

# THE STORY

FINDING YOUR STORY IN GOD'S STORY.

## *Synopsis & Context – Session #16 – The Beginning of the End*

For 209 years, the northern kingdom of Israel had endured one evil king after another. Their failure to keep God's covenant meant the complete relationship breaks-down. Israel is now so far from being the "blessing to all other nations," and would be delivered over to those very nations.

Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, set up a puppet government for the northern tribes of Israel and appointed Hoshea as king. Hoshea was as defiant of Shalmaneser as he was of God. He stopped paying tribute and as a result, the Assyrian army destroyed the capital city of Samaria and captured Hoshea. The king, along with many of his fellow Israelites, was deported by Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II. Here the focus expands beyond the king to that of the people themselves. Idolatry, lack of trust disobedience, paganism and stubbornness provoked God's anger and led Him to expel the northern kingdom from His land.

Meanwhile, just to the south in the kingdom of Judah, godly King Hezekiah was nervously watching these world-shaking events on his northern border. Hezekiah stands out from all of the other kings of Judah for his efforts to remove every vestige of idolatry in the land. He rebelled against the new Assyrian king Sennacherib. The Assyrians sent envoys, claiming that they wanted to negotiate a peaceful surrender with Hezekiah in Jerusalem. Their reasoning was faultless: What other nation had been able to stand against the Assyrian might? Had not God Himself commissioned them for this task? Sennacherib's commander appealed directly to the populace of Jerusalem, speaking to them in Hebrew.

King Hezekiah trusted in the LORD and prayed for deliverance. The prophet Isaiah promised that God would deliver them. What faith it must have taken to trust the prophet's prediction! The angel of the LORD swept through the Assyrians army as they slept. The next morning Sennacherib's camp was littered with 185,000 dead Assyrian soldiers. The army retreated and Judah was saved.

Isaiah had been called to be a prophet during the last year of King Uzziah's life. In a majestic vision of the LORD, he was commissioned to speak for God to turn the people of Judah away from sin and toward their God. He warned that Judah was walking in her sister Israel's footsteps and therefore would reap similar judgment. Unfortunately, he seldom found a listening audience.

Yet even the threat of foreign exile failed to curb the widespread social injustice, moral decay, and religious apostasy. Judah's pride would be her downfall. And although He warned of judgment, the promise does not end. When Israel perceived herself as forsaken and forgotten, her compassionate God would fully restore her. The whole world would know that the LORD is their Savior and Redeemer.



**Chapter #16: *The Beginning of the End* is ‘woven’ from selections from *The Second Book of Kings* and *the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*.**

2 Kings 17—19, Isaiah 3, 6, 13—14, 49, 53

*Plot Points for Chapter 16: The Beginning of the End*

At last, God’s patience with Israel is spent, and the northern kingdom falls to the Assyrian Empire, never to rise again. Judah illustrates what happens when God’s people allow him to be their ally. Even the mightiest empires fall back before him! In Isaiah’s prophecy, we see the clearest witness to the coming Messiah.

Israel lived in the midst of massive empires. To the southwest, mighty Egypt had stood for over a millennium. To the southeast, Babylon was on the rise as a world power. To the northeast, Assyria ruled as the biggest bully on the block. For a smaller nation like Israel, the “logical” way to survive, surrounded by bullies, was to make strategic alliances. Hoshea, the last king of Israel, must have figured, “If one alliance is good, two must be even better.” When Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, discovered that Hoshea had two-timed them with So of Egypt, that was the last straw. Israel would soon be no more.

Israel’s problem was simple: they chose the wrong ally. When Judah faced the same crushing armies of Assyria, they chose the Lord as their ally. In one night, the angel of the Lord laid to waste Assyria’s great military force.

One of the themes that runs straight through the historical books of the Old Testament is that the battle is the Lord’s. As we have seen when Moses sat on a mountaintop with two friends holding up his arms to fight the Amalekites (see Ex. 17:11), or when young David felled a great giant (see 1 Sam. 17:37), the battle is won by the Lord and not by human strength or power. In this case, we hear the same message as the king of Judah stands on the city wall and says to a much larger force, “We trust the Lord.” Sadly, Judah did not remain consistent in that conviction!

*Cf. Barr, Adam Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion (Story, The). Zondervan.*

**God’s Story – YOUR story!**

- **God frequently reminded Israel of examples of his faithfulness, such as their deliverance from Egypt. What would you point to remind a friend of God’s faithfulness?**
- **What is a significant difference that is observed in these sections of *The Story*?**
- **What makes Isaiah stand out for you from other books in the Bible?**
- **What do you feel is the biggest “take away” lesson for our own lives from today’s reading?**