

BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

by Mario Seiglie

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2 KINGS 15-25 DECLINE AND FALL OF JUDAH



In our final study on the Old Testament, we begin with the deportation of the House of Israel to Assyrian and beyond. The Assyrian army, according to the Greek writer, Ctesias, who lived in Babylon during the Persian period around 400 B.C., was comprised of 1,700,000 infantry soldiers, 200,000 horsemen and 16,000 war chariots, the most formidable military force the world had ever known. They refined the science of cruel military terrorism.

The deportations began in 732 B.C. under Tiglath-pileser III, and he only left unconquered some territory around the capital Samaria. Then the Assyrian king placed a puppet king on the Israelite throne, Hoshea, the last king of the house of Israel. At the beginning, he paid tribute to the Assyrians but later, he foolishly rebelled and refused to pay tribute.

Shalmaneser V, the new Assyrian king, captured and imprisoned king Hoshea. Then Samaria was conquered after a three year siege (2 K. 17:5). Most inhabitants were exiled to Assyria and its environs.

We read, "In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt...and they had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel...and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, for they served idols...Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments and My statutes...Nevertheless, they would not hear, but stiffened their necks...and they rejected His statutes and His covenant...And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire [a horrible type of infanticide], practice witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone...Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon...and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel, and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities" (2 K. 17:6-25).

This would be the origins of the Samaritans, people of mainly Babylonian backgrounds that settled around Samaria. They mixed their Babylonian mystery religion with the Israelite religion and created a syncretistic system. "So they feared the Lord and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the Lord, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the Lord had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel...So these nations feared the Lord, yet served their carved images, also their children and their children's children have continued doing as their father did, even to this day" (17:32-41).

We will later meet with the Samaritans in the New Testament and their deadly religious mix. Acts 8 tells us of Simon Magus, one of the chief founders of false Christianity, who was a Samaritan sorcerer.

We have a fine summary of the deportation of the house of Israel and what eventually happened to the Assyrians and them, in Mr. Armstrong's, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, "Through the rule of 19 kings and seven successive dynasties, the ten-tribed house of Israel continued in the basic twin sins of Jeroboam: idolatry and Sabbath-breaking. Several of the kings added other evil and sinful practices.

"But in 721-718 B.C., God caused the house of Israel to be invaded and conquered by the kingdom of Assyria. These Israelites were removed from their farms and their cities and taken to Assyria on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea as slaves. But the house of Judah—the Jews, a separate and different nation—were not invaded until 604 B.C.

"Two or three generations after the captivity of Israel, however, the Chaldeans rose to WORLD POWER, forming the first World-ruling empire. Under Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldeans (Babylon) invaded Judah (604-605 B.C.).

"The Assyrians—before 604 B.C.—left their land north of Babylon and migrated northwest—through the lands that are now Georgia, the Ukraine, Poland, and into the land that is called Germany today. Today

the descendants of those Assyrians are known to us as the German people.

“The people of ten-tribed Israel also migrated northwest. Though the Assyrians had taken Israel into captivity, the Israelites did not remain as slaves of the Assyrians in Europe. They continued on a little further—into Western Europe, the Scandinavian peninsula, and the British Isles!”

“Now why did they come to be known as the ‘Lost Ten Tribes’? They had lost their national identifying sign!...As long as they remained in the land of Israel and called themselves ‘the Kingdom of Israel,’ their identity was known. But in Assyria they were no longer a nation with their own government and own king. They were mere slaves. They took up the language of the Assyrians and succeeding generations grew up. They lost the Hebrew language as biblical prophecy said they would. They lost all national identity.

“After several generations, the tribe of Joseph, divided into the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, came to call themselves British...The tribe of Reuben settled in the country that is France today....The Ten tribes, known as the house of Israel, lost their identifying tag—God’s Sabbath. That is why they lost their national identity!...Every prophecy in the Bible showing where our people (Israel) will be, at the second coming of Christ and the coming great exodus back to Palestine, pictures them in captivity and slavery once again. The prophecy continues, “And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered...with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people [coming Exodus—Jer. 23:7-8], and there will I plead with you face to face (verses 34-35). Notice it! This is the Word speaking—Christ! He will then be on earth again in person! And then He is going to plead with our people face to face” (pp. 143-149).

So, what happened to Judah? They would survive for another century, since it had some righteous kings that halted the spiritual decay which had totally corrupted the house of Israel and led to its captivity.

Who were some of these righteous kings? The first was **Hezekiah**, who reigned around the same time as Hoshea, the last king of northern Israel. The Bible, that doesn’t praise someone unless he truly deserves it, says of him, “And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done. He removed the high places

and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it and called it Nehushtan [the bronze thing]. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses. The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory...And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, ‘I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay.’ And the king of Assyria assessed Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.”

But the king of Assyria was ultimately not satisfied with the gold and silver, so he sent a messenger to demand the surrender of Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah prayed and fasted to God, spreading the boastful message from the Assyrian king inside God’s temple. God replied through the prophet Isaiah, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard...thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city, says the Lord. For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.’ And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh. Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped in the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place” (2 Kings 19:20, 32-37).

Most of this account has been corroborated by Greek and Assyrian records and archaeological finds.

Hezekiah was spared, but then he fell gravely ill. When Isaiah came, he said, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live’” (2 K. 20:1). But Hezekiah knew of God’s mercy and pleaded with Him, reminding Him of his faithful obedience. God then extended His mercy and gave him fifteen more years of life. It shows God can be moved to change His mind and extend His mercy.

But then, Hezekiah committed a serious folly. After his healing, Babylonian ambassadors, who were Assyria’s deadly enemies and sympathized with Hezekiah, brought him presents. He let his guard down and fell for their flattery. So he showed them all the secret treasures in Jerusalem. It whet their appetites to one day come and conquer it, which they did. When Isaiah told Hezekiah God was highly displeased with this and would punish Judah in the future, Hezekiah just selfishly said he was thankful it would not happen during his lifetime.

After Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh became king, and was a very wicked king. The Bible says, “Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 K. 21:16). According to Jewish tradition, he had Isaiah sawn in half, and Hebrews 11:37 could allude to this.

Manasseh was captured by the Assyrians and taken “with hooks” to their country. There, he repented and God had mercy on him and he was returned to Jerusalem and given ruler ship. He came to “know that the Lord was God” and removed the idols from Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 33:11-17).

His son Amon ruled for two years and was wicked. But then his son **Josiah** took his place and this would be the last righteous king Judah had. “And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images” (2 Kings 34:2-3).

Then, while repairing the temple, workers found a copy of God’s law, which was probably the first five books of the Bible, if not more. They read the prophecies in Leviticus 26 and Numbers 28 of what

would happen if they disobeyed God. “Thus it happened, when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes” (2 K. 34:19). They inquired of the prophetess Hulda, and she told them God was about to punish them, but would hold back until Josiah was dead (2 K. 34:23-28).

King Josiah then kept the Passover as it should have been kept and they had a religious reformation. Tragically, after this, Josiah foolishly got caught up in an international incident when he heard the Egyptian army was crossing some of his land. “After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him.” In the battle, he was shot with an arrow and died.

From then on, it was a downhill spiral for Judah. Egypt now controlled much of the land and deposed Josiah’s son, Jehoshaz after a three months rule and placed another brother, Jehoiakim on the throne. He ruled for eleven years and was a wicked king. After his death, Jehoiachin, his son, was the new ruler and was also wicked. Nebuchadnezzar imposed a tribute on Judah, but after three years Jehoiachin rebelled. So the Babylonians came and laid siege to Jerusalem and Jehoiachin surrendered and was taken to Babylon, while Jerusalem was sacked. Most of the upper class was exiled to Babylon, Daniel included.

The king of Babylon then placed Zedekiah on the throne, the last king before the captivity. He eventually rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who laid a second siege against Jerusalem. Zedekiah tried to escape but was captured and taken to Babylon. He witnessed the death of his sons before he was blinded (2 K. 25:7). Jerusalem was then taken and destroyed.

The Jews would be exiled to Babylon for 70 years, as Jeremiah had prophesied (2 Chr. 36:21). Yet, they would come back under Ezra and Nehemiah and rebuild Jerusalem.

This leads us to the New Testament times--the coming of our wonderful Messiah, Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Church. We’ll begin this exciting study the next time.