

The Lord Removed Israel From His Presence

2 Kings 14:1-17:41

Key Verse: 17:8a

“So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence.”

Why should we study the books of Kings, the history of Israel? An American author, George Santayana, is generally credited with saying, "Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it." In 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul said, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come." Kings Bible study teaches us what is right and wrong in the sight of God. It teaches us that the rise and fall of a nation or a person does not depend on conditions or circumstances; it is in the hand of God. In this passage the histories of the northern and southern kingdoms are intertwined. Mainly this passage deals with why the northern kingdom was destroyed. We must take warning through their failure so that we may not repeat it. Today we will cover four chapters and the reigns of eleven kings.

I. Amaziah, king of Judah and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (14:1-29)

First, Amaziah, king of Judah (1-22). Amaziah became king after his father Joash. He was 25 years old when he became king and he ruled 29 years. How did the author evaluate his kingship? Look at verses 3-4. "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not as his father David had done. In everything he followed the example of his father Joash. The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there." Like his father Joash, Amaziah began well. But after experiencing some success he became proud and fell into idol worship.

Look at verses 5-7. Amaziah did two good things. First of all, he practiced justice according to the words of God. He executed the officials who had murdered his father. But he did not put to death the sons of the assassins in accordance with the word of God. (Deut 24:16) In ancient times, when a king came to power he destroyed all his enemies and everyone associated with them. But Amaziah tempered this tendency in obedience to the word of God. The other good thing he did was to defeat the Edomites in battle when he obeyed God's direction. At first, Amaziah hired 100,000 fighting men from Israel to fight against Edom for a hundred talents of silver. But a man of God told him that he would lose the battle if he fought with Israelite soldiers, for the Lord was not with them. Amaziah listened to the man of God and sent the Israelite soldiers back, though he forfeited the

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hundred talents of silver. Through this act of obedience he gained the Lord's favor and won a great victory. (2 Chr 25:5-12) However, when he returned from the battle, Amaziah brought the idols of Edom with him and worshiped them. (2 Chr 25:14) Why did he abandon the Lord who gave him victory and worship the gods of Edom, whom he had defeated, as his own gods? It was because in the time of victory, he did not glorify God or give thanks to God. Then his thinking became futile and his foolish heart was darkened. (Ro 1:21) We learn here that when we are successful we must render glory to God, give thanks to God, and do the work of God more diligently.

God sent a prophet to correct Amaziah. However, Amaziah did not listen to him, saying, "Have we appointed you an adviser to the king? Stop! Why be struck down?" (2 Chr 25:16) Amaziah's pride and stubborn heart made him foolish. He challenged Jehoash, the king of Israel. Jehoash rebuked him, saying, "You have indeed defeated Edom and now you are arrogant. Glory in your victory, but stay at home! Why ask for trouble and cause your own downfall and that of Judah also?" (10) However, Amaziah would not listen. So he was defeated by Jehoash and became a prisoner of war. (13) Jehoash broke down the wall of Jerusalem. He took all the treasures of the temple and brought them back to Samaria, along with hostages. (14) Amaziah was defeated, not because he lacked military power, or because he was not a good strategist, but because he was proud. Amaziah lived for 15 years after the death of Joash. He had enough time to repent of his sins. But he did not. When he abandoned the Lord, people conspired against him and killed him (19-20). At the beginning of his reign he did well. But in the latter part of his life, he failed. It is important to live by faith to the end. Life is like a marathon, not like a 100 yard dash. If a person runs fast in the beginning, but gives up in the middle, he cannot get the prize. But one who persists faithfully, not turning to the right or to the left, and going to the end, can win the prize. We should not be proud when we are successful. Nor should we despair when we fail. What is important is to live by faith to the end. (Ro 1:17) Let's run by faith to the end!

Second, Jeroboam II, king of Israel (23-29). According to history, Jeroboam II was the most powerful of all the kings of northern Israel. During his reign, the territory of his nation expanded until it nearly rivaled the territory of Solomon's kingdom. Economically, the nation prospered exceedingly. However, the prophets Hosea, Joel, Jonah and Amos, who lived during his reign, condemned the materialism and selfishness of the Israelite elite. In spite of his great political and economic achievement, what was God's evaluation of his reign? Look at verse 24. "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit." Here we learn that

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God's evaluation is different than man's evaluation. What is really important is not our achievement or man's praise, but how we live in the sight of God. Even though one is very successful in academics, politics, and economics, if they are not right in the sight of God, it is nothing. We must do right in the eyes of the Lord, because we will stand before the judgment of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." That is why we must make it our goal to please God.

Why did Israel prosper under Jeroboam II's reign, though he did evil in the eyes of the Lord? At that time, Israel had no shepherd. Everyone was suffering bitterly. So the Lord had compassion on them and became their shepherd. (26,27) The Lord used Jeroboam II to deliver them, even though he was evil. God blessed them so they might turn to him. (Ro 2:4)

II. Three kings of Judah and five kings of Israel (15:1-16:20)

This part begins with a king of Judah, Azariah, and ends with two kings of Judah, Jotham and Ahaz. Sandwiched between the kings of Judah are five kings of Israel: Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah. Two of the kings of Judah, Azariah and Jotham, did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. All the kings of Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

First, Azariah king of Judah (1-7). Azariah is also known as Uzziah. He was 16 years old when he became king. He reigned in Jerusalem for 52 years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. 2 Chronicles 26:5 explains why he was so successful: "He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success." Like his father Amaziah, he did well at first. But he failed later. 2 Chronicles 26:16 says, "But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense." In the ancient pagan world, the king could be both king and priest at the same time. But Israel had separated the offices of king and priest. Even the king could not usurp the office of the priest. But when Uzziah became strong, he became proud. Then he abused his power. The priest, also named Azariah, and 80 other priests confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priest. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and you will not be honored by the Lord your God." (2 Chr 26:18) But he did not listen and became angry. Then leprosy broke out on his forehead. He was as good as dead. Even a great man becomes

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useless when he becomes proud. For the Lord opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (Ja 4:6) Here we learn that to bear God's blessing is more challenging than to receive God's blessing. The way to receive God's blessing is to seek the Lord humbly. The way to bear God's blessing is also to seek the Lord humbly. Lord, help us not to be proud, but to be humble to the end of our lives so that we may bear your blessings!

Second, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah, kings of Israel (8-31). Zechariah reigned six months and was assassinated by Shallum. Through this, the word of the Lord spoken to Jehu was fulfilled, "Your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation." (12) Shallum reigned one month and was overthrown by Menahem. Menahem reigned in Samaria for ten years. During his reign, Pul king of Assyria invaded Israel. Menahem exacted money from wealthy Israelites in order to pay tribute to Assyria. Following Menahem, in the only peaceful transfer of power in this section, his son Pekahiah became king and reigned two years. He was assassinated by Pekah, one of his chief officers. Pekah reigned for 20 years. During his reign, Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria, came and took the towns of Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported people to Assyria. From that time on, Galilee was called, "Galilee of the Gentiles." (Mt 4:15) Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea. When we see all these kings, the common factor is that they did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit (9,18,24,28). However, this is not mentioned of Shallum, perhaps because he reigned only for one month; he had no time to do evil. When they abandoned the Lord and worshiped idols, their nation fell into confusion, disorder, corruption and violence. There was no peace, no trust, and no stability. The Lord punished them through neighboring countries.

Third, Jotham and Ahaz, kings of Judah (15:32-16:20). In the second year of Pekah, Jotham son of Uzziah became king of Judah. He was 25 years old when he became king and he reigned in Jerusalem for 16 years. Look at 15:34. "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Uzziah had done." Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the temple of the Lord. However the high places were not removed. On the other hand, Jotham was also different from Uzziah. 2 Chronicles 27:2 says, "...but unlike Uzziah, he did not enter the temple of the Lord." Jotham knew that his father became a leper because he usurped the priest's office and tried to burn incense in the temple. Jotham learned from his father's negative experience. This shows us that we don't have to repeat the mistakes of our forefathers. We can learn from history and improve. According to the historian Josephus, Jotham had

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high morality and integrity. He feared God and sacrificed himself for the benefit of his people. Also, he was willing to receive correction.

After Jotham, Ahaz became king of Judah. He was 20 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for 16 years. Unlike David, his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God. (2) He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even sacrificed his sons in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree. Therefore the Lord his God handed him over to the king of Aram. (2 Chr 28:5) At that time, Rezin king of Aram drove out the men of Judah and recovered Elath for Aram.

Still, the Lord was ready to help Judah. The Lord spoke to Ahaz through his servant Isaiah, saying, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz responded, "I will not put the Lord to the test." He seemed very spiritual. But actually, he was not. He was depending on Assyria, not God. Still, the Lord did not abandon him. The Lord himself gave him a sign: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him 'Immanuel.'" (Isa 7:14) This prophecy meant that Immanuel Jesus would come. That is the background of Matthew chapter 1. But Ahaz ignored the Lord's sign and sent to the king of Assyria for help. He took the silver and gold from the temple of the Lord and the royal treasuries, and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death. (9) King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. Ahaz saw an altar in Damascus and was fascinated by it. He may have said to himself, "Wow this is really contemporary religion! Our religion is out-of-date. We have to change it." Then he immediately made a sketch and sent detailed plans for construction of such an altar to Uriah the priest in Jerusalem. According to God's law, the kingship and priesthood were separate, like "separation of church and state" today. The king must not usurp the priest's position. But Ahaz did so. The priest should have resisted this at the risk of his life, as Azariah did. (2 Chr. 26:17,18) But Uriah compromised and blindly followed Ahaz's plan. So he quickly finished the altar. It was ready for Ahaz upon his return. The king made many offerings on the new altar and ordered Uriah the priest to do the same. Then King Ahaz began remodeling the temple. Throughout their history, no one had dared to remodel the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. But Ahaz did so in order to please the king of Assyria. At the time of crisis, Ahaz did not seek the Lord. He sought the help of Assyria. Assyria became his god. His idol worship led to Judah's fall.

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Ahaz' big mistake was that he tried to change the temple. The temple was made according to the pattern God showed Moses. It was precisely the way God made for man to come to God. So man could not change the temple. This temple was a shadow of the things to come. Later, Jesus became the temple through his suffering, death and resurrection. That is why he said, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." (Jn 2:19) The gospel of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection is the way God made for man to come to him. To repent of our sins and accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the only way of salvation God has provided. There is no other way. We cannot change the gospel message, just as Ahaz should not have changed the temple. However, some people want to change the gospel message. Many preachers are afraid to mention the sin problem. They do not use the words "repent," "cross," "self-denial," or "suffering." They emphasize health, wealth and success. But they don't help people repent, accept the gospel, and grow spiritually. They don't plant a sense of mission or a right attitude toward suffering for Christ. We must not change the gospel message. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. (Ro 1:16) The gospel gives us the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and hope in the kingdom of God. The gospel gives us true rest, peace and God's love. The gospel is effective in any generation. We must accept the gospel as it is, with repentance and faith. And we must share the gospel as it is with others.

III. The downfall of Israel (17:1-41)

Verses 1-6 tell us the direct cause of Israel's downfall. Verses 7-23 explain the fundamental cause. Verses 24-41 show how Samaria became the land of religious pluralism.

First, Hoshea, the last king of Israel (1-6). Hoshea conspired against the former king, Pekah, and assassinated him. (15:30). Then he succeeded him. He reigned nine years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but not like the kings of Israel who preceded him. He was more moderate in the worship of golden calves, and he did not hinder the people of northern Israel from worshiping the Lord in Jerusalem. (2 Chr 30:18) At the beginning of his reign, Hoshea paid tribute to the king of Assyria who had conquered Israel during Pekah's reign. However, Hoshea misread the times, tried to ally with Egypt, and stopped paying tribute to Assyria. So the prophet Hosea said in 7:11, "Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless—now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria." Egypt turned out to be a paper tiger. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, discovered that Hoshea was a traitor. So he attacked Israel, captured Samaria, and put Hoshea in prison. It was 722 B.C. Shalmaneser deported the Israelites to Assyria. Israelite prisoners of war numbered

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27,290. This was far more than the 4,600 taken from Judah to Babylon 136 years later. (Jer 52:30) Archeologists have discovered Assyrian sculptures that depict Israel's deportation. In them, Israelite prisoners are led from Samaria by hooks in their tongues. It was the tragic end of Northern Israel.

Second, the Lord removed Israel from his presence (7-23). In verses 7-23 we find the fundamental cause of the downfall of Israel. **In the first place, they forgot God's grace and worshiped idols (7-12).** Look at verses 7-8. The fundamental reason for Israel's downfall was their sin against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh. When the Israelites were slaves of Egypt they suffered unbearable oppression and could not escape by their own power. However, the Lord had mercy on them and freed them from bondage by his mighty acts of judgment against the Egyptians. That was the basic grace of deliverance they had received from the Lord. God wanted them to remember this grace at all times and to serve him with thanks and joy based on this grace. However, they forgot. They did not give thanks to God. Their thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened. (Ro 1:21) Then they began to worship other gods and to follow the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. Their idolatry began in secret, but soon spread to every corner of the nation and provoked the Lord to anger. We can understand. Fifty years ago in the USA, homosexuality was considered shameful. But today there is so much regard for the human rights of homosexual people that the shame of their sin is ignored. There are blatant public displays in support of the homosexual lifestyle all across America. To forget God's saving grace is the beginning of total depravity. We must remember God's saving grace: how we were miserable sinners before we were saved. We must remember how we suffered under the power of sin and Satan, and how the Lord saved us from the misery of sin and death, made us his precious children, and gave us a glorious mission to serve him. When we think about these things, we have no reason to complain. We only have reason to be thankful to God.

In the second place, they did not listen to God's warning through his servants (13-14). In the time of King Ahab, the whole nation became a Baal worshiping nation. At this time of spiritual crisis, the Lord sent the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and many other prophets, who warned Israel courageously: "Turn from your evil ways. Obey the words of God; otherwise, you will be destroyed." But the people would not listen. They were stiff-necked. They didn't turn away from their sins. They killed the prophets of the Lord. So they invited their own destruction. Today God still gives us warnings in many ways. When the events of 9-11 happened, Dr. Billy Graham delivered a clear message of repentance to America at a meeting of

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leaders in Washington, saying that it was time for America to come back to God. For a couple of weeks, churches were filled. But after that people forgot and resumed their lives without seeking God. Warnings also come through economic crises, natural disasters, and the rise of international enemies, like the terrorists. God warns us personally through health problems, family crises, failures, conflicts, and through his servants who share his word with us. When these warnings come, we should not be stiff-necked. We should be humble enough to listen to what the Lord is saying to us.

In the third place, they forsook the Lord's commands and imitated the nations around them. (15-17) God had a plan for his people. God wanted to teach them his word to restore his image in them and to enable them to live as his holy children. He wanted them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to give influence to the world. So they should not be influenced by the world, but influence the world. The Lord ordered them, "Do not do as they do." (15) However, they did the things the Lord had forbidden them to do. They worshiped idols cast in the shape of calves and Asherah poles. They bowed to the starry hosts and worshiped Baal. They even sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. When they forsook the Lord's commands, they lost their identity. They became just like the people of the nations around them. Christians must have a clear identity. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Christians should not be influenced by the world. Rather, Christians must give influence to the world. As children of light, we must declare Jesus' praises to a fallen, dark world.

Though the Lord had been very patient with Israel, what finally happened? Look at verse 18. "So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left...." When the Lord is angry, there are consequences. He removed Israel from his presence. He gave them over to their sinful desires and stopped intervening in their nation. (20; Ro 1:24,26,28) They lost God's protection, God's blessing, God's discipline, and God's provision. They became like orphans who are lonely, needy, unloved, and miserable always. People tend to think that wholehearted devotion to God means losing their freedom. So they abandon the Lord and his word in order to keep their freedom. But they are not really free. They become slaves of sin and the devil and do the things they really don't want to do. Furthermore, they provoke the Lord to anger. In verses 21-23, the author repeats his teaching to emphasize that it was because of Israel's sin they were removed from the Lord's presence.

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Third, Samaria became the land of religious pluralism (24-41). This part shows us what became of Samaria after the Lord removed them from his presence. The Lord gave them over to the Assyrian kings. These kings scattered Israelites throughout the Assyrian Empire and brought people of other nations to settle in Israel. However, the immigrants did not worship the Lord. Then he sent lions among them and they killed some of them. This was reported to the king of Assyria. He sent one of Israel's priests back to Samaria to teach the people how to worship the Lord. Nevertheless, each national group made its own gods in their towns. They set up their own shrines. They worshiped the Lord, and also their own gods, in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought. In this way Israel became the land of religious pluralism.

Religious pluralism seems attractive. Its adherents tolerate and embrace all religions in order to coexist peacefully. But this does not please God. In verses 34-41 the Lord told the Israelites very clearly to worship the Lord only and not to serve other gods or bow down to them. The Lord who brought them out of Egypt with his mighty power is the one they must worship. Why must we worship the Lord alone? Because God is only true God who created the heavens and the earth. God is the only true God who saves us from the power of sin and death through his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6) God alone is worthy to receive our worship. Religious pluralism is human-centered and relativistic. It ruins the glorious image of God in mankind and produces idol worshipers. In that atmosphere, the Israelites' children and grandchildren became idol worshipers.

This seems more and more to be a picture of modern American society. According to a Beliefnet poll from January 2007, 58% of Americans believe that as long as a worshiper is sincere and wholehearted, it does not matter which deity he worships; he is right with his deity and will probably go to heaven. If this is true, we have become a nation of religious pluralists. Lesslie Newbiggin, one of the great Christian theologians of the 20th century, in his book "Foolishness to the Greeks," explains that western culture has gradually become hardened to the gospel. Enlightenment influence exalted human reason to the highest place and proclaimed science as "the way" for mankind. Although the influence of Christianity is still evident, it is regarded as just one among many valid religions. So Newbiggin called for missionaries to come from other nations to the West to proclaim the gospel message plainly so that western culture could again be evaluated and judged by the gospel. At the very time Newbiggin was writing his book, the first missionaries from Korea were coming to America. Many Americans heard the gospel in a simple, direct and clear way, which challenged our sinful lives. Many

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of us were led to repentance and to receive the grace of Jesus through Korean missionaries. In this way the Lord has helped us. We must always hold the gospel supreme when we evaluate our lives and culture.

Today we have studied the sad story of Northern Israel's removal from the Lord's presence. This is a warning to us. We can learn from this. We must remember God's grace. We must heed God's warnings. And we must live with a clear identity as children of Jesus Christ and as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Then God will bless us continually and give us victory.