

## Remain Faithful

**[The two witnesses] heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on** (Revelation 11:12).

**Scripture:** Revelation 11:1–13

**Song:** “To God Be the Glory”

In North Korea, it's too risky to own a Bible, so believers memorize Scripture. Reported Christians are imprisoned in labor camps. Kim Eun Jin's family secretly worshipped God in their small apartment. Every day her father hugged her and warned her to be careful. One day he was arrested, and she never saw him again.

The Romans tried to silence John by exiling him. In his vision, two “witnesses” testify during the days before Christ's return, and some commentators say they are modeled after Moses and Elijah. Sent by God, they receive great power. For three and a half years, they prophesy. God is patient, wanting everyone to repent and no one to perish (2 Peter 3:9). But the beast, who opposes God, kills them. God validates His witnesses and reveals His power to people from every nation. A resurrection, ascension, and earthquake leave them trembling and very much aware of who the true Christ is.

Believers today are called to lovingly tell about Jesus, to invite others to know Him, and to share God's Word. We also face opposition, but we are given the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Father**, when opportunities arise, give me the courage to speak what You would have me speak and not be defeated by a *no*. In Jesus' name, amen.

---

July 21–27. **Denise Scott** lives in Wentzville, Missouri, has been a recent caregiver, and is seeking to fully live.

## Overcomers

**[God's people] triumphed over [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony** (Revelation 12:11)

**Scripture:** Revelation 12:1–11

**Song:** “Victory in Jesus”

Billy lived in Somalia, a very poor and dangerous place. Curiosity led him to study an English Bible alongside his Koran and to listen to Christian radio. Even though his country is majority Muslim and his family threatened him, Billy and another Christian started an underground church. Twelve of its members were murdered because of their faith. Billy survived. He moved to another country but travels to Somalia to plant and nurture churches. Christianity is spreading, partly because of the testimony of those who died.

Like Billy and his church, the woman and the Christ child in Revelation were threatened. No surprise that the dragon, who is Satan, wanted to snatch Christ before He could conquer sin and death through His shed blood on the cross. Peering behind the scenes, we see a cosmic war between Satan and the archangel Michael, who bears little resemblance to the angels in gift shops. God protected the woman, the child, and His plan for salvation. Satan was hurled to earth.

Christ is the one we testify about. But as we do, we can expect a spiritual battle. Satan can lead us astray through busyness or distraction. Many times, he repeatedly reminds us of past mistakes and whispers lies such as “God doesn’t care.” No matter what the accuser throws at us, by the power of Jesus we, like Billy, can overcome and continue.

**Father,** fill my heart and mind with Your truth, and give me Your strength. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Who Do You Follow? And Who Follows You?

**In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, . . . Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army (2 Kings 25:1).**

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 25:1–7

**Song:** “People Need the Lord”

King Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord (2 Kings 22:2). He repaired the temple and rid the land of idol worship. After reading the scroll with God's law written on it, he shared it with the people and led them in renewing their covenant with God.

Although King Zedekiah was Josiah's son, he paid no attention to the words the Lord spoke through the prophet Jeremiah. He hardened his heart and did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He was a puppet king placed on the throne by Babylon, and though he pledged his loyalty to them, he cheated them. The people under Zedekiah's rule paid dearly for his poor leadership. For about 18 months, Jerusalem was attacked, surrounded, and starved. Under cover of night, Zedekiah's army deserted. The last thing he saw was the execution of his sons. He was captured, shackled, and carted off to Babylon.

We're not kings and queens, but you and I influence the people around us. Are we leading others to God like King Josiah, or are we leading others away from God like King Zedekiah? The best way to lead others is to allow God to lead us. Where we go for advice matters. Godly advice is beneficial only if we follow it.

**Father**, please instill in me a heart that's open and responsive to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Ignore at Your Own Risk

**Judah went into captivity, away from her land** (2 Kings 25:21).

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 25:8–21

**Song:** “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling”

A barricade, a label on an electrical cord, and a tornado siren are all warnings that alert us to danger. A man who drives around a barricade may find himself sitting on the roof of his truck in floodwaters, hoping to be rescued. The “Keep away from water” tag on a hair dryer keeps users from being electrocuted. And without a working tornado siren, an entire town may find itself in the path of a deadly twister.

King Zedekiah did not heed the warnings God gave through the prophet Jeremiah, and his choices cruelly affected the people of Judah. The city of Jerusalem fell around 586 BC as the Babylonians destroyed the city walls, set fire to all the important buildings, and disabled the government by executing key officials. They looted the temple of its structural and sacred items and carried away more metal than could be weighed. Tragically, most of the people, including their king, were exiled to Babylon for 70 years—removed from the promised land God had given them.

Like King Zedekiah and the people of Judah, we cannot afford to rely on our own understanding when it comes to navigating life. We need God’s wisdom, and we will be guided by Him as we pay attention to the warnings and instructions He has given us in His Word.

**Father,** thank You for the gift of Your Word that provides the wisdom I need for life and godliness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## God Is Sovereign

**Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time** (Daniel 11:35).

**Scripture:** Daniel 11:21–35

**Song:** “He Is Lord”

Visit Russia today, and you still see some statues of Stalin, head of the Soviet Union from 1924 to 1953. He expected to be worshiped and had history books rewritten to flatter himself. The Soviet press lauded him as a great genius, but he was really just another one of history’s tyrants. Stalin disposed of anyone deemed a rival or resister. He sent people to Gulag labor camps and killed millions—many innocent—through the Great Purge, through famine, and by execution.

The prophecy of Daniel refers to events future to his time and some events future to our time.

Many scholars think the tyrant in Daniel’s vision refers to Antiochus Epiphanes (around 215 BC–164 BC), who ruled Syria. Never victorious over his enemy, Egypt, he preyed on Jerusalem. He tried to erase the religion of the Jews by appointing the high priest position to the highest bidder and by converting the temple into an altar for the Greek god Zeus. He massacred thousands.

The phrase “at the appointed time” occurs three times in today’s passage, reminding us that despite how it seems, God is in charge. Tyrants still come and go, but we can count on God because He is ruler over all, and His plans will ultimately prevail.

**Father**, as I read Your Word, help me not to worry about what I don’t understand but to act on what I do understand. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Search My Heart

**[Jesus said,] “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37).**

**Scripture:** Matthew 23:1–12, 37–39

**Song:** “Blessed Be Your Name”

Bernie Madoff (1938–2021) claimed to be a great financial advisor and investor, but he was caught running a \$65 billion Ponzi scheme. Victims lost homes, savings, pensions, and even friends they had referred to Madoff. People had placed their trust in him to provide financial guidance, but he did not have their best interest at heart, only his own.

Some religious leaders of Jesus’ time were exercising similar self-interest. They had added regulations to God’s law that tended to be to their own benefit, putting the people they were supposed to be serving at a disadvantage. Their self-serving motives ignored the weightier matters of God’s law: love, forgiveness, and mercy. These religious leaders were consumed with power and appearances but not with pleasing God and ministering to His people. Jesus did not hesitate to confront them. He called them hypocrites.

Hebrews 4:13 tells us plainly, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” Jesus sees into our hearts. What is there? An authentic pursuit of His truth and love? Or is He perhaps weeping over our resistance to His call?

**Father,** show me where am resisting You. Please soften my heart and draw me near to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## What's Ahead?

**“Tell us,” [the disciples] said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).**

**Scripture:** Matthew 24:1–8

**Song:** “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus”

In April 2019, Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris caught fire during renovation. Four hundred fire fighters responded, but they couldn't drop heavy water on the roof for fear of a collapse. Two-thirds of the roof, made from the wood of 1,300 oak trees, was severely damaged. The tall steeple of this 850-year-old masterpiece plummeted to the ground.

What seems permanent to us is often temporary. Jesus sat with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. This vantage offered a scenic view of Jerusalem and the temple that took over 40 years to build. While the disciples admired it, Jesus told them it would topple—which was unimaginable, since the largest stone weighed over 400 tons. In 70 AD, however, the Romans destroyed it, prying apart the stones to collect gold leaf that melted from the roof when the building was set on fire. Jesus also told His disciples that there would be famines, earthquakes, and wars throughout history. He warned them not to be deceived and urged them not to panic.

Like the disciples, we have limited understanding. The best way to avoid being deceived is to be in God's truth daily. And it's important that we read all of Scripture, not just the passages we find most appealing.

**Father,** help me to live ready for Your return, not caught up in my comforts nor the culture around me. In Jesus' name, amen.