

2ND KINGS

Week 25, Chapter 17

As we begin 2nd Kings 17 today, we will read of the end of the northern kingdom of Israel, and thus the beginning of the legend of the 10 lost tribes of Israel.

At the conclusion of chapter 16 the subject was primarily the southern kingdom of Judah, their king **Achaz**, and the invasion of Judah by an unholy military coalition of Israel and Syria. While the invasion devastated Judah, the coalition was unable to force **Achaz** from the throne, and so he remained king over a barely sovereign Judah. We saw that even though God rescued Judah and **Achaz**, **Achaz** preferred to thank the Syrian gods for his deliverance. And we learned that he had become so spiritually depraved that during the invasion he had sacrificed to the gods of Syria, (the same ones that were attacking him), and so he decided that it was they who found favor with him and allowed he and his kingdom to survive. He completely ignored the fact that Isaiah had earlier brought him a prophetic oracle from Yehoveh that He would not allow Israel and Syria to conquer and divide Judah between themselves.

Thus, when the invasion ended, King **Achaz** approached Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria with a proposition: he would give Tiglath-Pileser an enormous amount of silver and in addition pledged that Judah would become a tribute-paying vassal to Assyria, if Assyria would promise to protect Judah. This type of arrangement allowed King **Achaz** to retain his throne but only as a puppet governor who was fully beholden to the King of Assyria. Judah's economy, and thus the common citizens, would greatly suffer under this arrangement as so much of Judah's wealth would be transferred to Assyria. As self-serving and unfaithful as King **Achaz** was, the Lord allowed him to remain as King of Judah and die peacefully ending a 16 year reign. And the reason for this is that **Achaz** was a descendant of David's royal line, and the Lord had promised that there would be a Davidic King forever, and that while He would punish David's royal descendants when they sinned, that nonetheless the Lord would show them extraordinary mercy. Perhaps none more than the evil **Achaz** benefited from this divine promise.

Let's read 2nd Kings 17.

READ 2ND KINGS 17 all

King **Hoshea** is crowned King of Israel and he will become infamous as the king who presided over the extinction of the northern kingdom. King **Hoshea** is Israel's last king. He came into power during King **Achaz** of Judah's 12th year of reigning over his people, thus there was a 4 year period of time when these two kings ruled their respective kingdoms simultaneously. **Hoshea** would rule over Israel for 5 years after **Achaz** died, giving **Hoshea** a total time in office of 9 years.

Now interestingly, if we look back to 2nd Kings 15 we find that it was 8 years before **Hoshea** officially became King of Israel that he had assassinated the then-sitting King of Israel **Pekach**. While there is no Biblical or historical record that explains this long lag in time (one would think that **Hoshea** would have immediately become king after **Pekach's** death), we can only say in general that apparently it was not politically possible for **Hoshea** to assume the throne at that time. Thus he must have had to gain the loyalty of enough influential leaders of Israel before he could finally formally sit on Israel's throne. But we also read in 2nd Kings 17:2 that the Lord saw **Hoshea** as wicked, but much less so than his predecessors. Why would God see him as "less wicked", and what went on that seemed to increase his favor among his people? I believe that 2Chronicles 30 answers that question for us.

Turn your Bibles to 2nd Chronicles 30; we're going to read the entire chapter because as we've discussed, in order to understand the time of Kings, we must use the Book of Kings, Book of Chronicles, and some of the Books of the Prophets together in order to give us a more complete picture.

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 30 all

The time frame for what we read is that King **Achaz** of Judah has died and his son Hezekiah was now ruling. Hezekiah, who sought to restore some piety to the Kingdom of Judah after the wrecking ball his father had taken to Judah's morality and spirituality, called for all the tribes of Jacob to set aside their differences and come together for the springtime trio of Biblical Festivals that begins with Passover. Since that would mean gathering together at the Temple in Jerusalem, and the Torah rituals being presided over by a Levitical High Priest, it seemed altogether impossible for this to happen since for 200 years residents of Israel had been forbidden from traveling to Jerusalem to sacrifice and worship. In fact military outposts had been established by Israel's kings on the highways from Israel to Judah to prevent the 10 tribes from going to Jerusalem. Remember that at this time Israel had established its own state-run religious cult, complete with a priesthood and graven images of a Golden Calf god. This priesthood was composed primarily of non-Levites who invented their own rituals and rules, but ironically they insisted that they were worshipping (and the Golden Calves represented) Yehoveh God of Israel.

So there were essentially two separate and distinct groups of people who had little use for each other. And although all Hebrews descended from Jacob there was now established competing religions for the purpose of worshipping Yehoveh. The original Torah based religion was represented by the Jerusalem Temple and priesthood, while the newer religion of the Kingdom of Israel was based mostly on newly created doctrines and traditions, and the leaders of this new religion thought themselves as the better and replacement religion for the original.

A virtual ring of military forts kept those citizens of Israel who wanted to stay connected to the Torah, the Jerusalem Temple and Levitical priesthood from doing so. Does this have a familiar ring to it?

Of course it does because that's what would happen again almost 1000 years into the future when a group of gentiles decided that the Torah based religion of the Jews ought to be replaced with a newer religion based on new traditions and doctrines. This new religion called Christianity said that while it still worshipped the God of Israel the new Rome based religion also rejected (as had the northern kingdom of Israel) the Torah, the original Hebrew Scriptures, and all the Temple symbolism and relevance. A new set of gentile created icons and symbols and even newer Scripture were substituted for the old ways. High barriers were erected between the former religion and the new one, and the new religion's leadership promised excommunication to any Christian who even dared to look at the Torah and Old Testament. In time, during a period historians call the Inquisition, Believers who read any Scripture at all were burned at the stake. Those who read any part of the Old Testament especially were banished or killed for being Judaizers, or worse, suspected of converting to Judaism.

So King Hezekiah of Judah realized that the only path to reconciliation among the 12 tribes, and the only hope to regain God's favor, was for all Israel to return to their common Hebrew Roots. They had to swallow their pride, put down their traditions and icons, knock down their wall of separation, and gather together under the banner of God's Torah. They needed to go back to knowing, and being obedient to, the Holy Scriptures, to the commandments of God, and to set aside their manmade doctrines, rules, and observances. Thus King Hezekiah invited all Israel to come to Jerusalem for Passover and apparently King **Hoshea** of Israel saw the merit in this and allowed those among his people of the northern kingdom who wanted to come, to journey to the Temple and observe the Biblical Feasts.

I think it is fascinating that the righteous King Hezekiah saw that the Biblical Feasts represented the best and first step on a long and uneven road back to a reunion of God worshippers, and to the proper worship of Yehoveh. It re-opened a closed but necessary door. And it is also interesting that in modern times, the first steps by Christ's Church back towards obedience to the Lord, and to His Word, has been a reinstatement by those of the Hebrew Roots movement of those same Biblical Feasts. And that is because in these Feasts is the pattern of Redemption, and an illustration of the actual mission of our Messiah Yeshua to save all who would be saved.

Back to 2nd Kings 17. Verse 3 notes a change of kings in Assyria. Upon Tiglath-Pileser's death, his son Shalmaneser began to rule. When Tiglath-Pileser died, there was a brief period of a power vacuum in Assyria, and King **Hoshea** used it as an opportunity to try and free Israel from under Assyria's yoke. He failed; once Shalmaneser was able to gain the throne he quickly moved to punish **Hoshea** and Israel for their rebellion. And by the way, soon we're going to hear about yet another King of Assyria named Sargon. Sargon was Shalmaneser's brother; and it was probably the struggle for power between them immediately following their father Tiglath-Pileser's death that caused a brief period of unrest in Assyria such that **Hoshea** thought it might be Israel's ticket to independence. However about 4 years after Shalmaneser became King of Assyria, Sargon assumed a co-kingship with him which lasted for only a few months, then Sargon became the sole King of Assyria when Shalmaneser died during the siege of Samaria. Whether he was murdered or died of battle wounds is unclear.

Hosea was able to hang on to his throne by agreeing to become a tribute-paying vassal to Shalmaneser. But in verse 4, we find that **Hoshea** attempted to enlist Egypt's help to escape Assyria's hold on him, and **Hoshea** also refused to send the agreed to tribute to Assyria. King **Hosea** was arrested, held prisoner, the vassal arrangement was canceled and then the capital of the northern kingdom, Samaria, was invaded and taken by Assyrian forces. The year was either 722 or 723 B. C. With the fall of Samaria, it was the end of Israel. It took 3 years of siege for Shalmaneser to finally take Samaria but when he did, he deported the 10 tribes of Israel from their land and scattered them all over the 120 nations and kingdoms that now formed the enormous and unprecedented Assyrian Empire.

Let me be clear on something: when I say the 10 tribes of the north, that isn't technically correct. 2 ½ of those tribes (Reuben, Gad, and ½ of the clans of the tribe of Manassah) were living NOT in the north, but in the east, across the Jordan River, in the so-called Trans-Jordan. This was the same place they had occupied since the days of Joshua and Moses. In fact, Assyrian records show that it was the Trans-Jordanian tribes that were captured and exiled first before the remaining 7 ½ tribes who actually inhabited the northern kingdom of Israel were conquered. It's only that all of those tribes are lumped together as one group (the 10 tribes), because the Trans-Jordanian tribes allied themselves with Israel as opposed to Judah.

Hoshea's attempt to lure Egypt into a war with Assyria didn't work. The current Pharaoh of Egypt was named Seve or Sava (the name So as we find in many Bibles is just probably a bad attempt at a phonetic spelling), and he was too wise to be convinced by his ambassadors or Israel's king that there was any benefit for Egypt in helping Hoshea take on powerful Assyria. As an aside: it is interesting to note that this Pharaoh was an Ethiopian, and not a true hereditary Egyptian. He was the 1st Pharaoh of the 25th Dynasty, an Ethiopian Dynasty. Egypt thrived under Seve and became a strong, generally peace-loving nation.

In any case Shalmaneser found out about this attempt by Hoshea to rebel (probably from

Egypt who wanted no part of this alliance or conflict), and this was what finally led to checkmate, and exile, for Israel. I find it ironic, but probably more instructive, to remember God's warning to Israel about any thought of them dealing with Egypt:

Deut. 17:16 CJB

¹⁶ However, he is not to acquire many horses for himself or have the people return to Egypt to obtain more horses, inasmuch as ADONAI told you never to go back that way again.

After exhausting all possibilities, King **Hoshea** turned to the one place that, although it had power, was the epitome of the wrong place for God's people to ever seek help: Egypt. Egypt was the living symbol of sin and servitude to an evil master. Egypt even gained the status of a standard Biblical metaphor that represented all that was anti-God. In the New Testament and in modern Christian-eze, Egypt is symbolic of the Devil and of his kingdom. And so after God redeemed Israel from Egypt, it was unthinkable that they would actually turn back to God's enemy, Egypt, to seek friendship and deliverance. As verse 7 points out it was no coincidence that by King Hoshea turning to Egypt, it immediately led to the King of Assyria declaring Israel as its enemy, and then destroying them as a nation and exiling them from the Promised Land.

Verses 7 through 23 provide a sickening and heart-breaking testimony against Israel (meaning the northern kingdom) by the Lord. These are reminiscent (at least to me) of Messiah's Revelation warning to the 7 churches. And just like so much of Christ's Church is today in denial of the many characteristics that we display that Yeshua laments and rails against in Revelation chapters 1, 2, and 3, so were most of the people of Israel in denial against God's warnings and charges leveled against them. Let's go through them one by one.

In verse 7 the issue is faithfulness. The first commandment Moses is given on Mt. Sinai is that God rescued them from Egypt; that is the 10 Commandments #1 commandment is that it was Yehoveh who liberated Israel from Egypt, and then later other regulations and rulings make it clear that Israel must never try to reverse their salvation history by seeking out Egypt for help. So the first indictment against the 10 tribes is that they ignored the miracle of the Exodus, they renounced the grace of their redemption by Yehoveh, and instead chose to ally with their former evil task master.

Verse 8 says that Israel walked in the ways of the very people and nations that God drove out of Canaan due to their wickedness. Thus since Israel adopted their evil ways, it was only just that Israel would be driven out of the land as were the Canaanites.

Next is one that I shall go to my grave imploring my fellow Church members to repent about: we have imputed to God characteristics that are not Biblical, and have denied other characteristics about Him that are Biblical. When we tell one another that God is ONLY love, then we are committing idolatry just as surely as the Israelites did. One of God's many characteristics is love, no doubt. But he is also wrathful, He is judge, He is slow to anger but does get angry, He will take vengeance, He demands our obedience, and He will punish His own when we trespass because it is just. And these are only the beginning of God's Biblically defined characteristics. God did not change upon turning the page in our Bibles from the Old Testament to the Book of Matthew. Further verse 9 says that essentially Israel believed that there were other gods, and perhaps those gods cared more about Israel than Yehoveh. So they built altars to those other gods all over God's Kingdom land, and they worshipped and relied on those other gods.

Following that in verse 11, in addition they burned incense to those gods, meaning they prayed to those gods. Incense was symbolic in all Middle Eastern cultures (Israel included) of prayers and petitions being lifted up to the gods. And it's not that they didn't know better; God told them specifically in the Law of Moses not to do this. But so much time had passed since the days of Moses, and because they had created a new religion for themselves (the Golden Calf religion) that they still insisted honored the God of Israel, the leaders and people of Israel saw those old laws and commandments of Moses as no longer relevant to them.

Verse 13 explains why Israel AND Judah are without excuse before Him, and cannot ever say that they didn't know they were doing wrong. They did wrong because they WANTED to do wrong. God says that contrary to the belief that He had abandoned them, they had abandoned Him. He sent Prophet after Prophet warning His people of their sin and apostasy; pleading with His people to pay attention to Him and to return to the Torah and to proper worship of Him. But to no avail. Every argument and pleading was rationalized away.

What did this lead to? Verse 15 says that eventually Israel rejected God's laws and commandments, and they denied His covenants with their forefathers, and so refused to follow through with those terms and conditions. Among the many sins of the 10 tribes was that they decided to determine for themselves which commandments they would follow, which they would abolish, and which they would modify to suit their preferences. And as a consequence they took up worthless rituals (often in the name of worshipping Yehoveh), they regularly directed their worthless rituals to worthless idols, and as a result have made themselves worthless.

Verse 16 continues with God handing down His verdict. Israel simply stopped being obedient, thinking obedience was a thing of the past. So, they thought it OK if they did things God's Torah told them not to do, and chief among these was making graven images of God.

They adopted the horrific practice of human sacrifice and offered their sons and daughters as burnt offerings to these worthless idols. In fact, says verse 17, they dedicated themselves to doing things that they thought were good, but in fact were terribly evil in God's eyes.

Verse 18 is frightening because notice that it says that God didn't only exile Israel from their land, but from His PRESENCE! He put a distance between them and Him, such that they could not experience His holiness. Thus He removed all of the 10 tribes from their land, and only Judah remained (for now). It is noted that Judah was not walking in God's ways, and instead had taken up the same ways as their brother-kingdom Israel.

Verse 20 gives us the progression that resulted in the 10 tribes' exile:

1. God **rejected** Israel because of their sins.
2. God **oppressed** Israel with drought and other disasters
3. He **delivered** them into the hands of foreign invaders
4. In the end, He **cast** them away (He exiled Israel)

And then in verse 21 we have a passage that is critical to explaining God's actions. Israel seceded from the Kingdom of God (they broke away after Solomon's death), which operated by design under a Davidic king. That is to say, that the Kingdom of God on earth is ONLY the Kingdom of God when a member of the royal line of David is ruling over it on. And that principle applied then, and it still applies to this very day, and will forever. If anyone else than Yeshua of Nazareth is your Lord and King, then you live in some other kingdom than the Kingdom of God. And the chief characteristic of this Yeshua MUST be as a Davidic king. And those who want to be God's people must recognize him as a descendant of David (who, by the way, is a Jew), or they live in some other kingdom than God's Kingdom no matter what they may tell themselves.

When the people of the newly formed northern kingdom of Israel crowned Jeroboam as their king, they did so without God's sanction. When they did this they repudiated the divinely ordained line of David as the only authorized line of kings for the Hebrews. Jeroboam took it a step further and not only repudiated the line of David, but also repudiated the Temple, the Levitical Priesthood, and God's Torah, which the Lord says (to end verse 21) was a GREAT sin.

Verses 22 and 23 explain that the people of Israel eventually decided to accept the ways of Jeroboam and then in time refused to turn away from those ways even though God sent them

Prophets telling them that they had strayed. The Rabbis point out that even when King Hoshea took down the sentries and forts that had been blocking the 10 tribes from going to Jerusalem for the Biblical Festivals, and they had the chance to rejoin their Judean brothers in proper worship and celebration, the majority chose not to because they had become so comfortable in their new ways and traditions and observances.

Again, we have an exact parallel to that situation within modern Christianity. There were centuries when Israel did not exist, and Jews were little more than an afterthought for the Church. At most, Jews were a political problem, not a religious issue. The Church leadership had little opposition, and all knowledge of the Bible was locked up in the Christian Seminaries and dispensed to a relative few. So the average church-goer only knew whatever the leadership taught. But with the return of Israel as a nation, and with the advent of the Internet, suddenly the centrality of Israel and the Jewish people has become apparent. Knowledge of the Bible is easily accessible to everyone and almost free. The error and wrongness of Replacement Theology has been exposed. Yet, much (if not most) of the Church refuses to let go of it because so many of our cherished doctrines are predicated upon it.

But the Lord is turning the pressure up on us, His worshippers, even more. Millions of Believers around the globe now understand that the Torah and the Old Testament remain relevant. Obedience to God's commandments was not abolished. And that the many manmade customs and observances created by the Church leadership over the centuries, so many of them founded upon and steeped in pagan customs, and put in place to counter anything that seemed too Jewish or were a product of the Hebrew Old Testament, need to be retired and replaced with the ways that God teaches us in His Word.

This revelation and call to return to God's prescribed way is, I believe, the truest definition of revival. That is what King Hezekiah was trying for, and that is what Seed of Abraham Ministries and many, many other Hebrew Roots ministries are trying for (admittedly, imperfectly).

We'll continue next time with this pivotal chapter in 2nd Kings 17 that tells the story of the end of the 10 tribes of Israel and they're being cast away into their Assyrian exile that is right before our eyes coming to a close.