

NOON BIBLE STUDY: 2 KINGS 17

2 KINGS 17:1-6 - HOSHEA, THE LAST KING OF ISRAEL

THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE IS LOOMING OVER THE ENTIRE REGION. WE HAVE MET THE KINGS OF ASSYRIA IN THE LAST CHAPTERS, BUT NOW WE WILL COME FACE TO FACE WITH THE DOMINANCE OF THE KINGDOM LIKE NEVER BEFORE. INITIALLY HOSHEA KING OF ISRAEL BECOMES A "SERVANT" OF THE KING OF ASSYRIA (SHALMANESER V) AND "PAID HIM TRIBUTE" (V. 3). BUT FOR SOME REASON HOSHEA ATTEMPTED TO CONSPIRE WITH EGYPT AND STOPPED PAYING ASSYRIA ISRAEL'S DUES. AS A RESULT, HOSHEA IS IMPRISONED AND ISRAEL IS INVADDED.

AFTER A 3 YEAR SIEGE OF SAMARIA (WHERE THE INVADING ARMY SURROUNDS THE CITY AND "STARVES" OUT THE PEOPLE), THE CAPITAL OF ISRAEL IS FINALLY CAPTURED. AND THE CITIZENS OF ISRAEL WILL BE EXILED.

ASSYRIAN POLICY OF EXILE: ASSYRIA PRACTICED A MILITARY AND POLITICAL STRATEGY AGAINST THEIR CONQUERED FOES KNOWN AS EXILE AND DEPORTATION. THEY WOULD LITERALLY MOVE THE POPULATION OF ONE NATION INTO THE LAND OF ANOTHER. IN THE CASE OF ISRAEL THEY WERE MOVED FROM THE LAND OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM INTO ASSYRIA (SPECIFICALLY IN HALAH AND HARBOR ON THE RIVER GOZAN, PER 2 KINGS 17:6). THIS PROVED TO BE TREMENDOUSLY DISORIENTING FOR THE CAPTIVE PEOPLE. THEY ARE TAKEN TO LIVE IN UNFAMILIAR LANDS, SURROUNDED BY SPEAKERS OF UNKNOWN LANGUAGES. THIS LED TO THE DOMINATION OF THE DEFEATED NATION AS WELL AS THE DEPENDENCE OF THAT NATION UPON ASSYRIA (AND LATER BABYLON). IT OFTEN CAUSED THE CAPTIVES TO BECOME ASSIMILATED INTO THE ASSYRIAN CULTURE, LEADING TO A GROWTH IN THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE BY DEFAULT. IN ADDITION, ANOTHER NATION WOULD THEN BE TRANSPLANTED BACK INTO THE LAND OF THE DEFEATED COUNTRY, SO AS TO MAKE IT HARDER FOR THEM TO RETURN THERE, EVEN IF THEY HAD THE CHANCE (MORE ON THIS NEXT).

2 KINGS 17:7-18, 19-23 - THE END OF ISRAEL & WHY THEY WERE DEFEATED & EXILED

THIS IS QUITE THE EXHAUSTIVE LISTING OF ISRAEL'S SINS. BUT THIS NOT BECAUSE THE WRITER OF 2 KINGS IS WORDY, THIS LISTING IS QUITE INTENTIONAL BY THE LORD. IN A WAY THIS LISTING IS THE JUDGE'S SENTENCE UPON THE GUILTY PARTY WHICH INCLUDED A FULL AND EMBARRASSING READING OF ALL OF THE CRIMINAL'S EVIL DEEDS. ISRAEL IS GUILTY. OF THE FOLLOWING SINS...

- V. 7 - FEARING OTHER GODS, RATHER THAN THE LORD WHO BROUGHT "THEM" OUT OF EGYPT
- V. 8 - WALKING IN THE CUSTOMS OF THE PAGAN NATIONS AND THE EVIL KINGS OF ISRAEL
- V. 9 - DOING SECRETEIVE THINGS, BUILDING HIGH PLACES IN EVERY TOWN
- V. 10 - SETTING UP SACRED PILLARS AND ASHERIM
- V. 11 - BURNING INCENSE TO FALSE GODS, JUST LIKE THE CANAANITES DID
- V. 12 - SERVING IDOLS, WHICH THE LORD HAD TOLD THEM SPECIFICALLY NOT TO DO
- V. 13-14 - IGNORING THE WARNING TO REPENT THAT THE LORD DECLARED THROUGH HIS PROPHETS
- V. 15 - REJECTING HIS STATUTES AND HIS COVENANT
- V. 16 - FORSAKING THE LORD IN EXCHANGE FOR IDOLS, GOLDEN CALVES, ASHERIM, BAAL AND THE STARS
- V. 17 - SACRIFICING THEIR CHILDREN, PRACTICING WITCHCRAFT AND OTHER ABOMINATIONS

THIS IS A LISTING OF THE SINS OF ISRAEL. FROM THE BEGINNING OF THEIR INCEPTION THEY REJECTED TO THE LORD. THEIR FIRST KING, JEROBOAM HAD BUILT GOLDEN CALVES TO BE WORSHIPPED IN THE NORTH AND SOUTH. EVERY KING AFTER HIM DID THE SIMILAR OR WORSE. THE LORD WAS NEVER HONORED OR SERVED. AND NOTICE IN THESE VERSES, THIS WAS NOT JUST A DECLARATION OF GUILT AGAINST THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL, BUT THE ENTIRE NATION. THE PEOPLE WENT ALONG WITH THE FOOLISHNESS, SIN AND WICKEDNESS OF THEIR KINGS AND WERE JUST AS GUILTY.

YOU CAN HEAR THE JUDGE TELLING THE CRIMINAL IN HIS COURT ROOM "YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER. THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME YOU AND I HAVE SPOKEN, AND IN THE PAST I HAVE LET YOU OFF EASY. YOU SHOULD HAVE RESPONDED TO THE MERCY OF THE COURT BY REFORMING YOUR LIFE AND REJECTING CRIME AND EVIL. BUT SINCE YOU ARE HERE YET AGAIN, AND IT'S CLEAR YOU HAVEN'T HEEDED MY WARNINGS AND CLEAR LAWS, YOU'RE GOING AWAY, FOR A LONG TIME." THAT'S WHAT THE LORD IS SAYING TO ISRAEL

2 KINGS 17:13-14 (NLT) - AGAIN AND AGAIN THE LORD HAD SENT HIS PROPHETS AND SEERS TO WARN BOTH ISRAEL AND JUDAH: "TURN FROM ALL YOUR EVIL WAYS. OBEY MY COMMANDS AND DECREES-- THE ENTIRE LAW THAT I COMMANDED YOUR ANCESTORS TO OBEY, AND THAT I GAVE YOU THROUGH MY SERVANTS THE PROPHETS." 14 BUT THE ISRAELITES WOULD NOT LISTEN. THEY WERE AS STUBBORN AS THEIR ANCESTORS WHO HAD REFUSED TO BELIEVE IN THE LORD THEIR GOD.

NOT ONLY DID THE LORD SEND PROPHETS TO ISRAEL OVER AND OVER AGAIN TO CALL THEM TO REPENTANCE (JUST IN 2 KINGS WE SAW ELIJAH AND ELISHA WHO WERE PRIMARILY SENT TO THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL), BUT THE LORD FOREWARNED THE ENTIRE NATION OF ISRAEL (AND JUDAH) THROUGH MOSES AS THEIR ANCESTORS AGREED TO THE COVENANT. GOD WAS GOING TO BLESS THEM AND MULTIPLY THEM AND KEEP THEM AND FIGHT FOR THEM AND PROVIDE FOR THEM AND PROTECT THEM AND HEAL THEM AND MORE AND MORE AND MORE - IF THEY WOULD JUST FOLLOW HIS WAYS AND SERVE HIM ALONE. BUT IF THEY TURNED FROM HIM (AS ISRAEL DID), HE CLEARLY OUTLINED THE CONSEQUENCES (OR CURSING) OF THAT CHOICE.

DEUTERONOMY 28:15-20, 31-34, 36-37, 41, 45-52, 63-66

THE WORD OF THE LORD HAS COME TO PAST FOR THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL. FROM THIS MOMENT ON, THEY CEASE TO EXIST, SCATTERED AMONGST THE NATIONS, NEVER TO RETURN.

2 KINGS 17:24-28 - NEW RESIDENTS OF ISRAEL

THE KING OF ASSYRIA EXILED PEOPLE FROM BABYLON, CUTHAH, AVVA, HAMATH, AND SEPHAR-VAIM BACK INTO THE LAND OF ISRAEL. THESE NEW RESIDENTS DID NOT FEAR THE LORD AND THE LORD BROUGHT PUNISHMENT AGAINST THEM (LIONS, V. 25). IN RESPONSE TO THIS THE RESIDENTS WRITE BACK TO THE ASSYRIAN KING ABOUT THIS PROBLEM. THE KING SENDS A PRIEST OF THE LORD BACK TO ISRAEL TO TEACH THE RESIDENTS "HOW THEY SHOULD FEAR THE LORD" (V. 28).

THIS IS A CURIOUS MOMENT FOR THE LAND OF ISRAEL. INHABITED ONCE AGAIN BY PAGANS, A PRIEST COMES IN TO INSTRUCT THEM IN THE WAYS OF YAHWEH (FROM THE LAW OF MOSES). SO BABYLONIAN AND MESOPOTAMIANS ARE LIVING IN THE LAND FOLLOWING THE LORD WHILE THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL IS NO MORE. HOW STRANGE.

2 KINGS 17:29-33 - THE NATIONS SERVE THE LORD AND THE GODS THEY MADE

DESPITE THE OPPORTUNITY THAT THESE PAGAN NATIONS HAD TO WORSHIP AND SERVE THE LORD, THEY QUICKLY RETURN TO THEIR NATURAL TENDENCIES AND NATIONAL IDOLS. HOWEVER, THEY DON'T REJECT THE LORD FULLY BUT SERVE HIM ALONG WITH THE GODS THEY MADE.

2 KINGS 17:34-41 - THE NEW RESIDENTS CHOOSE THEIR OLD WAYS

V. 34 - THE NEW RESIDENTS OF ISRAEL ARE STILL FOLLOWING AFTER THE CUSTOMS OF THEIR ORIGINAL LANDS AND GODS. THE WRITER OF 2 KINGS CLOSES THIS CHAPTER WITH A SUMMARIZED STATEMENT OF THE TERMS OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT. HERE'S WHY. THE CHAPTER STARTS WITH A BAD KING (HOSHEA) BEING THE FINAL STRAW BREAKING THE LORD'S LONGSUFFERING TOWARDS ISRAEL. ASSYRIA INVADES, DEFEATS AND DEPORTS. AND THE JUDGE READS THE CRIMES AGAINST THE GUILTY PARTY AS THE OFFENDER IS LED AWAY IN JUDGMENT. AND IT'S AS IF A REPORTER STANDS BEFORE THE CAMERA AND MAKES SOME FINAL REMARKS TO THOSE VIEWING THESE PROCEEDINGS AT HOME.

THAT REPORTER ESSENTIALLY IS SAYING "WHAT A SIGHT WE HAVE SEEN TODAY FOLKS. AND HOW SAD THAT IT ALL HAD TO END THIS WAY FOR ISRAEL. AFTERALL, LET'S NOT FORGET WHAT THE LORD HAD ORIGINALLY OFFERED HIS PEOPLE. HE DELIVERED THEM FROM SLAVERY IN EGYPT AND CLEARLY AND CONSISTENTLY COMMANDED THAT THEY WORSHIP HIM AND HIM ALONE. NOW THE LAND IS FILLED WITH NEW RESIDENTS, BUT EVEN THEY SEEM BENT ON WORSHIPPING THEIR PREFERED GODS RATHER THAN THE LORD." AND THEN THE CAMERA TURNS OFF AND THE BREAKING NEWS EVENT IS OVER.

AND SO WE THEN, AS THE VIEWERS ARE LEFT WITHOUT A PREVIEW OF WHAT IS NEXT OR HOW THINGS WILL TURN AROUND IN "NEXT WEEK'S EPISODE". NOTHING. FADE TO BLACK, STORY OVER, SERIES OVER. THERE ISN'T GOING TO BE AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF ISRAEL NEXT WEEK. THERE ISN'T GOING TO BE AN ADDITIONAL SEASON THAT WILL RESUME AGAIN AFTER A SUMMER BREAK. WE AREN'T COMFORTED THAT IT'S "ALL GOING TO BE OKAY IN THE END". IT'S NOT. THERE IS NO CLOSURE. THE STORY IS OVER AND IT DOES NOT END WELL.

WE WILL START WITH THE LESSON THAT COMES OUT OF THE LAST SECTION OF VERSES. THE NATIONS WHO MOVE INTO THE LAND OF ISRAEL PROVIDE A LESSON FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TODAY. IT IS A COMMON PRACTICE IN OUR DAY TO INVITE NON-BELIEVERS TO CHURCH OR CHRISTIAN GATHERINGS. IN ONE SENSE THIS IS A GOOD IDEA - LET THEM SEE THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE LIVES OF THE CHRISTIANS AND HEAR THE WORD OF GOD THROUGH THE PREACHING OF THE SCRIPTURE, ETC. HOWEVER, THIS CANNOT BE A REPLACEMENT FOR THE GOSPEL BEING THE INVITATION INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD. HERE'S WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT. IF WE AREN'T ASSESSING WHERE PEOPLE ARE AT BASED ON THE GOSPEL, THEIR RESPONSE TO IT AND THE GROWTH OF SPIRITUAL FRUIT IN THEIR LIVES, WE WILL BE TEMPTED TO ASSESS THINGS BASED ON ATTENDANCE, INVOLVEMENT AND THE LIKE. PEOPLE ARE THEN "ASSUMED" INTO THE CHURCH BECAUSE THEY SHOW UP AND STAY FAITHFUL TO ATTEND THE MEETING RATHER THAN WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVE REPENTED AND TURNED TO CHRIST AS THEIR LORD.

HERE'S WHY THIS CONCEPT CAME TO MIND IN LIGHT OF THE PAGAN NATIONS MOVED TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL. THESE PAGAN NATIONS MOVED INTO THE PROMISED LAND. THEY HAD TROUBLE IN THEIR LIFE AND BEGAN TO SEEK THE GOD OF ISRAEL. THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA. IT APPEARS THAT THEY RECEIVED A CERTAIN LEVEL OF DELIVERANCE AS A RESULT OF THIS (NO MORE LION ATTACKS ARE MENTIONED). HOWEVER, WHILE THEY ARE LEARNING THE "BIBLE" AND STARTING TO WORSHIP THE TRUE GOD...THEY NEVER ACTUALLY REJECTED THEIR OLD GODS AND CHANGED THEIR OLD WAYS. IF ONE WERE TO LOOK AT THEIR LIVES FROM AN OVERHEAD VIEW WE WOULD SEE PEOPLE SHOWING UP AT THE MEETING, "WORSHIPPING" THE RIGHT GOD, AND READING/HEARING THE BIBLE...BUT IF WE FOLLOW THEM HOME FROM THE LORD'S GATHERING, WE'D FIND THEM WALKING TO ANOTHER TEMPLE TO WORSHIP ANOTHER GOD.

THE LORD IS LOOKING FOR THOSE WHO WILL LOVE AND WORSHIP HIM WITH ALL OF THEIR HEARTS AND NO OTHER GODS BESIDE HIM. YOU CAN LOVE HIM WITH MOST OF YOUR HEART AND MOST OF YOUR SOUL AND THEN LEAVE SOME FOR ANOTHER GOD. THAT'S CALLED IDOLATRY. WORSHIPPING 100 IDOLS IS IDOLATRY AND GIVING WORSHIP OTHER THAN 100% TO THE LORD IS AS WELL.

LASTLY, WE LEARN FROM THE TRAGIC DOWNFALL ISRAEL. I THINK THE OBVIOUS TAKEAWAY IS THAT THE LORD IS SERIOUS ABOUT HIS COVENANT. HE IS COMMITTED TO HIS WORD WHETHER THE OTHER PARTY IS COMMITTED TO THEIRS. IN THE EXILE OF ISRAEL WE SEE THAT THE LORD IS THE GOD OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE. I HOPE WE ALSO RECOGNIZE HIS MERCY HERE AS WELL. FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING THE STORY, WE RECOGNIZE THAT ISRAEL "SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER" AND HAD MANY "SECOND CHANCES" BUT CONTINUOUSLY REJECTED THEM.

WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY WHERE HUMANITY IS QUICK TO BLAME "GOD" WHEN JUSTICE IS SERVED. "I THOUGHT GOD WAS A GOD OF LOVE" OR "IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY DID X, Y, OR Z HAPPEN" ARE COMMONLY SPOKEN. WHAT WE MISS IS THE ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S MERCY THAT HAS BEEN PRESENT AND PRESENTED BEFORE THE DAY OF JUSTICE. WE CAN'T IGNORE HIS DAILY MERCY AND COMPLAIN ABOUT HIS FINAL JUDGMENT. WE CAN'T REJECT HIS CALL FOR US TO RETURN TO HIM AND THEN GET ANGRY WHEN TROUBLE COMES AS A RESULT OF OUR DECISION TO WALK OUR OWN WAY. INSTEAD, WE SHOULD RESPOND TO HIS GRACE, GRAB ON TO HIS MERCY AND LIVE FOR HIM WHILE WE HAVE THE CHANCE.

THE COVENANT THAT THE LORD OFFERED ISRAEL WAS NOT UNFAIR OR CRUEL. IT WAS SPECTACULAR AND SIMPLE. THE TERMS ISRAEL WAS CALLED TO KEEP WERE CLEAR. THEY JUST CHOSE TO SEEK SOMETHING ELSE.

THE NEW COVENANT OFFERED THROUGH JESUS IS NO DIFFERENT. OUR "PART OF THE DEAL" IS MINISCULE COMPARED TO THE REWARD OF THE COVENANT. HOW FOOLISH FOR US TO NOT HOLD UP OUR END OF THE BARGAIN. WHAT IS REQUIRED OF US IS "FAITH".

HEBREWS 11:6 - AND WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE HIM, FOR HE WHO COMES TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS AND THAT HE IS A REWARDER OF THOSE WHO SEEK HIM.

ISRAEL LOST FAITH. AND AS A RESULT ISRAEL LOST GOD. SO WE MUST LEARN FROM THEIR (BAD) EXAMPLE AND KEEP THE FAITH, FOR THAT IS OUR COVENANT REQUIREMENT. AND HOW WONDERFUL IS THAT, FOR IN THE END OUR FAITH IS ROOTED IN THE GREAT FATHER WHO HAS INVITED AND PAID FOR US TO BE HIS CHILDREN.

MAY WE BE RESOLVED IN OUR FAITH TODAY. MAY WE REMOVE THE IDOLS IN OUR HEARTS AND HOMES. MAY WE REJECT TEMPORAL OFFERS OF MOMENTARY AND LIMITED "SATISFACTION" IN EXCHANGE OF ETERNAL LIFE. MAY WE HAVE HEARTS THAT LONG TO OBEY HIS WORD. MAY THE LORD INCREASE OUR FAITH AND MOST OF ALL KEEP US NEAR TO HIM. FOR THE GREATEST TREASURE OF OUR COVENANT-KEEPING REWARD IS TO KNOW AND BE WITH HIM.