

Sin

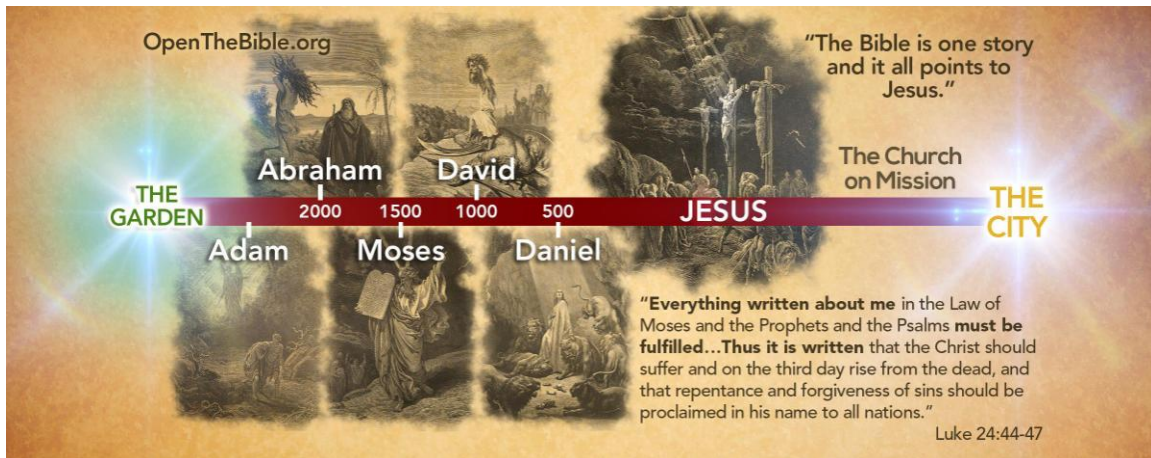
2 Kings 17

Why Avengers - Endgame might be the best movie of all time:

1. There is a plan
2. We have a mission
3. We must work as a team
4. A hero must die (it is the only way)
5. It's all about restoring relationships

Stories are always most compelling when they illustrate THE STORY of God's work in salvation history. In our *Open the Bible* series we have covered a lot of ground in just a few short months. Here is a snapshot of the story so far (which you have in your worship program):

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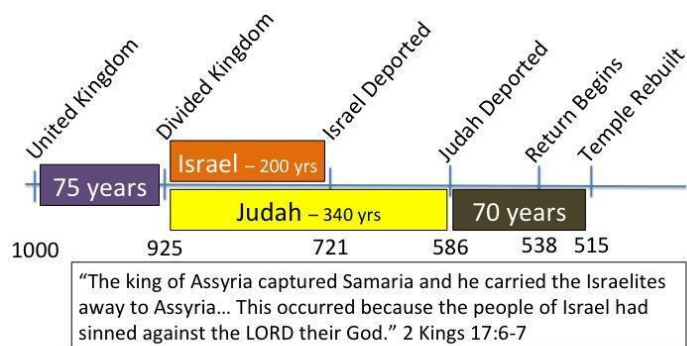
You can visualize the whole story of the Bible with just **five Old Testament names**. The story begins in the garden with Adam and Eve, and it ends in the City with believers from every tongue and tribe and nation! Abraham, Moses, David and Daniel serve as key characters in the story, coming along roughly every 500 years in the run up to the arrival of Jesus – who is the central character in the whole story.

Notice Luke 24 as Jesus explains to his disciples how it all fits together:

“Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled... Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.” Luke 24:44-47

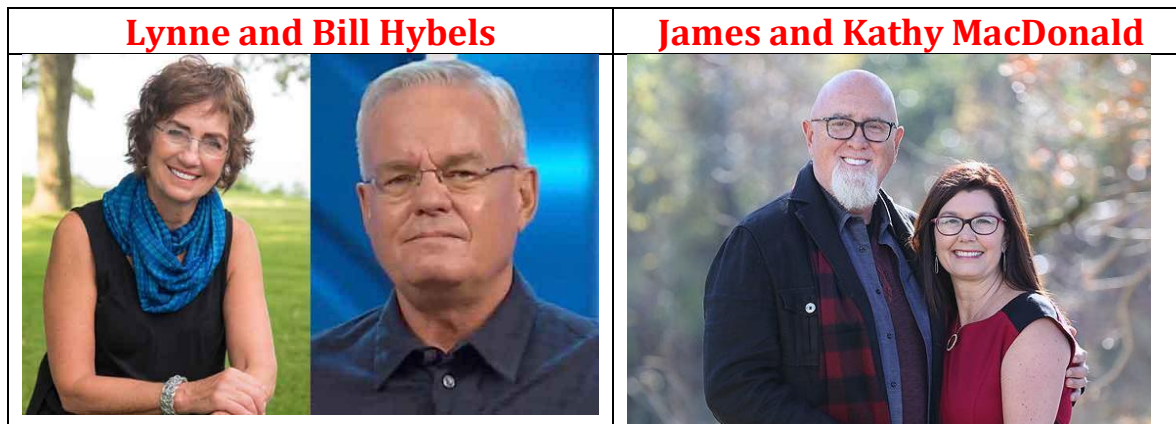
The whole Bible is one story - and it all points to Jesus! In our series we have talked about creation with **Adam**, God's covenant promises to **Abraham**, the deliverance from Egypt and the giving of the Law under **Moses**, the conquest of the Land and the establishment of the kingdom under **David**. Today we look ahead to the time of the exile, when **Daniel** - the faithful Jewish prophet - found himself in Babylon.

Why did the northern kingdom get carried off into exile after just 200 years? Why did the southern kingdom of Judah get conquered and deported after just 400 years? The answer is right here in our passage: ***“This occurred because the people of Israel had SINNED.”***



Today our topic is SIN. We will talk about ***the NATURE of sin*** and ***the CONSEQUENCES of sin***. Come back next week to learn about RIGHTEOUSNESS! We have to understand the disease before we can apply the proper cure. And, brothers and sisters, ***all of us are afflicted by the same disease called SIN***. Until we recognize that this is our fundamental problem we will not begin to treat the problem with the proper GOSPEL CURE.

I want to illustrate this issue with ***a tale of two pastors*** – both famous, influential men; both men who have greatly impacted me personally.



I’ve pictured both men with their wives very much on purpose. These two men led two of the largest, most influential churches in my hometown of Chicago. Our family attended a Willow Creek campus for one semester while I was in seminary. A leadership conference put on by Bill Hybels and a session he taught was instrumental in helping me identify my spiritual gift of teaching and therefore follow God’s call into ministry. James MacDonald has been one of my favorite preachers to listen to and often quote.

Sadly, ***both of these men were fired from their churches last year*** amid terrible scandal. Hybels was accused of being unfaithful to his wife in a prolonged adulterous relationship in addition to several allegations of inappropriate contact with female staff members over the course of his many years of ministry. MacDonald was accused of a gross abuse of power along with a rejection of all accountability for him even though he enforced strict accountability on all other staff members in his organization.

These were two of the most respected gospel leaders in America. ***How did they allow gross, ongoing patterns of sin to develop in their lives?*** The saddest thing to me is that both men

vehemently deny all allegations and have not shown the slightest indication of repentance. **Let's pause right now to pray.**

It is not hard to find examples of people who have fallen prey to the power of sin – from Israel up to the present day – and even among those who serve as leaders in Christian ministry. ***What causes sin to take root and grow in our hearts and lives?*** And what are its consequences?

The Nature of Sin:

1. Rooted in Unbelief

"They would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God." 2 Kings 17:14

All sin is rooted in unbelief. The devil's first question to Adam and Eve was, ***"Did God really say...?"*** His first and favorite strategy is to get us to question the goodness of God. If you begin to doubt God's plan for you and His goodness in general you will open yourself up to temptations that present what appear to be better offers.

Consider the context here in 2 Kings. In spite of all God had done for the nation of Israel - keeping His promises to Abraham by bringing them into the promised land; providing His law through Moses; driving out many nations stronger than they were and establishing David over a united kingdom, based in Jerusalem. Yet even in David's life ***compromises began to creep in.***

David married nine wives and had several other concubines. By allowing sexual sin into his life, desire began to take root until the temptation with Bathsheba presented itself and David fell into the most despicable sin of his life - committing adultery with the wife of one of his closest friends and then conspiring to have that friend murdered.

David's compromises became Solomon's corruption. David had 9 wives, Solomon had 700 plus 300 concubines - an even 1,000. Solomon's corruption became Jeroboam's idolatry which festered and spread until King Ahab married Jezebel and all prophets of God except Elijah were executed and the whole of Israel was devoted to the worship of Baal and Asherah, and the worship of God was outlawed. We studied that story two weeks ago.

From Ahab to this final word of judgment on Israel, the northern kingdom, more kings followed Ahab's path of idolatry and evil in the sight of the Lord until finally God's patience was exhausted and He sent Israel into exile. **Their rebellion was rooted in UNBELIEF.**

- **David doubted** the goodness of God's plans for marriage to one woman.
- **Solomon doubted** God's goodness to protect the nation without great piles of gold and great numbers of horses and chariots.
- The **other kings doubted** the power of God to provide for their crops, their children, their happiness and security and so they turned to other gods.

Listen again to verse 14:

"They would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God." 2 Kings 17:14. Though God spoke to them through the Law and the prophets they would not listen. They remained stubborn. They hardened their hearts in UNBELIEF. Those were the roots of sin. Let's look at our own hearts:

- ***Do you trust God's plans for your health?*** Illness, especially severe, life-threatening illness, tempts us more than other things to question the goodness of God.
- ***Do you trust God's good plans for your work?*** Unemployment tests our faith to the extreme. And if you don't believe in the Fatherly love of God to meet all of your needs you will give in to the sin of WORRY instead of letting each day worry about itself.
- ***Do you trust God's plans for sex?*** Scripture makes it clear that sex is a good gift to enjoy in a marriage relationship between a man and a woman. All sexual sin is rooted in unbelief. Doubt in the goodness of God's plan and the goodness of His provision for you is what sets you up to go looking for sexual fulfillment outside of the bounds of marriage.
- ***Do you trust God's plans for the future?*** Worry and fear are bound up in UNBELIEF. When we root our plans and efforts in the pursuit of God's kingdom and His righteousness we don't have to worry!

All sin is rooted in unbelief. If we truly, firmly, unshakably believed in the goodness of God we would never turn away from God and His way. Sin is first of all rooted in unbelief. Secondly, it rises from the desires in our own hearts.

The Nature of Sin:

2. Rising from the Desires in our Hearts

"The people of Israel had sinned... and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations... And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger." 2 Kings 17:9-11

This passage piles sin upon sin. "The people did secretly against the LORD their God... they built high places... they set up pillars and Asherim..." Even though the Lord clearly commanded them "You shall not do this" yet they persisted in their sinful desires.

James explains why this is so:

The Nature of Sin:

2. Rising from the Desires in our Hearts

"Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed **by his own desire**. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.." James 1:14-15

James makes it clear that God is never the source of evil or temptation. **The source of sin is evil desire embedded in our own hearts.** So when you consider your life – the good, the bad and the ugly – it's vital to properly diagnose the problem. Yes, there is sin in the world and no doubt there is sin in other people. But your biggest problem, ***your deepest disease, is the sin embedded in your own heart.***

My biggest problem is my own sinful desire. Unbelief opens the door to desire. Desire is secretly conceived in the depths of our hearts where it begins to grow. Eventually sinful desires grow up and become visible for all to see. But in their beginnings they dwell in the deep, secret darkness inside of us.

Remember **Bruce Banner's reveal** in the first Avengers movie? How he was able to instantly become the Hulk whenever he wanted to? Everyone knew that Banner became the Hulk when he was angry. The secret to quickly becoming the Hulk, he told them, was that he was ALWAYS

angry. Basically *his anger was always simmering just below the surface* and it just needed a little trigger to be released.

What a picture of sin! If we let sinful desire simmer in our hearts and minds all it will take is a small trigger and it will explode. Angry words and actions certainly illustrate this. Desire is conceived quietly, secretly, deep down, but growing day by day, moment by moment, if we let it.

The Nature of Sin:

2. Rising from the Desires of our Hearts

“Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” James 1:15

“Desire dwelt upon makes sin a matter of time.” James MacDonald

James MacDonald said years ago: “Desire dwelt upon makes sin a matter of time.” He applied that mainly to sexual temptation. If you dwell on the desires of your flesh then it’s just a question of timing. ***You are building up the motive and just waiting for the opportunity.*** Sadly, MacDonald perceived this danger related to sexual sin but he did not guard against it related to the sin of PRIDE. His desire for influence and prestige grew steadily in his heart until it overcame him. He let it simmer and build up until it spewed on people around him.

And that is the third truth about the nature of sin:

The Nature of Sin:

3. Resulting in a Growing Power in our Lives

“They despised his statutes and his covenant... and the warnings... They went after false idols and became false.” 2 Kings 17:15

Sin is not just bad choices that we make. Sin is a growing power in our hearts. If we are not aware of it, sin will grow and grow until it masters us. Remember God’s warning to Eve and later to Cain? ***“Sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it.”***

As the northern kingdom of Israel persisted in their rebellion and idolatry do you see the result? They went after false gods and thereby BECAME FALSE. ***Their idolatry mastered them.*** Sin came of age and gave birth to death. Their simmering evil finally boiled over. And the trouble with sin is that you never know when it will boil beyond your control.

Again, think of **King David**. He thought that he could dabble in some sexual sin. He thought a little compromise to be like kings of other nations was ok for him. So he not only married 9 women but he took other concubines as well. Personally, I like how ***Veggie Tales presents this as King George*** and his closet full of rubber duckies – arguably the best Veggie Tales video of all time. “Don’t question the king’s grammar – it had to rhyme!”



So there is David in his palace with a closet full of duckies. But he sees another rubber ducky down in the city, on a rooftop nearby. And suddenly all of his other duckies just aren’t good enough anymore – he has to have THAT one. So, being the king, he goes and gets

it. (Remember, we are talking about a married woman – don't get lost in the rubber ducky metaphor.)

Remember, this was not David as a young man. He was not in his 20s at this point, but in his 50s. This was David AFTER all of his great victories. He had driven out the Philistines and all other remnants of the Canaanite tribes. He had written dozens of Psalms under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He truly was a man after God's own heart. But in the background of an otherwise godly life, David let his sexual desire (sorry – his love of duckies) grow until it reached a sizzling simmer. And that desire being dwelt upon made sin a matter of time.

Finally, seeing Bathsheba, the desire boiled over and consumed David. **What sinful desire is simmering in your heart?**

- **Is it anger?** Did someone hurt you and you nurse your anger and rehearse the injustice of it?
- **Is it lust?** Is there something or someone that you want and you secretly dwell on those desires?
- **Is it greed?** Do you have a simmering interest in making more and more money for yourself?
- **Is it pride?** Do you deeply long for attention, applause, affirmation and recognition?
- **Is it laziness?** Do you long for comfort and spend your days dreaming about your next vacation?
- **Is it food?** Do your physical appetites consume your thoughts?
- **Is it vanity?** Are you always thinking about how you look and how much you weight and what people think of you?

These are rightly called the 7 DEADLY SINS because that is what they are – deadly. Sin is rooted in unbelief, rising from desires in our hearts and resulting in a growing, overwhelming power in our lives. Left untreated this disease will lead to death.

We've seen where sin comes from, now let's look at what sin leads to.

The Consequences of Sin:

1. Judgment

“They sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, *provoking him to anger*. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel *and removed them from his sight*.” 2 Kings 17:17-18

Sin by definition is a breaking of God's law. God's standards of right and wrong are established by His own righteous character and as such are unchangeable. When we break God's law we provoke Him to anger and invite His judgment. The judgment of God is pictured in the prophets as a boiling goblet filled with His wrath. The book of Revelation shows seven bowls of God's wrath being poured out to consume the whole world.

Evil makes God angry. ***Think how you would feel if your daughter was kidnapped and abused by evil men.*** That is how God feels whenever we sin against someone – like we have just kidnapped and abused one of His children. A man who was consumed by his lustful desires finally turned to the Lord in repentance when he flipped on his TV and heard God say in his heart, “Which of my daughters will you violate tonight?”

The exile of Israel was God's judgment upon them since their ongoing, unrepentant sin continually provoked Him to anger.

The Consequences of Sin:

2. Suffering

"And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and *afflicted them* and gave them into the hand of plunderers." 2 Kings 17:20

Sin leads to suffering because sin is slavery. "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin." Our sinful desires are cruel tyrants. Israel doubted the goodness of God to rule over them, but what they got by rejecting God's rule was the terrible rule of the Assyrian Empire. This was one of the cruelest civilizations in all of history – helpfully portrayed by Veggie Tales as "fish-slappers." A nation of warriors, they conquered by fear and mutilated the corpses of those they defeated, hanging heads and body parts around cities they demolished so that survivors would tell of their power and others would bow before them.

<https://www.hopechannel.com/au/read/terrorists-of-the-ancient-world>

It was Assyrian policy to deport those they conquered as a way of maintaining control over them. This they did to Israel, carrying them off into a distant land. The consequence for Israel's sin was affliction by this cruel foreign nation for generation after generation.

Sin leads to judgment, suffering and ultimately it leads to death. Listen to these sobering verses:

The Consequences of Sin:

3. Death

"And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel... *until he had cast them out of his sight...* the LORD removed Israel out of his sight." 2 Kings 17:20,23

Physical death is not the worst thing – spiritual death is. The Bible calls the final judgment "the second death." Revelation describes it as being cast into the lake of fire with the devil and his demons. Here in 2 Kings the exile is a picture of that final judgment – Israel being cast out of the loving presence and blessing of the LORD.

Jesus described the final judgment as those being cast out into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. What greater fear, what greater pain, what greater regret could there be than to be utterly, finally, and permanently cast out of the presence of God?

But that is precisely what sin does. Sin cannot be in the holy presence of God any more than darkness can be in the presence of light. When God comes near, sin is driven out.

So that leaves all people with two options: ***conceal your sin now and Jesus will expose it later; or confess your sin now and Jesus will cover it!***

- If you conceal our sin – in denial or defensiveness or delay, Jesus will have no choice but to reveal it on the day of judgment, bringing God's righteous anger to bear against you. "Everything hidden in darkness," Jesus said, "Will be brought into the light. Everything whispered in the inner rooms will be shouted from the rooftops."
- But if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness!

Here is the wonderful news of the gospel!

The Consequences of Sin:

1. Judgment
2. Suffering
3. Death

“The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

What we deserve for our sin is judgment, suffering and death. Romans 6 tells us these are the wages we have earned. We have provoked God to anger through our sin, idolatry and rebellion against His Law. We have suffered natural consequences for our sins already. And we will all face physical death one day as the punishment for the sin of Adam and Eve. But the greatest consequence of sin is the second death – to be cast out of God’s presence forever.

Consider – **this is what Jesus endured on the cross for us.** He who knew no sin BECAME sin for us. Though we were the ones who provoked God to anger, Jesus endured that anger for us. Though we were the ones who should suffer for our sins, Jesus suffered in our place. Though we are the ones who should die, forever separated from a holy God, Jesus DIED and endured that greatest of all agonies when He was forsaken by the Father, covered in the wickedness of sin and cast into outer darkness.

Sin is rooted in unbelief. So we uproot sin most effectively when we dig our roots deeply into God’s Word, ***strengthening our FAITH in who God is and all He has done for us in Christ.*** Don’t get bogged down under the weight of your sin. Focus instead on the glory of Jesus who has paid for your sin. McCheyne said, “For every look at your sin take 10 looks at Jesus!”

We started today with the story of ***two prominent Christian leaders who fell prey to the power of sin in their own hearts and lives.*** Though both men preached about the dangers of sin and the need for accountability from fellow Christians, neither man allowed real accountability in his life. Neither Hybels nor MacDonald took seriously the dangerous and growing presence of sin inside them. Because of that, the power of sin grew until it became a simmering reality that just needed an opportunity to overflow. Hybels preached and wrote about character as “who you are when no one is looking,” yet he developed secret sin. MacDonald preached, “desire dwelt upon makes sin a matter of time,” yet he allowed his desire for greatness lead him into a longstanding pattern of pride.

Of course **King David himself** reminds us that ANYONE can be susceptible to ANY sin if we let down our guard. David started with small compromises that let sexual sin begin to simmer in his heart. Then, with the right trigger, his desires boiled over into adultery and murder. Let me close with the happier story of two different leaders. **John Stott**, the great British preacher and theologian, once famously said, “There is NO SIN of which I am not capable within ten minutes of leaving this pulpit.” Hear the significance of that. One of the greatest Christian leaders of the 20th century said, “There is no sin of which I am not capable.” Because he was aware of the dangers of sin, the craftiness of sin, Stott was able to serve faithfully his entire life and graduate to glory with an untarnished reputation.

And probably the most famous of all 20th century Christian leaders was **Billy Graham**. He just went home to the Lord last year as one of the most respected leaders in American history. And

one of the reasons he was so respected and influential was his commitment – throughout the whole course of his long ministry – to never be alone with a woman who wasn't his wife. Never. Not once. Why? Because Billy Graham knew the power of sin. He knew better than to trust himself and set up these wise boundaries to protect himself.

Robert Murray McCheyne, the great Scottish pastor wrote this while just in his 20s:



“I am tempted to think that I am now an established Christian...I may venture very near the temptation, nearer than other men...This is a lie of Satan. I might as well speak of gunpowder getting by habit a power of resisting fire, so as not to catch the spark... The seeds of all sins are in my heart and perhaps all the more dangerously because I do not see them.” Robert Murray McCheyne

Sin is rooted in unbelief, it rises from the desires in our own hearts and it results in a growing power that can spread throughout our lives. Though we should grow in self-control and steadily make progress over areas of sin in our lives, we must never let down our guard. The gunpowder of our sinful desires can always flash when placed next to the spark of temptation.

May we fix our faith in Jesus who bore the penalty for sin for us. May we build up our confidence in His goodness, mercy and grace so that we will be increasingly resistant to the lies of temptation. May we cultivate a hunger and thirst for righteousness, fixing our minds on the Lord and His Kingdom above all. And may we increasingly surrender ourselves to the power and leading of the Holy Spirit.

An important application today is **not to walk alone**. You need a brother or sister beside you in this fight. Because it is a battle. There is an enemy outside of us who prowls around like a lion and there is an enemy INSIDE of us who is crouching at our doors. Every believer should have one or two Christian friends you meet with at least once a month to share openly and honestly about what you're going through. Pray for each other. Encourage each other. Build up the faith of the other person. Help them see the truth of the situation in order to let the light of God's Word drive out the darkness of doubt and deception. Let's pray together now as we prepare to come to the Lord's table.