

Message on Commemorating 250 Years of the Bible in the United States

April 17, 2026

This week, I send my best wishes to every citizen gathered at the Museum of the Bible, on the National Mall, and all across our country participating in America Reads the Bible, a historic initiative in which nearly 500 Americans will take part in a public reading, over the course of 1 week, of the entire Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—to celebrate 250 years of the Bible in America.

From Christopher Columbus' arrival in the New World and the first permanent English-speaking settlement at Jamestown to our founding in 1776 and to the present day, the Bible has been indelibly woven into our national identity and way of life. Nearly 400 years ago, a decade after the arrival of the Mayflower, the legendary John Winthrop powerfully invoked Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: "We must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us," Winthrop said, imploring his fellow Christian settlers to stand as a beacon of faith for all the world to see.

In the decades that followed, the truths of Holy Scripture remained deeply embedded in our culture, not only within the walls of our churches, but in our homes, schools, courtrooms, and public square. Nearly 150 years after Winthrop's storied sermon, on July 4, 1776, our Founders echoed Holy Scripture in the central animating principle of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

From the declaration of those immortal words at the very beginning of our Republic, and ever since, the Bible has enduringly illuminated our system of Government, given life to our constitutional framework, bolstered our educational institutions, and informed our deepest civic and moral identity. The 1787 Northwest Ordinance—one of our Nation's earliest and most formative laws—stated that "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." Two decades later, John Adams, our second President, wrote the following to his fellow Founding Father Benjamin Rush: "The Bible contains the most profound Philosophy, the most perfect Morality, and the most refined Policy, that ever was conceived upon Earth."

In every generation, through every trial and triumph, God's Word has guided our people and our country to incredible new heights. During the first Inauguration, George Washington, setting a precedent for all future Presidents, put his left hand on the Bible and took the oath of office, after which he kissed the Bible. In his First Inaugural Address Washington stated: "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than those of the United States." In President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, he quoted the Bible 4 times, mentioned God 14 times, and invoked the power of prayer 3 times as he sought to bring the country back together after a bloody 4-year Civil War. As more than 70,000 American troops prepared to land on the beaches of Normandy, President Franklin D. Roosevelt took to national radio and prayed that God's blessings prevail over "the unholy forces of our enemy." And at the height of the cold war and the righteous crusade that he led to defeat atheistic communism, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed 1983 to be the Year of the Bible, writing: "Of the many influences that have shaped the United States of America into a distinctive Nation and people, none may be said to be more fundamental and enduring than the Bible."

Today, during our 250th year of American independence, the America Reads the Bible initiative invites all citizens to once again acknowledge our Nation's extraordinary Biblical foundations and to give thanks for the countless ways in which God has been the sacred source of our unity and national strength. This 1-week event, during which leaders in faith, Government, business, and entertainment will read every verse and chapter of the Bible, will inspire countless citizens to rediscover the Biblical truths that have animated our Republic for two and a half centuries and to pray that the Bible will continue to guide us—as individuals, as a people, and as a Nation—for the next 250 years and beyond.

I applaud every citizen participating in the America Reads the Bible initiative. Together, we will honor Holy Scripture, renew our faith, usher in a historic resurgence of religion on American shores, and rededicate the United States as one Nation under God.

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