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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

This is the next message in the series I have been preaching called, "Big Events of the Old Testament." I'd like to say that we reach the pinnacle in the history, but actually we have already passed the pinnacle and now are at the low point in all of Old Testament history tonight. It was before Christmas when I preached the last message about Elisha. Let me start over here and give you a brief timeline of everything that took place in the Old Testament. Don't worry! It's going to be the *Reader's Digest* condensed version.

God created the heavens and the earth. He created Adam and Eve and they sinned and because they sinned, they were cast out of the Garden of Eden. Because Adam sinned we all inherited that tendency and the guilt of sin. Then, the world became more and more wicked until God had to send a flood. He delivered Noah and his family and the animals. Then, man continued to repopulate the earth until finally God called to a man named Abraham who was in Babylon. He said, "Abraham. Get up and go." Abraham said, "Go where?" God said, "I'll tell you when you get there. Go!" So by faith, Abraham trusted God and he got up and started following God. God entered into a covenant, an agreement, with Abraham and all of his family. He said, "Abraham you are going to have more children than there are stars in the sky, than there are grains of sand on the seashore!" Abraham said, "Yeah!" because he didn't have any children. Eventually, of course, he had Isaac, and then Isaac had Jacob. Jacob had twelve boys and Joseph was one of the young ones and Joseph was hated by his brothers. They sold him into slavery. He went down to Egypt and was thrown into prison and then came before Pharaoh and became the Prime Minister of Egypt. Because there was a famine in the land, Jacob and all of his family moved down to Egypt. They were there for almost four hundred years.

Then there was a Pharaoh who came to the throne who did not know Joseph. So the Jews, the Hebrews, became slaves in Egypt and God had to call out another deliverer. His name was Moses and what a great story it is with Moses! God called Moses when he was eighty and said, "Moses, I want you to go back and tell Pharaoh to let my people go!" Well, you know the story of the Exodus and how finally Pharaoh let them go and they wandered in the wilderness. They came to Kadesh Barnea and God said, "Go in and take the land!" They said, "We can't do that. There are giants in the land! We just don't believe you are big enough, God!" God said, "I'll show you!" So for forty years they wandered in the wilderness until everybody over the age of forty died there and a younger generation led by Joshua came in and conquered the Promised Land.

There issued forth about four hundred years, called "the time of the judges," when specially anointed men and women came to the forefront and because of the gifts God gave them, they provided leadership for the nation of Israel. Then, the nation of Israel started looking around saying, "You know what, God everybody else has a king. We don't have a king. We want a king!" God says, "You don't need a king. I want to be your king!" They said, "Oh, we want a king! C'mon, God." God said, "Okay, you want a king. I'll give you a king. So they got Saul as their first king. Saul stood head and shoulders above everybody else, but was a wicked king. Then, there was a youth named David who slew the giant Goliath and God anointed David to be the next king. During David's leadership, the nation of Israel became a prominent world power in that time. After David died, his son Solomon took the nation of Israel to a point in which they

were highly respected in the civilized world at that time! There was probably no other stronger nation of the earth than during the time Solomon was king over Israel. In fact, the queen of Sheba came all the way from Egypt and said, "I have to check out this guy I've heard about who has all of these riches and he's so wise." When she came to visit him, she said, "The half of what I heard was not true. Solomon, you have passed them all!" Well sometimes when you get rich and things start going easy, that's when there is danger of falling into traps of sin and laziness. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, came to the throne and some of the leaders of some of the tribes said, "Now, Rehoboam, your father, Solomon, was pretty tough on us. Ease up on us a little bit." Rehoboam said, "You think my dad was tough? Just wait until I get tough with you! I'm going to double the tax load he put on you." When that happened, ten of the tribes broke away and the nation was divided. This happened in the year 922 B.C. The northern kingdom, the ten tribes, became known as the nation of Israel. Their capitol became the city of Samaria. The southernmost nation of two tribes, Benjamin and Judah, became the nation of Judah where Jerusalem was. So for a number of years there were two separate kingdoms, two dynasties, and two sets of kings.

Over the past few weeks, we have been studying the prophets God sent. He sent Elijah then he sent Elisha and Elisha said, "You guys had better straighten up or you are going to be punished!" Tonight we are going to find that this "unconquerable" nation, God's people—the people with whom he had established a covenant—is going to fall. You'd think God would sooner fall from the heavens above than for these nations to fall. Not so, because these nations collapsed and fell. Tonight we're going to look at that. Actually, it is the fall of *two* unconquerable nations and then we're going to draw some parallels between them and the United States of America.

I. HOW ISRAEL FELL (722 B.C.)

First of all I want to talk about tonight how Israel fell, and it was in 722 B.C.

2 Kings 17:5-6. "The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes."

1. God's people sinned

In 722 B.C. the Assyrian kingdom attacked the northern kingdom of Israel and conquered them, deporting a lot of the people. Do you remember "the woman at the well" in Samaria and the Samaritans in the New Testament in Jesus' time? They are the people who intermarried with these Assyrians, who moved in and became a half-breed race and that is why during Jesus' time the Samaritans in the same territory were considered second-class citizens, because they intermarried with these Assyrians. How did that happen? There's a pattern we're going to see tonight. Here's step number one in the pattern; it always happens: God's people sinned.

2 Kings 17:7-9, 11-12. "All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the

Lord had driven out before them...The Israelites secretly did things against the Lord their God that were not right...At every high place they burned incense, as the nations whom the Lord had driven out before them had done. They did wicked things that provoked the Lord to anger. They worshiped idols, though the Lord had said, ‘You shall not do this.’”

2. God’s prophets warned

The second step in this pattern is this: God’s prophets warned. God always sends prophets to warn people to repent!

2 Kings 17:13, 16. “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 fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.’...They forsook all the commands of the Lord their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal.”

There are three particular incidents here. First of all they made an Asherah pole. Asherah was a fertility cult back in those days, where they actually worshiped the reproductive cycle. Pagan man tended to worship things they didn’t understand and because human reproduction and the reproduction of flocks were fascinating and mysterious, they worshiped it. This was a sexually oriented kind of worship. We would call it moral depravity disguised as religious activity. Then it says that they “bowed down to the starry hosts.” Well they also got into astrology. They started worshiping the stars and the zodiac, looking for the word of God from the stars. They also worshiped Baal. Baal was a word used throughout a number of pagan cultures to describe the greatest of all of their gods. The word *Baal* meant “mighty one” and Baal was worshiped in many ways. In one of the worst ways Baal was worshiped was “they sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger.” (verse 17) In other words, they burned their newborn babies before this altar of Baal. These are God’s “covenant” people!

3. God’s punishment fell

God’s people sinned and God’s prophets warned and number three God’s punishment fell. So that’s the pattern.

2 Kings 17:18-19. “So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, and even Judah did not keep the commands of the Lord their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced.”

This nation that claimed to be blessed by God sinned and did not heed the warning of God’s prophets. God’s judgment fell and suddenly after 722 B.C. there was no more nation of Israel.

II. HOW JUDAH FELL (587 B.C.)

The second thing we are going to look at is how Judah fell. Jerusalem was in the southern

kingdom and God's presence was believed to dwell there in the temple Solomon had built. Let's see the pattern there and let's see if we don't find a completely identical pattern. What happened? Please turn to 2 Chronicles 36. 2 Chronicles is the recounting of the history, with the focus on the nation of Judah rather than the nation of Israel.

2 Chronicles 36:10. "In the spring King Nebuchadnezzar sent for him [king Jehoiachin] and brought him to Babylon, together with articles of value from the temple of the Lord, and he made Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, king over Judah and Jerusalem."

1. God's people sinned

The actual conquering of the southern kingdom took place over a series of about thirty years. First the Babylonians came in and exercised control; this is when they deported Daniel and these other teenagers back to Babylon and said, "We're going to let your city survive and we're going to let your temple survive as long as you pay us tribute and you are good subjects of the Babylonian kingdom." But eventually, that is not what happened. Let's see the pattern again. What happened? Number one, God's people sinned.

2 Chronicles 36:14. "Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem."

We are going to see the same pattern. Even though the southern kingdom was not totally destroyed until 587 B.C.—it lasted almost a couple of hundred years more—they still fell into the same kind of moral depravity and sin.

2. God's prophets warned

Second step in the pattern God's prophets warned again!

2 Chronicles 36:15-16. "The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy."

Some of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament, particularly the prophet Jeremiah, was one of the first prophets who preached to the nation of Judah. Jeremiah said, "Do you think because the temple is here in Jerusalem that Jerusalem will never be destroyed? You are wrong! Unless you repent God is going to come and destroy this temple and destroy this city and destroy this nation!" Do you know what they said to him? Read the book of Jeremiah. "Jeremiah, that will never happen. God would sooner die before the temple would be destroyed. God would have to fall out of heaven dead before Jerusalem, which is the home of God, the city of God, would be destroyed!" Jeremiah said, "You are wrong!" They laughed at Jeremiah and persecuted him. The Bible says he sent a message to the king and the king cut that message up and threw it in the fire. The Bible says they even threw Jeremiah down into a pit and left him to die. He was rescued by some people who loved God. Do you know why they called Jeremiah "The Weeping Prophet?"

It was because when he got the message from God and he looked at Jerusalem and Judah, his heart was so broken, he cried, just like Jesus stood over Jerusalem the week before he was crucified and wept, because Jeremiah saw that Jerusalem—although it was five centuries later—was also going to be destroyed because they were rejecting God again. Jeremiah wept and said, "Repent! Repent!" but they didn't repent.

3. God's punishment fell

The third step in the process, God's punishment fell!

2 Chronicles 36:17, 19. "He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar...They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there."

Put yourself in this place for a moment. How would you feel if suddenly the entire city of Tyler were engulfed in flames? Your house, your schools, all the office buildings, this church, everything was burning and being destroyed. That would be hard to take. What if you had grown up in Jerusalem and you had been told all your life that Jerusalem was indestructible and that the temple of the God of the universe lived there and it will never be destroyed? Josephus tells us what happened the day the Babylonians came in to destroy Jerusalem. All the people in Jerusalem ran to the temple and grabbed hold of it. For the first time, they went over the barricade that was to keep the women and the men and the priests out and got as close as they could and held on to it, because they said, "If I am touching the temple, I won't die!" Yes, they died. The Babylonians ran them through with their swords and then they burned the temple. As far as we know, the Ark of the Covenant was in the temple that day, and there is never any record of the Ark of the Covenant being removed by the Babylonians. As I mentioned to you several weeks ago, there is a group of Orthodox Jewish Rabbis who say they have uncovered evidence that says Solomon in his wisdom had prepared for just such an attack and had prepared a secret hiding place deep below the temple mount for the Ark of the Covenant. Be that as it may, all I am saying is that the Bible never speaks of what happened to the Ark of the Covenant, but the temple was totally leveled!

2 Chronicles 36:21. "The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah."

Okay get out your pencil and write down these numbers. When the nation of Israel was established as a kingdom God said, "Not only do I want you to practice a weekly sabbath, the seventh day you should always rest, I want you to practice every seventh year a year of Jubilee and on the seventh year, the land has to rest!" Israel didn't do that, Judah didn't do that. From King Saul to King Zedekiah was 490 years. For 490 years Judah went without taking a yearly sabbath. 7 into 490 is 70 years. How many years was Judah taken off into captivity? 70 years. God said, "If you had just obeyed me, if you had must followed my precepts and my principles, this never would have happened."

Now turn back a few chapters in 2 Chronicles to a very familiar passage of scripture, because I want to make an application to where we are today. If there is any verse in 2 Chronicles that you are familiar with, it is chapter 7, verse 14. But you may not know the context into which it was spoken. The day Solomon dedicated this beautiful new temple, God gave them this ultimatum:

“If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Isn't that a great promise? That's what God is saying to *all* of his people, not just to nations. He is saying that to individuals. “If you are my people if you will just do that, I promise to bless you.” Had Israel done that they never would have been conquered. Had Judah done that they never would have been conquered. But sometimes we only read verse 14. Everybody knows that verse. It's on posters, it's on little cards to memorize. This is the other side of the coin that sometimes people never read:

“But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword [that word means *a joke*] and an object of ridicule among all peoples. And though this temple is now so imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and say, ‘Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt.’” (2 Chronicles 7:19-21)

God said to the people of Israel the same thing he is saying to us today. He is saying, “One side of the coin says this: ‘If you will humble yourselves and pray and seek my face and turn from your wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and I will forgive your sins and I will heal your land but if you forsake my commands and you forsake worshiping me and you go after other gods and you worship them, I will make a joke out of you and your destruction will become a proverb among all the people of the land.’” You say, “Pastor, are you talking about the United States of America now?” That's very difficult to do, because there is a tremendous distinction. God has never formally entered into a covenant with the United States of America, so you cannot say we are exactly like Judah and we are exactly like Israel but it is true and we all know America was founded on godly principles by godly people. I don't think we can just lay the blame on our American culture. I think the blame still lies with us, who are for sure the people of God, and when the Bible says in 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If my people which are called by my name” he's not talking about Americans there he's talking about those of us who are part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are his people! We are called by his name! If God does send judgment on America, I think it will be because of God's people—Christians who forsook the Lord. Many more homes have been destroyed by termites than by tornados. If America falls, I don't think it will be some foreign nation coming in and destroying America. It will be because of the moral decay from within.

CONCLUSION

I finish with what Paul Harvey wrote one time.

"If I were the devil...If I were the Prince of Darkness, I would set about to take over the United States.

I would begin with a campaign whispering with the wisdom of a serpent 'the Bible is a myth!'

I would convince Americans that man created God instead of the other way around!

I would whisper that what is bad is good and what is good is not cool!

In the ears of the unmarried I would whisper that work is debasing and that cocktail parties are good for you!

I would caution young adults not to be extreme in religion, patriotism or in moral conduct.

And to the old I would teach them to pray and to say after me, 'Our father which art in Washington!'

Then I would get organized. I would educate authors on how to make lewd literature exciting so that anything else would appear dull and uninteresting.

I would threaten TV with dirtier movies and vice versa.

I would peddle narcotics to whoever would buy them.

I would sell alcohol to ladies and to gentlemen of distinction.

I would tranquilize everyone else with prescription medicines.

If I were the devil, I would encourage schools to refine young intellects but neglect to discipline their emotions and encourage them to run wild.

I would designate an atheist to front for me before the Supreme Court and I would even have people say, 'She is right!' With flattery and promise of power I would get the courts to vote against God in favor of pornography.

Then I would evict God from the courthouse then from the schoolhouse then from the House of Congress then from his own churches.

I would substitute psychology for the Bible and defy science. That way men would become "smart" and I would be able to control them.

If I were Satan, I would make the symbol of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a

liquor bottle.

If I were the devil, I would take from those who had and give to those who won't work until I kill the incentive of the ambitious and then my police state would force everybody to do my work.

If I were Satan, I would just keep on doing what I'm doing and watch while the nation goes to Hell!"

The Bible says everything in the Old Testament ought to serve as a pattern to us. Let me remind you once again of that pattern when God's people sinned and God's prophets warned there was no repentance and God's punishment fell. Wouldn't it be wonderful if as God's people we could change that pattern, reverse the trend? And we could see in our own lives not only those sins that we do that are wrong but those good things that we ought to be doing that we don't do because the Bible says, "To him that knows to do good and does it not to him it is sin!" Wouldn't it be wonderful if as the people of God, we would repent and become pure so God could bless us and we could be a blessing to our nation?

OUTLINE

I. HOW ISRAEL FELL (722 B.C.)

The pattern:

1. God's people sinned
2. God's prophets warned
3. God's punishment fell

II. HOW JUDAH FELL (587 B.C.)

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