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President Donald Trump speaks with reporters at Joint Base Andrews, Md., Sunday, April 12, 2026, after he returned from Miami. (AP Photo/Julia Demaree Nikhinson)

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Washington — April 23, 2026

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The scriptural passage that President Donald Trump read in a livestreamed [Bible-reading marathon](#) dates back to the depiction of an ancient event — but it's one that carries a highly charged significance in the current religious and political climate.

It has long been quoted and promoted by those who believe America was founded as a Christian nation and should be one. It's from the seventh chapter of 2 Chronicles, a book in the Hebrew (Old Testament) portion of the Bible.

The 14th verse — the one most often quoted — says:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Trump is among hundreds who are taking turns reading the entire Bible aloud over the course of a week. Most of the readings are taking place at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, though Trump's on Tuesday came by video from the Oval Office.

A passage often quoted at National Day of Prayer events

The Chronicles passage has for decades been a major theme at annual National Day of Prayer events. Organizers of the America Reads the Bible marathon invited Trump to read from it. "It's a powerful statement that he decided to read that passage," said Bunni Pounds, founder of Christians Engaged, which organized the project.

The passage has been recited over the decades at countless rallies, services and events, often organized around [the disputed belief](#) that America was created as [a Christian nation](#) and needs to repent of its sins and return to God. The passage has particularly been associated with annual events commemorating the National Day of Prayer, which has taken various forms since the mid-20th century and became fixed by law on the first Thursday in May since the 1980s.

During the Capitol riot by [a mob of Trump supporters](#) on Jan. 6, 2021, [Couy Griffin](#) — the founder of Cowboys for Trump, a fan club that rode on horseback to Trump's political events — evoked the 2 Chronicles passage while praying to the crowd through a megaphone.

The verse is set in a context far from modern America — during the reign of King Solomon in ancient Israel some 3,000 years ago. Solomon is presiding over the dedication of the first temple in Jerusalem, and in a lengthy prayer he asks for divine mercy if a future generation sins, is punished with military or natural disaster and then repents. In the key passage, God replies with a promise of restoration.

Critics say the passage is used out of context

But the use of the passage in modern settings has its critics.

The Chronicles passage is "a popular verse among Christian nationalists and has been for quite some time," said Brian Kaylor, a Baptist pastor and president and editor-in-chief of Word&Way, a progressive site covering faith and politics.

He said its use has taken on a partisan and polarizing tone, often used in tandem with a promotion of a belief in a Christian America in an increasingly diverse country.

"This verse is not about the United States," said Kaylor, author of "The Bible According to Christian Nationalists: Exploiting Scripture for Political Power." It is "a promise made to one particular person in one particular moment. It doesn't really work to pull it out of context and apply it to whatever you want to."

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But many have done so recently and in decades past, either saying America has a divinely ordained destiny similar to ancient Israel's or simply that they believe every nation has a duty to follow God and repent when needed.

President [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) took the oath of office in 1953 with his hand on a Bible opened to the 2 Chronicles passage. President Ronald Reagan quoted the passage in a proclamation declaring 1984's National Day of Prayer. A speaker at the 2024 Republican National Convention also quoted it.

The National Day of Prayer, while officially nonsectarian, has long drawn particular promotion and participation from evangelical Christians. Readings of the "If my people" passage has been a staple of such events.

Politicians, others joining in the Bible-reading marathon

Evangelicals — a loyal Republican voting bloc for decades — have formed a crucial part of Trump's [electoral base](#). His [rallies have featured a fusion](#) of Christian and national symbols and rhetoric, featuring songs like "God Bless the USA" and T-shirts with slogans like "Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president."

Many other Republican politicians are taking part in the Bible reading, along with celebrities, pastors and others. And Trump isn't the only one reading a passage significant to his office or mission.

Mike Huckabee, a Baptist pastor and U.S. ambassador to Israel, was reading from a Genesis passage in which God says he will bless those who bless Abraham — a passage popular with many evangelicals who believe they have a biblical mandate to support Israel.

David Barton, whose Wallbuilders promotes belief in America as a Christian nation, will read from a passage that gave his organization its name, in which Nehemiah rebuilds the broken walls of Jerusalem.