

The Story: The Beginning of the End

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[0 : 00] So, good morning, Bremar Baptist. I've mentioned it before, and I'm a big fan of the Edmonton Oilers. So, I'm just going to, just as a reminder, this is the subtle hat I have.

I have some that have the logo. This one, Emily likes this one because she said it's not so painfully nerdy as a fan. So, I mentioned before that I'm a big fan of the team, right? I have a confession to make that on nights when the Oilers are playing, as often as my schedule allows, I am glued to the TV.

We need a support group. So, I absolutely erupt. Ask Emily. I erupt into shouts of joy when the team scores, and I get really bummed when they get scored on.

Can anyone relate? And just like that little dust cloud, if you know the Peanuts comics, that little dust cloud that follows Pigpen around, when the Oilers lose, there is a dark cloud that follows me around the house.

It settles over my head. I'm not particularly a happy camper. And you can ask Michelle. Everybody's thinking, go Oilers, please, go Oilers, because it's not going to be that good if they lose.

[1 : 20] So, there we go. So, Roger's Place. So, I love the games.

The highs for sure, and at times the lows as well. At least when I hope the team, I'm hoping they can rally and make a comeback. And we've seen that happen, right?

Your team gets down, and they bounce back. Sometimes, like last season, your team gets down and can't come back. And then it happens again and again.

So, I've been to a handful of games in person and watched lots on TV. But have you ever noticed what happens when the home team gets behind? If you're a hockey fan, your team, and if that's not the Oilers, I'm willing to pray for you specifically on that front.

They get behind by a few goals, and it's the third period, right? There's 20 minutes left to the game. I'm getting grins from people that I know are Oilers fans.

[2 : 26] And if you look around in the stands, if you're at home or if you're at the game, people start to leave, don't they? There's a point where that margin, that comeback push is possibly not possible anymore.

Or if you're a baseball fan, the clock is winding down, and your team is down by 30 points. People start basketball. I said baseball. You're a basketball fan, and people start to leave the gym, right?

You see that happen. Not to the Raptors, but you see that happen. People walk out. Football fans, Noel, see their team get down by a touchdown or a field goal, and they can't stand the pressure.

Or they fear the worst, that their team won't be able to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. And if a team is down by enough of a margin, that hope is starting to seem lost.

And even the most diehard fans will start heading for the doors to beat the rush to the parking lot. I've been there. It stinks.

[3 : 38] But when a team has a shot, when there's time to get back in the game, people will stay glued to their seats. But when that team is losing by a landslide, we lose interest very quickly.

And I also recognize that for some of you that are listening right now, you're actually probably thinking, hmm, I wonder if Flip or Flop is on HGTV this afternoon.

Because you can't relate. But stay with me. What's true in the world of sports is also true at this point in our series on the story.

At a certain point, the northern kingdom of Israel was in such bad shape, they were so rebellious, that there was no way they were going to turn things around.

So using that sports analogy, there was still time on the clock, but the end result was clear for everyone to see.

[4 : 45] Our sermon this morning is titled, The Beginning of the End. And if you read that on the bulletin, and we're hoping we're going to dive into some really meaty, exegetical study of some apocalyptic literature, sorry.

So this is not a sermon on Revelation. We're actually going to look at how bad things got for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. We're going to be looking at the beginning of the end for Israel. Things were hopeless for the northern kingdom of Israel, but they were even looking hopeless for the southern kingdom of Judah. But sometimes, as we've recognized this morning already, a team can rally, even when it seems there's no chance of a comeback, against all odds. So if you were here last week, or listened to that sermon online, you'll remember that human beings got God's people into a lot of trouble.

Do you remember that? So you don't need to, there'll be a test after the sermon, so study this closely. Don't worry about not being able to read the names.

[5 : 59] The nation split into two smaller, weaker nations. And during the time of the divided kingdom, you can see them all here, there were 38 kings in all.

38. And you can even see there are some familial connections, there are children and so on, there are even connections between the two lines of kings.

Between 931 and 587 BC, that's a span of 344 years, there was a combined total of 38 kings. Now granted, there were many factors involved in the beginning and the end of the reign of each king, in both Israel and Judah. But in a basic sense, I did the math, not good at math, but I can do it when I need to.

That's an average of just over roughly nine years per king of ruling. So by comparison, Queen Elizabeth II, who is now, by the way, the longest reigning monarch of all time, has reigned for 65 years.

[7 : 19] One ruler, 65 years. Go Liz. But the history of God's people is such a stark contrast, isn't it?

Like granted, Queen Elizabeth's kingdom has largely been united. Hence the name. The United Kingdom. And scripture teaches us that of those 38 kings, only five, believe it or not, not great odds, only five were good kings.

Kings who followed God and sought his will for the people. That's the definition of good king. The other 33 kings, as the Bible says, did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

And as we learned last week, over a span of 208 years, sorry, lots of numbers this morning, 208 years, more than two generations of people, God sent nine prophets to the northern kingdom. Nine prophets. But the people still refused to listen, refused to obey, refused to return to God. See the faithfulness of God there?

[8 : 35] Two generations. He will not give up. He still has not given up on us. So let's take a little bit of a closer look at the situations in the two kingdoms.

The northern kingdom, Israel, fell to the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. More numbers. The Bible says in 2 Kings 17, verse 13, let's read this together.

The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers, turn from your evil ways, observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire law that I commanded your ancestors to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants, the prophets.

That's a pretty clear message, isn't it? If you heard this message, it would make sense to you, wouldn't it? Right?

It's fairly clear, I would say. It doesn't really seem to be open to interpretation to you, does it?

There's nothing unclear about that. Listen or follow along in your Bibles as I continue on in verses 14 and 15.

[9 : 56] Now, what we're looking at here is how did the people respond to that very clear message that God gave them? Let's listen to this. But they would not listen and were stiff-necked as their ancestors who did not trust in the Lord their God.

They rejected his decrees and the covenant that he had made with their ancestors and the statutes that he had warned them to keep. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them. Although the Lord had ordered them, do not do as they do. So let me pick this apart a little bit here for us.

Let's dig in a little deeper and consider a few phrases. The people were compliant, right? No. The passage says the people were stiff-necked.

That doesn't mean you need a chiropractor. That means they were stubborn. So they didn't really prefer God's statutes and his covenants with them, right?

[11:15] No. They, the words are, rejected them. They chased after what they wanted.

The Bible, this passage says, worthless idols. And in doing that, they themselves became, as the passage I read says, worthless.

They deliberately chose not to follow God, but to imitate other nations around them. Does it sound familiar?

As we talked about a few weeks ago, God's people wanted what everyone else had, not what was good for them. God's perfect will and perfect plan for them was there, and they chose to ignore it. The people were warned that choosing their own way and being stubborn would not wind up in their best interests. But they chose that anyway.

[12:23] Ultimately, the ten tribes in the north are conquered by the Assyrians and sent into exile. And they become known as the lost tribes of Israel.

The Bible says in 2 Kings 17, verse 18, let's read this together. So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence.

Have you ever said the words, get out of my sight? Have you ever been so angry that you said that?

Possibly you've had that said to you, or possibly you've said it to someone else. Think about that for a second. Because that concept is the exact idea here behind God removing the people of Israel from his presence.

Imagine the implications of that. Regardless of any previous relationship or connection we've had, I don't want to interact with you.

[13:35] It's an old expression now, ish, but talk to the hand. Right? I'm not interested. I don't want to talk to you. In fact, I'm so done with you right now that I can't even stand the sight of you.

So now let's turn to the southern tribe of Judah, whose fate seems to have been somewhat different. Let's begin by looking at what the Bible says in 2 Kings 18, verse 19.

Let's read this together. The field commander said to them, Tell Hezekiah, This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says.

On what are you basing this confidence of yours? So let me just give you a little context there. A messenger is sent from the king of Assyria to the king of Judah, Hezekiah.

They have recognized that Hezekiah will not bend to their declaration of authority over them as a nation. So he recognizes this to the point where he sends a messenger and says, Who do you think you are, first of all?

[14:52] And where do you get this confidence from? So it's important to recognize that Judah had been ruled by both good and bad kings up to this point.

And so one of the good kings that we learn about in Scripture was Hezekiah. He was a good king who trusted God. After Hezekiah received the message from the Assyrian king, we read about what Hezekiah's next move was.

We read about it in 2 Kings 19, 14-19, and I'll read this for us. So have a listen. Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it.

Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord. Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth.

You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, Lord, and hear. Open your eyes, Lord, and see. Listen to the word Sennacherib has sent.

[16:13] Sennacherib was the Assyrian king. Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God. It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands.

They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them. For they were not gods, but only wood and stone fashioned by human hands. Now, Lord our God, deliver us from His hand.

Listen to this. So that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, Lord, are God.

Do you see the perspective there? Deliver us, not for our sake, Lord, but for yours, so that our deliverance will point people to you.

Hezekiah recognized God and praised Him. He recognized God's provision, His authority, as you've heard here, His protection, and most importantly, His perfect will.

[17 : 26] On behalf of His people, Hezekiah had submitted to God and asked for Him to intervene on behalf of His people.

And in 2 Kings 19, 35-37, we learn that God answered Hezekiah and that 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were defeated.

That they broke camp and retreated. In contrast, we're going to look at Manasseh, who was Hezekiah's son.

And he, my friends, was an evil king. In the book of Isaiah, chapter 3, we learn that God sent the prophet Isaiah to warn Manasseh that God would use the Babylonians as His tool of judgment and that the people would ultimately be sent into exile.

So we know that judgment and exile would come to Judah as well. But I want to point you to the book of Isaiah, chapter 14.

[18 : 45] Why? We don't have time to read that whole chapter this morning as much as I would like to. But I encourage you to do that on your own.

Isaiah, chapter 14, is an amazing love letter to God's people from their Creator. The chapter recounts the rebellion of the people, but it also reminds them that they are still chosen and valued by God.

It recounts their exiles and judgment, but it also speaks of how God will work in and through them ultimately for the greater good of all people.

And later in the book of Isaiah, the prophet begins to speak more directly to how God will keep His promise to Judah specifically as He restores them to their rightful place.

The Bible says in Isaiah 49, verse 23, let's read this together. Kings will be your foster fathers and their queens your nursing mothers.

[19 : 59] They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground. They will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Those who hope in me will not be disappointed. Let that last phrase stick in your head and penetrate your heart this morning.

Those who hope in me will not be disappointed. But how specifically will God bless the nation of Judah?

You may be wondering. And perhaps you already know this. But that original line of David continued through Judah.

Continued through that southern kingdom. And it would eventually lead to, directly to, the Messiah.

[20 : 57] To Jesus. To the Son of God incarnate. God's ultimate plan for His people, and Judah in particular, was to play a significant role in His ultimate plan.

not just for the people of Israel, or for Judah, but for all of humanity. That small, seemingly insignificant tribe of Judah, that little nation, would ultimately be a blessing to the whole world.

I want you to think about prophecy for a moment. When a prophecy is fulfilled, and we can look back in hindsight, hopefully it seems miraculous, right?

Hopefully we can see they said that, and 2,000 years later, that happened? It's pretty amazing. But I wonder if at times, does prophecy to us, especially Bible prophecy, become mundane?

Become not that exciting? Not that inspiring? Is it possible that we might actually take the Old Testament prophecies for granted? Even those that refer to Jesus?

[22 : 27] Let's stop and recognize for a moment that 700 years, 700 years, before Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah provided a character sketch of the Messiah. 700 years, folks. Isaiah chapter 3 is full of this.

53, sorry, 3. So listen as I read some selections from this chapter for us. And again, read 53 from beginning to end.

Isaiah 53, verses 1 to 7. Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind.

[23 : 39] A man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced. I'm going to try and get through this part. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was on him. And by his wounds we are healed.

We all like sheep have gone astray. Each one of us turned to our own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[24 : 43] He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

And now to Isaiah 53 verses 10 and 11. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer.

And though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days. And the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

700 years. Is that more amazing? Seems like Jesus to me. It's easy for us to read or hear these words and think, knowing this was God's ultimate plan for his people, for all people, how could anyone ever have chosen to do otherwise?

How could anyone ever have missed that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus? How could anyone miss that? And that's probably a fair question.

[26 : 18] But I believe we can also ask ourselves, having the benefit of not only knowing the prophecies, but also knowing those same prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus, we have the benefit of both.

faith. How is it that you and I can still manage to find ways to choose our own path over God's path for us?

How is it that we can choose to fit in, in so many ways in our lives, instead of standing out for the right ones?

Jesus. This is one of my favorite pictures of Jesus. Artist's interpretation, of course, because she didn't meet him.

700 years before Jesus, Isaiah said, this is the kind of Messiah you should be looking for.

[27 : 27] it's pretty specific stuff. That same Messiah, that same Jesus, is still here for you and for me today.

That same Jesus is offering us freedom and joy beyond any we could ever create for ourselves. my friends, if you've accepted what Jesus is offering you, if you accepted his offering of grace and salvation, I celebrate with you.

But remember to return to that gift every day. And if you have no idea what I'm talking about, or very little, please come and talk to me about it and what it can mean for you.

And I'm going to say it again, if you have accepted that offer to you already, please, I beg you, do not be stubborn and hold on to your own expectations for your life and your future.

[28 : 49] fear. Because, my friends, you will continue to face regret over past disappointments. You'll continue to experience present regret day after day.

day. So, my prayer for you, my encouragement for you, is to let go of your expectations for yourself and take hold of God's promises to you.

Let's pray. day. Day. Day. Day. Day. Day. Day. Day. Day.

Day. Day. Day. Day. Day. Day. Day. Day.