

Kings and Prophets 15-10-29

This is Thursday, the 29th of October 2015. We continue our study of kings and prophets, limited now to the southern kingdom of Judah, since the northern kingdom is defunct, kaput, no more, gone, historically absent, deported, captive, scattered, no more to be. We are looking at the second king to rule in Judah after that event in 721 B.C., Hezekiah's son Manasseh, and we pick up tonight where we left off last week in 2 Kings chapter 21.

It has a parallel in 2 Chronicles chapter 33. We'll take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, and then we will begin. Father, we thank you as always for your watch care, your provision, the many expressions of your grace and faithfulness to us, the ones we recognize, and no doubt many more that we don't see and are largely unaware of.

We know that all things are ordered and coordinated by your will and in your plan and designed to bless us as we learn, as we press against resistance, as we face the challenges and the tests of this life to enhance our appreciation and application of the truth that we have learned from your word. We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit and His ongoing presence within us, His bringing to our minds and to our understanding the truth that defines us and guides us, enabling us to redeem the time and to glorify the Lord Jesus as we live here on this earth and prepare to serve Him and to serve you in the ages that are to come. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word that each one who is here and who is studying with us will receive a blessing, that it will be meaningful, that it will be something the Holy Spirit can use to facilitate our growth and our response, our motivation, and our encouragement and hope as we wait for the day when you send the Lord Jesus to retrieve us and to take us to those realms that are even now being prepared.

We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified as we study together. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our king currently on the throne in Judah is Manasseh. His namesake is Joseph's son, born in Egypt with an Egyptian mother. And Joseph named his son, his firstborn in Egypt, Manasseh.

The reason he named him this is the name means the one who causes me to forget. If you recall, Joseph had a lot to forget. The difficulties being sold into slavery and being a slave in Egypt and having risen to a place of prominence in the land.

And so the hardships of his past are forgotten in the birth of his son, the blessing of his marriage. And so he's happy when he names his son Manasseh. But there is an ironic twist in this king's son who is named Manasseh because he is going to cause Judah to forget.

The things that were brought back to mind by the reforms of his father, Hezekiah. Now there's an interesting conclusion to the history of the southern kingdom that we are embarking on here as we look at Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah. You know Josiah is a good king.

We know this from Sunday school from days gone by. Good King Josiah. You remember that at some point they're going to find the book of the law in the rubble of the abandoned temple that is rubbished by the policies of our current subject of discussion.

So Josiah is a good king. Manasseh is almost entirely a wicked king. And his father Hezekiah is on the list of good kings.

No king before him followed the heart of his father David like he did. So if you think of it there's sort of an Aaron and Hur on each side of Moses here only in reverse. Good King, Bad King Manasseh, Good King Josiah.

So there's sort of an opposite, equal and opposite triad here with the guy in the center, the guy inside the good king brackets being an intensely wicked king. And there is a school of thought, in fact it's prominent, it is dominant, it is almost entire in the realm of biblical scholarship today. And by this I mean all the guys that inhabit classrooms and write books and journal articles.

That's not everybody but those are the ones that get looked at and quoted and they influence the training of pastors who go through Bible schools and so on. But for generations now, for almost 150 years and maybe more, there's been an understanding of Kings and Chronicles that this history was all written up and largely filled out after the fact, after the destruction of Jerusalem in the Babylonian captivity and that people in the captivity were trying to figure it out. How could God let Jerusalem be destroyed? How did we let Jerusalem get destroyed? What happened that we have come to this terrible past? We've been in the land since 800 years ago.

That's a long time. If we had been in America for 800 years, we would have come here in the 1200s. This is like people in Britain, people in England.

They say, well, we've been here since Joffrey and Chaucer and King Arthur and all those old guys that are lost in the mists of history. 800 years. Judah has been in the land for 800 years.

And they've had a king under David, they've had a monarchy for over 300 years, almost 500 years. So it's a long time. That's back to the days of Columbus, if you think about our situation or thereabouts.

I'm speaking loosely here because math is not my strong suit. But suffice it to say that it would be understandable, and this is the assumption of the scholars, the authors, the people who shape opinion and write commentaries, that much of the Bible, Old Testament in particular, that we have in its current form was written after the fact out of some motivation. In the case of Kings and Chronicles, and they think Chronicles is later than Kings, but that Kings was probably composed in the latter part of the Babylonian exile.

And that it, in fact, they think Deuteronomy was written in the exile. And Kings and Deuteronomy, I don't want to get into a lot of long-winded nonsense here, but you need to know this just in case you pick up a Christianity Today or read an article in some magazine and you see this viewpoint reflected and you say, wait a minute, I've been through Kings and

Chronicles and I heard and saw no such thing. Well, I'm telling you now of such things so that when you see it you'll say, aha, that's what he was talking about.

Maybe you'll never see it and God bless you, you won't have to deal with it. But suffice it to say, there's a, and I'm talking about people who still believe in God, they just don't think the Scripture is all it's cracked up to be. Anymore, there's a very low view of Scripture.

This explains why in, quote, conservative biblically-based churches there is practically no knowledge of the Bible, opinion of the veracity of the Bible, its infallibility, its inerrancy, its inspiration and so on has fallen so low that people say, you know, what we really need to focus on are just the morals of the story. That's what the guys were doing that wrote the Bible so we should just focus on the morals and the details, you know, they were using their paradigm and their little Aesop fables to get the point across but those don't work in our day. We need new and different ways of communicating the same truths.

So we're going to ignore Jonah and the whale, we're going to ignore, you know, Noah and Daniel and these other stories and we'll just, we'll cut to the chase, what is the moral of the story and then we'll tell that in contemporary terms, we'll have a puppet show, we'll do skits, we'll have somebody do an interpretive dance while somebody reads a poem about that truth. By the way, I've seen all of these things in what allege to be conservative Bible-based churches. It's shocking.

You wonder why I'm recently on a tear about the difference between truth and error. That challenge I mentioned a week or two back, if you haven't tried it, try it and it will drive you back to the Scriptures. It will drive you to more and deeper communion with the Lord God in heaven because we are in trouble and the water got hot while we weren't paying attention to the temperature.

It's way worse than you think. I don't care how bad you think it is, it's worse. And if you don't believe me, just look around, go to just pick some church websites, pull up the sermons, look at the forms of worship, look at the emphasis, look at what's going on, just pretend like, well, I'm looking for a church, let me see if this is one I could go to.

Try it and you'll understand why I am on the verge of alarmed at where we are. It's worse than you think. And this section of Scripture that we're looking at, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Josiah, is typical.

Let me read you something. This is a book that I got as a gift, which I very much appreciate. It is, I mentioned it before, Everett Fox's part of the Shock and Bible translation series, but it's a very literal and fulsome and interpretive, helpfully so, translation of Hebrew, trying to get back to the real thing.

But I'm not going to read you the translation, what I want to read you is his introduction to this section that we are now in, in 2 Kings, and he has this at the beginning of the section dealing

with Hezekiah. And it is a good summary of the viewpoint of which I now speak. And this is going to be at the beginning of chapter 18.

And he's got a larger introduction, but here's a little section, it's called On Three Kings of Judah. It's short, it's only a little over a page, well, a page and a half. But I'm going to read just a little bit of this to you, just to give you a flavor.

Why am I doing this? Why should you pay attention? Because it's context. The application of what we're about to study hinges on how you understand it. If you understand it this way, you can't apply it.

It's just a bunch of writing. If we understand why God put it in the Bible, which is going to be in contrast to this popular view, it is applicable. And it is applicable because of the situation I just described.

We effectively are in the days of Josiah. In fact, the waning days of Josiah, in my view. And I think you'll see why.

But we want to get a little bit of background. And you need to understand, I think you need to understand, we all need to understand how this section of Scripture, the reason it's not being applied, the reason we don't get the warning value of it is it has been dismissed. It has been discredited, largely.

And here's why. Let me just read you this, it's quick. Although the book of Kings covers the reigns of 39 kings and one queen, three of Judah's rulers, who appear toward the end of the book, occupy disproportionate space and thus have particular importance.

And then he transliterates the names. So instead of Hezekiah, he says His-ki-yahu. That's how you would... Beelzebub? That's how you would pronounce it if you're reading it out of the Hebrew.

His-ki-yahu, Menashe, that's our guy, Menashe. And Yoshi-yahu, which is Josiah. We harden the S's typically when we bring names across.

Moshi becomes Moses and so on. So these three have particular importance. Now we've already seen this in Hezekiah.

We took the three-dimensional view. Chronicles, Kings, Isaiah. And some notes in the Minor Prophets as well, right? So we've already understood independently that Hezekiah was important.

Well, Manasseh and Josiah are the other two in this expanded lens view. That's what he's talking about. These three take up disproportionate space and thus have particular importance.

While recovering precise historical information about these kings is difficult, given the ideological thrust of the biblical text. That's a tactful way of saying this was written as

propaganda by guys in the captivity. It's hard to know exactly what happened because of the ideology that caused this to be written.

And the vagueness of some passages, the way in which the Bible presents them has great interest for the overall narrative. And that's true. Their portrayal in Kings posits that despite the... Now pay attention here.

Despite the extensive reforms, especially the eradication of idol worship enacted by Hezekiah, remember that? He came in day one, refurbished the temple, knocked down the altars, burned all of the stuff that his father Ahaz had done. Despite these extensive reforms, especially the eradication of idol worship enacted by Hezekiah in the late 8th century and Yoshi-Yahu. We'll see this when we get to Josiah.

Josiah's reforms. This is why they're cleaning up the temple and they find the scroll of the book. Despite that, in the late 7th, it is Manasseh's evil deeds which ultimately could not be overlooked or overcome.

And Judah inevitably met its horrible fate of destruction and exile. In these texts, one can feel a later historian, if not the wider culture itself, attempting to grapple with the question, if Hiskiah and Yoshi-Yahu were so faithful and zealous in their observance of the covenant, why was Jerusalem destroyed? Fair question from any perspective. Hezekiah, massive reforms, kind of failed his biggest tests.

We saw that. Manasseh is going to be a complete rascal. And then we have good King Josiah.

And you will remember, I think, that in Josiah's reign is the 40-year ministry of Jeremiah. Largely covers that period. But in between, we have the longest reigning king in Israel's history, 55 years total for Manasseh.

So their take on this is, people said, well, yeah, Manasseh was a bad guy, but look at Josiah and all the good things he did. So if he was such a great king and skipping one, so was Hezekiah. Why did God bring about the destruction of Jerusalem and fall of the temple and we're all in captivity? Historically, things may well not have been cut and dried, et cetera, et cetera.

The Book of Chronicles, written later and perhaps using other sources, sees the history and gives many more details of Hezekiah's reform, presents a startling view of Manasseh, absent in Kings as an evildoer who, after being exiled, repents and restores his father's covenant loyalty. Remember that story of Manasseh being afflicted and repenting and coming back and being kind of a good guy is only in Chronicles. Well, they're saying, see, that didn't really happen, but the author of Chronicles writing later said, well, let me give you a different story.

So the reform of Hezekiah is outlined in chapter 18, as we saw, and involves the destruction of pagan altars around the country and the consecration of the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple. Since these ideas are central to the Book of Deuteronomy, some scholars have been inclined to identify the period of Hezekiah's reign as the time of origin of much of the

Deuteronomistic history, DH for short, the Deuteronomist, which, as the reader will recall, is often bunched together with that fifth book of the Torah. This conclusion is buttressed by the undoubted emigration of northern refugees from the destruction of Israel in 722 a population which might well have brought with them a kind of northern-based tradition found in Deuteronomy and portions of the Deuteronomistic history.

In any event, back to reality here, it is not clear how successful Hezekiah's policy was. Its accomplishments may have been played down by Josianic editors a century later who sought to claim greater credit for Josiah than for Hezekiah. In other words, you can't just take the text as it stands.

You've got to assume that it was written for human ends by human minds with human motives and fallibilities. Well, if you want to read the rest of this, you can borrow this from me. Here's my point.

That's very prevalent. This is what you get in seminary. I got it in seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary.

It's the prevailing view. But here's the thing. If you look at just the Bible text, Hezekiah did reforms, and everybody went along.

And they celebrated the Passover, month off, and all. But here's the thing. If the people's hearts were really in that, how did King Manasseh succeed? It says he seduced the people.

The idolatry was worse than anything the Canaanites, the Amorites ever did. If the people's hearts, if all of the people were like us in here, do you think Manasseh could walk in here and sell us on idolatry and Asheroth worship and Baal cult and passing children through the fire and all that other nonsense? Look how quickly and how effectively Manasseh wildly successful with idolatry. Like never before in the history of the land.

It's never before. As bad as they've gotten in all the previous times, did it say it was worse than the Canaanites? Worse than the Amorites that Joshua drove out of the land? Not until Manasseh. So think about my little diagram here.

If I do it backwards for you, here's Hezekiah, or backwards for me, right side up for you. Here's Hezekiah, here's Manasseh in the center, and here's Josiah. Bracketed by these good kings, but in the middle, the 55 year reign of Manasseh characterized almost entirely by the grossest idolatry ever seen at any time in Judah, ever.

Now, one guy wearing a crown notwithstanding can't produce that unless the reform stuff on each side isn't genuine. Leaders can lead, but if the followers don't really follow, then what? It's like the seed that falls on the shallow soil. It takes up, it blossoms in a day, but when the heat comes, the roots cook, it withers and dies.

That's Jesus' example in the parable of the soils. You remember that? The seed in shallow soil

springs up real quick, but it has no root, and it doesn't last. It's the fad.

It's the popular thing. Now, looking around today, because this is important to our understanding and our application. Do you look around in the Christian world today, Christian media today, Christian radio, Christian television, Christian publishing, walk up and down the book aisles at any bookstore, Christian or otherwise, go to Mardel, go to Barnes & Noble, go to whatever, look at the Christian books, and ask yourself the question, and you are qualified to answer this question because you know your Bible.

I'm not looking at anybody that hasn't spent hundreds of hours in Bible study, so you are qualified to judge, and this is a time for evaluation. Does this represent a Christianity that has got deep roots in fertile soil and can weather all kinds of storms, or is it a superficial, shallow, spring up in a day, latest fad Christianity? In my view, it is very much the latter, and this is why I say in my view, we have had, and when you step back in history, we had a great time of solid, biblical foundation building beginning in the 1800s with Darby, with the movement in the late 1800s with the great revivals, Billy Sunday and others, and the Scofield Bible coming out and people coming to understand God's plan for the ages and dispensations. Your conservative theological schools were founded, Dallas Seminary, 1920s, many others, and in the pre-World War II era of this country, there was a very strong, solid Christianity built, and it had momentum that carried through the 1950s and into the 1960s, but the cultural shift that we saw, and I say we, those of us who are old enough, saw in the 1960s, you start that era with Bobby Vinton and Herb Alpert on the radio, and you end up with Janis Joplin and screaming Mimi hair bands and so on.

That isn't a cause of cultural change. That is an effect. That is a symptom of what happened in the hearts.

That is Manasseh. That is going back to earlier times, and people like to glorify the days of the founding fathers and so on. There was a real problem in this country when it was founded, and it's the reason that people who were already here were treated so badly.

It's the reason Andy Jackson and others were such heinous, evil men, and the revival, the things that happened from the time of the settlement of this country by Europeans all the way to the founding of this country was very problematic. That's why slavery got a root. People who understand their Bible would have never gone for slavery, would have never treated people like chattel, but they did, and they tried to justify it on the Bible because they didn't understand it, and they didn't understand fair treatment.

They didn't educate. They didn't make independent. They didn't treat people as brothers in Christ even when they came to Christ, and there was a huge roots of the black church come out of slavery, the Negro spirituals and so on are a reflection.

They had a better Christianity in the slave quarters than Massa did down in the plantation, but there was rot, and there was corruption, but there was the time of Hezekiah in the late 1800s

into the early 1900s into the mid-1900s, and there was a renaissance and a renewal at that time, a time of Hezekiah as it were, but then you have sort of the shake that all off, throw it away, and you have what we've seen in the last, say, 40 years. Well, now there is this neo-Christianity that is trying to popularize faith and is trying to make it viable, and there is actually still and has been good Christian faith being preached and practiced in a few places, but the popular Christianity, why do all rock stars wear crosses? Why do so many people that are in public life and in the media, they tattoo crosses on themselves? It's a superficial Christianity. The jewelry and the tattoos is just emblematic of the external nature of the Christianity that is largely practiced and preached now, and was Josiah a good king? When we get to him, we will see that yes, he was.

The problem is, so was the Lord Jesus. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not, even though there were multitudes that followed Him, right? There was a superficial response, but it had no root, and when the Lord Jesus fell out of favor with the Israel leadership and was arrested and sent to the cross, all forsook Him. You have the superficial Hosanna march down the hill to the temple on Palm Sunday.

Where are those people when there's nothing but shouts of crucify Him, crucify Him? It's variable, it has no rudder, it has no root, it has no grounds, it has no foundation, and it is as fickle as the way the wind blows. The Christianity so-called that is prevalent, dominant, almost exclusively to be seen in this country today is of that variety. And if you don't believe me, go look, if you haven't already.

And that's Josiah. So here's the answer to the question, and we haven't done a lot of Bible tonight, but this is big picture stuff, because it will help us fit what we've seen of Hezekiah and Manasseh, and what we are about to see of Josiah into this context. God sends an actual good king, Yoshi-Yahu, and the Yoshi part of his name is the same root as Yeshua.

The Lord is the Savior. Jehovah-Yahu is Yeshua. Yeshua-Yahu, Savior-Lord.

That's the last king of Judah's, the last meaningful king's name. The last of these big three. And these secular scholars say, well, he really was a good king, and there was all kinds of reforms, and it's just a big mystery, now and in the captivity, as to why God destroyed Jerusalem.

Have you not read the book of Jeremiah? Have you not read Lamentations? The time of Jeremiah is the time of Josiah. You've got good king Josiah on the throne for a good portion of the time that Jeremiah is prophesying and saying, people, you've got a good king, follow him. You've got a good example, you've got a good opportunity, lean into it, grab hold of it.

And they don't. And because they don't, that's why it got destroyed. You don't need to postulate all of this back-filling rationalization of later writing and trying to manipulate the text and change the history.

What really happened is there was an opportunity to learn about God and to know God and to

be God's people and to reflect His glory, and God gave them a king that would take them there. Just like when the Lord Jesus came to Israel the first time. He came unto His own and His own received Him not.

Where is the truth teller? Between the two pillars, between Hezekiah and Josiah, you have the longest, most corrupt, idolatrous time in the history of Judah. That's the exposed heart of the people. To me, it's like open-heart surgery.

You crack open the chest. On one side is Hezekiah, on the other side is Josiah. What's inside the chest, inside the ribcage? What is the heart? Manasseh.

How easily did he make idolatry and corruption the most popular thing? Bloodshed, passed his own son through the fire. Did anybody go say, we've got to run this guy off because of how evil he is? No. The nation followed him blindly.

Worse than the Amorites, worse than the Canaanites. The exposed heart of Judah is the reign of Manasseh. That's what we have just seen.

So when Josiah comes and you say, what a good king, what a wonderful set of reforms, what a great effort. Well, the Sermon on the Mount was a great address. It just wasn't taken to heart.

It wasn't followed. What is the application of that, then and now? We have access to the Word of God as never before. You can have a theological library better than anything I had when I was going to seminary.

Free online. Go to Bible Hub. Go to any one of a number of places.

It's replete. Some of those old commentaries are the best because it's before they got into all this Graf, Wellhausen, multiple authors, and everybody had a motive and it's all propaganda. Read the old guys.

Read Adam Clark. Read Matthew Henry. Read these other great commentators and just read your Bible.

The Bible will interpret itself. And what do we see? What does it say? What does the Bible say was the reason that Judah is going to go into captivity? Chronicles spells it out in gory detail. Spends the better part of a chapter saying here's what they did.

And it's all stuff that is exposed and brought to the surface right here in the reign of Manasseh. So for us, what should we be doing? Take warning. We are in the midst of a people who are ripe for judgment and ripe for destruction.

Believers. The axe is laid at the root of the trees. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

That was the message of John the Baptist because he was in a Josiah day and he knew it. The one coming after me is greater than I. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Holy

Spirit baptism, good.

Fire baptism, not so good. I mean, this doesn't take great interpretive genius. It's one or the other.

You are going to be lifted up into the realms of spirit by God's Holy Spirit or you are going to be in the flames of judgment as a believer. Flames of judgment. Rich man in the story of Lazarus, the leper, believer.

In torments, in flames, baptized with fire in Luke 16. We are in the time of decision. You have made a decision consistently to learn the Word of God, to reflect on the Word of God and to apply the Word of God.

Don't be discouraged when you look around and say, as my dad has told me since I was old enough to understand English, you need to think twice if you find yourself saying, they are all out of step but me. This is a picture of guys in formation and you say, my left foot is hitting and everybody else is hitting at a different time. Is it possible that maybe I am the one out of step? When you look around today and you are out of step with popular Christianity, they are all out of step but you.

Look at your Bible. That's the drumbeat. That's the standard.

That's the recto and the verso. That's the front and the back, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. That is the standard by which things are measured and sadly, somebody has beat a different drum and everybody is marching to it when you look around in popular Christianity.

Don't be discouraged. Remember, we are in the days of Josiah. There is good example.

There is good teaching. There is good truth to be grasped and to be followed. But don't expect there to be many people on the narrow road going to the straight gate.

There has never been a wider road and a broader gate leading to destruction, baptism of fire, than there is right now. In this nation, it is as bad or worse than it ever was. The Europeans all came in and said, well, these godless, heathen savages here, we need to Christianize them because they are so evil.

Remember what the Bible says in the days of Manasseh? That the people of God became worse than the original inhabitants of the land? That is what is happening now and people are doing it in the name of Christ. They have introduced Eastern mysticism. They have introduced meditation.

They have introduced visualization. They have introduced every marketing ploy, every secular technique, every piece of godless materialism and brute, overt, grasping greed, merchandising. When there isn't any of the word of God, it's merchandised.

Send us money and for your generous gift, we'll give you some of the word of God back. It's heinous. We're worse than anybody that was ever displaced here and God evidently judged all the previous inhabitants of this continent because they're largely gone.

I say all of that to say this. It is emphasized in Kings and Chronicles. This section of three kings, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Josiah.

It's not a difficult code to break. We're in a people that Manasseh can easily lead into the grossest form and superficial Christianity, even well-meant and well-intentioned, even when there's good teaching, it isn't taken to heart. It isn't making a difference.

It has no traction. You can't even read the Ten Commandments on a public wall anymore. Who allowed that? We did.

There's not enough of us believing the Ten Commandments to keep them on the wall of the courthouse, to keep them in public view. It isn't that we should go out and try to do that. It is a sign that there aren't enough of us left to influence the culture in a positive direction.

We're in the days of Josiah and the day of judgment is coming. How can you be ready? Well, you can take whatever practical steps you deem prudent, but the biggest and most important and central step is be in a position for the marking angel to come and mark us for preservation, mark us for deliverance, mark us for being inside the ark and not out of it when God's flood of judgment comes. But we live in dangerous times.

People are saying peace and safety. There's prosperity everywhere. Destruction will come suddenly.

That's Bible. That's truth. And if you have any eyes to see, you have seen the gigantic cracks in the foundation and the thin soap bubble film that is our current economy and our current culture.

Judgment is coming. What is the biggest and best preparation? Just what you're doing tonight. Just what you will do after you leave here and for the next days in reflecting on the word of God, ensuring that it is being metabolized and being applied, that it's the object of our faith, that we are righteous before God.

Why did God preserve Noah? He was righteous. He was upright in his generation. Be upright in your generation and no harm can befall us.

Nothing will happen to us that isn't designed for our benefit and our good. But as we move into the time of Josiah and it's going to be all happiness and, oh, look, he's rebuilding the temple and it's the shades of Hezekiah. It's superficial.

He believes it. He's doing what he can. But you can have a good king or a good president and the people don't follow.

And it's where we are now. It's where they were there. And in just a few short years, it's going to be Nebuchadnezzar and you're going to have the flower of the land, Mishaël, Hananiah, Azariah, Daniel, castrated.

You're going to have Ezekiel and the other people taken captive, dragged away to a foreign land. And if it doesn't happen physically in this nation, it will happen spiritually. And there's a sense in which it is already happening spiritually.

People have been taken captive and we don't want to be one of those. So this good king coming up, Josiah, that's the background. That's the context.

And we'll see it when we pick up our study next time. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the up-to-date and current guidance that it gives us as we seek to live our lives before You.

May God the Holy Spirit minister it to our hearts. Even as we are sobered by the warning and the rebuke and the correction of this portion of Your Word, we are also encouraged and we are strengthened. And our hope is secure in the knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Savior.

He represents us before Your throne. And You work all things together for good to those who love You and are called according to Your purpose. We pray that we will see the pertinence and the application of these truths in our lives in the days ahead.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.