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HOPE

An Anchor for Life



Chapter 7

HOPE FOR OUR NATION

The Benham Brothers, David and Jason, were successful real estate entrepreneurs who thought they'd won the jackpot when HGTV decided to air their reality show. But no one was prepared for the media's wrath when the brothers later voiced their biblical convictions about social issues, such as homosexuality and marriage. Their show was abruptly cancelled and they were treated like outcasts and bigots by the secularized media.

The brothers recently spoke at an event for the Family Research Council and they warned their listeners that society's "sexual revolution" is nothing more than tragic and abject moral decay, and that those who uphold godliness are becoming "prey"—whether they are wedding vendors, pizza shop owners, government officials, or Major League Baseball commentators.

"It is more than just a sexual revolution," said David, "it is a moral revolution, it's a spiritual revolution that is

taking place right now before our eyes and the ceiling has become the floor.” American judicial decisions, said the brothers, have the effect of trying to force all Americans to accommodate and participate in evil, causing immorality to “spread like gangrene” throughout our nation.

In warning how Bible-believers will become “prey,” David Benham pointed to a specific verse of Scripture about the condition of ancient Judah—Isaiah 59:14-15: “Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. So truth fails, and he *who* departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the Lord saw *it*, and it displeased Him that *there was* no justice.”

Our society has reversed justice, pushed away righteousness, toppled truth into the street; and those who stand up and object to this pervasive moral decay make themselves “prey.” The media, the courts, the corporations, the government, the tax authorities, the popular press, everyone—will come after them and after us.

“We are watching the prophetic implications of [Isaiah 59:14-15],” said David Benham, “that was spoken to the nation of Israel. They had turned their backs on God and we are watching the exact same spirit rise up in this country. He who turns himself from evil makes himself a prey.”¹

One terrible example of this rising flood of immorality is sexting, the habit of sending sexually explicit messages and pictures to another person, usually via mobile phones. Some messaging applications like Snapchat allow users to send explicit pictures of themselves for ten seconds, and then the pictures vanish from the screen. Teens believe they

can take sexually explicit pictures of themselves, send it by text, shock or delight the other person, and do so without consequences. Psychologists warn this has become a “rite of passage” for teenagers; and law enforcement officials warn that users may face imprisonment if the subjects are underage.

And much of it *is* underage. As technology advances, it’s hard for parents to keep up with the apps their youngsters are downloading. Young people can now share nude pictures on a large number of electronic platforms, and practices like sexting are gaining social acceptance. A 2014 study by the Pew Center for Research found that 44 percent of cellphone owners between ages 18 and 24 say they have received sexts. One information systems management student at Carnegie Mellon University, Abhinav Aditya, shrugged off the implications of the report, saying, “I don’t think it should be a big deal if people are doing it within their relationships. It’s a matter of personal choice. Everyone else is doing it; that’s how fads go.”²

What this means, of course, is that pornography is becoming much more pervasive and personal than we could have imagined. It’s not just a matter of *seeing* pornographic material. Now young people are becoming the stars of their own pornographic pictures and movies. They have the ability to create it instantly without censorship. Our whole nation is on the verge of becoming X-rated, from young to old, creating and consuming nudity and sensuality of all kinds, without restraint or restriction. It’s like the days of Noah, when every imagination of the heart was only evil all the time (Genesis 6:5).

Donna Rice Hughes, president of Enough Is Enough, a nonprofit organization devoted to making the Internet safe for children, recently made this chilling comment: “Internet pornography has become the wallpaper of our children’s lives from a very early age.”³

Those issues greatly disturb godly Christians. Even many non-Christians are disturbed, especially when children and young people are at risk. Sadly, much of the world celebrates its success at casting off moral restraints and obliterating the last vestiges of the Judeo-Christian heritage on which our nation was founded.

My friend, Dr. Albert Mohler, wrote a blog post entitled: “The Moral Revolutionaries Present Their Demands: Unconditional Surrender.” He said, in essence, the secular forces that have swept the new tides of immorality into our nation are now demanding that Christians lie down and play dead. Mohler quoted Dr. Mark Tushnet of Harvard Law School, who has declared total liberal victory, especially after the mysterious and unexpected death of conservative Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. Because of his death and the continuing leftward turn in our national politics, it seems unlikely that recent liberal court decisions will be overturned or reversed in the future.

Tushnet wrote,

For liberals, the question now is how to deal with the losers in the cultural wars. That’s mostly a question of tactics. My own judgment is that taking a hard line (“You lost, live with it”) is better than trying to accommodate the losers Trying to be

nice to the losers didn't work well after the Civil War And taking a hard line seemed to work reasonably well in Germany and Japan after 1945.

It's hard to imagine those words coming from an American citizen. Tushnet is saying that today's Jesus-followers and Bible-believers are losers who should be required to submit to unconditional surrender and be treated as the Nazis, who were occupied and prosecuted by the victors after World War II.⁴

I hope you feel as I do. I'm going to be occupied all right. I'm going to be occupied with holding high the cross of Jesus Christ, standing on infallible Scripture, and praying for a biblical revival to sweep our land. There is still a lot that's right about America, and it's time to stand up with fresh courage and hope. It's appropriate to hope for revival and to rest in absolute assurance that God is still on His throne, the Most High still rules in the affairs of men, and the course of history is following a pre-appointed path.

This Isn't the First Time Wickedness Has Reigned in a Nation

This isn't the first time there has been such wickedness in a land. I've titled this book *Hope—An Anchor for Life* because I believe the Bible teaches us to ground our attitudes in the unshakable future hope God has promised. This chapter is about hope for our nation, and, although, like you, I feel like shaking my head in despair, I don't think that's our best response. We need to look up. And it might also help to look back and remind ourselves that things have been this way

before. Let me tell you about another era when wickedness seemed to have reigned supreme.

The Old Testament kingdom of Judah was unique among the ancient nations of earth. Almighty God had ordained and established this people, for He intended to use its line of royal descendants to send a Messiah into the world in the fullness of time. His covenants with Abraham and David afforded promises and reassurances that were Judah's alone.

In the middle of the holy city of Jerusalem, the Lord Himself dwelt in His glory in the Holy of Holies of the Jewish Temple. This was a nation chosen by God, blessed by God, protected by God, used by God, and destined by God as the channel of His redemption to the world. Time and again, Jehovah had given them remarkable victories over ruthless enemies.

Yet Judah declined spiritually over time and eventually sank to levels of moral decay that can scarcely be described, and one of the worst epochs involved the 55-year reign of King Manasseh, from 697 B.C. to 642 B.C. Billy Graham once called Manasseh the most wicked man who ever lived, and that's not far from the mark. Manasseh became king at age twelve, upon the death of his father, the good King Hezekiah. From the very beginning, he did evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Kings 21:2). The Bible is too discerning to give us raunchy descriptions of his teenage or young adult years, but it indicates he lived with few restraints. The word used in 2 Kings 21:2 to describe his moral choices was: *abominations*.

Manasseh cast off the God of his fathers and popularized the spread of idolatry throughout the land. He became enamored with astrology and worshiped the stars and built altars in God's temple for all the heavenly hosts. He took his own son and had him burned to death as part of his occultist rituals. He turned to fortune-tellers and witches and spiritists and mediums (2 Kings 21:6). He seduced his people to engage in more evil than the pagan Canaanite nations whom the Lord had destroyed in the early days of Jewish history (2 Kings 21:9).

Manasseh wasn't without opposition. God raised up prophets to withstand him, but their voices were ignored as the nation sunk into a cauldron of sensuality and violence. Manasseh sent troops against those who opposed him, he killed the prophets, and blood flowed through the streets of Jerusalem as though war had broken out (2 Kings 21:16). According to tradition, Manasseh ordered his soldiers to kill the prophet Isaiah by putting him in a hollow tree and sawing him in half. The New Testament alludes to this when it says in Hebrews 11:37, "They were stoned, they were sawn in two."

Manasseh maintained this reign of terror for half a century; and, if you can believe it, things got even worse when his son Amon, 22, ascended to the throne. According to 2 Kings 21:20-22:

And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. So he walked in all the ways that his father had walked; and he served the idols that his father had served, and worshiped

them. He forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD.

That's when the tipping point came. Amon was such a wretched man that not even his own servants could tolerate him. Verse 23 says, "Then the servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his own house."

That's where Josiah enters the picture. He was only eight years old, yet he rose to the throne upon the death of his evil father. Josiah is one of my heroes because he came to the throne of Judah in her darkest hour. As he grew into his teen years he allowed God to work in his life; and he eventually became responsible, from the human perspective, for the greatest turn-around in the decadence of any nation that we know about in history.

Second Kings 22:1-2 says, "Josiah *was* eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem And he did *what was* right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left."

How can we account for Josiah's godliness? Where did he learn to follow the Lord? We aren't told, but here's an interesting theory. The story of the kings of Judah is told twice in the Bible—in both the books of Kings and Chronicles. In the parallel account of the story of Manasseh in the book of 2 Chronicles, we learn something amazing. According to 2 Chronicles 33:11, late in the reign of Manasseh God humbled him by sending the king of Assyria to chasten him, and the next verses say: "Now when [Manasseh] was in affliction, he implored the LORD

his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers and prayed to Him Then Manasseh knew that the LORD *was* God” (verses 12-13).

Whenever I read that I feel ashamed that I ever think about giving up on hard cases. Some of the greatest Christian leaders are those converted from notorious lifestyles, and God’s hand isn’t shortened that it cannot save. If you’re worried about someone, keep praying for him or her. Don’t give up, for even Manasseh turned his life around, by God’s grace, before it was too late.

So here’s the theory. Perhaps the humbled old man, newly converted to the Lord, took his young grandson on his knee and said something like this: “Josiah, my grandson, you’re very young right now. You’re only six years old. But one day you will be king of Judah. I’ve made too many mistakes; I’ve done terrible things and my name will go down in infamy. It’s because I rejected God. I’ve found the Lord now, and I am asking Him to help you serve Him when you become king. I beg you, my boy, honor and serve the Lord God Jehovah from your earliest days. That’s the only way to turn around this nation.”

I don’t know if that’s what happened, but it’s certainly plausible. It would explain why Josiah, while yet even a child-king, had a heart for God. According to both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, his influence turned the nation of Judah around, at least temporarily. He helped usher in the kind of revival that our own nation of America now so desperately needs. One of the first young men to join Josiah’s cause was Jeremiah, a priest and prophet from nearby Anathoth. These two young men, one in the palace and one in the

pulpit, brought about one of the most remarkable revivals in history.

The revival in the days of Josiah gives us hope for America and for our Western world today, and there are three keys to this hope.

We Must Return to the Word of God

Our nation's hope for survival depends, first, on returning to the authority of the Word of God. If that doesn't seem likely to you, consider what happened after more than a half-century of evil in ancient Judah. Young Josiah came to the throne, and when he was eighteen years old, in the tenth year of his reign, he visited the temple and was appalled by its state of disrepair. He sent his scribe, Shaphan, with a message to the high priest, Hilkiah. The king wanted to know how much money had been accumulating in the temple treasury, and he wanted the money channeled into the necessary renovations. When Josiah got that information, he hired carpenters and builders and masons to restore the temple to its former glory. One day when Shaphan went to inspect the progress, Hilkiah had exciting news. "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD," he said (2 Kings 22:8).

Think of that! For nearly six decades under the kingships of Manasseh and Amon, the Word of God had been neglected. It had been so ignored that people forgot where it was even stored. Can you imagine! For decades, no priest, scribe, or temple prophet had unscrolled the Law of God or read it aloud to the people. It had been tucked away somewhere to accumulate dust.

Believe me when I tell you, there are many churches across our land in which the same thing is true. They no longer teach the Word of God. And there are many people who think of themselves as Christians who have forgotten where they've put their Bibles. It reminds me of an old Charles Spurgeon quote. He once complained to his congregation: "There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write 'damnation' with your fingers."

What would happen if all the churches and homes in America suddenly blew the dust off their Bibles and opened them again? It might generate a cloud like the Dust Bowl days, but it might also produce a cloud of righteousness that would break with showers of blessings over our land.

The high priest carefully handed the scroll over to the scribe, who returned to the palace and showed it to Josiah. "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book," Shaphan told the king in verse 10.

Shaphan read it to the king. As Josiah heard the words, he was stricken with fear, remorse, conviction, and repentance. He tore his clothes and cried out to the Lord. In response, God sent him a message through the prophetess Huldah, the wife of his wardrobe keeper. The Lord told Josiah, "... because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD ... and you tore your clothes and wept before *me*, I also have heard *you*" (2 Kings 22:19).

The Bible tells us Josiah began to bring the Word of God back to a place of national prominence among his people. In the next chapter, he proclaimed a convocation in Jerusalem so everyone could hear the Word of God. Second Kings 23 says:

Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. The king went up to the house of the LORD with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD. Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all *his* heart and all *his* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant. (verses 1-3)

Can you imagine such a moment? The king took the Word of God, stood up by the pillar in the central place, read the Word of God aloud, and said, “I will follow this with all of my heart and with all of my soul. Will you follow me?” And the people took a stand for God’s Word.

The hope for our nation, as strange as it may seem to the secular mind, is the re-establishment of the Word of God as the basis of all our faith and practice. Let me tell you why. This world operates on the basis that there are no transcendent standards that are absolute. No objective truth. No absolute values. This has caused morality to collapse and to be replaced by a philosophy that there is no right and no wrong. If it feels good, do it. If it seems good, it is. If society okays it, go for it. But the results of

this philosophy include streets erupting in crime, racism rekindled, babies aborted by the millions, teenagers sexting each other all the time, pornography threatening our children, drugs out of control, marriages falling apart, children descending into sex slavery, and politics deteriorating into slugfests.

The re-establishment of the Word of God has to begin with us, in our homes and churches and in our pulpits. Without transcendent values from God, we have absolutely no chance of being a nation with a future and a hope. Because God created us, He knows what's good for us and what's bad for us. Deuteronomy 10:13 tells us to "... keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today *for your good*" (italics added). So we must revere His Word, study it, teach it, and obey it.

What this nation needs more than anything else is the reinstatement of the moral values of the Word of God, the transcendent values of God Almighty. It has happened before. These are the values that have undergirded our national values until recent days.

President William McKinley provides a good example. He grew up in a Methodist home where his mother taught the Bible to her children. At age ten, William went forward at a camp meeting to be saved. When he was elected President of the United States, he spoke these words in his Inaugural Address: "There is no safer reliance than upon the God of our fathers, who has so singularly favored the American people in every national trial, and who will not forsake us so long as we obey His commandments and walk humbly in His footsteps."

He once told visitors to the White House, “I am a Methodist and nothing but a Methodist—a Christian and nothing but a Christian.”⁵

According to professor Richard V. Pierard, five Methodist clergymen visited the president in the White House on November 21, 1899, and presented him a resolution of thanks from their denomination. When they turned to leave, McKinley called them back. “Hold a minute longer! Not quite yet, gentlemen! Before you go I would like to say just a word about the Philippine business. I have been criticized a good deal about the Philippines I sought counsel from all sides—Democrats as well as Republicans—but I got little help I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night.”

He told them the answer finally came to him “that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died. And then I went to bed, and went to sleep, and slept soundly, and the next morning I sent for the chief engineer of the War Department (our map-maker), and I told him to put the Philippines on the map of the United States [pointing to a large map on the wall of his office], and there they are, and there they will stay while I am President!”

As Pierard points out, “This is one of the most remarkable religious statements ever made by a sitting

president The context of the statement, the Spanish-American War, marked the emergence of the United States on the world scene as an imperial power. McKinley, regarded by many historians as the ‘first modern U.S. president,’ was a devout man whose Christian rationale ... saw America as a nation through which God had chosen to manifest his will and power in the world.”⁶

I’m sure William McKinley wasn’t a perfect man. Neither was Josiah. But nothing replaces a leader who reveres the Word of God and seeks the Lord in his or her decisions. Nothing blesses a nation like the rediscovery of the Word of God.

Return to the Worship of God

The next thing that happened under Josiah’s leadership involved a return to the worship of God. For the Jewish people, the observance of the Passover was at the heart of their worship pattern, but for many years Judah had neglected the Passover. It would be like our forgetting Christmas or Easter. But when Josiah read the Word of God and learned God’s instruction concerning the Passover, he reinstated this great festival, brought the people together, and reignited the worship of Jehovah in the land. According to 2 Kings 23:22, “such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah.” They rediscovered the joy and exuberance of the worship of God.

America’s fortunes have always been dependent on God-fearing, church-attending leaders who understood

their power was subservient to the throne of heaven and who honored Him. Let me remind you of how that played out at Valley Forge during the worst winter days of the Revolutionary War. George Washington's soldiers were cold, starving, ill fed, and desperate. More were dying from exposure than from battle. The survivors were thinking of deserting and going home; and elsewhere the American cause was slipping away. British armies occupied New York and Philadelphia, and the powerful British navy patrolled the coast.

Washington ordered the army chaplains to conduct worship services for the troops, and he ordered his men to take seriously the national day of prayer and fasting proclaimed by Congress in April of 1778. One of Washington's chaplains, thirty-year-old Israel Evans, preached a sermon on thanksgiving from Psalm 115 on the text: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory." The sermon hit home, and copies of it spread through Valley Forge. Washington read and endorsed the sermon and told Evans, "It will ever be the first wish of my heart to aid your pious endeavors to inculcate a due sense of the dependence we ought to place in that wise and powerful Being on whom alone our success depends."⁷

The army gained renewed morale, and later George Washington said he hoped future generations would look back on the American Revolution to see how the hand of God's guidance had wrought the miracle of liberty. Washington said, "The hand of Providence has been so conspicuous in all of this that he must be worse than an

infidel that lacks faith, and more than wicked, that has not gratitude enough to acknowledge his obligations.”⁸

What would Washington think of us today? Our nation has lost both its faith and its gratitude, but I haven't lost hope. If God could reverse the fortunes of the Continental Army at Valley Forge, He can reverse the tides of evil today. He can send a great revival to our homeland. He can send a great revival to our souls if we will again worship Him as we should.

Return to Prayer to God

The third aspect of Josiah's revival involved a return to prayer. According to 2 Kings 22:19, Josiah prayed with tears, and God heard him. The Bible says, “Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did *any* arise like him” (2 Kings 23:25).

This has been the secret of the greatest days of America, for until now we have been a land birthed in prayer, liberally sprinkled with God-fearing men and women, with churches that upheld the moral code of the Cross, and with institutions unafraid to open their proceedings with prayer.

It began that way on September 5, 1774, when the Continental Congress met. According to John Adams, who wrote about it in a letter to his wife, the session was tense and discouraged. One of the congressional members suggested they open with prayer, but others questioned the wisdom of that, since so many different religious groups

were present. Samuel Adams rose and said that he was no bigot and could join in a prayer offered by any gentleman of piety and virtue. Psalm 85 was read, which includes verse 6: “Will you not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?” The effect was electric, as every word of that Psalm seemed to hang in the air.⁹

At the next session two days later, Reverend Jacob Duché offered an extemporary prayer. Kneeling nearby was George Washington. Other members of the Continental Congress knelt or stood reverently, and, as Adams put it, the prayer offered by Duché “filled the bosom of every man present.” We still have the words of the prayer, which said, in part:

O Lord our Heavenly Father, high and mighty
King of kings, and Lord of lords, who dost from
Thy throne behold all the dwellers on earth and
reignest with power supreme and uncontrolled
over all the Kingdoms, Empires and Governments;
look down in mercy, we beseech Thee, on these
our American States, who have fled to Thee from
the rod of the oppressor and thrown themselves on
Thy gracious protection, desiring to be henceforth
dependent only on Thee Be Thou present, O
God of wisdom, and direct the councils of this
honorable assembly; enable them to settle things
on the best and surest foundation Preserve the
health of their bodies and vigor of their minds;
shower down on them and the millions they here

represent, such temporal blessings as Thou seest expedient for them in this world and crown them with everlasting glory in the world to come. All this we ask in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ, Thy Son and our Savior. Amen.¹⁰

That, my friends, is how our nation was birthed; and in the fear and worship of Almighty God and His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ, we find our nation's only hope. Prayer, worship, and the Word of God! The story of Josiah in the books of Kings and Chronicles gives us the model of a man with the courage to stand up and be counted.

Our hope is in God alone, and our churches must cling to the hope of 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face ... then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

What does that mean? That means that the future hope of our country is wrapped up in the lives of men and women like you and like me—men and women who believe in the transcendent value of God's Word, who are not ashamed to come to church and lift up their voices in prayer and praise to God.

What about prayer? We pray in our homes. We pray with our wives and our husbands. We find ways to pray in our schools. We pray in church. But it's going to take more than that. It is going to take men and women who somehow come together on a regular basis to pray specifically for revival in our nation. Our constant prayer must be: "Will You not revive us again that Your people may rejoice in You?" There

may be one last hope for America to return to God. But if we don't get busy as God's people, restoring to its proper place God's Word, God's worship, and prayer to God for this country, we will not have a chance.

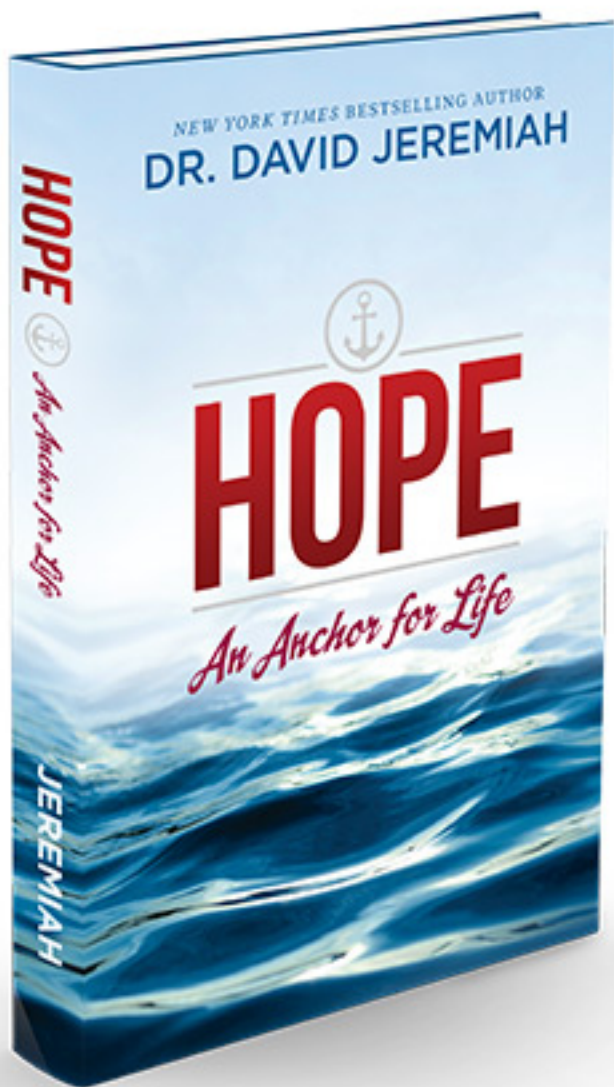
Perhaps you're thinking, "Dr. Jeremiah, I'm just one person, just one Christian, and not a very loud voice at that." But as I've read the history of many revivals, I've learned that each one started with a person like you or me. I'm sure there was a moment in Josiah's life as an eight-year-old king as he began to mature in his faith when he wondered, "How in the world am I ever going to turn this nation back to God?" But he did what he knew to do and God honored him.

What is your place? What role do you occupy in your church, in your community, in your nation?

Yes, there's hope for our country. Our hope is God alone.

...

Our Father, help us remember there is hope in You. We pray You will not allow apathy among Your people. Fulfill Your purpose and have Your way in these days and in our generation. Help us not lose sight of the transcendent values of the Word of God and of the God of the Word. We cannot be perfect because we are human. But Lord, we seek to be men and women who live for You and who make a difference in our community. Make us men and women of hope. Make us modern-day Josiahs and Jeremiahs, and turn our nation back to You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.



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