

## Dead Air



The **ON AIR** light flickered an anemic red as Conrad Reeves leaned back in his chair, rubbing tired eyes. The glow of the mixing board cast long shadows across the cramped AM studio, its faded carpet stinking of decades of stale coffee and cigarette smoke. Midnight had come and gone, and **KXXV**'s signal barely reached past the county line any longer. No one was listening. No one ever did. Thank goodness their funding primarily came through an estate sale whose late owners willed that a portion of the sale go to funding **KXXV**'s needs for twenty years.

He took another sip of coffee, wincing at the taste. The overnight shift was a slow death, one song at a time. He lined up another track—some forgotten rockabilly tune no one had requested—and let it roll, leaning back with a sigh. There was a time when being a radio DJ was considered cool. Nowadays, saying you're a radio DJ was akin to telling someone you were a telegraphist or a typewriter repair technician.

His life seemed as cliché as the modern Western male. Two ex-wives, a crappy bachelor's apartment...a dated apartment, that is, a goldfish who probably should have died five years earlier, and a midnight shift working as an AM radio DJ. He took a drag of his cigarette.

This was his life now.

Then, it happened.

The static was faint at first, creeping in under the music like a whisper through a cracked door. Conrad sat forward, tapping the console. **KXXV**'s equipment was old, sure, but it shouldn't be picking up rogue signals. Then, through the static, a voice rose, clear as a bell.

*“...and I say unto you, the time is at hand! Judgment is near! When they say ‘peace and safety,’ sudden destruction will come upon them. Do you not see the signs? I tell you, half of California will settle into the ocean!”*

The music cut back in. Conrad’s pulse quickened. He spun the dial, but the signal was coming through the station’s own frequency. The voice carried a rich, old-time cadence, the kind of southern fire-and-brimstone preacher you’d find on dust-worn revival tapes. The radio crackled again, and the rockabilly music returned as if nothing had happened.

Scratching his head, Conrad was completely befuddled at what just transpired.

Well, it’s a good thing no one listens anymore or else he might have bosses who cared about these sorts of things.

Early that next day, Conrad was three hours into his well-earned reverse cycle sleep when he got a phone call. Annoyed yet predictable, Conrad answered “Hey Guss.” Guss was short for Ronald Gustafson, who was an old friend who also worked the night shifts at the 24-hour service station. He told Conrad to turn on the news.

Wiping the crusties from his eyes, he looked around for his remote control. Noticing it on the dresser the television was also sitting on (and noting the irony), he got up and turned on his television and flipped over to a news channel.

**“Breaking News:** If you’re just tuning in, California has just experienced a massive 9.9 earthquake along the San Andreas Fault Line, and we are seeing extensive damage all along the coastline from our ‘eye in the sky’, Chopper 9 News....”

Conrad was beyond stunned. He immediately thought back to the mysterious sermon that came on the broadcast last night unexpectedly. He looked up to his ceiling, but pretending to look beyond into heaven and asked, “God, is this you?”

The next night, radio listenership was way up, and the phone lines were buzzing like he hadn’t seen since they did that *car give away* several years earlier. He didn’t know if the mysterious pastor was going to make a reappearance tonight, but if he did, he’d try to be a little more prepared next time.

It would be another week before the mysterious preacher would make his unscheduled appearance. This time it happened at 1215, and it was during the middle of the 1980s hit, “Everybody Wants to Rule the World” by the British pop duo, *Tears for Fears*. In the second stanza, the music stopped, and that’s when it happened...

“This world slumbers in sin, blind to its own demise. But the Lord sees, yes, He sees! And what will you do when the ground beneath you tumbles into the sea. Night is coming, when no man can work, but before that, fires will light the dusk and sweep from west to east. Then the world will see.”

The signal crackled, then cut off entirely. The dead air stretched on, thick and unnatural, before Conrad scrambled to slap the next record on.

He sat there, heart hammering. That voice. It had a presence to it, an unnatural clarity that sent goosebumps crawling up his arms. He wondered. He put a long song on next and walked back to some old filing cabinets in the back room, fumbling through the station's archives.

Amidst a graveyard of unlabeled reels and forgotten tapes, Conrad's fingers brushed against a dust-covered case labeled in shaky handwriting: *Pastor Eli Morton – 1963.*

*This has got to be it*, he thought.

He didn't know the name, but a deep unease settled over him as he loaded the reel onto a different player in the room. The tape whirred, then the same voice crackled to life.

“Many will hear, but few will listen. The day will come when the clock strikes twelve and the night lingers longer than it should. And there will be one—a man lost in his own ways—who will hear these words and wonder...”

*Ok, that is weird. But how are these messages getting on the airwaves?* He played every song individually. He didn't even have digital copies as backups. Conrad's breath caught. He leaned closer. His name was never mentioned, but the words wrapped around him, suffocating in their precision.

“...He will drink coffee from a chipped mug, waiting for dawn that will never come.”

His gaze snapped to his cup—ceramic, cracked along the rim. His hand trembled. It had to be a coincidence.

“...He will reach for the cigarette he swore he would quit, but he has not. And still, he will hear me.”

The cigarette lay beside him, half-smoked, still warm from his last drag.

Conrad's throat went dry. He continued searching thru the archive box, rifling through the tapes when, he saw it. *Pastor Eli Morton – August 2, 2025.*

How is this dated to the future? That was still months away. And there were only three of them that worked at **KXXV**. He knew the two others were even less motivated than he was to start any drama, let alone concoct some technologically malevolent way of slipping not-so subliminal messages into the middle of his song list. His stomach knotted as he loaded the tape. The

moment it started; Conrad sat frozen. His fingers twitched over this portable control board. He had to know. He had to play the sermon. If no one else would hear it, at least he would.

*“There is no tomorrow. This day is Tish b’ Av, the 9th of Av to us English speakers. It is the traditional day of tragedy that has befallen the nation of Israel and Jews alike countless times since the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. This is the day the Lord will remove His church and usher in the final week of years!”*

The words were flat, final. A hiss of static swallowed them whole, and the tape clicked off. The studio was silent but for the hum of dead air. He heard the end of the other song playing on the radio coming to its end so he got up and rushed to start the next song. As he cued it up, he reached for the mic, heart pounding, and simply let muscle memory take control- *Thank you for joining the Midnight Hour broadcast on KXXV. Your AM destination for the best of the 70s, 80s, and 90s music.* He then pressed play and allowed the music to take back over.

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## **Each Night, the Sermons Intensify**

From that night forward, every midnight brought a new, chilling broadcast. Pastor Eli Morton’s voice returned, each sermon more urgent than the last, weaving vivid warnings of impending judgment and a call to repentance. Conrad had no control over it. The sermons hijacked the station’s frequency from twelve to one A.M. with unsettling precision. No tape deck played them. No files existed in the station’s database. Yet, night after night, the voice of a long-dead preacher filled the airwaves.

Unbeknownst to Conrad, a TikTok user who regularly posted Bible prophecy content clipped a segment of the first mysterious broadcast and uploaded it. Something about the eerie monologue, paired with a montage of current events, struck a nerve. The 59-second clip went viral overnight. Listeners across the globe began searching for the source, and an internet sleuth finally traced it back to an obscure AM station in northern Arizona.

As theories exploded online, the sermons became a phenomenon. TikTok users compiled every available clip, dissecting Pastor Eli’s words and linking them to real-world events. The hashtag

**#MidnightSermons** trended, amassing millions of views. People whispered about its eerie accuracy—natural disasters, political upheavals, and economic turmoil that seemed to align too well with the sermons' warnings.

The once-forgotten **KXXV** radio station had become an international sensation. And it wasn't long before the authorities took notice.

The **FCC opened an investigation**, demanding to know where these broadcasts were coming from. If Conrad thought his station was on the verge of a breakthrough, he was dead wrong. The station owner called, panicked. A cease-and-desist order loomed. The FCC wanted the sermons shut down, convinced it was a hoax or a rogue transmission.

But Conrad knew the truth. He wasn't playing the sermons. And he had no way to stop them.

Authorities, including the FBI, took interest, probing any potential threats these sermons might pose. Conspiracy theories flourished, some suggesting government experiments, others hinting at supernatural phenomena.

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The world was listening now.

What began as a niche internet mystery had exploded into a global obsession. News outlets picked up the story. Was this a hoax? A pirate signal? A divine warning? Everyone had a theory.

Journalists dissected each sermon, pouring over transcripts for hidden messages. Religious scholars debated the theology—was Pastor Eli Morton a forgotten prophet, or was someone fabricating his sermons to stir panic? Internet sleuths traced every lead, desperate to uncover who—or what—was behind the broadcasts.

And at the center of it all was **Conrad Reeves**.

He hadn't asked for this. He was just a washed-up radio DJ riding out the last embers of his career. Now, he couldn't step outside without being recognized. Reporters clogged the phone

lines, demanding interviews. Conspiracy theorists accused him of masterminding an elaborate deception. Devoted listeners hailed him as the vessel of a divine message.

Even **KXXV**'s station manager cracked under the pressure. Corporate called, issuing thinly veiled threats. "Fix it, Conrad. Or we pull the plug on the station."

But how do you stop something you can't control?

Each night, the sermons continued—clear, untraceable, unstoppable. And the date looming in Pastor Eli's final recorded message was drawing closer.

### **The Final Sermon**

August 2, 2025.

The world held its breath.

The anticipation surrounding the final sermon had reached critical mass. The story had dominated headlines for weeks, stirring religious fervor, skepticism, and outright hysteria. Protesters gathered outside the **KXXV** station—some demanding answers, others clutching Bibles, weeping, and praying. A swarm of news vans clogged the parking lot, their satellite dishes pointed like weapons at the studio.

The **FCC** had officially opened an investigation into the rogue transmissions, citing unauthorized broadcasts and potential signal hijacking. The station's owner had called Conrad that morning with a chilling message:

*"If this sermon plays tonight, we're shutting you down. Permanently."*

And yet, deep down, Conrad knew there was no stopping it. Over the past three months, he tried manually keeping the song playing. He tried killing the power during one of the sermons, and it just kept playing. He didn't know if the FBI or anyone else could jam the frequency, but he was out of options.

He sat in the dim studio, heart hammering as the clock inched toward midnight. The ON AIR light flickered weakly. The entire station felt suffocating, as if the air itself had thickened under the weight of something unseen.

**11:59 PM.**

Outside, thousands of people had tuned in to livestreams, radios, and hacked feeds from online broadcasters who refused to let the message be silenced. Social media exploded with anticipation—#MidnightSermon was the top trending hashtag worldwide.

Then, the moment arrived.

**12:00 AM.**

The static came first, crawling across the signal like fingers on glass. Conrad didn't touch the controls. He didn't breathe.

Then, the voice returned. Pastor Eli Morton.

*"The night is far spent, and the day is at hand..."*

The sermon unfolded, but this time, it was different. It was no longer a warning. It was a proclamation.

*"They did not listen, though the signs were clear. They mocked, though the heavens trembled. And now, the hour is here. Judgment is at the door."*

Then, a new sound emerged beneath the preacher's voice—a distant rumbling.

Conrad's skin prickled. At first, he thought it was feedback, but then he noticed something terrifying—his coffee cup trembled on the desk. The studio monitors flickered.

Across the country, seismic alerts began pinging.

The world was shifting.

Pastor Eli's voice did not waver.

*"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin."*

The words—straight from the Book of Daniel—chilled Conrad to his bones. “You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting.”

Then, silence.

The broadcast ended.

But the shaking did not.

History will remember August 2, 2025, as the day the Yellowstone Caldera erupted.

Oh, and a bunch of people disappeared right beforehand.

All on Tisha B'Av.

The world would never be the same.