

# CHAPTER 17

This chapter gives us an account of the captivity of the ten tribes, and so finishes the history of that kingdom, after it had continued about 265 years, from the setting up of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. In it we have,

- I.** A short narrative of this destruction (v. 1-6).
- II.** Remarks upon it, and the causes of it, for the justifying of God in it and for warning to others (v. 7-23).
- III.** An account of the nations which succeeded them in the possession of their land, and the mongrel religion set up among them (v. 24-41).

## ~~1270~~ 2 KINGS 17:1-6

### ISRAEL SUBDUED BY ASSYRIA

We have here the reign and ruin of Hoshea, the last of the kings of Israel, concerning whom observe,

**I.** That, though he forced his way to the crown by treason and murder (as we read ~~1250~~ 2 Kings 15:30), yet he gained not the possession of it till seven or eight years after; for it was in the fourth year of Ahaz that he slew Pekah, but did not himself begin to reign till the twelfth year of Ahaz, v. 1. Whether by the king of Assyria, or by the king of Judah, or by some of his own people, does not appear, but it seems so long he was kept out of the throne he aimed at. Justly were his bad practices thus chastised, and the word of the prophet was thus fulfilled (~~2805~~ Hosea 10:3), *Now they shall say We have no king, because we feared not the Lord.*

**II.** That, though he was bad, yet not so bad as the kings of Israel had been before him (v. 2), not so devoted to the calves as they had been. One of them (that at Dan), the Jews say, had been, before this, carried away by the king of Assyria in the expedition recorded ~~1259~~ 2 Kings 15:29, (to which perhaps the prophet refers, ~~2805~~ Hosea 8:5, *Thy calf, O Samaria! has cast thee off*), which made him put the less confidence in the other. And some

say that this Hoshea took off the embargo which the former kings had put their subjects under, forbidding them to go up to Jerusalem to worship, which he permitted those to do that had a mind to it. But what shall we think of this dispensation of providence, that the destruction of the kingdom of Israel should come in the reign of one of the best of its kings? *Thy judgments, O God! are a great deep.* God would hereby show that in bringing this ruin upon them he designed to punish,

**1.** Not only the sins of that generation, but of the foregoing ages, and to reckon for the iniquities of their fathers, who had been long in filing the measure and treasuring up wrath against this day of wrath.

**2.** Not only the sins of their kings, but the sins of the people. If Hoshea was not so bad as the former kings, yet the people were as bad as those that went before them, and it was an aggravation of their badness, and brought ruin the sooner, that their king did not set them so bad an example as the former kings had done, nor hinder them from reforming; he gave them leave to do better, but they did as bad as ever, which laid the blame of their sin and ruin wholly upon themselves.

**III.** That the destruction came gradually. They were for some time made tributaries before they were made captives to the king of Assyria (v. 3), and, if that less judgment had prevailed to humble and reform them, the greater would have been prevented.

**IV.** That they brought it upon themselves by the indirect course they took to shake off the yoke of the king of Assyria, v. 4. Had the king and people of Israel applied to God, made their peace with him and their prayers to him, they might have recovered their liberty, ease, and honour; but they withheld their tribute, and trusted to the king of Egypt to assist them in their revolt, which, if it had taken effect, would have been but to change their oppressors. But Egypt became to them the staff of a broken reed. This provoked the king of Assyria to proceed against them with the more severity. Men get nothing by struggling with the net, but entangle themselves the more.

**V.** That it was an utter destruction that came upon them.

**1.** The king of Israel was made a prisoner; he was shut up and bound, being, it is probable, taken by surprise, before Samaria was besieged.

2. The land of Israel was made a prey. The army of the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, made themselves master of it (v. 5), and treated the people as traitors to be punished with the sword of justice rather than as fair enemies.

3. The royal city of Israel was besieged, and at length taken. Three years it held out after the country was conquered, and no doubt a great deal of misery was endured at that time which is not particularly recorded; but the brevity of the story, and the passing of this matter over lightly, methinks, intimate that they were abandoned of God and he did not now regard the affliction of Israel, as sometimes as he had done.

4. The people of Israel were carried captives into Assyria, v. 6. The generality of the people, those that were of any note, were forced away into the conqueror's country, to be slaves and beggars there.

(1.) Thus he was pleased to exercise a dominion over them, and to show that they were entirely at his disposal.

(2.) By depriving them of their possessions and estates, real and personal, and exposing them to all the hardships and reproaches of a removal to a strange country, under the power of an imperious army, he chastised them for their rebellion and their endeavour to shake off his yoke.

(3.) Thus he effectually prevented all such attempts for the future and secured their country to himself.

(4.) Thus he got the benefit of their service in his own country, as Pharaoh did that of their fathers; and so this unworthy people were lost as they were found, and ended as they began, in servitude and under oppression.

(5.) Thus he made room for those of his own country that had little, and little to do, at home, to settle in a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. In all these several ways he served himself by this captivity of the ten tribes. We are here told in what places of his kingdom he disposed of them — in *Halah* and *Habor*, in places, we may suppose, far distant from each other, lest they should keep up a correspondence, incorporate again, and become formidable. There, we have reason to think, after some time they were so mingled with the nations that they were lost, and *the name of Israel was no more in remembrance*. Those that forgot God were themselves forgotten; those that studied to be like the nations were buried among them; and those that would not serve God in their own land were

made to serve their enemies in a strange land. It is probable that they were the men of honour and estates who were carried captive, and that many of the meaner sort of people were left behind, many of every tribe, who either went over to Judah or became subject to the Assyrian colonies, and their posterity were *Galileans* or *Samaritans*. But thus ended Israel as a nation; now they became *Lo-ammi* — *not a people*, and *Lo-ruhamah* — *unpityed*. Now Canaan spued them out. When we read of their entry under Hoshea the son of Nun who would have thought that such as this should be their exit under Hoshea the son of Elah? Thus Rome's glory in Augustus sunk, many ages after, in Augustulus. Providence so ordered the eclipsing of the honour of the ten tribes that the honour of Judah (the royal tribe) and Levi (the holy tribe), which yet remained, might shine the brighter. Yet we find a number sealed of every one of the twelve tribes (Revelation 7) except Daniel James writes to the twelve tribes scattered abroad (<sup><300></sup>James 1:1) and Paul speaks of the twelve tribes which *instantly served God day and night* (<sup><400></sup>Acts 26:7); so that though we never read of those that were carried captive, nor have any reason to credit the conjecture of some (that they yet remain a distinct body in some remote corner of the world), yet a remnant of them did escape, to keep up the name of Israel, till it came to be worn by the gospel church, the spiritual Israel, in which it will ever remain, <sup><800></sup>Galatians 6:16.

## <sup><200></sup>2 KINGS 17:7-23

### THE WICKEDNESS OF ISRAEL

Though the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes was but briefly related, it is in these verses largely commented upon by our historian, and the reasons of it assigned, not taken from the second causes — the weakness of Israel, their impolitic management, and the strength and growing greatness of the Assyrian monarch (these things are overlooked) — but only from the First Cause. Observe,

**1.** It was *the Lord that removed Israel out of his sight*; whoever were the instruments, he was the author of this calamity. It was *destruction from the Almighty*; the Assyrian was but the *rod of his anger*, <sup><300></sup>Isaiah 10:5. It was *the Lord that rejected the seed of Israel*, else their enemies could not have seized upon them, v. 20. *Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the*

robbers? Did not the Lord? <sup>2323b</sup> Isaiah 43:24. We lose the benefit of national judgments if we do not eye the hand of God in them, and the fulfilling of the scripture, for that also is taken notice of here (v. 23): *The Lord removed Israel out of his favour, and out of their own land, as he had said by all his servants the prophets.* Rather shall heaven and earth pass than one tittle of God's word fall to the ground. When God's word and his works are compared, it will be found not only that they agree, but that they illustrate each other. But why would God ruin a people that were raised and incorporated, as Israel was, by miracles and oracles? Why would he undo that which he himself had done at so vast an expense? Was it purely an act of sovereignty? No, it was an act of necessary justice. For,

**2.** They provoked him to do this by their wickedness. Was it God's doing? Nay, it was their own; by their *way and their doings* they *procured all this to themselves*, and it was their own wickedness that did correct them. This the sacred historian shows here at large, that it might appear that God did them no wrong and that others might hear and fear. Come and see what it was that did all this mischief, that broke their power and laid their honour in the dust; it was sin; that, and nothing else, separated between them and God. This is here very movingly laid open as the cause of all the desolations of Israel. He here shows,

**I.** What God had done for Israel, to engage them to serve him.

**1.** He gave them their liberty (v. 7): He *brought them from under the hand of Pharaoh* who oppressed them, asserted their freedom (*Israel is my son*), and effected their freedom with a high hand. Thus they were bound in duty and gratitude to be his servants, for he had loosed their bonds; nor would he that rescued them out of the hand of the king of Egypt have contradicted himself so far as to deliver them into the hand of the king of Assyria, as he did, if they had not, by their iniquity, betrayed their liberty and sold themselves.

**2.** He gave them their law, and was himself their king. They were immediately under a divine regimen. They could not plead ignorance of good and evil, sin and duty, for God had particularly charged them against those very things which here he charges them with (v. 15), *That they should not do like the heathen.* Nor could they be in any doubt concerning their obligation to observe the laws which they are here charged with rejecting, for they were *the commandments and statutes* of the Lord their

God (v. 13), so that no room was left to dispute whether they should keep them or no. He had not *dealt so with other nations*, <sup><3479></sup>Psalm 147:19, 20.

**3.** He gave them *their land*, for he *cast out the heathen from before them* (v. 8), to make room for them; and the casting out of them for their idolatries was as fair a warning as could be given to Israel not to do like them.

**II.** What they had done against God, notwithstanding these engagements which he had laid upon them.


**1.** In general. They *sinned against the Lord their God* (v. 7), they *did those things that were not right* (v. 9), but *secretly*. So wedded were they to their evil practices that when they could not do them publicly, could not for shame or could not for fear, they would do them secretly — an evidence of their atheism, that they thought what was done in secret was from under the eye of God himself and would not be required. Again, they wrought wicked things in such a direct contradiction to the divine law that they seemed as if they were done on purpose to *provoke the Lord to anger* (v. 11), in contempt of his authority and defiance of his justice. They *rejected God's statutes and his covenant* (v. 15), would not be bound up either by his command or the consent they themselves had given to the covenant, but threw off the obligations of both, and therefore God justly rejected them, v. 20. See <sup><3416></sup>Hosea 4:6. They *left all the commandments of the Lord their God* (v. 16), left the way, left the work, which those commandments prescribed them and directed them in. Nay, lastly, they *sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord*, that is, they wholly addicted themselves to sin, as slaves to the service of those to whom they are sold, and, by their obstinately persisting in sin, so hardened their own hearts that at length it had become morally impossible for them to recover themselves, as one that has sold himself has put his liberty past recall.

**2.** In particular. Though they were guilty (no doubt) of many immoralities, and violated all the commands of the second table, yet nothing is here specified, but their idolatry. *This* was the sin that did most easily beset them; this was, of all sins, most provoking to God: it was the spiritual adultery that broke the marriage-covenant, and was the inlet of all other wickedness. Hence it is again and again mentioned here as the sin that ruined them.

(1.) They feared other gods (v. 7), that is, worshipped them and paid their homage to them, as if they feared their displeasure.

(2.) They *walked in the statutes of the heathen*, which were contrary to God's statutes (v. 8), *did as did the heathen* (v. 11), *went after the heathen that were round about them* (v. 15), so prostituting the honour of their peculiarity, and defeating God's design concerning them, which was that they should be distinguished from the heathen. Must those that were taught of God go to school to the heathen — those that were appropriated to God take their measures from the nations that were abandoned by him?

(3.) They *walked in the statutes of the idolatrous kings of Israel* (v. 8), *in all the sins of Jeroboam*, v. 22. When their kings assumed a power to alter and add to the divine institutions they submitted to them, and thought the command of their kings would bear them out in disobedience to the command of their God.

(4.) They *built themselves high places in all their cities*, v. 9. If in any place there was but the tower of the watchmen (a country tower that had no walls, but only a tower to shelter the watch in time of danger), or but a lodge for shepherds, it must be honoured with a high place, and that with an altar. If there was a fenced city, it must be further fortified with a high place. Having forsaken God's only place, they knew no end of high places, in which every man followed his own fancy and directed his devotion to what god he pleased. Sacred things were hereby profaned and laid common, when their altars were *as heaps in the furrows of the field*,  Hosea 12:11.

(5.) They *set them up images and groves* — *Asherim* (even *wooden images*, so some think the term, which we translate *groves*, should be rendered) or *Ashtaroth* (so others) — directed contrary to the second commandment, v. 10. They served idols (v. 12), the works of their own hands and creatures of their own fancy, though God had warned them particularly not to do this thing.

(6.) They *burnt incense in all the high places*, to the honour of strange gods, for it was to the dishonour of the true God, v. 11.

(7.) They followed vanity. Idols are called so, because they could do neither good nor evil, but were the most insignificant things that could be; those that worshipped them were like unto them, and so they became vain

and good for nothing (v. 16), vain in their devotions, which were brutish and ridiculous, and so became vain in their whole conversation.

(8.) Besides the molten images, even the two calves, they *worshipped all the host of heaven* — the sun, moon, and stars: for it is not meant of the heavenly host of angels; they could not rise so far above sensible things as to think of them. And, withal, they served Baal, the deified heroes of the Gentiles, v. 16.

(9.) *They caused their children to pass through the fire*, in token of their dedicating them to their idols. (10.) They used divinations and enchantments, that they might receive directions from the gods to whom they paid their devotions.

**III.** What means God used with them, to bring them off from their idolatries, and to how little purpose. He testified against them, showed them their sins and warned them of the fatal consequences of them by all the prophets and all the *seers* (for so the prophets had been formerly called), and pressed them to *turn from their evil ways*, v. 13. We have read of prophets, more or less, in every reign. Though they had forsaken God's family of priests, he did not leave them without a succession of prophets, who made it their business to teach them the good knowledge of the Lord, but all in vain (v. 14); they would not hear, but hardened their necks, persisted in their idolatries, and were like their fathers, that would not bow their necks to God's yoke, because they *did not believe in him*, did not receive his truths, nor would venture upon his promises: it seems to refer to their fathers in the wilderness; the same sin that kept them out of Canaan turned these out, and that was unbelief.

**IV.** How God punished them for their sins. He *was very angry with them* (v. 18); for, in the matter of his worship, he is a jealous God, and resents nothing more deeply than giving that honour to any creature which is due to himself only. He afflicted them (v. 20) and *delivered them into the hand of spoilers*, in the days of the judges and of Saul, and afterwards in the days of most of their kings, to see if they would be awakened by the judgments of God to consider and amend their ways; but, when all these corrections did not prevail to drive out the folly, God first *rent Israel from the house of David*, under which they might have been happy. As Judah was hereby weakened, so Israel was hereby corrupted; for they made a man king who *drove them from following the Lord and caused them to sin*



*a great sin*, v. 21. This was a national judgment, and the punishment of their former idolatries; and, at length, he *removed them quite out of his sight* (v. 18, 23), without giving them any hopes of a return out of their captivity.

*Lastly*, Here is a complaint against Judah in the midst of all (v. 19): *Also Judah kept not the commandments of God*; though they were not as yet quite so bad as Israel, yet they *walked in the statutes of Israel*; and this aggravated the sin of Israel, that they communicated the infection of it to Judah; see <sup><1231></sup>Ezekiel 23:11. Those that bring sin into a country or family bring a plague into it and will have to answer for all the mischief that follows.

## <1274> 2 KINGS 17:24-41

### THE SAMARITANS' IDOLATRY

Never was land lost, we say, for want of an heir. When the children of Israel were dispossessed, and turned out of Canaan, the king of Assyria soon transplanted thither the supernumeraries of his own country, such as it could well spare, who should be servants to him and masters to the Israelites that remained; and here we have an account of these new inhabitants, whose story is related here that we may take our leave of Samaria, as also of the Israelites that were carried captive into Assyria.

**I.** Concerning the Assyrians that were brought into the land of Israel we are here told,

**1.** That they possessed Samaria and *dwelt in the cities thereof*, v. 24. It is common for lands to change their owners, but sad that the holy land should become a heathen land again. See what work sin makes.

**2.** That at their first coming God *sent lions among them*. They were probably insufficient to people the country, which occasioned *the beasts of the field to multiply against them* (<sup><1239></sup>Exodus 23:29); yet, besides the natural cause, there was a manifest hand of God in it, who is Lord of hosts, of all the creatures, and can serve his own purposes by which he pleases, small or great, lice or lions. God ordered them this rough welcome to check their pride and insolence, and to let them know that though they had

conquered Israel the God of Israel had power enough to deal with them — that he could have prevented their settling here, by ordering lions into the service of Israel, and that he permitted it, not for their righteousness, but the wickedness of his own people — and that they were now under his visitation. They had lived without God in their own land, and were not plagued with lions; but, if they do so in this land, it is at their peril.

**3.** That they sent a remonstrance of this grievance to the king their master, setting forth, it is likely, the loss their infant colony had sustained by the lions and the continual fear they were in of them, and stating that they looked upon it to be a judgment upon them for not worshipping the God of the land, which they could not, because they knew not how, v. 26. The God of Israel was the God of the whole world, but they ignorantly call him the *God of the land*, apprehending themselves therefore within his reach, and concerned to be upon good terms with him. Herein they shamed the Israelites, who were not so ready to hear the voice of God's judgments as they were, and who had not served the *God of that land*, though he was the God of their fathers and their great benefactor, and though they were well instructed in the manner of his worship. Assyrians begged to be taught that which Israelites hated to be taught.

**4.** That the king of Assyria took care to have them taught *the manner of the God of the land* (v. 27, 28), not out of any affection to that God, but to save his subjects from the lions. On this errand he sent back one of the priests whom he had carried away captive. A prophet would have done them more good, for this was but one of the priests of the calves, and therefore chose to dwell at Bethel for old acquaintance' sake, and, though he might teach them to do better than they did, he was not likely to teach them to do well, unless he had taught his own people better. However, he came and dwelt among them, to teach them how they should *fear the Lord*. Whether he taught them out of the book of the law, or only by word of mouth, is uncertain.

**5.** That, being thus taught, they made a mongrel religion of it, worshipped the God of Israel for fear and their own idols for love (v. 33): *They feared the Lord*, but they *served their own gods*. They all agreed to worship the God of the land according to the manner, to serve the Jewish festivals and rites of sacrificing, but every nation made gods of their own besides, not only for their private use in their own families, but to be put *in the houses of their high places*, v. 92. The idols of each country are here named, v.

30, 31. The learned are at a loss for the signification of several of these names, and cannot agree by what representations these gods were worshipped. If we may credit the traditions of the Jewish doctors, they tell us that Succoth-Benoth was worshipped in a hen and chickens, Nergal in a cock, Ashima in a smooth goat, Nibhaz in a dog, Tartak in an ass, Adrammelech in a peacock, Anammelech in a pheasant. Our own tell us, more probably, that Succoth-Benoth (signifying *the tents of the daughters*) was Venus. Nergal, being worshipped by the Cuthites, or Persians, was *the fire*, Adrammelech and Anammelech were only distinctions of Moloch. See how vain idolaters were in their imaginations, and wonder at their sottishness. Our very ignorance concerning these idols teaches us the accomplishment of that word which God has spoken, that these false gods should all perish (<sup><3101></sup>Jeremiah 10:11); they are all buried in oblivion, while the name of the true God shall continue for ever.

6. This medley superstition is here said to *continue unto this day* (v. 41), till the time when this book was written and long after, above 300 years in all, till the time of Alexander the Great, when Manasse, brother to Jaddus the high priest of the Jews, having married the daughter of Sanballat, governor of the Samaritans, went over to them, got leave of Alexander to build a temple in Mount Gerizim, drew over many of the Jews to him, and prevailed with the Samaritans to cast away all their idols and to worship the God of Israel only; yet their worship was mixed with so much superstition that our Saviour told them they knew not what they worshipped, (<sup><402></sup>John 4:22).

II. Concerning the Israelites that were carried into the land of Assyria. This historian has occasion to speak of them (v. 22), showing that their successors in the land did as they had done (*after the manner of the nations whom they carried away*), they worshipped both the God of Israel and those other gods; but what did the captives do in the land of their affliction? Were they reformed, and brought to repentance, by their troubles? No, they did after the former manner, v. 34. When the two tribes were afterwards carried into Babylon, they were cured by it of their idolatry, and therefore, after seventy years, they were brought back with joy; but the ten tribes were hardened in the furnace, and therefore were justly lost in it and left to perish. This obstinacy of theirs is here aggravated by the consideration, 1. Of the honour God had put upon them, as the seed of Jacob, *whom he named Israel*, and from him they were so named, but were a reproach to *that worthy name by which they were called*.

2. Of the covenant he made with them, and the charge he gave them upon that covenant, which is here very fully recited, that they should *fear and serve the Lord Jehovah* only, who had *brought them up out of Egypt* (v. 36), that, having received his statutes and ordinances in writing, they should *observe to do them for evermore* (v. 37), and never forget that covenant which God had made with them, the promises and conditions of that covenant, especially that great article of it which is here thrice repeated, because it had been so often inculcated and so much insisted on, that they *should not fear other gods*. He had told them that, if they kept close to him, he would *deliver them out of the hand of all their enemies* (v. 39); yet when they were in the hand of their enemies, and stood in need of deliverance, they were so stupid, and had so little sense of their own interest, that they did after the former manner (v. 40), they served both the true God and false gods, as if they knew no difference. *Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone*. So they did, and so did the nations that succeeded them. Well might the apostle ask, *What then, Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin,* ~~511~~ Romans 3:9.