

Commentary on Second Kings chapter 17 by Chuck Smith 2.1.23

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February memory verse Luke 24:45 (NKJV)

And **He** opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the **Scriptures**.

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Kings, chapter seventeen. In the seventeenth chapter, we come to the death of the northern kingdom, the nation of Israel.

In the twelfth year when Ahaz was the king in Judah ([2Ki 17:1](#)),

That's the king of the southern kingdom.

Hoshea began to reign in Samaria over Israel. He reigned for nine years. He did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD ([2Ki 17:1-2](#)),

So, unfortunately, Israel did not have one single king of which it was not testified that he did evil in the sight of the Lord. Not one king of Israel followed after the Lord from the very beginning of Jeroboam, when the kingdom was divided into the northern and southern kingdom. From Jeroboam onward, all of the kings did evil in the sight of the Lord. It is interesting that as the king goes, so went the nation so often. And the nations following after God or turning from God was largely dependent upon the influence of the king. And so the Assyrians came up against them.

Shalmaneser the king of Assyria; and Hoshea became a servant; he began to pay tribute unto Shalmaneser. But the king of Assyria found him conspiring: for they had sent to the king of Egypt for help ([2Ki 17:3-4](#)).

They had taken the money that they were supposed to send for tribute, and they sent it to the king of Egypt to hire mercenaries to come and to fight against Assyria.

So the Assyrians came again [and they circled the city and they captured it and they bound him up and placed him in prison] after sieging Samaria for three years ([2Ki 17:5](#)).

And in the ninth year Hoshea the king of Assyria.

Commentary on Second Kings chapter 17 by Chuck Smith 2.1.23

In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah, in Habor by the river Gozan, and the city of the Medes ([2Ki 17:6](#)).

Now God begins to enumerate His indictment against Israel and lists the reasons why Israel, a once great and powerful nation. The people who were once known as the people of God and have been a strong and powerful nation. But God lists His indictment against them, the reasons why they became weak. The reasons why they were defeated and fell to their enemies.

And 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 the Pharaoh, and they feared other gods ([2Ki 17:7](#)),

The first indictment is their failure to be what God wanted them to be, the missing of the mark. They sinned against the Lord, and they served... they began to reverence and worship and serve other gods. This was caused partially by a misinterpreting of their history. They failed to realize that it was God that made them great. It was their relationship to God that made them strong. It was God who brought them out of Egypt. It was God who brought them through the wilderness. It was God who brought them in the land. It was God who caused them to possess the land and to defeat their enemies. But they began to misinterpret their history and they began to attribute their greatness and their victories to other things: to other gods.

They build the golden calf, two of them. Set one in Dan and one in Bethel, and the king said, "These are the gods that brought you out of Israel." And they began to forsake the true and the living God and worshipped the gods that they had made with their own hands.

Now a man has to worship something. It's just innate within us; I've got to worship something. There is a void within that I am seeking to fill. It is a spiritual void. I've got to fill it with something. And if I don't fill it with the true and the living God, I'm going to fill it with garbage, the garbage of nonsense. I will, as the humanistic philosophy says today, I will take my leap of faith. I must take the leap of faith. For they say the lower story of reality is only despair and man can't live in despair. So man must take the leap of faith into the upper story of a non-reasoned religious experience. And the world today is filled with non-reasoned religious experiences.

So the children of Israel sinned against the Lord. They turned from God, but they sought to fill the void in the worship of the other gods. They misinterpreted their history, and they began to attribute the greatness to characteristics of their own nationality. "We're tough people. We're hearty people. We're smart people. We have a democratic system of government. We have a free enterprise system. This is what makes a nation great. This is what makes the nation strong." And we begin to attribute the greatness and the strength to these other things rather than to the fact that we were a nation founded in God. And that God was the strength because God was the heart of the nation, and thus,

Commentary on Second Kings chapter 17 by Chuck Smith 2.1.23

there was strength because of the moral strength that was in the heart of the nation because the people worshipped and served God.

But when the planks that hold the people and the nation together, when these moral planks begin to decay, and begin to rot, then the nation surely cannot stand much longer and the planks have become so rotten. The moral decay have become so great in Israel that the nation could no longer stand.

And so the children of Israel did secretly those things which were not right in the eyes of God, they built the high places in the cities, and the towers in order to worship the strange gods. They set up images. And they burned incense in all the high places, until the LORD carried them away captive: they served the idols, whereof the LORD said, You should not do this thing. The LORD testified against them, He sent His prophets unto them to warn them but they failed to listen to the prophets of God. They did not hearken to the servants, the prophets said, Turn you from your evil ways, keep God's commandments and statutes. But they would not hear, they hardened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenants that he had made with their fathers, and the testimonies which he had testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain ([2Ki 17:9-15](#)).

That is always the effect of following vanity. You become vain. The word vanity is emptiness. Following emptiness, you become empty. Now, it is interesting that people today are following after emptiness in their pursuit of happiness. It seems that the goal of man today is to be happy. And we all have in our own minds that mental concept of what it will take to make me happy. Happiness is... you know, and each of you can finish that sentence yourself, because each of you have in your mind that which you think it would take to make you happy. Happiness is a million dollars in the bank. The bank may fold tomorrow.

Happiness is an experience that results in the right relationship with God.

The pursuit of the world: following after emptiness, they've become empty.

and they went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD charged them, you should not do like them ([2Ki 17:15](#)).

Now, here is one thing that we've got to be careful about, because there is strong pressure today for us to do exactly this. To do like the world around us. Today the world around us is governed by a humanistic philosophy, which declares that there is nothing really evil or wrong in and of itself. For there is no absolute good or bad. It is all relative to your culture, to your background, to the area where you live, to the mores of society, and the mores are always that which determines what is right and what is wrong within a society. And so the sociologists point to the mores of the New Guinea culture, or the mores of some South American Indian tribe, or the mores of the Eskimos, and so forth. And they can prove that any kind of a relationship is accepted and is good in particular

Commentary on Second Kings chapter 17 by Chuck Smith 2.1.23

societies. So it all depends upon your society whether or not a relationship is right or wrong.

Wrong. There are absolutes as far as morals are concerned. God has laid down the absolutes, but the men of Israel, the people of Israel had made the mistake of following the mores of the society around them, and following the mores of that society, they became corrupted before God. And being corrupted before God, they were destroyed. And the greatness and the strength of the nation was sapped and they became weak morally. Weak spiritually, and then it only follows that they were to be destroyed as a nation. For the true strength of any nation lies in the moral planks upon which that nation stands.

God sent his servants, the prophets. They cried out against the way the people were living. But they were accused of being bigoted, narrow-minded, old fashioned, prudent, and the people would not hearken. And thus, the nation fell. Now God had given them other warnings; God had allowed them to fall, really, in the battle even against small nations. Not totally defeated, but they were once ruling over Moab, and the Moabites rebelled against them. The Moabites were not a big people. They were not a strong people. They were just a little nation. But Israel had become so weak they could not subdue Moab and bring it back under their control.

And seeing that Moab had made a successful incursion against them, then the Edomites decided to rebel from their control. And the other small nations, one by one seeing and being encouraged by the weakness of Israel began to pick on Israel. Began to battle against them, and they were unable to win a decisive victory over them. And even then, they didn't recognize their weakness. Even then, they were deceived as Samson, who, once his hair was cut off and his vow before God was broken, knew not that he was weak as other men. And when Delilah said, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you." He said, "I will shake myself as at other times and go out against them." And he did not know that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. And he fell before the hands of the Philistines, because without the power of God's Spirit, he was weak just like anybody else.

And without God, our nation is weak just like anybody else. And our nation is turned from God. We have turned from actually having God at the heart and the center of our national life. And though we still print on the coin, "In God we trust," it seems almost a travesty. And though the Bible was the first textbook, and the only textbook in the first public school in America, yet now, because of the decisions of the Supreme Court, we cannot even have a Bible class in a public school that the children can attend at their own discretion. Nor can there be public prayers offered within the schoolroom. Of course, the kids violate that every time a test comes along.

The nation has become weak. And now the little nations are beginning to pick on us. North Korea, unable to defeat them. South and North Vietnam, they defeated us. Iran, they are mocking us. They're taking advantage of us. They know we're too weak to react, to respond, and it will be some other nation next. And after that, another. Because

Commentary on Second Kings chapter 17 by Chuck Smith 2.1.23

we have proven our inability to react or to respond. And it is only encouraging the enemy, and it is only a matter of time until Russia makes her move. And believe me, if we can't defeat the little vassals of Russia, how in the world do we ever expect to defeat Russia? We can't.

So the death of a nation. It's always sad. It's always tragic to see a nation that was once strong, once mighty, once glorious, to see it die. To watch it in its agony of death. To stand helplessly by and know there is nothing you can do. We see our nation today in the agony of death. The same conditions that prevailed in Israel prevail in our nation today. We have turned our backs upon God. We have made materialism, pleasure, intellectual pursuits the master passions of our lives. We have turned from the true and the living God. We've become weak. We failed to realize that it was God that made us strong. That it was God's grace that was shed upon us that made us a mighty nation. And we've begun to attribute the greatness to other things and to declare the praises of the free enterprise system or of the democratic system of government and all, rather than to praise and thank God for His strength and what He has done. And I am convinced that unless there is a great spiritual revival and a turning to God in the United States, that we will fall.

So God gives His indictment against them, and in verse twenty-three he concludes.

Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day ([2Ki 17:23](#)).

In 721 BC, the northern kingdom fell to Assyria. And the king of Assyria had a practice of taking the people, all of them, out of the land, and taking them to other places, scattering them, and then re-populating them in strange places.

It would be like if Russia should defeat us now, and they move all of the people out of the United States to various provinces in Russia, down into the area of the Caucasus, and down through the areas of Estonia, and up through Latvia, and to Siberia. And all of a sudden you're living in a city where maybe there are only three other Americans and there's a hundred thousand Russians. You can't speak their language and everything is strange. It's strange culture and all. You're completely alienated. You're demoralized. There's no way you can get together to rebel against this kind of situation. Thus was the practice of the Assyrians.

So subduing their enemies until there is no recovering from it. As they re-populate them into other areas where they have no chance of getting together and forming a united kind of a rebellion against what has happened to them. And so, thus happened with the nation Israel by Assyria, and they became scattered, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom.

Now the Assyrians then took other nations that they had conquered and they brought the people from those other nations and they established them in this strange area to

Commentary on Second Kings chapter 17 by Chuck Smith 2.1.23

them, the area of Samaria. Totally uprooted them, brought them into an area that they were totally unfamiliar with. And they set them in the area of Samaria.

And so it was when they these other people first began to dwell in the land of Samaria [the land of Israel there, the northern part], that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, and began to destroy the people ([2Ki 17:25](#)).

And so they came to the king of Assyria and they said, "Hey, we don't understand the ways of the gods of the land. And lions and wild beasts are killing our people. So send someone to teach us the ways of the gods of the land so that we can live in that land." And so the king got one of the priests and he sent him back unto Samaria, and the priest taught them the ways of the Lord. And then there is a very interesting scripture. So it said,

And they feared the LORD, but served their own gods ([2Ki 17:33](#)),

Oh, what a picture of so many people today. They respect the Lord. They acknowledge the Lord. They give obeisance to the Lord. But they serve their own gods. They may even sing praises unto the Lord. They may listen to the songs about the Lord. They acknowledge the Lord that He exists. But when it comes down to their life and their lifestyles, they're actually serving other gods. Now Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: you're either going to love the one, and hate the other; or hold to the one, and despise the other. And you cannot serve God and mammon" ([Matthew 6:24](#)); which was, of course, another god of those days. The god of power represented by money.

How many people today reverence, fear the Lord, but yet, they serve other gods. It's like Bob Dillon saying, "You've got to serve somebody." And it isn't the one that you really are reverencing so much as the one that you're actually serving that really counts. Who are you serving? Are you serving the gods of your own creation? Your own lust? Your own desires? Or are you serving the true and the living God, obedient unto His Word and to His commands? And so a real paradox here. "Fear the Lord, serve their own gods."