

The End of the Northern Kingdom of Israel

2 Kings 17

2 Kings 17:1-6 - *"In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel who were before him. Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against him; and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute money. And the king of Assyria uncovered a conspiracy by Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and brought no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.*

Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes."

Background Notes

King Hoshea was the last of the 19 kings who reigned over the northern kingdom of Israel. Hoshea reigned from the capital city of Samaria for 9 years. King Shalmaneser V of Assyria forced Hoshea to pay annual tribute, or taxes (v2), but Hoshea refused to pay the tribute after he made a military treaty with Egypt. However, this treaty was unsuccessful, and Shalmaneser invaded Israel. He besieged Samaria for three years, from 725BC down to 722BC, when Samaria was finally conquered by Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II.

At that time, the Assyrians took a number of Israeli captives into exile and re-settled them in towns of Assyria. According to Assyrian records of Sargon II that have been found by archaeologists, Sargon captured and carried away 27,290 Israeli captives.

Doctrinal Points

1. Rebellion against God leads to captivity.

2 Kings 17:7-23 - *"For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the*

high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, 'You shall not do this thing.'

Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.' Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.

Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel they made. And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight. For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord, and made them commit a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day."

In these verses we have an explanation of why God allowed the downfall and captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel. Instead of getting rid of all the pagan practices in the land God gave them, Israel adopted those pagan practices and the heathen gods behind them. They broke all the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant (v16). They lowered themselves to worshiping golden calves. They got involved in astrology and other occult practices. They even sacrificed their own children in their idolatry (v17)! They refused to listen to the prophets that God graciously sent them.

And so we read in verse 23: *"So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day."* Rebellion against God leads to captivity.

The same is true today. People think that they can gain true freedom by ignoring God's moral standards and by getting rid of any restraints on their lifestyle. Ironically, just the opposite is true: they become captives to their sin and to Satan! Ephesians 2:1-3 makes it clear that unbelievers are not only **dead in sin** but **captives of Satan** as well.

This can be true of Believers. Christians who rebel against God can also become captives of the enemy in certain areas of their lives. It may be in the area of false doctrine, or a moral area, or worldly pursuits. Rebellion against God and His Word leads to captivity.

2. Rebellion against God leads to syncretism.

2 Kings 17:24-41 - *“Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities. And it was so, from the beginning of dwelling there, that they did not fear the Lord. Therefore the Lord sent lions among them that killed some of them. So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, “The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land.” Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, “Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land.” Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord.*

However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places that the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt. The men of Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. So they feared the Lord, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.

To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the Lord, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment that the Lord had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel, with whom the Lord had made a covenant and charged them, saying: ‘You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them; but the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, Him you shall worship, and to Him you shall offer sacrifice. And the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment that He wrote for you, you shall be careful to observe forever; you shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods. But the Lord your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies.’ However they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals. So these nations feared the Lord, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children’s children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day.”

Syncretism is the fusion or mixture of different forms of belief or practice. Besides taking some of the people of Israel away as captives, the Assyrians also re-populated Israel with foreign peoples from other areas of the Assyrian Empire.

Intermarriage took place between the Israelis and the foreigners. The resulting “mixed race” became known as the Samaritans. The fusion of Jews and non-Jews by intermarriage resulted in a fusion of religions as well - syncretism.

As a warning, the Lord sent lions from the hills to kill some of the people. At this point the Jewish people who were left in Israel should have heeded the warning, returned to the Lord, and taught the newcomers the Law of the Lord. Instead they joined in the worship of the foreign gods. When the foreigners complained to the king of Assyria, he sent one of the captive priests to teach them how to placate the God of Israel. Undoubtedly, this was one of the false priests who had served at the golden calf shrine in Bethel.

As a result of all of this, syncretism took place. Verse 33 once again, **“They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods.”** This was a direct violation of the first commandment, *“Thou shall have no other gods before me.”*

Rebellion against God leads to syncretism, then and today. In many foreign countries around the world today, you will find syncretism - a fusion of Christianity and vestiges of the former pagan or animist religions. This is the result of rebellion against the First Commandment. Other gods were not completely removed when the message of Christianity came and spread in that foreign country. Syncretism is happening in our own country as well. Rebellion against God leads to syncretism.

Practical Application

Watch out for syncretism in your own family.

Verse 41 - *“So these nations feared the Lord, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children’s children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day.”* Syncretism has a ripple-down effect. What’s accepted and tolerated in one generation is passed down to the next, by word and by example.

For example: What is Christmas? What does Christmas mean to you? Is the celebration of the birth of Christ inextricably fused with Christmas trees and glitzy gifts? That mixture is a form of syncretism that’s been passed on to you!

What are you passing on to your children or grandchildren? What is Christmas in their minds? Are the birth of Christ and the truth of the incarnation mixed with our culture’s false “god” of materialism? Be careful! Watch out for syncretism in your own family.