

September 27, 2026 (Lesson 4)

DEMISE OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

1. **Hoshea: Israel's Last King** (2 Kings 17:1-6)
2. **Why Israel Fell** (2 Kings 17:7-18)
3. **Fallen Israel's Continued Idolatry** (2 Kings 17:24-34)

Central Truth: People are ruined when they refuse to repent.

Focus: Realize that persistent sin invites God's judgment and determine to live pleasing to God.

Evangelism Emphasis: Jesus Christ saves repentant sinners from condemnation.

Golden Text: "The Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only" (2 Kings 17:18).

The northern kingdom of Israel lasted about two hundred years. For that entire period, they did not have one righteous ruler. Beginning with Jeroboam until Hoshea, the last king, each sovereign of Israel was wicked and led the people astray into idolatry. In this lesson, we deal with the final days of the kingdom. Hoshea was like his predecessors, evil and godless. And, like them, he refused to heed the word of God's prophets who repeatedly warned of the Lord's impending judgment. During this period, we see the ministries of Isaiah and Micah in Judah, and Hosea, who was sent from Judah to Israel. These men of God constantly called on both Israel and Judah to repent. Some in Judah heeded the warning. However, neither King Hoshea nor the northern tribes listened to the word of the Lord. They stubbornly followed their false gods and rejected the ways of the true and living God.

As we study the last days and fall of the northern kingdom, we should learn from their example. Each of us needs to seek to have a humble, contrite, and repentant heart. The psalmist declared that God accepts such a heart attitude (Ps. 51:17). May the account of Hoshea and the fall of Israel serve as a warning for us today.

1. HOSHEA: ISRAEL'S LAST KING

A. An Evil King (2 Kings 17:1-3)

¹ In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years.

² And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. ³ Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents.

Hoshea's name means "salvation." However, the nineteenth and last king of Israel was anything but an agent of salvation for the northern kingdom. Instead, he only brought bondage and destruction upon the land. Hoshea came to power by assassinating the previous king, Pekah (2 Kings 15:30). This occurred when Ahaz was king of Judah (17:1), which was about 732 BC. Hoshea reigned for nine years, walking in the ways of the previous kings—in wickedness and idolatry. However, he was not as evil as those kings who had gone before him (v. 2). He did evil, but he was not an Omri or Ahab.

Hoshea probably continued the calf worship instituted by Jeroboam. However, he did not introduce any new idols or religious systems. His reign overlapped that of Hezekiah, including Hezekiah's restoration of the Passover celebration. In 2 Chronicles 30:11, 18, we read that Israelites from the northern tribes came to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival. For this to happen, apparently Hoshea would have had to allow them to leave Israel to journey to Judah. This may have indicated a relative openness to the worship of Jehovah.

At this time, the dominant world power was the Assyrian Empire. Assyria may be thought of as one of the first "superpowers." The empire stretched from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea and encompassed the lands of Babylon, Mesopotamia, Aram (Syria), and Israel. Later, Egypt also would be conquered. Under Hoshea, Israel became a vassal state of Assyria, required to give regular tribute (the "presents" in 2 Kings 17:3). In the annals recording the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria, he claimed to be the one who killed King Pekah and placed Hoshea on the throne. In this claim, we see the boasting of a powerful ruler. However, we should consider the

Biblical account as more accurate reporting how Hoshea became king. The Assyrian ruler also noted he took ten talents of gold and one thousand talents of silver from Hoshea, a huge sum of tribute.

In 727 BC, Tiglath-pileser III was succeeded by his son, Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC). As recorded in 2 Kings 17:3, Israel continued to pay tribute to Assyria under the rule of Shalmaneser, and Hoshea served as his vassal. Our text notes Shalmaneser “came up” against Hoshea. Hoshea had become an Assyrian vassal under the previous king. However, this language seems to imply that upon Tiglath-pileser’s death he may have rebelled against Assyria, and Shalmaneser had to attack Israel and force Hoshea into servitude again.

Kill the Spider

A man was praying at the altar in a half-hearted attempt at repentance. The pastor heard him say, “Lord, take away the cobwebs from my life.” The pastor immediately interrupted. “Lord,” he said, “Forget the cobwebs, kill the spider!”

B. An Imprisoned King (2 Kings 17:4-6)

⁴ And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. ⁵ Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. ⁶ 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.

Hoshea did “evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 17:2). We do not know many details about his life or character. However, we do know he was prone to treachery. He came to the throne by killing his sovereign. He revolted against his Assyrian master when there was a change in leadership. Later, he engaged in a full-blown rebellion against the Assyrian king.

In an effort to cast off the yoke of Assyrian rule, Hoshea stopped paying tribute and turned to the king of Egypt for help (v. 4). He did this despite God’s repeated warnings about Israel not

putting their trust in the Egyptians (see Isa. 30:1-4). The text states Hoshea sent a message to “So, king of Egypt.” Exactly who is meant by “So” is a matter of debate among Biblical scholars. There is no record of a pharaoh with this name. However, there are a couple of possible explanations. First, we must understand the situation in Egypt at this time. There was not just one pharaoh ruling the land. Instead, there were several kings ruling over different regions of Egypt. The two most likely candidates for So are Tefnakht I and Osorkon IV. Tefnakht was the ruler of the western Nile Delta. He is associated with the city of Sais. Perhaps “So” was a Hebrew variant of this city’s name; thus, Hoshea sent word to the king in Sais. Osorkon was the ruler of the eastern Nile Delta. “So” may have been a shortened form of his name. Of the two, Tefnakht was the more powerful. However, Osorkon was closer and more available to help Hoshea.

When Shalmaneser learned of Hoshea’s actions, he invaded the land. He captured Hoshea and put him in prison. This is the last we hear of Hoshea. His ultimate fate is unknown. Shalmaneser then laid siege to the city of Samaria. Omri and Ahab had built Samaria not only as a city of great beauty but also strongly fortified and not easily conquered. The siege lasted for three years. Yet, Shalmaneser finally won and captured the city. This happened in the ninth year of Hoshea’s reign, in 722 BC.

The Assyrian king laid waste to the land. He then deported thousands of Israelites to lands far to the east. Some of these locations were at the northern end of the Euphrates River valley. The “cities of the Medes” (2 Kings 17:6) were northeast of the Tigris River and south of the Caspian Sea. This exile was the prophetic fulfillment of God’s word in 1 Kings 14:15.

\$ *Why do you suppose Hoshea turned to Egypt for help instead of calling on God?*

2. WHY ISRAEL FELL

A. Pagan Practices (2 Kings 17:7-13)

⁷ 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.

¹⁰ And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: ¹¹ And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the Lord carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger: ¹² For they served idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.

This passage reviews the history of Israel's sins and explains why God sent Israel into exile, beginning with a reference to the deliverance from Egypt. The Exodus was the premier event in Israel's history. It was their beginning as a nation and the foundation of their identity as a people: They were the chosen people of God, delivered from Egyptian bondage. During the Exodus, God revealed Himself as their sovereign Lord and entered into a covenant relationship with them. But they rejected their covenant Lord and disdained His commands. The most fundamental command was to not serve or worship other gods (see Ex. 20:2-5). Yet, this became their primary sin.

Israel had two sources for their idolatry (2 Kings 17:8). First, they followed after the gods of the surrounding nations. They worshiped Moloch, Chemosh, Baal, Asherah, and other false deities. Second, they worshiped the calf idols, beginning with Jeroboam and encouraged by the subsequent kings of Israel. Some of these shameful acts were done openly, and others were done in secret, as though they could keep God from seeing them. (Note a similar situation in Judah in Ezekiel 8:12.)

In 2 Kings 17:9-12, the Lord listed the specific sins of Israel. First, they built places to honor their gods, erecting shrines or altars on hills or mountaintops. If these were not available, they would construct a raised platform for worship. The thinking seems to have been that an elevated place of worship would bring them closer to their gods. (Note the similar thinking at the Tower of Babel in Gen. 11:4.) Second, they built wooden images and groves on these high places. This practice refers to the *asherim*, the pillars and trees sacred to the pagan goddess Asherah. This was done in both urban and rural locations—"from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city" (2 Kings 17:9).

The worship on these high places involved burning incense (v. 11). The use of incense in worship was common in the cultures of many ancient countries, including Babylon, Egypt, and Canaan. Incense was also offered in the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. Specific instructions had been given to Aaron to offer incense on a daily basis (Ex. 30:7-8). The incense represented the prayers of God's people (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8). What should have been exclusively used for God's glory was presented to idols instead. This idolatrous worship also involved "wicked things" (2 Kings 17:11)—grossly immoral acts. Many scholars think this refers to ritualistic temple prostitution, which was not uncommon in Canaanite worship. This catalog of wickedness reaffirms Israel's gross idolatry, which the Lord had forbidden (v. 12).

The Lord finished His case against Israel by reminding them that, in His mercy and compassion, He had repeatedly warned them (v. 13) of judgment if they did not change their ways. Over and over, for two hundred years He had sent prophets to call them to repentance. Even in the final years of the kingdom, He had sent men such as Hosea to plead with them to change. But they stubbornly resisted, and judgment had come to them.

Disbelief in the Devil

One of the most striking proofs of the personal existence of Satan . . . is found in the fact that he has so influenced the minds of multitudes in reference to his existence and doings, as to make them believe that he does not exist; and that the hosts of demons or evil spirits, over whom Satan presides as prince, are only the fantasies of the brain, some hallucination of mind.—Charles Baudelaire

B. Closed Ears and Hard Hearts (2 Kings 17:14-18)

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁷ And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.

The Lord reminded Israel of their rebellion against His servants, the prophets of the Lord. Instead of heeding their warnings, they “hardened their necks” (2 Kings 17:14). To stiffen or harden the neck is a common Hebrew expression that conveys the idea of someone who is obstinate and unbending in their self-willed rebellion. Israel refused to bow or yield to the Lord’s word, following the example of generations of their fathers.

God continued presenting the evidence of Israel’s sinfulness, noting their rejection of His statutes and commands (v. 15). At Mount Sinai, God gave the Law. The people accepted it and entered into a covenant of obedience to God’s commands (Ex. 19:5-8). But their history was full of disobedience rather than obedience. In choosing to disobey, and pursuing the ways of their neighbors, they “followed vanity, and became vain” (2 Kings 17:15). The Hebrew word translated as *vanity* means “breath.” The term conveys the idea of brevity, worthlessness, or lack of substance. Like a passing breath, their lives became empty and void of any real substance. The concept that people become like the objects they worship is common in the Old Testament (see Pss. 135:15-18; 115:8; Jer. 2:5 NIV).

The Israelites disobeyed God’s commands and actively followed false gods (2 Kings 17:16). This included: (1) making idols, including the two golden calves, (2) erecting a sacred grove honoring the goddess Asherah, and (3) worshiping the Canaanite god Baal. Idolatry usually turns into occult practice—so with the Israelites (v. 17). They sacrificed their children to idols in an attempt to appease them and seek their favor. They engaged in “divination,” which is the practice of seeking information through supernatural means. In ancient times, this included examining the flights of birds, the pattern of arrows cast on the ground, or the shape of animal entrails. Today, divinatory practices include horoscopes, Tarot cards, and fortune-telling. All of these are emphatically condemned by God (Deut. 18:9-14; Isa. 8:19; Lev. 19:31).

The Lord finished His indictment of Israel by declaring that because of all these sins, He sent them into exile. Only Judah remained as a sovereign nation in the land (2 Kings 17:18).

§ *What do Proverbs 28:14 and 29:1 warn about hardening one’s “heart” and “neck”?*

3. FALLEN ISRAEL’S CONTINUED IDOLATRY

A. Foreign Settlers Sent to Israel (2 Kings 17:24-28)

²⁶ Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. ²⁷ Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land. ²⁸ Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord.

Once the Assyrians conquered a land, they commonly sent many of the people into exile, usually a great distance away, so they could not cause a rebellion in the conquered land. It was also a source of humiliation. This is what happened to Israel (2 Kings 17:6). However, the Assyrians did not want the conquered land to be unproductive. So they brought groups from other parts of their empire and settled them in the newly captured territory.

Verse 24 describes the importation of foreign peoples to settle in Israel. This most likely began in 721 BC under Sargon, who succeeded Shalmaneser. (Shalmaneser died during the siege of Samaria.) The first group mentioned was from Babylon. Being from such a prominent city, some scholars suggest these may have been the designated leaders of the new colony. “Cuthah” was a city not too far from Babylon. The other deportees were from towns along the Euphrates River in Syria. Such forced migrations were recorded in ancient Assyrian records, thus there is ample archaeological evidence for the practice.

When Israel settled in Canaan, God declared the land itself belonged to Him (Lev. 25:23). Now, foreign peoples settled in the land—pagans who worshiped false gods. Even though the Lord had used Assyria to punish Israel, He was not pleased with these foreign idolaters. Therefore, He sent lions among them, killing some of the people (2 Kings 17:25). There are currently no lions in Israel. In ancient times, however, a species called the Asiatic lion was found throughout this region. These lions went extinct in the Middle Ages.

This passage gives us God's perspective on the situation. In verse 26, we have insight into the settlers' perspective. Ancient pagans generally thought each land or people served regional gods. The gods of Babylon were not universal deities. This gives us an understanding of their viewpoint. They thought the local god was displeased with them because they did not understand how to serve him. The king of Assyria, operating with the same worldview, therefore sought out Israelite priests living among the exiles (v. 27). He had one of them return to the land to teach the people about Jehovah and how to serve Him (v. 28). This priest chose to live in Bethel, an appropriate location considering its ancient significance in Israel's history. It was the site of Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:19) and a site of worship during the period of the Judges (Judg. 20:18 ESV; 1 Sam. 10:3). It was also the location of one of the two calves that Jeroboam had created (1 Kings 12:28-29). It is likely this priest taught the settlers to worship in the manner of the Israelites previous to their exile. This would have been a composite religion, giving lip service to following Jehovah, but all the while worshiping the calf idols.

Revival Without Reformation?

In his book *I Surrender*, Patrick Morley writes that the church's integrity problem is in the misconception "that we can add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin. It is a change in belief without a change in behavior. . . . It is revival without reformation, without repentance."—Charles Swindoll

B. Pagan Worship Continues (2 Kings 17:29-34)

³³ They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. ³⁴ Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the Lord, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel.

The various settlers continued their respective customs, including the worship of their established gods (2 Kings 17:29). Two factors are worth considering. First, since the Israelite priest instructed them to worship the calf idols, they likely thought such local gods were no better than their own gods. Second, they considered Jehovah simply one god among many. Therefore, it would make sense to worship the gods they were familiar with, while also giving some allegiance to the local deity, Jehovah. That is why the text says they both "feared the Lord" (v. 32) and "fear[ed] not the Lord" (v. 34). They were not giving Jehovah the exclusive worship and honor He demands. They simply added the Lord to the pantheon they already worshiped.

The gods mentioned in verses 30-31 are a mixture of ancient deities. This list includes: (1) Succoth-benoth, consort of the Babylonian god Marduk; (2) Nergal, the Babylonian war god; (3) Ashima, a goat-god similar to the Greek Pan; (4) Nibhaz, possibly a dog-headed deity; (5) Tartak, a god we know nothing about; and (6) Adrammelech and Anammelech, sun gods who were worshiped with child sacrifice. The wickedness of the people is evident in their equating Almighty God as being anything like these false and absurd gods. Verse 34 says the people who settled in the land continued to worship the gods of their native lands while giving superficial honor to Jehovah. This was a rejection of God and His Law, and very offensive to the Lord.

However, there were still Israelites living in the land. This is evident from the records of Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Chron. 30:1; 34:9). According to Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian,

these remaining Israelites began to intermarry with the Assyrian settlers. This is the origin of the Samaritans. They apparently wanted to serve the Lord in some measure. However, there were problems in doing this. Principally, the temple, the true priesthood, and all that was associated with Jehovah's worship was located in Jerusalem. To deal with this situation, the Samaritans developed their own worship system with Mount Gerizim being the central place of worship (note John 4:20). They also had their own version of the Torah, the Law of Moses. As a mixture of Israelites and foreigners, the Samaritans were despised by the Jews. However, they saw themselves as true worshipers of God and guardians of the faith.

\$ *How do some people try to mix worship of Jesus Christ with unbiblical forms of worship today?*

HOPE IN CHRIST

Without Christ, we are spiritually dead in our trespasses and sin. A "second death" awaits the wicked. But sin also causes the death of relationships, families, cultures, and nations. Israel's history is a prime example. After centuries of rejecting God and rebelling against His Law, the nation was destroyed. The wages of generations of sinful degeneracy resulted in national death. However, the most remarkable truth is not that judgment came, but that it only came after centuries of rebellion.

God's mercy and grace are amazing. How the Lord patiently dealt with the Israelites is beyond our comprehension, but He did. This should give us hope. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).