

North Korea Threatens Nuclear Action; Trump Warns of Total Destruction

In the News

In his first address to the United Nations General Assembly, President Donald Trump took aim at North Korea's "reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons" which he said threaten "the entire world with an unthinkable loss of human life." That nation's ruler, Kim Jong Un, whom he called "Rocket Man" due to his increasingly frequent tests of missiles, "is on a suicide mission for himself and his regime," he said, warning that the United States would "have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea" if it jeopardizes America or its allies.

North Korea has ramped up weapons development, saying they are needed to deter American aggression. Recent tests demonstrate that North Korean long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) are now capable of reaching most of the U.S. mainland.

On September 3, Kim detonated a thermonuclear bomb 20 times more powerful than the bomb America dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, toward the end of World War II. The U.N. Security Council responded with sanctions banning exports of North Korea's textiles and limiting its imports of crude oil. North Korea called the sanctions "the most vicious, unethical and inhumane act of hostility to physically exterminate" its people, system and government.

White House National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster said the U.S. was fast running out of patience. "We've been kicking the can down the road, and we're out of road. ... We really have to move with a great sense of urgency on sanctions, on diplomacy and preparing, if necessary, a military option."

But leaders of China, Russia and other nations have urged the United States to refrain from bombastic rhetoric in favor of dialogue and diplomacy. U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said "The United States still wants a peaceful solution and has been waiting for the North Koreans to indicate they are ready to talk."

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and Marine Corps Col. Steve Ganyard, called the options available to the United States "unpalatable," ranging "from dangerous to demonstrably futile." Ganyard expressed little hope in the effectiveness of diplomacy or sanctions, which have failed to deter North Korean aggression for decades.

Many diplomats and military experts believe that pre-emptive strikes against the regime's weaponry would likely trigger such a vicious response that the consequences would be too catastrophic and horrific to fathom. Defense

Secretary Mattis has warned the consequences of any military action would be "tragic on an unbelievable scale" and bring severe risk to U.S. ally South Korea as well as to the American troops stationed in the demilitarized zone between the two Koreas.

Ganyard suggested that the United States and its allies form a perimeter in international waters around North Korea to knock down every missile Kim launches, to minimize his ability to improve and deliver his nuclear weapons.

Since the 1950-53 Korean conflict was halted with an armistice and not a peace treaty, the United States and South Korea are technically still at war with North Korea. It is Kim's stated ambition to reunite North and South Korea under his rule.

Kim Jong Un of North Korea and President Trump have been in a war of words that threatens to escalate into a war with weapons. How do we as Christians decide when and if violence is an appropriate response when words fail to solve conflict?

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Exodus 10:3-4, 7

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me. For if you refuse to let my people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country. ... Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long shall this fellow be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the LORD their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?" (For context, read 10:1-20.)

The Egyptian Pharaoh and Moses were engaged in a clash of wills that could only result in tragedy, since their goals were mutually exclusive: Pharaoh wanted to retain the Hebrews as slaves, and Moses was fighting for their freedom.

The conflict is recorded in Exodus 1-14, and involved threats and counterthreats, a series of deadly plagues, unsuccessful attempts at dialogue and diplomacy, and final deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery, at great cost to the Egyptian leader and his people due to Pharaoh's pride and hardness of heart (10:1, 3).

Questions: How do the leaders in this bible passage and our present day equate? How do you rectify your notion of God with the story of God using

violence and plagues to free the Hebrew people? Do you believe God uses these tactics in present day?

Proverbs 29:8, 11

Scoffers set a city aflame,

but the wise turn away wrath.

... A fool gives full vent to anger,

but the wise quietly holds it back. (For context, read 29:8-12.)

The author of the verses in Proverbs offers guidance that can be useful in interpersonal relationships between individuals as well as in civic and world affairs involving large populations.

U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policy is sometimes encapsulated in the advice to "speak softly and carry a big stick."

Questions: How does current U.S. policy seem to compare with that of Theodore Roosevelt? How might the United States apply this verse to the tension between our nation and North Korea? Is it ever appropriate or helpful to breathe fire and threats?

Joshua 6:13-16

The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD passed on, blowing the trumpets continually. The armed men went before them, and the rear guard came after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets blew continually. On the second day they marched around the city once and then returned to the camp. They did this for six days. On the seventh day they rose early, at dawn, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city." (For context, read 6:1-21.)

In this passage, Joshua led the Israelites in a strange siege of the city of Jericho that must have been unsettling to the residents. We can imagine that the city dwellers, curious about this odd military strategy, might well have gathered in increasing numbers on the wall to see the parade while deriding the marchers. Their threatening appearance, accompanied by the dramatic simultaneous raising of a war cry, likely would have filled the citizens of Jericho with dread.

Questions: Are there times when Christians might be perceived as a threat by non-Christians? Is it appropriate for Christians to use threats at any time in their dealings with others? Is there a difference between trusting God to solve

problems and addressing problems directly trusting that you will have God's help?

Matthew 5:38-39

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;" (For context, read 5:38-48.)

This passage, from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, is a direct message discouraging his followers from resorting to retaliation.

Questions: Are there times when it is not appropriate to "turn the other cheek?" In matters of life or death, what does turning the other cheek mean?

Matthew 26:51-53

Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (For context, read 26:36-56.)

This passage from the Gospel of Matthew depicts the scene when Jesus is arrested prior to his death. When an unnamed disciple attempts to defend him by fighting back Jesus admonishes him. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus is depicted taking the additional step of healing the man whom the unnamed disciple struck (22:51).

Questions: Jesus urges his disciples to accept what is to come in order to fulfill the scriptures. Do you ever feel like current events are inevitable and should be allowed to occur without obstruction? As Christians, is it ever appropriate for us to "take the sword?" When is it appropriate to wait for, or ask for, "legions of angels" to intercede on our behalf?

Prayer for Peace Among the Nations (BCP p.816)

Almighty God our heavenly Father, guide the nations of the world into the way of justice and truth, and establish among them that peace which is the fruit of righteousness, that they may become the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.