

2 Kings 17: The Fall of Israel and the Assyrian Captivity

Narrative Summary

2 Kings 17 tells the tragic story of the end of the northern kingdom of Israel. Hoshea, son of Elah, became Israel's final king and ruled from Samaria for nine years. Though he was not described as being as wicked as some earlier kings, he still "did evil in the sight of the LORD." Politically, Hoshea became a vassal of Assyria and paid tribute, but he later rebelled by seeking help from Egypt and withholding payment. Assyria responded by imprisoning Hoshea, invading the land, besieging Samaria for three years, and finally carrying Israel away into exile.

The chapter makes clear that Israel's fall was not merely a political defeat. It was a spiritual judgment. The people were taken captive because they sinned against the LORD who had redeemed them from Egypt. They worshiped other gods, followed the customs of the nations, built high places, served idols, rejected God's covenant, ignored His prophets, and refused to repent. The exile was the outward consequence of a long inward rebellion.

This background also helps explain why Samaria remains significant in the New Testament. The northern kingdom was devastated, but the people of the land did not simply vanish. A remnant remained in and around Samaria, mixed with foreign settlers brought in by Assyria, and their descendants were known in Jesus' day as Samaritans. They preserved memories of Israel's patriarchs, honored Jacob's well, and expected the Messiah, even while their worship and identity had become separated from Jerusalem.

Key Scripture: Israel Taken Captive Because of Sin

2 Kings 17:5–6 records the historical fall of Samaria: "Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes."

2 Kings 17:7–8 explains why this happened: "For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made."

2 Kings 17:13–14 shows that God had warned them before judgment came: "Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying,

Turn ye 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. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God.”

2 Kings 17:18–20 gives the theological verdict: “Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. Also Judah kept not the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight.”

Historical Context: Who Was Taken Captive?

The people taken captive were the Israelites of the northern kingdom, whose capital was Samaria. This kingdom included the northern tribes that had separated from David’s line after Solomon’s reign. By the time of 2 Kings 17, Assyria had become the dominant empire in the region. After Hoshea’s rebellion, Samaria fell, and many Israelites were deported to Assyrian-controlled territories: Halah, Gozan by the Habor River, and cities of the Medes.

Historically, the Assyrian policy was to remove conquered peoples from their homeland and resettle them elsewhere. This weakened national identity, disrupted rebellion, and helped Assyria control conquered territories. Israel’s deportation therefore included many of the leading families, officials, soldiers, craftsmen, landowners, and ordinary citizens from the northern kingdom. The biblical text emphasizes the covenant reason for the captivity: they were carried away because they had sinned against the LORD.

Who Was Left Behind?

2 Kings 17 does not give a complete census of who remained, but it indicates that not every person in the land was removed. Some poorer or less politically significant inhabitants likely remained in the countryside, while Assyria brought foreign peoples into the land to repopulate Samaria and its cities. **2 Kings 17:24** says, “And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.”

The result was a mixed population in the former northern kingdom. Some Israelites remained, but many were deported, and foreign settlers were brought in. This mixture contributed to the later identity of the Samaritans. The chapter describes these new settlers as learning something about the LORD while continuing to worship their own gods, producing a divided and syncretistic religion rather than covenant faithfulness. In the New

Testament, this history is still visible: Samaria is inhabited by Samaritans who remember Jacob, debate the proper place of worship, and are still treated by Jews as a separate and disputed people.

Mixed Worship in Samaria

The new population that Assyria settled in Samaria developed a mixed form of worship that combined reverence for the LORD with devotion to other deities. This is a major theme of 2 Kings 17 and helps explain the spiritual condition of the region in later biblical history. [[2 Kings 17...by Assyria | Word](#)]

2 Kings 17:33 states: *“They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence.”* [[2 Kings 17...by Assyria | Word](#)]

This verse exposes the central problem of the new Samaritan population. While they acknowledged the LORD and practiced certain aspects of His worship, they refused to abandon their former gods. Their religion was not wholehearted covenant faithfulness but a blending of truth and idolatry. This kind of mixed worship, often called **syncretism**, violated God's repeated command that He alone was to be worshiped. The tragedy of Israel's history was that the nation had fallen into idolatry, and the people who replaced many of the exiles continued a similar pattern of divided allegiance. [[2 Kings 17...by Assyria | Word](#)]

This background is important for understanding the Samaritans in the New Testament. They retained elements of Israel's faith and heritage, yet their worship had developed separately from Jerusalem and was shaped by the mixed religious history described in 2 Kings 17. The conversations between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4 reflect the lasting effects of this historical and religious division.

New Testament Connection: Israel's Remnant in Samaria

By New Testament times, Samaria was still populated by people who traced their religious and regional identity back to the northern kingdom. They were not simply Gentiles, nor were they fully identified with the Jews of Judea. They were a mixed people: descendants of Israelites who remained after the Assyrian conquest, joined with foreign settlers whom Assyria had placed in the land. This helps explain the tension between Jews and Samaritans and also why Jesus' ministry to Samaria is so meaningful.

John 4:5–6 connects Jesus' ministry in Samaria to Israel's patriarchal history: “Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that

Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there." The mention of Jacob, Joseph, and the well shows that Samaria still carried the memory of Israel's ancestral inheritance.

John 4:9 also shows the deep divide that had developed: "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." Yet Jesus did not avoid Samaria. He entered it, spoke truth there, and revealed Himself as Messiah to a Samaritan woman.

John 4:20–26 shows the Samaritan woman's connection to Israel's worship controversy: she said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus answered that true worship would not be centered merely on Gerizim or Jerusalem, but that "the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." He then revealed, "I that speak unto thee am he."

Acts 8:5–8 continues this restoration theme after Jesus' resurrection: "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake." The gospel reaching Samaria shows that the people once associated with Israel's broken northern kingdom were not forgotten by God. The same land that had been judged in 2 Kings 17 became a place where Christ was proclaimed and received with joy.

Bible Study Themes

- **Sin has covenant consequences.** Israel's captivity was not random misfortune; it was the result of persistent rebellion against the LORD.
- **God warns before He judges.** The LORD sent prophets and seers calling Israel and Judah to turn back, but the people refused to listen.
- **Idolatry reshapes identity.** Israel "followed vanity, and became vain," showing that people become like what they worship.
- **Political compromise cannot replace repentance.** Hoshea looked to Egypt for deliverance, but Israel's deepest problem was not Assyria; it was sin against God.
- **Judah remained, but the warning applied to them too.** The text says only Judah was left, yet Judah also failed to keep God's commandments.
- **God's purposes continue beyond judgment.** The exile scattered the northern tribes, but Samaria's later appearance in the New Testament shows that a remnant connected to Israel's northern heritage remained within God's redemptive concern.

Discussion Questions

1. According to 2 Kings 17:7–8, what specific sins led to Israel's captivity?

2. Why is it important that God sent prophets and seers before judgment came?
3. How did Israel's worship of other gods affect its national identity and spiritual life?
4. What can Hoshea's failed alliance with Egypt teach about trusting political solutions without repentance?
5. How does 2 Kings 17 serve as a warning to Judah and to later readers?
6. How do John 4 and Acts 8 show that Samaria, once judged in 2 Kings 17, was still included in God's plan of redemption?