

Why Israel Fell

M. W. Bassford

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Introduction.

- A. One of the passages in Scripture that we most often use to justify our study of the Old Testament is 1 Corinthians 10:11-12, particularly vs. 11. Much of the time, in this study, we look at the success stories of the Old Testament. Just last week, I preached a sermon on Gideon. Interestingly enough, though, although it's certainly appropriate to study those successes, that's not really what 1 Corinthians 10 is talking about. In context, Paul is discussing the failures of Israel and our need to learn from them.
- B. Sadly, the story of God's people in the Old Testament has much more to say about failure than success. From the time of David onward, the kingdom of Israel, then the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, embarked on a period of steady decline that was only broken by occasional restorations. At the end of this decline, both Israel and Judah were conquered and taken into exile, not because their military might had failed, but because their devotion to God had failed. This story of failure is the story arc of the Old Testament.
- C. As grim as this story is, it's a story that we need to pay attention to. We need to understand what happened to Israel so that we can avoid the same fate ourselves. There are few chapters in the Bible more suited to this study than 2 Kings 17. Many of the lessons here apply to our physical nation, but there's not really any way we can make the U.S. listen to them, and to be honest, I wonder if it's not already too late. However, these are still lessons that we can take and apply to our spiritual nation, especially to the part that is gathered here in this local church. Lest we fall, let's spend some time this evening examining why Israel fell.

I. Early Sins.

- A. According to 2 Kings 17, the first thing that Israel did wrong was that they **IMITATED THE NATIONS**. This appears in 2 Kings 17:7-8. This was probably a very gradual process. They began to act like the evil Canaanites around them in small things, harmless things that they thought wouldn't have much spiritual effect. As time passed, though, and generations succeeded one another, they came to the point where they imitated the nations in everything, even in the idolatry that eventually caused them to be destroyed.
- B. This is a problem that Christians today need to recognize. In our heart of hearts, whom do we really want to imitate? Do we want to be like the people around us, with their clothes and their language and their leisure-time activities and their lifestyle, at least as much as we can without sinning, or do we want to be like Christ? Believe me, brethren, if we love the world and the things in the world, Satan will be delighted to bring us to what we love. On the other hand, if we don't care about blending in, if we are determined to be different, if we are willing to stand out for Christ's sake, even if that brings us the scorn of our neighbors, we too will get what we want. We have to make a choice. Whom do we follow, the world, or Jesus?
- C. Likewise, the Israelites **SINNED SECRETLY**. We learn this from 2 Kings 17:9. This too is a classic sign of the beginnings of apostasy. Remember, folks, when the Israelites saw idolaters or evildoers in their midst, they weren't just supposed to shrug their shoulders and continue on. Instead, they were supposed to stone idolaters so that their evil would not corrupt all of Israel. If there were enough people around who cared about doing what God said, that sort of behavior could make idolatry hazardous to your health! As a result, the Israelites who wanted to do evil had to practice their sin in secret at first, until no one around them cared.
- D. Probably none of us are tempted to build a shrine to Baal in our basements, but we certainly have our problems with secret sin. We don't run the risk of public execution if we sin openly, but we do risk being shunned by our brethren. As a result, many Christians who want to dabble in sin choose the hypocritical route. Rather than going to strip clubs, they get theirs on the Internet. Rather than bar-hopping, they drink at home where no one else can see. Rather than cussing like a sailor on the church building steps after services, they only use that kind of language around the people of the world. Folks, when we sin secretly, we are making a huge mistake. The biggest problem with sin is not that our brethren might see it and disapprove. It's that God ALWAYS sees it and ALWAYS disapproves. No matter how secretive we are, we can't fool Him.
- E. The Israelites took their next downward step when they **REJECTED THE PATTERN**. That's what 2 Kings 17:9, once again, tells us. Remember, folks, when the Bible talks about the sin of the Israelites in worshiping on the high places, it's not talking about Baal worship or any other kind of idolatry. It's talking about worship of Jehovah. On those high places, the Israelites were worshiping the right God. The problem was that they were worshiping Him in a way He did not command. They had rejected the Scriptural pattern for worship.
- F. This is just as much a temptation today as it was 3000 years ago. As I've observed recently, we have a great deal of liberty in Christ in the way we worship. However, in our worship, what God has commanded, we must do, and what God has forbidden, whether explicitly or by His silence, we must not do. Sadly, there are plenty of Christians today who don't want to recognize that. They want to import musical instruments into the

assembly, have female preachers, prayer leaders, and song leaders, and turn the Lord's Supper into a full-fledged meal. Brethren, we can't do that. We must follow the pattern rather than rejecting it.

- G. After the nation had decayed a little bit more, the Israelites **SET UP IDOLS**. We see this in 2 Kings 17:10. This, of course, is different from the worship of Jehovah on the high places. It involved the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth and Milcom and all the detestable gods of the nations around them. Of course, this worship didn't replace the worship of Jehovah. Instead, they just kind of turned God into part of a Middle Eastern pantheon. They were still worshiping Him, but they were worshiping others too, and that wasn't good enough.
- H. Sometimes we forget that we too serve a jealous God. I've never been tempted to bow the knee to Dagon, but every one of us is surrounded by the idols that Satan is urging on us. We have the idol of money, we have the idol of career, we have the idol of leisure time, and we even have the idol of family. Brethren, God must be more important to us than any of those things, or even than all of them put together. He refuses to share the top pedestal with anyone or anything, and if we put Him on the same level as something else, we might as well not bother serving Him at all. We have to tear our idols down and lift Him up.

II. Later Sins.

- A. As they continued down the road to destruction, the Israelites also **IGNORED HISTORY**. Look at how their behavior is described in 2 Kings 17:11. The Canaanites were idolaters. Finally, they reached a point where God couldn't stand them anymore, so He destroyed them and replaced them with the Israelites. So what do the Israelites do? They start in on the same idolatry that got the people before them destroyed! In fact, the Bible tells us that toward the end, the Israelites got even worse. They ignored the lessons of the past.
- B. We can be guilty of exactly the same thing. If the record of human history in the Bible tells us anything, it's that God will always bring the wicked to judgment. That's universally true on a physical level—just think of how many corrupt nations through history have fallen. It is also universally true on a spiritual level. Every human being either obeys God and lives, or rejects God and dies. And yet, I've known more than a few people who assembled with the saints who made it quite clear by their conduct that they thought it wouldn't happen to them. Friends, that is a foolish, foolish delusion. God will bring every act to judgment, even ours.
- C. Similarly, the Israelites **IGNORED GOD'S MESSENGERS**. We learn this from 2 Kings 17:13-14. Everything that we're talking about in this lesson, of course, didn't happen overnight. Instead, it was the result of hundreds of years of slow decline. God saw where things were headed from the very beginning, and so He diligently sent prophet after prophet to warn Israel about the dangers of the choices they were making. Did Israel listen? Not a bit. Sometimes they went so far as to murder the men who were trying to save them.
- D. Christians today are often confronted with a similar choice. We no longer have prophets who receive direct revelation from God, but a man of God today speaking from His word speaks with the same authority. As all of us will acknowledge, not everything we hear from a preacher or a Bible-class teacher is guaranteed to make us happy. In fact, sometimes, when they point out the difference between what the Bible says and what we do, it stings. The question is, what do we do with the unpleasant truth when we hear it? Do we get mad at the preacher? Do we forget the Bible class as soon as we get home? Or do we listen, obey, and save our souls?
- E. Things got really serious when the Israelites **REJECTED GOD'S COVENANT**. God says they did in 2 Kings 17:15. This is an extremely important accusation. The very basis of Israel as a nation was the covenant that Israel made with God on Mt. Sinai. On that day, God told them that if they obeyed Him, He would be their God and protect them, and they would be His people. That was how they conquered the land in the first place, and that was how they kept it. By rejecting the covenant, they endangered their existence as a nation.
- F. No less than the Israelites did, we too have a covenant with God. When we were baptized, in exchange for forgiveness of our sins and the hope of eternal life, we promised to serve and obey God. That covenant was sealed with the blood of Jesus. However, just like the Israelites did, we too can reject our covenant. God's promise of salvation is not unconditional. Instead, it is contingent on our continued obedience. When we live lives of sin, we breach that agreement and forfeit God's protection. It is a deadly dangerous mistake.
- G. Finally, though, the Israelites **SOLD THEMSELVES TO DO EVIL**. We read this in 2 Kings 17:17. This is the same accusation that Elijah levels against Ahab after he murders Naboth to take his vineyard in 1 Kings 21. The idea seems to be that Ahab wanted that vineyard so much that he was willing to sell his soul to the devil in exchange for the joy that he would have from that vineyard. That's what all of Israel did.
- H. It's something that we can do today too. We too can enslave ourselves to sin all over again for one wicked pleasure that we think we can't live without. We know it's wrong, but we do it anyway, repeatedly and without remorse, because that sin is worth more to us than the blessings of God. That's the final step. Once we let ourselves reach that point, friends, unless we go through some catastrophic shock, there's no appeal from God or his people that is going to bring us back, because we don't want to go back. We're Satan's property now.
- I. We see the result of Israel selling itself in this way described in 2 Kings 17:18. Because of the evil they had done, they lost their inheritance forever. If we walk the same road, the same thing will happen to us, except that the inheritance we will lose won't be some rocky fields in Palestine. It will be eternal life in heaven.

Conclusion. If you're following in Israel's evil footsteps, repent and return to God now, before it's too late.