

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings

Lesson 19: The Fall of Samaria -- 2 Kings 15:1–17:41

Picture a house that has been slowly rotting from the inside. The paint still clings to the boards, a few flowers grow by the door, and neighbors walk past without noticing. Then one autumn morning the whole structure collapses into a pile of splinters and dust. Anyone who had watched closely would not be surprised. The signs were there for decades. That is Israel in 2 Kings 15 through 17: a kingdom that rotted through two centuries of idolatry and covenant rebellion until, in 722 B.C., the Assyrian empire swept in and carried its people away captive. What looks like a geopolitical catastrophe is, in God's eyes, something far more personal: a Father making good on warnings He had issued again and again.

The parade of kings in chapter 15 is almost dizzying. Zechariah reigns six months, then Shallum murders him. Shallum lasts one month before Menahem kills him. Menahem buys off the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser with a crushing tribute that he squeezes from every wealthy man in Israel. Pekahiah follows for two years, then Pekah assassinates him and reigns twenty. Finally Hoshea kills Pekah and stumbles along for nine years until Samaria falls. Six kings in roughly thirty years, five of them removed by assassination. Every one of them "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD." Meanwhile in Judah, the faithful Jotham is succeeded by the catastrophically wicked Ahaz, who sacrificed his own son in fire, erected a pagan altar in the temple, and looked to Assyria for salvation instead of to God.

But the heart of this passage is chapter 17. After the fall is described in three stark verses, the inspired writer pauses for a full twenty-three verses to explain why. This is not just history. It is theology. "This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt." The text rehearses the Exodus, the covenant, the commandments, the prophets sent to warn them, and Israel's stubborn refusal to listen. They feared other gods. They walked in the customs of the nations God had driven out before them. They crossed every line. And God, patient beyond what their rebellion deserved, finally gave them over to the consequences they had chosen.

There is both warning and wonder here. The warning is sobering: God means what He says. Persistent, unrepentant sin against a covenant God brings real and severe judgment. The wonder is that even in exile, God had not finished. His promises to David still stood. The Redeemer was still coming. The same chapter that records the darkest hour of the northern kingdom also shows us a God who keeps His word across centuries of human failure. If He was faithful then, He is faithful now. That is the God we worship.

Group Discussion: When you look at the rapid succession of wicked kings in 2 Kings 15 and the theological explanation in chapter 17, what does this passage reveal about how God's patience and God's justice work together, and how should that change the way we live today?

Personal Reflection: Is there an area of your life where you have been receiving warnings from God's Word or from brothers and sisters in Christ, but you have been slow to respond? What would it look like this week to take that warning seriously before the consequences deepen?

Read 2 Kings 15:1–17:41

Study Questions

1. Read 2 Kings 15:8–31. Six kings rise and fall in the northern kingdom in a remarkably short span of time, most of them through violence. What does this cascading instability reveal about the kind of nation Israel had become, and how does the repeated phrase 'he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD' function as the inspired writer's verdict on each reign?
2. The writer of 2 Kings keeps score not with military victories or economic prosperity, but with faithfulness to God. Think about the measuring sticks you use day-to-day to assess whether life is going well. How closely do those match the measuring stick God uses here?
3. Read 2 Kings 15:32–16:20. Jotham 'did what was right in the eyes of the LORD,' yet 'the high places were not removed.' His son Ahaz went further into wickedness than almost any Judean king, even sacrificing his son in fire and copying a pagan altar for the Jerusalem temple. What does the contrast between Jotham and Ahaz teach us about the danger of leaving reform incomplete, and how does Ahaz illustrate the downward spiral that results from looking to pagan nations rather than to God?
4. Ahaz chose the king of Assyria as his protector instead of trusting God, and then remodeled the temple worship to please his new political ally. In what specific ways do people today redesign their faith to fit the values and expectations of the culture around them, and what is the first step toward resisting that pressure?

5. Read 2 Kings 17:1–6. Hoshea the last king of Israel tries a political maneuver, secretly appealing to Egypt for help while withholding tribute from Assyria. It fails, and Samaria falls after a three-year siege. How does Hoshea's desperate diplomacy contrast with what a faithful king should have done, and what does it show us about trusting human strategies over God in moments of crisis?
6. Hoshea's attempt to play superpowers against each other instead of crying out to God is painfully relatable. Describe a time when you found yourself scrambling for a human solution to a problem before it even occurred to you to pray and trust God. What did you learn from that experience?
7. Read 2 Kings 17:7–23. This passage is the inspired theological explanation of why Israel fell. List the specific sins named in these verses. How do these verses demonstrate both the seriousness of Israel's guilt and the extraordinary patience God showed before the judgment came?
8. Second Kings 17:14 says the people 'would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been.' Stubbornness to God's Word is rarely dramatic; it usually looks like drift and delay. What habits of Bible reading, prayer, or communal accountability help you stay genuinely responsive to God's Word rather than merely familiar with it?
9. Read 2 Kings 17:7–23 alongside 1 Corinthians 10:1–12. Paul explicitly says that what happened to Israel 'was written down for our instruction.' How does the fall of Samaria function as a solemn warning to Christians about the danger of presuming on God's patience? How do you hold that sobering warning together with the reality of God's mercy and His promise of a coming Redeemer, so that you arrive at healthy fear rather than despair?

10. Read 2 Kings 17:24–41. The nations resettled in Samaria developed a religion that mixed fear of the LORD with worship of their own gods. The text says bluntly, ‘They feared the LORD but also served their own gods.’ As you look back over this entire passage from chapter 15 through chapter 17, what is the one most specific truth about God’s character or one concrete change in how you are living that God is pressing into your heart through this study, and how will you act on it this week?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 28:15–68, where Moses warns Israel of the precise curses that will come for covenant unfaithfulness; Hosea 4:1–6, a prophet’s lament over Israel’s lack of knowledge and its fatal consequences; Amos 4:6–12, God’s repeated appeals through hardship before final judgment; Isaiah 10:5–12, God’s use of Assyria as an instrument of judgment; 1 Corinthians 10:1–12, Paul’s direct application of Israel’s failure as a warning to the church

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