

## **The Story – Chapter 16: *The Beginning of the End***

### **Introduction**

This week, we look at Chapter 16 in *The Story* and finally see what it looks like to have a king who relies on God in times of potential disaster. While the Northern Kingdom literally disappears, Judah in the South renews its devotion to God . . . at least for a while.

Because of all the different characters, these can be some difficult chapters to follow.

These stories are also found in the Bible,

- If you do not have *The Story*, can read 2 Kings 17-19, and Isaiah 3, 6, 13-14, 49 and 53.

### **Summary of Chapters 16 – The Beginning of the End**

To Israel's north, the Assyrian empire grew powerful and threatening. Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, even set up a puppet government for the northern tribes of Israel and appointed Hoshea as king. Later, Hoshea stopped paying tribute and as a result, the Assyrian army destroyed the capital city of Samaria and captured Hoshea. In 722, the king and many of his fellow Israelites were deported by Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II. All those deported were resettled elsewhere in the Assyrian Empire, and gradually assimilated with the other inhabitants. They are now often referred to as the ten lost tribes of Israel.

Meanwhile, just to the south in the kingdom of Judah, King Hezekiah, who was one of the few "good" kings, was nervously watching these 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. In 705, he rebelled against the new Assyrian king Sennacherib, and in response, Assyrian armies conquered many of the other cities in Judah. The Assyrians then sent messengers to tell Hezekiah that it would be wiser to surrender now than to endure the consequences of a continued rebellion. They spoke to the king and appealed directly to everyone living in Jerusalem. Their reasoning was faultless: What other nation had been able to stand against the Assyrian might? Judah could not count on God to protect them.

However, 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 Bible tells us that, much like back in Egypt many years earlier, one night the angel of the Lord swept through the Assyrian 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 reign of one of Judah's earlier kings. 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.

The Book of Isaiah later recounts the prophet's promises of restoration. 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.

In one of his most memorable passages, Isaiah described a Suffering Servant, who was "pierced for our transgressions." Christians later understood these passages as describing Jesus, who redeemed all humanity.

### **Discussion Questions**

As you read, remember there are discussion questions for each chapter beginning on page 473 of the book and also questions that can be found on *The Story* bookmark (which is also on our website). Also, feel free to consider some of the questions below:

1. The end begins when the northern tribes (referred to as Israel) are taken into captivity by Assyria around 722 BC. The southern part of the kingdom, called Judah, would not face God's judgment for about 150 years. How does the decisive and complete judgment of Israel square with the goodness of God? How does it challenge your views about God?
2. The reigns of kings Hoshea and Hezekiah overlapped for about six years. Which king trusted God to be provider and protector for him and his people? Which king was stuck in the ways of this world? How do you know? What was the result?
3. King Sennacherib of Assyria sent his envoy to Jerusalem to persuade King Hezekiah to surrender peacefully, claiming he came on the LORD's orders. Isaiah's message to Hezekiah said otherwise. How do you evaluate people who claim to have a word from the LORD?
4. The Assyrians also tried to convince the people of Judah not to trust God. Whose "voice" is most likely to cause you to doubt God? To whom do you listen when you feel surrounded by stress or fear?  
Can you think of a time someone tried to discourage you or a loved one from trusting God? What happened?
5. What do these stories of kings and their people teach you about leadership?
6. Isaiah thinks he is unworthy to be God's messenger because he is a sinner, but that doesn't stop God from using him. Can you think of a time God broke through your feelings of unworthiness to use you? What happened?
7. God used Isaiah to warn Judah of an imminent judgment. God also provided the promise of restoration through Isaiah. What specific promises might bring you comfort when you need it?