



Second Kings - Chapter Seventeen

Summary of Chapter Seventeen

The authors now describe the uprooting and scattering of Israel, long foretold but delayed because of God's promises and God's character.

King Hoshea was to be the last king over the northern kingdom. During the early part of his nine year reign he paid tribute to King Shalmaneser of Assyria as a vassal state. However, he then turned to Egypt and stopped paying Assyria. Therefore, Shalmaneser came against Israel, defeated them and took all the people into captivity. The Lord allowed this to happen to his people because of their continuous sin and apostasy. Only the kingdom of Judah now remained of the people of God and even they were not faithful to the Lord.

Assyria resettled the land with people from many other lands but they did not know the Lord and he sent lions to kill them. So the Assyrians had one of the priests brought back from captivity to teach the people how to worship God. Although the people worshipped the Lord they did not do so wholeheartedly. They appointed their own priests and they continued to worship all their traditional pagan gods as well.

VIII 2 Kings 17:1-41 - The End of Israel

Refer to the chapter summary above.

VIII.a 2 Kings 17:1-4 - Hoshea Reigns over Israel

Hoshea was the last ruler of the northern kingdom of Israel (732-722 BC). A seal from this time has been found that reads, 'Belonging to Abdi servant of Hoshea.' It is one of the final artefacts from Israel before it was destroyed at the hands of the Assyrians. While Hoshea paid tribute to Assyria he remained as king but when he turned to Egypt instead, King Shalmaneser V of Assyria put him in prison.



The Fall of Samaria and Deportation of Israelites 722 BC

During the reign of Hoshea of Israel, King Shalmaneser V of Assyria attacked Israel and made it a vassal kingdom. Later, however, Hoshea conspired against Assyria, refusing to pay the tribute and appealing to Egypt for help, so the Assyrians came and besieged Samaria until it fell. Many Israelites were exiled far from Israel to the area near Gozan and the cities of the Medes, and foreign peoples from other parts of the empire were relocated to Israel in an effort to prevent revolt. This signalled the end of the northern kingdom of Israel.

¹ In the twelfth year of King Ahaz of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel; he reigned for nine years. ² He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, yet not like the kings of Israel who were before him.

2 Kings 17:1-2

In the twelfth year of King Ahaz of Judah was 732 BC.

Hoshea son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel. Hoshea was last referenced in 2 Kings 15:30, as the man who led a conspiracy against Pekah, the

king of Israel. After the successful assassination, Hoshea took the throne and started his own brief dynasty.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, yet not like the kings of Israel who were before him. Hoshea was an evil man, but by no means the worst of the kings of Israel. Sadly, his bloody overthrow of the preceding king and violent ascent to power did not make him unusually evil among the kings of Israel. The language seems to indicate that he did not continue in the false worship of God through the golden calf idols that Jeroboam had set up.

As with the kings of Judah who were ‘not like David’ (2 Kings 14:3), the reader is left to surmise what exactly this means. Perhaps Hoshea was not wholly unrestrained in his pursuit of Jeroboam’s sins, as he ruled over what remained of northern Israel after the Assyrian assault of 732 BC recorded in 2 Kings 15:27-31. His succession to the throne as an Assyrian vassal is recorded not only in 2 Kings 15:30 and here but also in an inscription of Tiglath-pileser III himself, who claims that he placed Hoshea as king over them.

³ King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against him; Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute. ⁴ But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to King So of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Assyria confined him and imprisoned him.

2 Kings 17:3-4

King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against him; Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute. In the pattern of Meahem before him (2 Kings 15:17-22), Hoshea accepted the status of vassal unto the king of Assyria. If he paid his money and did as the king of Assyria pleased, he would be allowed to continue on the throne of Israel.

But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to King So of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria. Hoshea had re-established his vassal status with Tiglath-pileser’s successor Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) but later reneged on this agreement and courted Egypt instead, bringing down upon himself the wrath of the Assyrian king. Hoshea hoped to find help among the Egyptians, who were in a constant power struggle with the Assyrian Empire. On account of this conspiracy, and the failure to pay the yearly tribute money, Hoshea was imprisoned by the king of Assyria.

As might be expected among the kings of Israel, Hoshea did not look to the Lord for help - he looked to Egypt instead, as the prophecy foretold: <<*They shall not remain in the land of the Lord; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria they shall eat unclean food*>> (Hosea 9:3). Therefore, Hosea said of

him: <<*Samaria's king shall perish like a splinter on the face of the waters*>> (Hosea 10:7). Hoshea thought he had a strategic opportunity when a new king came to the Assyrian throne, but he was wrong. When Tiglath-pileser III died in 727 BC and was succeeded by his own son Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), the time seemed ripe for certain western states to renounce their vassal status. Moreover, a seemingly important ally lay southward in the delta of Egypt.

The reference to King So of Egypt is probably better understood as a reference to a place - Sais, which was at that time the capital of Egypt. Therefore, the verse would read 'he had sent envoys to Sais (even unto) the king of Egypt.' The pharaoh in question might have been Osorkon IV, the last pharaoh of the twenty-second dynasty (730-715 BC), or Tefnakht, founder of the overlapping and rising twenty-fourth dynasty (727-720 BC). Sais was the capital of Pharaoh Tefnakht.

Therefore the king of Assyria confined him and imprisoned him. As his vassal, King Hoshea was subject to the will of his overlord the king of Assyria and he was sent to prison with no trial or option to appeal.

VIII.b 2 Kings 17:5-23 - Israel Carried Captive to Assyria

King Shalmaneser then came up against Israel and took all the people away into captivity. This was ordained by the Lord because of the sin of his people who would not turn from worshipping other gods to be true to God alone.

⁵ Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria; for three years he besieged it. ⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

2 Kings 17:5-6

Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria; for three years he besieged it. This was a long, dedicated campaign to finally crush the rebellious northern kingdom of Israel, who had defied the power of the Assyrian Empire. Although it took a three year siege, it was worth it to the Assyrians. The fact that it took three years to break the defences of Samaria bear testament to the wall that had been constructed under the reigns of Omri and Ahab.

This sad tale of the demise of the people of God is a good example of the way that God can use any person or any nation to bring about his will. They do not have to follow him or even know him to come under his command, for everyone is part of God's creation - they are all his children.

In the ninth year of Hoshea was 722 BC, the final year of the existence of the northern kingdom of Israel.

The king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria.

When Samaria finally fell and the northern kingdom was conquered, the Assyrians implemented their policy towards conquered nations. They deported all but the very lowest classes back to the key cities of their empire, either to train and utilise the talented or to enslave the able.

Two hundred years and 19 kings after the time of Solomon (the last king over a truly united Israel), the northern kingdom of Israel fell. It was not because the God of Israel was unable to help them, but because they had so forsaken that God and ignored his guidance and correction that he finally stopped actively protecting them and let them rot and degrade according to their own desire.

As they carried the Israelites away to Assyria, they followed their typical custom. When the Assyrians depopulated and exiled a conquered community, they led the captives away on journeys of hundreds of miles, with the captives naked and attached together with a system of strings and fishhooks pierced through their lower lip. Some were even blinded. God would make sure they were led in this humiliating manner through the broken walls of their conquered cities; refer to Amos 4:2-3. This shows another principle of God's judgement: When it comes, it is often humiliating and degrading.

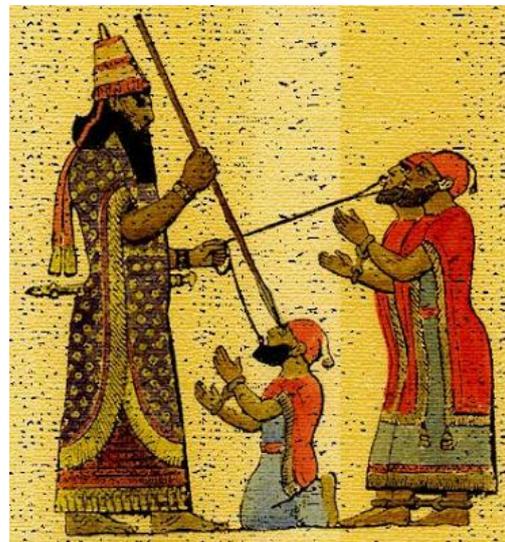


Image of Assyrian Prisoners

Shalmaneser is identified here as the conqueror of Samaria in 722 BC, after a three year siege (refer also to 2 Kings 18:9-10); this agrees with the Babylonian Chronicle. However, Shalmaneser's successor Sargon II (722-705 BC) takes this honour for himself in his inscriptions, perhaps in order to claim more success for himself than he actually achieved and also to give himself legitimacy (as a usurper of the Assyrian throne) by connecting himself with the previous reign. The places of exile mentioned in this verse, i.e. Halah, the Habor, the river of Gozan, and the cities of the Medes, are scattered widely over the Assyrian Empire, from the western to the eastern borders. An Aramaic inscription from the 10th Century BC mentions the city of Gozan. The inscription has 23 lines, and it appears on a life-size statue of King Haddayishi, the ruler of Sikanu and Gozan. It was found in a field near Tell Fakhariyah in northeastern Syria.

It seems that Sargon II, the brother and successor of Shalmaneser, finished this siege or at least took credit for it: "The men of Samaria with their king were hostile to me and consorted together not to carry out their vassal obligations and bring tribute to me, so they fought me . . . I clashed with them and took as booty 27,280 people with their chariots and their gods in whom they trusted. I

incorporated 200 chariots into my army. The rest of the people I made to dwell within Assyria. I restored the city of Samaria and made it greater than before.” (Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud)

⁷ 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 from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They had worshipped other gods ⁸ and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had introduced.

2 Kings 17:7-8

This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God. In the following verses, the divine historian explains the fundamental reasons for the conquering and captivity of the northern kingdom. At the root, it was a problem with sin. It was not geopolitical changes or social causes - it was sin. The authors describe the disobedience as sin against God’s love and faithfulness, thus clarifying its seriousness.

They had worshipped other gods. The people of Israel worshipped false gods from watchtower to fortified city, i.e. from the smallest to the largest place where people lived, at their high places, building themselves pillars and Asherim and two golden calves, and worshipping Baal. All of this was done in flagrant disregard for God’s Law and covenant, and in defiance of his prophets. Interestingly, however, some of the sins listed are not those of Israel only but also of Judah, which is drawn into the condemnation. Only in the account of Ahaz’s reign have the authors mentioned child sacrifice (2 Kings 16:3) and divination (2 Kings 16:15); and only when they reach Manasseh’s reign will the authors tell of omens (2 Kings 21:6), and worship of the host of heaven (2 Kings 21:3), i.e. the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars. In the ancient Near East these astral bodies were identified with specific gods and goddesses and worshipped as such, and their movements were carefully studied for astrological reasons. Israel encountered worship of this kind as soon as it entered Canaan, as indicated by: <<***They abandoned the Lord, and worshipped Baal and the Astartes***>> (Judges 2:13). Astarte or Venus was a prime pagan goddess and the plural forms of the names of these gods here refer to various local manifestations of Hadad and Astarte. Astral worship is forbidden to Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:19-20, as indeed divination and omens, along with fire sacrifice, are prohibited in Deuteronomy 18:10.

In the central act of redemption in OT history, God had brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt. Remembrance of this act alone should prompt Israel to a single-hearted commitment to the Lord. Yet they did not remember this and instead they feared other gods, breaking the covenant God made with his people. However, the

northern kingdom of Israel had feared other gods since their founding some 200 years before this. This shows another principle of God's judgement: It is often a long time in coming, because God holds back his judgement as long as possible.

And walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. Before Israel occupied Canaan in the days of Joshua, the Promised Land was populated by degenerate, pagan peoples who practiced the worst kinds of idolatry and human sacrifice. One of the fundamental sins of Israel was that they followed in these ancient Canaanite ways. God had cast out the Canaanite nations in the days of Joshua because of these sins. Now he had cast out the northern kingdom of Israel for the same sins. God's judgement was not against the ancient Canaanites because of race or ethnicity; it was because of their conduct. As Israel shared the same conduct, they would share the same judgement.

And in the customs that the kings of Israel had introduced. It was not just their pagan worship that had so angered God; it was also the false worship that Jeroboam had set up that was also sin in the eyes of the Lord, for it showed that they recognised him as God but wanted to worship him in the image they had created for him and not for who he truly is - the Lord Almighty.

⁹ The people of Israel secretly did things that were not right against the Lord their God. They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watch-tower to fortified city; ¹⁰ they set up for themselves pillars and sacred poles on every high hill and under every green tree; ¹¹ there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. They did wicked things, provoking the Lord to anger; ¹² they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, 'You shall not do this.'

2 Kings 17:9-12

The people of Israel secretly did things that were not right against the Lord their God. Rebellion and sin cloud the judgement of men, and clearly the judgement of Israel was affected. Their judgement was impaired enough to think they could sin secretly against the God who sees everything.

They built for themselves high places at all their towns. These were places of unauthorised and idolatrous sacrifice, as were the **pillars and sacred poles.**

As the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. The divine historian repeats this theme. The same sins that brought judgement upon the Canaanites also brought judgement on the northern kingdom of Israel. For just as

the Canaanites had been driven from the land, so too it was now time for the Israelites to follow them because of their sin.

God had said that his people must go into Egypt for a while: <<And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete>> (Genesis 15:16). When their sin was complete God allowed his people to take the land from them. Now that the people of God were complete in their sin they too could go from the land.

You shall not do this. The people had been given clear instruction through the Mosaic Law and plenty of warnings through the prophets of God but they went their own way anyway. They can have no excuse or claim to have committed their sin inadvertently. The wise words of Paul could have been applied to them: *<<Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened>> (Romans 1:20-21).* They are even more relevant today.

¹³ Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, ‘Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law that I commanded your ancestors and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets.’ ¹⁴ They would not listen but were stubborn, as their ancestors had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God. ¹⁵ They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their ancestors, and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false; they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should not do as they did.

2 Kings 17:13-15

Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer. In love, mercy and grace, God sent prophets to the northern and southern kingdoms. Their message was a warning against the sins that corrupted God’s people and separated them from their God. They invited God’s people with the theme, ‘**Turn from your evil ways.**’

They would not listen but were stubborn. God sent these messengers to help Israel and to spare them the judgement that would come if they did not turn from their evil ways. Yet God’s people became even more stubborn when God brought this call to repentance, and they sank deeper into sin. When God brings

judgement, he first brings warning - and often many warnings over a long period. It is only after these warnings are rejected that the judgement comes.

The word stubborn is literally stiff-necked. They refused to submit their neck to the yoke of God's precepts; a metaphor from stubborn oxen that make their necks hard, or stiff, and will not bow to the yoke.

As their ancestors had been. The Israelites had a track record of hardheartedness towards God and the people had been warned not to repeat the mistakes from the past: <<*Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work*>> (Psalm 95:8-9).

They went after false idols and became false. The NIV translates this: <<*They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless*>>. The NASB has it: <<*they followed vanity and became vain*>>. The original is more accurate at this point: 'They worshipped emptiness and became empty.' The word here is *hebel* meaning 'air,' 'delusion,' or 'vanity.' The idea is that they became like the gods they worshipped. They bowed down to nothingness and became nothing.

¹⁶ They rejected all the commandments of the Lord their God and made for themselves cast images of two calves; they made a sacred pole, worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. ¹⁷ They made their sons and their daughters pass through fire; they used divination and augury; and they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. ¹⁸ Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone.

2 Kings 17:16-18

They made for themselves cast images of two calves. This refers to the infamous sin of Jeroboam recorded in 1 Kings 12:26-29. This state-sponsored idolatry did not immediately ruin the kingdom - the northern kingdom of Israel lasted as an independent nation for another 200 years following the time of Jeroboam. Yet it certainly was the beginning of the end.

They made their sons and their daughters pass through fire. This refers to the abominable worship of the idol Molech, to whom children were burned in sacrifice. The Lord would speak out against this again through a later prophet: <<*And they go on building the high place of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire – which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind*>> (Jeremiah 7:31).

They used divination and augury. The northern tribes embraced the same occult practices that the Canaanite tribes before them. Collectively, these great sins of idolatry provoked God to anger.

Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone. This was the end of the ten northern tribes as an independent kingdom. When they were dispersed by the Assyrians, some assimilated into other cultures, but others kept their Jewish identity as exiles in other lands. Yet, it is a mistake to think of these ten northern tribes as lost. Far back in the days of Jeroboam and his original break with the southern kingdom of Judah, the legitimate priests and Levites who lived in the northern ten tribes did not like the Jeroboam's idolatry. They, along with others who set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, then moved from the northern kingdom of Israel to the southern kingdom of Judah; the account is given in 2 Chronicles 11:13-16. So actually, the southern kingdom of Judah contained Israelites from all of the ten tribes.

Considering all this, it can be said that the ten northern tribes were not lost, and they certainly did not migrate to Britain in accord with some British-Israelite theories:

- As noted above, some (in particular, the godly of that day) migrated to the southern kingdom of Judah in the days of Jeroboam I.
- Some assimilated into other cultures.
- Some kept their Jewish culture and identity in the lands of their exile.

There are references to members of some of the other tribes in NT times: <<There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day>> (Luke 2:36-37), <<There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement')>> (Acts 4:36), and: <<If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless>> (Philippians 3:4b-6).

¹⁹ Judah also did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced. ²⁰ The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel; he punished them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had banished them from his presence.

2 Kings 17:19-20

Judah also did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced. Spiritually speaking, Judah was more faithful to God than the northern kingdom of Israel. Yet they also began to imitate their sinful neighbours to the north. Judah had the lesson right in front of them - the conquered nation of Israel was evidence of what happened when hearts turned from God. Yet they ignored these plain lessons and imitated the sins of Israel.

The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel; he punished them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had banished them from his presence. The summary of Israel's sin is simply that they were given over to idolatry. They worshipped the true God in a false way and then began to also worship false gods.

²¹ When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat king. Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord and made them commit great sin. ²² The people of Israel continued in all the sins that Jeroboam committed; they did not depart from them ²³ until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had foretold through all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.

2 Kings 17:21-23

When he had torn Israel from the house of David. This is a reminder that it was the Lord who was behind the split between the northern and southern kingdoms. He gave the ten tribes the chance to follow his ways exclusively rather than to come under the yoke that had been placed upon them by Solomon and was going to be an even heavier burden under his son Rehoboam. However, Jeroboam soon spurned the opportunity by setting up alternative worship idols in his territories, causing his generation to sin. Sadly, all the following generations continued in all the sins that Jeroboam committed.

So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day. The exiled people became known as the Diaspora and were not only still in exile at the time of writing but were in the time of Jesus: <<*The Jews said to one another, 'Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?'*>> (John 7:35). Indeed, over the centuries the descendants of these people have travelled even further and now live in almost every country in the world.

VIII.c 2 Kings 17:24-41 - Assyria Resettles Samaria

King Shalmaneser had the land previously occupied by the northern tribes of Israel repopulated with people from many nations. However, they did not know the Lord and he brought lions against them. So the king had an Israelite priest brought back to the land to teach the people about the Lord. Although they started to worship the Lord they never gave up worshipping their pagan gods as well.

²⁴ The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria in place of the people of Israel; they took possession of Samaria, and settled in its cities. ²⁵ When they first settled there, they did not worship the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them. ²⁶ So the king of Assyria was told, ‘The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them; they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land.’

2 Kings 17:24-26

The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim. The policy of the Assyrian Empire was to remove rebellious, resistant people and to resettle their former lands with people from other parts of the empire. Not only did the Assyrian monarchs hope to make the repopulated and reconstituted districts more manageable because they would not be fighting for their own homeland, but they hoped to train and encourage the citizenry to transfer their loyalties to the Assyrian Empire.

The land of Israel is not left empty; people from places both close at hand, e.g. Hamath, and farther away such as from Babylon were settled there. Their religion is the subject of interest in this last section of the chapter. It was a religion that involved them in what they thought of as fearing the God of Israel while also serving their own gods (v.33), but that the authors regarded as not fearing the Lord at all (v.34). As the only God who truly exists, the Lord claims exclusive worship; a broad pantheon of gods is not acceptable. The deities in question include Succoth-benoth, the goddess Banitu and possibly also Sakkut/Ninurta; the Mesopotamian underworld god Nergal, who was associated with famine, drought, plague, and death; and the West Semitic god Ashima. Nibhaz and Tartak may be Elamite deities, while Adrammelech and Anammelech may be Phœnician and Emarite gods respectively.

They did not worship the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them. This shows that there was not only something special about the kingdom of Israel, but

also something special about the land of Israel. God demanded to be feared among the people of the land, even if they came from other nations. Perhaps because many unburied bodies still remained after the bloody warfare and due to the depopulating of the land, voracious lions began to roam freely throughout the area, whereas they would normally be found only in the more remote and mountainous areas.

Prophecy after the Babylonian exile return reveals that the land of Israel is still the Holy Land. God regards it as something special, and will hold accountable those who live there who do not fear him: <<The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem>> (Zechariah 2:12).

Because they do not know the law of the god of the land. These Assyrian officials seemed to know what the recently conquered kingdom of Israel did not know, that they had to honour the God of Israel. Yet, any faith in God among these resettled people was founded in simple fear of the lions, leading to an inadequate relationship with God.

Charles Spurgeon commented, “He did send lions among them, and it was these lions that converted them. Their teeth and fangs and fiery eyes and the thunders of their roars converted them. They must have a god to deliver them: they could not bear the lions, therefore they must fear the Lord who could send lions, and who perhaps would cease to send them. Now, dear friends, always be somewhat diffident of your own conversion if you can trace it only and solely to motives of terror.”

²⁷ Then the king of Assyria commanded, ‘Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there; let him go and live there, and teach them the law of the god of the land.’ ²⁸ So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel; he taught them how they should worship the Lord.

2 Kings 17:27-28

Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there. The Assyrians may have recognised the value of the Levitical priesthood and that only a true priest would be able to teach the people the statutes of the Lord. However, it seems he sent one of the false priests from the northern kingdom and they may not have known or even cared about the difference. Also see the comment below.

So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel. This was, of course, one of the locations of the golden calves that Jeroboam had set up in false worship to God; refer to 1 Kings 12:30.

He taught them how they should worship the Lord. The priesthood of the kingdom of Israel was corrupt, but the king of Assyria did not know and was not interested in the pure religion of Israel. Therefore this nameless, possibly corrupt priest taught the new inhabitants of the land a corrupt religion. Certainly, it had elements of the true faith in it; but at the same time it was corrupted by the centuries of state sponsored idolatry that reigned in Israel.

²⁹ But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the shrines of the high places that the people of Samaria had made, every nation in the cities in which they lived; ³⁰ the people of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the people of Cuth made Nergal, the people of Hamath made Ashima; ³¹ the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. ³² They also worshipped the Lord and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. ³³ So they worshipped the Lord, but they also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. ^{34a} To this day they continue to practise their former customs.

2 Kings 17:29-34a

But every nation still made gods of its own. The priest-for-hire brought in by the Assyrians did not tell the new inhabitants of the land that they must only worship the Lord God of Israel. He did not teach it because, coming from Israel, he did not believe it.

They also worshipped the Lord and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places. They accepted the Lord but only as one of many gods and they had no understanding of the gift of priesthood that the true God had given to the descendants of Aaron.

So they worshipped the Lord, but they also served their own gods. This described the pagan peoples that the Assyrians brought in to populate the area of the northern kingdom of Israel. They gave a measure of respect to the God of Israel - after all, they did not want to be eaten by lions. Yet they also served their own gods, picking and choosing among religious and spiritual beliefs as it pleased them:

- This accurately described the pagan peoples who re-populated Israel.
- This accurately described the northern kingdom of Israel before they were conquered and exiled.
- This accurately describes common religious belief in the modern world.

Charles Spurgeon uses this example to describe how similar the Christian faith of Victorian England was to the resettled lands of the Promised Land: “Is not worldly piety, or pious worldliness, the current religion of England? They live among godly people, and God chastens them, and they therefore fear him, but not enough to give their hearts to him. They seek out a trimming teacher who is not too precise and plain-spoken, and they settle down comfortably to a mongrel faith, half truth, half error, and a mongrel worship half dead form, and half orthodoxy.” And that was an era when the churches in England were full every Sunday!

^{34b} They do not worship the Lord and they do not follow the statutes or the ordinances or the law or the commandment that the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel. ³⁵ The Lord had made a covenant with them and commanded them, ‘You shall not worship other gods or bow yourselves to them or serve them or sacrifice to them, ³⁶ but you shall worship the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm; you shall bow yourselves to him, and to him you shall sacrifice. ³⁷ The statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment that he wrote for you, you shall always be careful to observe. You shall not worship other gods; ³⁸ you shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you. You shall not worship other gods, ³⁹ but you shall worship the Lord your God; he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.’ ⁴⁰ They would not listen, however, but they continued to practise their former custom.

2 Kings 17:34b-40

They do not worship the Lord. The writer of Second Kings describes how it should have been for people of God for he had made a covenant with them and had given them laws to follow in order that they should know how to worship the true God.

Whom he named Israel. The Lord had renamed Jacob as Israel: <<*Then the man said, ‘You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed’*>> (Genesis 32:28). Since all Israelites are descended from the twelve sons of Jacob or Israel, the Lord wanted the whole nation to be known by that name in order to remember their heritage.

But you shall worship the Lord your God; he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. The writer states this as a reminder that if Israel had been faithful - even moderately faithful - to their covenant with God, they would still stand as an independent nation. God would have delivered them from all of their

enemies. Instead, they were conquered by the Assyrian Empire after their own self-destruction in sin and rebellion.

⁴¹ So these nations worshipped the Lord, but also served their carved images; to this day their children and their children's children continue to do as their ancestors did.

2 Kings 17:41

So these nations worshipped the Lord, but also served their carved images; to this day their children and their children's children continue to do as their ancestors did. The area of the northern kingdom of Israel was not re-occupied by Judah before their own subjugation and conquest by the Babylonian empire. This mixed religion first promoted by the Assyrians continued for many centuries in Samaria, existing even until NT times. It seems that God was more lenient with these Samaritans of corrupt belief than he was with disobedient Israel: <<***When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all***>> (Romans 2:14-16). This teaches that those with more revelation from God are held to stricter account before him. Yet, 2 Chronicles 30:10-19 shows that in the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, there were some worshippers of the true God among the area that was formerly the northern kingdom of Israel. Some responded to his invitation to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem.