judah (2 Chr 27:3–5). He contributed mightily to the protection of his people and the temple of the Lord. Yet he neglected to destroy evil and punish wickedness.

In this way, Jehu and Jotham are a good pairing, for they each reflect the opposite error a king can make. Protect and reward the righteous, punish and destroy iniquity. A good king must do both, or all his efforts on the one will be brought to nothing by the neglect of the other.

The Christian man is in need of both sides of the coin: repentance and regeneration. The Old Adam must be drowned, yet the New Man must arise. Daily. God's Word accomplishes both tasks. It destroys the self-righteousness and wickedness of the Old Adam and makes alive the New Man through the waters of Holy Baptism and the Word of Absolution.

The King of Psalm 72, our Lord Jesus Christ, does both things. He protects the weak and destroys the wicked. He wields His two-edged sword, Law and Gospel, for the chastisement of the impenitent and the consolation of the penitent.

Every king should follow suit in their sphere of responsibility: destroy and protect. Tear down the idols of your heart, cut off the hand that clings to Hell, and confess your sins. Listen to the absolution, protect your mind and heart with God's Word, and build up your local congregation and pastor.

What Jotham built was good. What he failed to destroy was evil. A good king must do both.

## **Saturday, March 26<sup>th</sup>–Jehoahaz (or Joahaz): King of Judah**

2 Kings 8:16–24

2 Chronicles 21:1–20

*Jeremiah 22:10–12 Weep not for the dead, nor bemoan him; Weep bitterly for him who goes away, For he shall return no more, Nor see his native country. For thus says the Lord concerning Shallum [Jehoahaz] the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went from this place: “He shall not return here anymore, but he shall die in the place where they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more.”*

Jehoahaz the son of Jehu reigned over Israel for seventeen years, yet we know little about these years. Syria had been carving off portions of Israel for itself over the course of his father’s reign, and it appears that most of Jehoahaz’s reign was spent under the thumb of Syria. We do know that Jehoahaz was not a follower of Jesus Christ. He kept the religion of Jeroboam, he erected Asherah poles and other idols, even after God delivered Israel from Syria. In other words, I doubt we’ll see him numbered among the sheep on that final day.

Yet when Jehoahaz reached out to God, his prayer wasn’t rejected. God heard even him. Even this pagan ruler who would continue to be a pagan ruler after God answered his prayer and delivered him. Why? Because God remembers His promises. Even though His people had forsaken Him, He hadn’t forsaken them. He still loved them and cared for them. Yes, He disciplined and chastised them through the oppression of the Syrians. But He hadn’t abandoned them. He was still their God even though they were whoring after other gods.

I believe that the days are coming when our world is going to get a lot more barbaric, a lot more violent. And in those days, I’d wager that there will be people who are only marginally acquainted with Jesus Christ who will call out to him for mercy. He will answer their prayers, even if they can’t understand His answer. And you, dear Christian who are reading this, you can be certain that God will hear your prayers. So bring your cares and concerns to Him, who doesn’t reject even the prayers of a pagan king. He will not reject the prayers of one washed in the blood of His beloved Son. Amen.

## **Fourth Sunday in Lent—Parable of the Vineyard Workers**

Matthew 20:1–16

Matthew 20:13b–16 *“Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good? So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”*

The human desire for justice is strong. This is especially the case with regards to justice for ourselves. We want what is due to us when it is in our favor. Thankfully, God does not work this way. He does not give us the punishment we deserve. But even his mercy and forgiveness are not given according to what we deserve: they are given freely by grace.

This is grating to many. Jesus tells a parable that highlights this. A master of a house hires laborers at different times of the day. He promises the first ones a denarius, typical wages for a day’s work. But to all the others he promises “whatever is right”—and they trust him enough to work the rest of the day. He gives a denarius to each, regardless of whether they worked a full day or only an hour.

Those who worked the whole day are angry. They had been doing the math. Surely they deserve far more for their work! But God’s math is not man’s math. He gives his mercy to all because all have deserved damnation equally. The mercy shown to them is far greater than any small increase that they are complaining over. God’s justice was focused on Jesus Christ as he died on the cross, and God’s mercy is found in the crucifixion and in the gifts that God now gives to you free of charge and free from works.

## **Monday, March 28<sup>th</sup>—Ahaz: King of Judah**

2 Kings 16:1–20

2 Chronicles 28:1–27

Isaiah 7:9b *“If you will not believe, Surely you shall not be established.”*

There are rulers who seek to do a little good in return for a plethora of evil, though they do not see it at the time. Ahaz neutralized threats to his rule, but it came at the complete expense of his soul and the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Judah. Even before appealing to Assyria, Ahaz was sealing his intended villainy with the blood of his own sons in the wicked acts of sacrificing to Moloch.

And yet, God sees an opportunity to demonstrate His unsearchable capacity for mercy, that He truly is the King over all kings, no matter the vile machinations they concoct in the dark corners of their hearts. With war at his doorstep, God sends Isaiah to Ahaz with the promise of a sign testifying to a greater promise that the kingdoms rising against Judah will not prevail. Remarkably, Ahaz will not ask for one; perhaps because he knows that God’s word is true, and it would not give him justification to align with the glory of Assyria, nor support from those who also witness the sign.

The homage Ahaz went on to pay to Assyria’s pagan rule was a deliberate affront to God’s long-established, spoken will against such treaties, placing the kingdom into a vassal state. This nefarious king gleefully traded regular tributes from Judah’s wealth for worldly honor, unclean sacrifices to a demonic nation.

Satan cannot overcome the Church. So, when a ruler like Ahaz positions himself against God after the fashion of the fallen prince, there will be strife for the Christian community within those borders. Ahaz means to work for evil. But God works good for His people. Thus, God gives Ahaz a sign nonetheless, a prophecy that points to the coming of the Christ by a virgin.

## **Tuesday, March 29<sup>th</sup>—Jehoash (or Joash): King of Israel**

2 Kings 13:10–14:16

2 Chronicles 25:17–24

2 Kings 13:17b *And [Elisha] said, “The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from [Aram]; for you must strike the [Arameans] at Aphek till you have destroyed them.”*

Jehoash wasn’t particularly bad, especially as compared to other kings of Israel. But he was still judged as evil for two reasons.

First, like the kings before, Jehoash didn’t tear down the golden calves set up by Jeroboam I at Bethel and Dan when the kingdom first divided. He may not have endorsed idolatry, but he tolerated it. Later he rebuked his counterpart, King Amaziah of Judah, not because Amaziah had fallen into idolatry, but rather for getting too big for his britches.

Second, he demonstrated faithlessness unbecoming of one serving in the office of Christ’s kingship. In 2 Kings 13:14ff, Elisha, in the waning hours of life, instructed Jehoash to shoot an arrow. This represented God’s promise to destroy the threat of the Arameans. Then Elisha told the king to grab more arrows and let fly. Not trusting God’s spoken fidelity, or perhaps seeking his own glory, he let loose only a few instead of a whole handful. Elisha chastised him for not grasping in boldness the full promise of God. Because of this, the Arameans would now endure. They would form part of the Babylonian Empire, who would conquer God’s people and take them into exile.

Jehoash is a warning account to be bold in faith, grasping Christ firmly as the divine grace-bearer when the Lord makes promises to His people. For, as Luther says, “It is a great reproach and dishonor to God if we, to whom He offers and pledges so many unspeakable treasures, despise the same, or have not the confidence to receive them, but scarcely venture to pray for a piece of bread” (LC III, 57).

## **Wednesday, March 30<sup>th</sup>–Hezekiah: King of Judah**

2 Kings 18:1–20:21

2 Chronicles 29:1–32:33

2 Kings 19:34 *For I will defend this city, to save it For My own sake and for My servant David's sake.*

God uses the princes of this world to call us to repentance. That is what happened when Assyria appeared before the gates of Jerusalem, openly mocking God and laying bare the idolatry and foolish alliances that Judah had made, particularly with Egypt.

Repeatedly, God had instructed the leaders of His people to trust Him alone for their defense. Yet, out of persisting weakness and failure to remain engaged in God's Word and His promises, Hezekiah made forbidden treaties and capitulated to Assyria's relentless conquering.

Recognizing the dire situation of Jerusalem and the futility of trusting in the ways of men, Hezekiah immediately fell to his knees in repentance and prayer, seeking mercy and help from the living God.

When God uses the rulers of darkness to call us to repentance, it is often because we have allowed our constitutional freedoms to be used to overturn God's created order, or to sacrifice those weaker than ourselves on the altars of convenience and covetousness. Even if we don't directly support those that do these evils, we find ourselves apathetic in our knowledge, faithless in our prayers, and lacking in our conversation. In this way, too, we become complicit in alliances with Babel-Redux's princes.

Thus, we should be little surprised when God finally gives us over to those who, in league with their demon masters, fashion themselves after the blood-lusting, power-mad gods of the ancient world. They would again make us slaves of the fallen dragon-prince, as they are. They would make us fearful of his overlord, Death, as they are. When these dark days come, may God's Holy Spirit grant us wisdom like Hezekiah to repent, and boldly trust in the one true King of Creation who has, for those justified in Him, ordered all things for a blessed life in His eternal Kingdom.

## **Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup>—Jeroboam II: King of Israel**

2 Kings 14:23–29

Amos 5:14–15 *Seek good and not evil,*

*That you may live;*

*So the Lord God of hosts will be with you,*

*As you have spoken.*

*Hate evil, love good;*

*Establish justice in the gate.*

*It may be that the Lord God of hosts*

*Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

Jeroboam II continued after the fashion of his namesake and made nearly two centuries of generational wickedness come to bitter fruition. Amos presents the vivid picture: the elite prospered at the gross exploitation of all those beneath them, wanton debauchery was rampant, the land was bereft of justice, and worship was spiritually bankrupt as the people followed the temple cultus at Bethel.

Under this king, the aristocracy made it their special priority to falsely acquire land and then buy those who had dwelt on it as slaves for mere pittance. This land was not a simple matter of real estate. In a sacramental way it was each family's stake in the eternal Promised Land. The elites were regularly engaging in a spiritual ravaging of families as well as the "living" Land for their own profit. Meanwhile, they would go to Bethel to offer the obligatory sacrifices and prayers—even as they were looking to their idols.

Those who desired in their hearts to do the right thing were compelled to silence because evil dominated.

Through Amos, God revealed that He has reached His limit. The Day of the Lord they sought would be their undoing. Jeroboam would die. The elite would suffer tenfold the very shame and death that had inflicted on the people. A famine of the Word would come upon Israel, a more terrible judgment than natural calamities. God would tear down the temple at Bethel Himself. He would hunt down the arrogant deniers with prejudice from the depths of Sheol to the heights of Carmel.

Yet the Day of the Lord for the faithful who are plowed under or silenced will be a glorious day. Indeed, it has already come in Christ, the Tabernacle of David who has been raised up from the ruin (Amos 9:11ff).

## **Friday, April 1<sup>st</sup>—Manasseh: King of Judah**

2 Kings 21:1–18

2 Chronicles 33:1–20

Manasseh reigned the longest of any of the kings of Israel or Judah: fifty-five years. Not only were his deeds evil, but his reign of an entire generation so altered Judah that there would be no coming back from the idolatry that had set deeply into the culture of the nation. “Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel” (2 Chronicles 33:9).

Manasseh rebuilt all the high places that his forefathers had torn down. He erected altars to Baal, Asherah, and set idols in the house of the Lord. He brought back fortune-telling, sorcery, mediums, and necromancy. He even sacrificed his sons on altars to Molech.

And yet, he repented. The Assyrians captured him and brought him to Babylon, where he called upon the Lord, who heard his plea and brought him back to Jerusalem. He even worked to destroy the very altars he had built and restore the altar of the Lord to its proper use.

What are we to make of this man? He is certainly a prefigurement of Saul-turned-Paul, someone who did unspeakable crimes yet repented and became a strong believer. On the other hand, Manasseh could not completely undo all the evil he had accomplished in his long reign. While we praise God for every sinner who repents, we also lament the great evil done by leaders that infect the culture of those who follow them—evils that are far harder to remove. In the end, Babylon would come and take the people into captivity. Such it is with repentance: God removes our sin from before his face as far as the east is from the west because of Jesus’s blood, but we may still suffer the earthly consequences for our actions. We pray even in those consequences that our Lord will be merciful. For the sake of Christ, he was merciful for the line of David, not snuffing it out, and his mercy extends to you through Christ.

## **Saturday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>–Zechariah: King of Israel**

2 Kings 14:29–15:12

*2 Kings 15:8–10 In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his fathers had done; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Then Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck and killed him in front of the people; and he reigned in his place.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is all we have recorded in the Scriptures for us regarding Zechariah, son of Jeroboam II. It is likely that, due to the length of his father's reign, he was not a child like some of the other kings were. It's also likely that he was not thrust suddenly into his role as king but was prepared to take on this role. So why is his reign so short and ends so violently? Perhaps it's because Shallum was evil and saw an opportunity to seize control of Israel, much like Zimri had earlier. Perhaps it's because Jeroboam II was a brutal dictator to his people (2 Kings 14:23–25), and his son wasn't any better.

Ultimately, it was because God had promised that since Jehu would not abandon the twisting of God's Word brought about by Jeroboam, his descendants would only remain on the throne to the fourth generation. "This was the word of the Lord which He spoke to Jehu, saying, 'Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.' And so it was" (2 Kings 15:12).

In many ways, Western Christianity has been resting on the faithfulness of our forefathers for a long time now. Sure, we had the "Battle for the Bible" in the 60s–70s, but despite claiming to have "won" that battle, did we really? For our claims to love God's Word so much that we fought to keep it, how many in our congregations have more than just a passing familiarity with it? How many of you, right now, without looking at your table of contents or any tabs on the side of your Bible could easily find the book of Hebrews? Would you have any clue where to look, what other books might be nearby? God's patience with the apathy and apostasy of Western Christianity is not infinite, and we may be headed towards a time of violence like Zechariah's reign. May God preserve our faith and keep us secure in His hands during these increasingly hostile days.

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent—The Parable of the Talents:**

Matthew 25:24–25, 30 *Then he who had received the one talent came and said, “Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.” ... [His lord said], “cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

It is not enough to simply sit on your faith and never live it out in your life. This is most certainly true, but it doesn't necessarily tell us more about the Kingdom of God and the Kingship of Jesus Christ. But looking at this parable while studying that, I saw something that I haven't ever seen before. The wicked servant isn't just wicked because he's lazy. I'm not saying that being lazy is a good thing, but there is more to what makes him wicked than just laziness. He doesn't even know his Lord and master.

Sure, he claims to know the master, but how does he describe him? He claims the master is one who reaped where he did not sow and gathered where he has not scattered seed. He is a hard man, and one to be feared for his impossible expectations. Yet the other servants did not find him so. They found in him a kind and generous master who not only gave them the money to start with but allowed them to keep the original investment and all their profits. This doesn't sound like the hard master that the unfaithful servant is describing.

That's because he doesn't know him, just as the unbeliever doesn't truly know our Lord Jesus. They claim that he sets for us an impossible standard, when He simply shows us the standard that He kept for us. He has sown seed all over, scattered it to the four corners of the world. Recklessly sowing seed even where it cannot grow, all out of love for His servants. The same servants that He came to save by giving His life for them. So, do you truly know your Lord? I pray that you know Him and His kingdom better as we journey through this Lenten season. Amen.

## **Monday, April 4<sup>th</sup>—Amon: King of Judah**

2 Kings 21:19–26

2 Chronicles 33:21–25

2 Kings 21:23–24 *Then the servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his own house. But the people of the land executed all those who had conspired against King Amon. Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place.*

Whether for good or bad, Judah largely avoided the short reigns and dynastic turmoil that plagued the Northern Kingdom of Israel, although there were plenty of assassinations. Like Ahaziah who only lived for two years, Amon's reign was cut short by an assassination at the hands of his servants. The people then turned on those assassins, striking them down and making Josiah king in his place.

We see God's providence in this turmoil. The Northern Kingdom's assassinations resulted in several dynasties being completely annihilated—sons, grandsons, women, children, everyone. Although there were plenty of regicides in Judah, they never resulted in complete dynastic ruin. God remained faithful in his promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon. Out of this kingly line would, one way or another, come the Messiah. No sin or plot of the devil could stop God from keeping these promises.

Even through the Babylonian captivity and the many years afterwards, God remained faithful to his promise to send a Messiah from the stump of Jesse. That Savior likewise remained faithful to his mission, never sinning yet bearing your sin the whole way, dying and rising to forgive and save. He remains faithful in his promises to you. Baptism now saves you. His Word forgives. He works faith in your hearts by the Holy Spirit. The Lord's Supper unites you with the divine flesh of the God-man.

## **Tuesday, April 5<sup>th</sup>–Shallum: King of Israel**

2 Kings 15:10–15

*2 Kings 15: 13–15 Shallum the son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria. For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, came to Samaria, and struck Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; and he reigned in his place. Now the rest of the acts of Shallum, and the conspiracy which he led, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.*

We know in our minds that God is in control of the course of history, but we seldom think of that practically. In other words, we say that we know that this is true without actually stopping to consider and realize that this is actually true. God proves it time and time again, and even points it out to us time and time again. Remember when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, and then God turned around and used it to save the entire world?

It's not just the serendipitous good that God brings to the faithful; God uses the same power to punish the wicked. Shallum is a perfect example of this. Zechariah was a wicked king who did not fear the Lord. God used the wicked ambition of Shallum to achieve his goal of punishing the wicked family of Jehu by ending his dynasty. Shallum himself was no saint, so God will later punish him with the ambition of another wicked man, Menahem. If this sounds familiar, it's because this same pattern has already played itself out in the history of the Northern Kingdom. Zimri killed Elah, executing God's justice on the house of Jeroboam, and was himself killed shortly after by Omri. At least for Shallum, he got to reign for three more weeks than Zimri did.

God is in control of our world. This doesn't mean that we're robots, but it does mean that we can trust in Him to give us what we need most. And sometimes that's suffering. Other times, it's happiness. But always it's joy in what He's done for us on the cross. For the wicked will not escape God's wrath. The only way to escape it is to have that wrath pour out on Jesus own head. Trust in our Lord to deliver and keep you. Amen.

## **Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>–Josiah (or Josias): King of Judah**

2 Kings 22:1–23:30

2 Chronicles 34:1–35:27

Josiah is an inspiring figure in the history of Judah. After the turmoil of Manasseh and Amon, Josiah is crowned at only 8 years of age. He shows more dedication to religious and cultural renewal than any other king in Judah's history.

First, he brought back true worship of God. He tasked workmen with repairing the temple and did not even nickel-and-dime them with the costs (2 Kings 22:7). While they were cleaning out the temple, they found the Book of the Law, likely containing the Pentateuch. While a scribe began to read it, Josiah tore his clothes in repentance, realizing how far from God's law the people had wandered. Because of his repentance, God chose to delay his punishment upon Judah until after Josiah's reign.

Hearing this, Josiah then began cleansing the land of all idols. He was so thorough that the writer of Kings says, "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him" (23:25).

In the end, Judah was still doomed to fall under God's wrath. Do we not live under similar circumstances? We live in an idolatrous land. Who knows when and how God's wrath will fall? But we are given to do what Josiah did: repent, worship God rightly, recognize idols, and strive against our sinful nature, the world, and the devil. We do what we can with the time that is given to us and entrust the future to His hands. May God be merciful on us.

## **Thursday, April 7<sup>th</sup>—Menahem: King of Israel**

2 Kings 15:14–22

*2 Kings 15:19–20 Pul king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his control. And Menahem exacted the money from Israel, from all the very wealthy, from each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land.*

Menahem was not a legitimate king, at least not in the way that the kings of Israel were typically chosen. They were either a direct descendant of the king before them, or they were anointed by a prophet of the Lord to slay the current king and to assume his throne. Menahem was none of the above. He was simply a wicked man who had slain the previous wicked man who had slain his wicked king. So he most likely felt the lack of any sort of authority other than “I have the power to kill you because of my army.” But when Pul (aka Tiglath Pileser) came knocking on the door of Samaria, Menahem saw a way forward. He couldn’t possibly meet Pul in battle; Assyria was the dominant world power at the time, and Israel’s armies had been decimated. But, if he could convince Pul to leave without a fight, then he would be a hero and show the people that he legitimately deserved to rule. So he did, by paying him the exorbitant sum of 1,000 talents of silver (about \$26 million in current US dollars). That was how much being a legitimate king was worth to him.

But we struggle with that same thing; we struggle with the world seeing us as legitimate. We don’t want to be called crazy or schismatic or fundamentalist or any other derogatory buzzword. So we assure everyone that “we’re a Christian, but we’re not like ‘those’ Christians,” followed by us typically denying some point of Christian doctrine. Was it worth it? Menahem’s bribe bought Israel a few years, but Assyria came back and eventually wiped out the entire kingdom. It’ll be worse for us. Denying what Jesus taught is denying Him, and that’s never worth it. We are to deny ourselves, not Him. Let us take up our crosses, denying ourselves and this world’s “legitimacy” and be legitimately following Christ this Lenten season. Amen.

## **Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup>–Jehoahaz (Joahaz/Shallum): King of Judah**

2 Kings 23:31–33

2 Chronicles 36:1–4

*Jeremiah 22:10–12 Weep not for the dead, nor bemoan him; Weep bitterly for him who goes away, For he shall return no more, Nor see his native country. For thus says the Lord concerning Shallum [Jehoahaz] the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went from this place: “He shall not return here anymore, but he shall die in the place where they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more.”*

Judah is on the decline, she has had her last king who followed the Lord. Now until her time of exile only wicked men remain who try to manipulate the people and God himself. We start with Jehoahaz, also known as Shallum and Joahaz. The book of 2 Kings tells us that he did evil (23:32) but not what evil he did. But we do know that he is on the receiving end of his father’s folly. In opposing Pharaoh Necho, Josiah had provoked Egypt’s anger. So Egypt comes in and deposes Jehoahaz after he was king for a short three months. Necho then makes Eliakim, Jehoahaz’s brother, king. Jehoahaz then becomes the first of the kings to be taken away from Judah to die in captivity, never to see the promised land again.

And even though Jehoahaz deserved it, it’s hard not to feel a bit of pity for him. Caught up in a war that he didn’t start, and because of his father he will never again see the land of his birth but will die in captivity. Yet, how many of us have chosen to voluntarily do just that? To leave behind home and congregation and strike out across the state, or nation, or even across the world. And how often do we do that without even thinking about where we might find the real promised land? The land where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed faithfully. Where the people are washed in the waters of Baptism? Where the Body and Blood of Jesus are given to you regularly? Instead our thoughts are about the job prospects, the school system, the college degree, the property values, the crime rate, and any other host of concerns. Let’s take an honest look at our lives, repent of our own evils that we have done, and return to the Lord. Amen.

## **Saturday, April 9<sup>th</sup>—Pekahiah: King of Israel**

2 Kings 15:22–26

2 Kings 15:23–25 *In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Then Pekah the son of Remaliah, an officer of his, conspired against him and killed him in Samaria, in the citadel of the king's house, along with Argob and Arieah; and with him were fifty men of Gilead. He killed him and reigned in his place.*

Pekahiah is the last king of Israel to succeed his father. Death and destruction have come home to roost in the halls of Samaria. We don't know much about the specific sins of Pekahiah, but he did continue in the sins of the kings of Israel. This sin had been plaguing the kings of Israel since Jeroboam received the kingdom from the Lord: the sin of twisting God's Word and making the two golden calves. This sin had increased over the time due to the constant addition of false gods to worship. It spiraled so out of control that even human sacrifice became such a common practice. The prophet Hosea tells us about it in Hosea 13:2, "And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of them, 'Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!'" (ESV).

Pekahiah's evil is so utterly unremarkable compared to the rest of his nation that is barely worth mentioning. Evil wasn't just commonplace, it was "how it's supposed to be" and "how it's always been" in Israel. We sit here in 2022 and think to ourselves, "how could they let this happen?" But we already know. The devil has mastered the slow slide into wickedness. Abortion and transgenderism didn't just spring out of the ground as evils that our Western culture embraced out of nowhere. You can see their roots in the sexual revolution, birth control, and no-fault divorce. And I'm sure if we sat down, we could see the roots going even further back than that. And yes, it seems to be accelerating the pace at which a new evil is revealed and accepted as good by our culture. Just like Israel was rapidly accelerating before they were destroyed. Pray for our hearts and the hearts of those around us to be filled with repentance this Lenten season, that we might turn to Him in these days of destruction. Amen.

## **Palm Sunday–Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**

Matthew 18:23–35

Matthew 18:26–27 *The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.*

This parable hits home every time I read it. I’m bad at letting go of those times when I’ve been hurt or wronged. And then the weight of my sins comes crashing down on me as I read this parable, and all I can do is cry out to Jesus for mercy.

But as I was reading this parable in light of these kings of Israel and Judah, something struck me that I usually just gloss over. The servant asks not for mercy, he asks for patience. He wants simply for more time to repay this debt. This is an impossible debt for the common man, \$20.9 billion in today’s US dollars. It is staggering that this master would even give out this much money to his servant.

However, that’s not the biggest thing in this parable. It’s the master’s reaction. The master doesn’t lament the loss and despair of ever recovering it. He simply sees the plight of his servant in front of him and has compassion on him. Then without thinking about it, he writes that debt off. He cancels it. It’s as if he never had that money to begin with. To put it in a modern perspective, if Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world in 2021 according to Forbes, just chocked it off at a loss, he would lose 11% of his net worth, not just his money on hand, but net worth. That’s not a small loss. But this master is so rich and cares so much for his servant that he doesn’t hesitate. He doesn’t ask for a written promise or a vow or anything. He just forgives.

Which is why He is our master. This is who Jesus is. He is rich in grace and mercy, and just gives it away. Sure, it cost Him His life, but He’s not stingy with it. He gives and forgives. So, when you come to this king bowed down with your sins this Lenten season, remember that He is gracious and merciful, forgiving far beyond our capability to understand. Amen.

## **Monday, April 11<sup>th</sup>—Jehoiakim: King of Judah**

2 Kings 23:34–24:5

2 Chronicles 36:5–7

Jeremiah 36:30–31 Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: “He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. I will punish him, his family, and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring on them, on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah all the doom that I have pronounced against them; but they did not heed.”

Jehoiakim, formerly known as Eliakim, was the brother of the previous king Jehoahaz and the son of the king Josiah. He was the first of the puppet kings installed by a foreign power. He was not a good king—or even a good man. Or, for that matter, a good vassal. He was corrupt and switched sides whenever he saw a chance to be on the “winning” side—and even then he couldn’t really pick the winning side. He definitely couldn’t stand it when God called him to repentance through the prophet Jeremiah. He heard of Jeremiah reading a scroll calling all Judah, including himself, to repentance. He acquired a copy of the scroll and had a member of his council, Jehudi, read the scroll to him. He proceeded to cut it to pieces as it was read and toss it into the fire. It was in rebuke to this that God spoke the words of Jeremiah 36:30–31. We aren’t sure when this promise of God was fulfilled, as it wasn’t recorded. But it likely happened during the upcoming siege of Jerusalem, that Jehoiakim is taken outside the walls and killed there, his body unceremoniously dumped to the ground by Babylon.

There was another King of the Jews who was taken outside of Jerusalem and killed for treason against his emperor. Only instead of the emperor of Babylon, this was the emperor of Rome. This man was killed for crimes that weren’t his own, but for the good of His people. This man didn’t treat God’s Word with contempt, rather He was that very Word of God made flesh. Yes, I am talking about Jesus Christ, the king of kings. He is everything that Jehoiakim isn’t. He is selfless instead of selfish. He is just and righteous instead of wicked and unjust. And He is our king. This Holy Week, keep your eyes on our king as He ascends to His cross outside Jerusalem, where He takes on all our punishment on Himself. Amen.

## **Tuesday, April 12<sup>th</sup>—Pekah: King of Israel**

2 Kings 15:27–31

2 Chronicles 28:5–8

*Isaiah 7:5–9 Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you [Ahaz], saying, “Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabel”— thus says the Lord God: “It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. If you will not believe, Surely you shall not be established.”*

Pekah, the son of Remaliah, took the throne of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by force, murdering his predecessor Pekahiah. Unlike the previous two who usurped the throne through murder, he was not cut down himself in short order. He was just as wicked and twisted as the king that he cut down and those who ruled before him. He reigned in Samaria for 20 years, but they weren’t a peaceful 20 years. It was twenty years of paper cuts as Tiglath Pileser of Assyria cut off chunks from Israel. To regain some power, Pekah, the king of Israel and Rezin, the king of Syria, determined to conquer Judah. Israel, who should have been Judah’s ally, instead allied with Syria, who had been one of their most hated enemies.

Yet this wicked alliance did not prosper, even with wicked king Ahaz on the throne in Jerusalem. For God remembers His promises to His people, and so Isaiah prophesies the failure of this offensive and the destruction of both kingdoms. Pekah would fail would eventually be repaid for murdering his king and taking the throne, for the same would happen to him.

We see the kingdom crumbling here under the rule of Pekah. To some, the kingdom of Israel under Pekah looks like the Church right now. Churches closing left and right. Christians being increasingly persecuted and treated as enemies of the people. More and more people leaving the faith. But Jesus is no Pekah. The Church will not cease to exist in 65 years. Rather, Jesus is King, He is victorious. And that victory is the cross. Amen.

## **Wednesday, April 13<sup>th</sup>—Jehoiachin: King of Judah**

2 Kings 24:6–16

2 Chronicles 36:8–10

2 Kings 25:27–30 *Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.*

Jehoiachin was king for 3 months only. In that time, he demonstrated that he followed in the footsteps of his father and uncles by being a wicked king. I doubt he was ready to take the throne, and certainly not with the Babylonian forces controlling Judah and Jerusalem. King Nebuchadnezzar didn't leave him in charge but instead took him as prisoner to Babylon, leaving his uncle in charge of Judah.

Perhaps Jehoiachin's greatest accomplishment isn't in his reign but rather in his surviving in exile, as God would tell the people of Israel to do. He would be freed after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, and he would take his place at the court of the king of Babylon as a noble, afforded the revenue from his former lands to pay for his seat at the table of the king. In this role, Jehoiachin becomes a symbol of hope, a reminder that God has not forgotten His promise to send a Messiah, descended of David, to occupy the throne forever. While Jehoiachin would not live to see the Messiah, his descendants would be among those who returned to the land and rebuilt Jerusalem. He is even mentioned in the New Testament under another name, Jeconiah (Matt 1:11–12).

Like his fathers before him, he was imperfect. But God uses this imperfect family filled with failed kings to bring forth the King of Kings, who was about to ascend to His throne on the cross. He would undo all the wickedness, not only of the kings of the earth, but of all mankind. He took all of it upon Himself and died for His people. Pray for your king, Come quickly, Lord Jesus, Amen.

## **Maundy Thursday–Hoshea: King of Israel**

2 Kings 15:30–17:6

*2 Kings 17:1–4 In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel who were before him. Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against him; and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute money. And the king of Assyria uncovered a conspiracy by Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and brought no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.*

Hoshea, the last king of Israel, only became king of Israel by murdering the king before him and taking his place. He did this by conspiring with the king of Assyria, Tiglath Pileser. While Tiglath Pileser reigned in Assyria, Hoshea was a faithful vassal, paying his tributes to his Lord in full and on time. But then Tiglath Pileser died, and his son Shalmaneser took the throne. At this point, Hoshea figured that his deal was only with Tiglath Pileser, not his son, so he stopped paying tribute. He also sent messages to Egypt trying to secure aid in order to topple this brand-new king before he could get his feet under him. The problem? Egypt didn't take him seriously and his letters never got to Pharaoh. But that didn't stop copies of them from ending up in the hands of the king of Assyria.

Shalmaneser wanted to make a point to all his other vassals and decided to put down this rebellion quickly and thoroughly. So he did. He besieged Samaria for three years. When he finally broke Israel, he put her king in chains and brought him back to Samaria, and he took a portion of the people into exile and scattered them throughout his empire. Meanwhile he brought other people of his empire into Israel's land and made them to dwell there. This destroyed the people and fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah.

In the end, Hoshea was powerless. His name means salvation, and there is no salvation in Hoshea. Only captivity and destruction. Yet, his name is a derivative of Joshua, and Joshua is the Hebrew version of Jesus. Tonight we'll remember when Jesus was taken captive by the Sanhedrin and would be turned over to the Romans. Death will even hold him captive later. But He will burst forth from the tomb, a triumphant king that will deliver His people. Amen.

## **Good Friday–Zedekiah: King of Judah**

2 Kings 24:17–25:30

2 Chronicles 36:11–21

*Jeremiah 39:4–7 So it was, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw [the princes of Babylon], that they fled and went out of the city by night, by way of the king's garden, by the gate between the two walls. And he went out by way of the plain. But the Chaldean army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. And when they had captured him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced judgment on him. Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes in Riblah; the king of Babylon also killed all the nobles of Judah. Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon.*

Zedekiah, son of Jotham, was the last king of before Jerusalem's destruction. He was uncle to Jehoiachin and brother to Jehoiakim. Like Jehoiakim, he was renamed when he was given the throne by a foreign king. Zedekiah was a fool. God had sent the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Judah in these last days, and Zedekiah had sought advice from the prophet, advice that he ignored while imprisoning Jeremiah. That advice was simple: surrender to Babylon and you will be spared. The kingdom was doomed and there was no way to save his title, but he could save his life.

Zedekiah refused, and we see the result of his folly. Nebuchadnezzar came one last time to besiege Jerusalem, and it was brutal. There were families who resorted to cannibalism to survive. The book of Lamentations describes its horrific details. After the people had been weakened, Babylon broke down the wall and entered Jerusalem. Zedekiah saw the army enter and decided to run. Just as God promised, he was destroyed along with his household.

Our king doesn't run, not even when the temple of His body was taken captive, beaten, pierced, and bloodied. He remained and prayed for His enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." His opponents taunted him to come down from the cross, to flee like Zedekiah before Him. But He didn't. He remained to the end when He declared His victory against His enemies with the cry, "It is finished!" Keep us steadfast until the day when the kingdom of this world is finished and your kingdom comes in full force. Amen.

## **Holy Saturday—Jesus Christ: King of Kings**

John 18:33–37

Colossians 1:15–18

*John 18:33–37 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered him, “Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”*

Failure, death, destruction, idolatry, disappointment, greed, lust, selfishness, bloodlust, ignorance. These words and more describe the kings of Israel and Judah. Sure, there were a couple good ones in there, but even they were flawed individuals who fell short of the standard set by God of a truly good king. A truly good king will selflessly look out for his people, even if that means disciplining them. A truly good king will suffer for His people. A truly good king will die for His people. But this world says that’s backwards. That a loyal subject of the kingdom should be willing to die for his king. They should be willing to suffer for the king and the kingdom.

Jesus said it best, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). His Kingdom isn’t anything like anything that we’ve ever seen in this world. His kingdom isn’t tainted by sin that makes us an enemy of God, sin that twists everything good around. Instead of Jesus demanding that we die for Him, He dies for us. He goes to the cross and lays down His life for His people. By doing so He defeats all His enemies, sin, death, the devil, and even our own sinful human nature. He has freed us from our slavery to sin, set us free to be a part of His kingdom. This kingdom is not built with human hands. It is a kingdom that is not of this world, a kingdom that is of the world to come. And we’re getting ready to celebrate that world to come, when we remember our king bursting forth from the tomb after His rest on this Holy Saturday. Come, Thou almighty King! Amen.

## **Easter Sunday–The Pearl of Great Price:**

*Matthew 13:44–46 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

I’ve heard this parable explained over and over that this is about us needing to recognize just how important our faith is, that we have to be willing to sell all that we have in order to follow Jesus. I admit, that isn’t a bad way to look at this parable. After all, it is Jesus himself who says, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt 16:24–26).

But what if it wasn’t about us, at least not in the way that we think about it? What if we aren’t the merchant? What if we are the pearl/treasure? This would make Jesus the man/merchant. He is the one who goes and sells all that He has to buy us. He is the one who lays down His life for you. You are worth everything to Him. And that’s who the true King of Kings is. The King who stepped down off His throne, got into the muck with us, and pulled us out, even though it cost Him His life. We can’t fully comprehend how amazing this kingdom is yet, but the day is coming soon when that kingdom will be full revealed. Come quickly, king of kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ, God almighty. Amen.