

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 10

THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION

This chapter relates the end of the history of the Northern Kingdom Israel. Its history spans 200 years. The LORD had warned her first king, Jeroboam, that He would “smite” and “root up” Israel, and “scatter” her beyond the river because they had made themselves molten images and worshipped other gods thus provoking the LORD to anger (1 Kings 14:15). This uprooting and scattering of Israel had been long delayed. Once again God proved that He is patient but He is also righteous and holy and He will fulfil His Word in His time.

In 2 Kings Chapter 15, the last kings of Israel changed hands in quick succession. Shallum assassinated King Zechariah and seized the throne; then Menahem assassinated Shallum, who reigned only for one month; Menahem died and his son Pekahiah became king but he was assassinated by Pekah. Hoshea conspired against Pekah and assassinated him. Hoshea was the last King of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. In his reign, the

Assyrians invaded and conquered Israel. The details and the reasons of the downfall of the king and Israel are given in this chapter. It is clear that the ultimate purpose of the inspired writer was to show that disobeying God’s Law would inevitably bring about punishment, even for God’s people.

OUTLINE

1. Hoshea’s wicked reign and the eventual downfall and captivity of Israel by the Assyrians (vv. 1-6);
2. The causes of Israel’s downfall and destruction (vv. 7-17);
3. The wrath of the LORD against Israel and Judah (vv.18-23);
4. The Assyrian occupation of Israel (vv.24-33);
5. There is no compromising in the worship and service of the LORD (vv.34-41).

COMMENTARY

Hoshea’s Wicked Reign & the Assyrian Captivity – 17:1-6

In the 12th year of King Ahaz’s reign in Judah, Hoshea became the King of Israel (732-722 B.C.). The writer states that he did evil in the sight of the LORD, but commended him for not doing as his predecessors did. The detail of this “commendation” was not explained for it was not much of a commendation when one is compared with one of the worst kings that ever ruled Israel. Slight improvement from a

great sin to not so great a sin will not turn away the wrath of God.

By this time the nation of Israel was in a very poor and weak condition. Hoshea became the king of Israel by force having assassinated King Pekah. It is apparent that Hoshea was sponsored by Tiglath-pileser III for he was made a vassal nation of Assyria and had to pay a heavy annual tribute. In 727 B.C. (five years into his reign) Tiglath-pileser died and his son, Shalmaneser V became King of Assyria. When the reign of Assyria was changing hands, Hoshea must have thought that it was a good time to shake off the Assyrian yoke. He secretly conspired against the newly crowned Assyrian king by seeking the aid of King So of Egypt, and stopped paying his annual tribute to Assyria. Shalmaneser V came to know of Hoshea's conspiracy against him. He led a massive invasion against Israel in order to suppress the revolt and to capture and imprison the king (725 B.C.). In the process, the Assyrians ravaged Israel's outlying towns and cities, and laid a great siege of Samaria, the capital city.

Samaria put up a strong resistance and it took three years (725-722 B.C.) before the city was finally conquered. This was a testimony of the good wall which Omri and Ahab had built around the capital city. At the beginning of the siege, Shalmaneser V died. Sargon II, the next king, continued the siege of Samaria which his predecessor had begun. In 722 B.C. the city of Samaria finally fell. The number of Israelites

killed or taken captive was not given by the inspired writer. But it was large enough to eliminate the nation as a political entity and to destroy its military might. The Assyrians left the weak, poor and powerless Israelites to stay in the land partly to tend the fields for agriculture.¹ Then he brought the people from the other lands whom he had conquered into Samaria (v.6). These foreigners inter-married with the remnant Israelites. This was the origin of a mixed race which is frequently mentioned in the Gospels as the "Samaritans".

The Causes of Israel's Downfall – 17:7-17

This section explains why Israel was destroyed. It is emphatically stated at the outset that it was because of Israel's sin against the LORD their God. The immediate cause that brought the downfall of the Northern Kingdom was King Hoshea's conspiracy against the King of Assyria. He did not want to continue to pay the annual tribute to Assyria and if he should be attacked by Assyria, he could seek military aid from the King of Egypt.

¹Compare with what Jeremiah later wrote concerning the fall of Judah by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 39:10): *But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.* Sargon's reign is known in much detail from inscriptions uncovered in his palace in Khorsabad, and from historical texts and letters found in Nineveh and Nimrod (**New Bible Dictionary** edited by Marshall, Millard, Packer, Wiseman, s.v. *Sargon*). He claimed in his annals that he confiscated 50 chariots and carried away 27,290 captives.

However, the real cause was Israel's persistent sin of idolatry, rejecting the laws of God and constant breaking of the covenant. God had been good to Israel. God had liberated them from slavery in the land of Egypt under the oppressive Pharaoh. But the Israelites had forgotten the goodness of God. Instead they feared other gods and walked in the ways of the pagan Canaanites in the land which God had promised and given them. They committed wrongdoings against the LORD in stealthily. They built the "high places" of worship practically everywhere. They set up idolatrous images and pillars everywhere in the land of Israel. They worshipped in these places by burning incense to the idols and by serving them. The LORD had warned them against doing these things.

The LORD could have struck them dead right away, but He was patient and merciful. He sent His prophets to the Israelites to call them to turn from their evil ways and to keep the commandments of the LORD, which He had given to their forefathers.² But they would not listen. Instead they became stiff-necked, stubborn, and rebellious, and did not believe in the LORD their God. They also rejected His statutes and the covenant He had made with their forefathers. In worshipping these idols, they were guilty of chasing after "vanity" (emptiness, nothingness) and

became "vain" themselves. The LORD had repeatedly warned them that they should not adopt the ways of the pagan Canaanites. They rejected God and His laws and made for themselves molten images of calves and worshipped them and served Baal, the god of the Canaanites. In addition, they practised human sacrifices to the idols. This horrendous act of human sacrifice is the fruit of idolatry. They indulged in sorcery and witchcraft, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD. They were guilty of provoking the LORD to anger.

In summary, the primary reason for their downfall was their idolatrous lifestyle and not the might or superpower status of the Assyrians. They gave to idols the devotion and service that belonged to God alone. Simply put, they rejected the living God, and chose instead lifeless molten idols which could do nothing. In other words, they essentially said to the LORD God "You have not been good to us." That brings us to the next section.

The Wrath of the Lord against Israel – 17:18-23

Having listed the sins of the Israelites against the LORD, the writer states clearly that the LORD was very angry with Israel and "removed them out of His sight" (v.18). The phrases "out of His sight" and "none left but the tribe of Judah only" (v.18) do not mean that the LORD was blind to their existence or that every Israelite individual was annihilated respectively. But it means that the LORD would no longer be looking favourably upon the

² Hosea 14:1 O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. 2 Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive *us* graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.

Israelites because of their sin against Him. The ten tribes were taken into captivity and scattered as the LORD had said. It also intimated here that Judah would also sin against the LORD just like their brethren in the north, and they too would be taken captive and scattered (v.19). Judah would be destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

Attempts to trace the ten tribes were unsuccessful. No one knows precisely where they are today. It is explained that some of each of the ten tribes had gone to live in Judah in the course of the history of Israel because they did not want to follow the ways of the evil king. There is no Scriptural basis for the notion of the "lost ten tribes." James in the New Testament wrote his letters addressing to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1). The Apostle Paul also made a reference to "our twelve tribes" in his defence before King Agrippa (Acts 26:7). Whatever, the LORD knows where the ten tribes are and they are mentioned in chapter 7 of the Book of Revelation.

Another point to note, regarding the fall of Israel, was that the LORD had repeatedly sent His prophets with warnings after warnings to repent of their sins but all these calls from the LORD fell on deaf ears. Dynasty after dynasty came and went with not a single good king to turn the people of Israel back to the LORD. They had the word of God and His servants but to no avail. The love of idolatry was the real cause for Israel's demise as a nation. He had earlier warned them

that He would bring them down and disperse them abroad. Israel persisted in rejecting and sinning against the LORD, and the LORD removed Israel out of His sight just as He had warned them of what He would do (1 Kings 14:15).

The Assyrian Occupation of Israel – 17:24-33

A detailed account of how Assyria treated the remaining Israelites in the land is mentioned here. The Assyrians brought men from a list of countries which they had conquered and settled them in Samaria to possess the land. These men dwelt in the cities of the land of Israel. The inspired writer records an interesting phenomenon which occurred when these men settled in Samaria in the beginning. They did not fear the LORD for these people were pagans and godless. The LORD caused the lions to come among them and kill them (v.25). These men complained to the King of Assyria that they were ignorant of the God of the land and as a result He had sent the lions to kill them.

This incident indicates that the pagans in those days believed that each land had its own god. They should know the God of the land and worship Him so that He would not be angry by sending the lions to kill them. After hearing their complaint, the King of Assyria ordered that one of the captured priests be sent back to Samaria to teach the people to worship the God of the land. One priest was picked but his identity was not revealed. He was sent to Samaria where he dwelt in Bethel and taught

the migrants how they should fear the LORD. This was an irony. What kind of priest was he? It could not be ascertained other than the fact that he could not be from the tribe of Levi. All the Levites had emigrated to Judah when Jeroboam I made the golden calves for worship in Bethel and Dan. The presence and teaching of the priest served to fit in with the superstition of the people. For the people began to worship their own gods – Succoth-benoth, a Babylonian god; Nergal, another Babylonian god of the nether-world; Ashima, which looked like a hairless he-goat of unknown origin; Nibhaz, a dog-shaped deity; Tartak looked like a donkey; Adrammelech and Anammelech, Molech-like gods that took the form of a mule and a horse.³ (vv. 30-31). Their syncretistic worship was like the Bahai faith of today where they believe that they should worship all the gods so that they will not miss the right god.

These men feared the LORD as they were taught by the priest but they served their own gods. They “feared the LORD” that means they worshipped the LORD but they did not worship according to the laws of Moses. The priest who was sent back did not say or do anything about it. This is a religion of compromises and conveniences. Reduce the religion to the commonest denominator and the rest is up to the worshipper to do as he likes. Many Christians today are like that. The fear of the LORD was not the biblical kind, which causes the sinner to turn to Christ and not to idols. They

fear for their physical lives (the lion incident) rather than for the eternal punishment of sin in Hell.

No Compromise in the Worship of the Lord –17:34-41

God has clearly given His laws to the people of Israel that they should not fear other gods nor worship them. They should keep God’s commandments. Moreover, God had made a covenant with His people and had charged them that they should fear Him and serve Him only. Anything less than that is not acceptable for the LORD God is a jealous God. And God who made His covenant with His people would faithfully keep it if the people would fear and obey Him. He would deliver them from their enemies. But these people professed to fear the LORD but they served their own graven images. This is totally unacceptable to God.

These last few verses describe clearly the spiritual state of the Samaritans and reveal to us the reason why the Jewish returnees from Babylonian in the days of Zerubbabel turned down their offer to help rebuild the Temple of God (see Ezra 4:1-6).

PRACTICAL VALUE

Sin begets sin. The succession of assassinations by each aspirant to the throne of Israel illustrates this truth. Each king sets an example for subsequent kings to follow. How true this is in every form of government, country, companies and even churches! Christian pastors and leaders must learn this truth and

³ 1 & 2 Kings by Russell Dilday, p. 422.

constantly check themselves so that they continue to conduct the work of the church in a manner that is approved of God and pleasing in His sight.

Hoshea who wanted to shake off the Assyrian yoke should have asked the LORD for help rather than the world. The reason was that Hoshea had never known the true God. Therefore, he sought help from the King of Egypt. It was not only futile but became the catalyst that precipitated Samaria's downfall and destruction. Here we learn that when we need help, we should seek the LORD and not the world for it. Sadly, many Christians tend to lean on man's help instead of trusting God. It is very foolish of them. If they have been walking close to the LORD, they would know they can trust the LORD wholeheartedly for help in time of need and trouble.

The sin of idolatry is abominable in the sight of the LORD. In modern day, it takes various forms. We ought to beware of this sin and not be guilty of it as it will devastate and destroy our lives. If we have this sin in our life, cut it off and re-consecrate our life to the LORD our God, who is merciful and will forgive and restore us if we confess and repent.

Let us also not be guilty of compromising our Christian profession. Let us not be like the Samaritans who worshipped the LORD but served other gods. We need to take the profession of our faith in Christ very seriously and soberly. The Lord Jesus Christ demands our all or

nothing at all for He is God. God, on the other hand, will be faithful to His Word and the covenant He has made with us. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If we persist in sinning against Him, compromising our worship and service to Him, He will surely judge and punish us one day. Our God is a loving God; He is also a patient God. He is a righteous and holy God who has no respect for persons and will keep His Word. Disobedience on the part of His people will incur His wrath whereas obedience to Him will bring His abundant blessings. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 2 Kings 17:1-6; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

TUESDAY: 2 Kings 17:7-17; Hosea 14:1-9, Daniel 4:17

WEDNESDAY: 2 Kings 17:18-23; Deuteronomy 4:24; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10.

THURSDAY: 2 Kings 17:24-33; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

FRIDAY: 2 Kings 17:34-41; Psalm 119:9-16; Proverbs 3:5-8.

Discussion Questions

1. Can we say that the patience of God is infinite? When was the start of God's patient dealing with

Israel? Is the patience of God always related to sin committed by His people? Can we say that God is also patient in His dealing with unbelievers or is it exclusively reserved for believers only?

2. Can you trace the sin which started the progressive decline of the moral and spiritual condition of the northern kingdom in verses 7 to 18?

3. What is meant by the statement: "They feared the LORD, and served their own gods" (v.33)?

4. From what you see in this chapter, what are God's expectations of His people?

5. What indications do you see of God's love in verses 7-23?

6. What warning should we take heed from the lesson in this chapter?
