Israel Falls

Focal Verses • 2 Kings 17:6–16

Aim For Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **UNDERSTAND** the consequences of sin, **DETEST** our sinful ways as God does, and **REFLECT** on how God's warnings against willfully sinning will not go on forever.

In Focus

Nikki ran with excitement to show her mom her acceptance letter. "I got in! I got in!" Denise tried to be supportive of her daughter's happiness, but she was worried. Up until a few months ago, Nikki was happy enough to attend a small, local college. Then she heard her friends talking about all the cool facilities at their big universities. The shiny new swimming pools, the active Greek life, the trendy student centers. Nikki decided to apply to a big state school, several hours away, where a couple of her friends were going.

Denise wanted Nikki to get the best education she could, but she worried how the culture of a bigger campus would affect her. There would be an active Black sorority for her, but there was no Christian campus ministry to speak of. Nikki's mom and grandmother set her up at college with a well-stocked dormroom and a lot of prayer. But after a year away, Nikki had changed. Her grades were slipping. She wasn't attending church. She had picked up unhealthy habits. She even expressed doubts if Jesus had even been real.

That summer, Denise and Grammy Jean sat Nikki down. "We're worried about you, sweetheart. We sent you to that school so you could show them what a good Christian looks like, not so you could become just like them. We'll help you transfer to the local college if you want, but we won't keep paying to send you where you're losing your way."

Like Nikki, Israel lost their way instead of being a light to the nations. How do we live so that we are in the world, but not of it?

Keep in Mind

"Therefore, the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only." (2 Kings 17:18, KJV)

KJV

2 Kings 17:6–16

6 In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.
7 For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods,
8 And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.
9 And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.
10 And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree:
11 And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger:
12 For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.
13 Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

14 Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God.
15 And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them.
16 And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

NLT

2 Kings 17:6–16
6 Finally, in the ninth year of King Hoshea's reign, Samaria fell, and the people of Israel were exiled to Assyria. They were settled in colonies in Halah, along the banks of the Habor River in Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.
7 This disaster came upon the people of Israel because they worshiped other gods. They sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them safely out of Egypt and had rescued them from the power of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.
8 They had followed the practices of the pagan nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of them, as well as the practices the kings of Israel had introduced.
9 The people of Israel had also secretly done many things that were not pleasing to the LORD their God. They built pagan shrines for themselves in all their towns, from the smallest outpost to the largest walled city.
10 They set up sacred pillars and Asherah poles at the top of every hill and under every green tree.
11 They offered sacrifices on all the hilltops, just like the nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of them. So the people of Israel had done many evil things, arousing the LORD's anger.
12 Yes, they worshiped idols, despite the LORD's specific and repeated warnings.
13 Again and again the LORD had sent his prophets and seers to warn both Israel and Judah: "Turn from all your evil ways. Obey my commands and decrees—the entire law that I commanded your ancestors to obey, and that I gave you through my servants the prophets."
14 But the Israelites would not listen. They were as stubborn as their ancestors who had refused to believe in the LORD their God.
15 They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors, and they despised all his warnings. They worshiped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves. They followed the example of the nations around them, disobeying the LORD's command not to imitate them.
16 They rejected all the commands of the LORD their God and made two calves from metal. They set up an Asherah pole and worshiped Baal and all the forces of heaven.

The People, Places, and Times

Assyria. This country was a powerful ancient civilization known for its military strength and ruthlessness in warfare. The Assyrian Empire was located north of Israel, where they sought to expand their territory. They often fought against other nations, forcing them to become vassals. This meant that the vassal nations had to provide resources to the king of Assyria in exchange for protection from being overthrown and enslaved. The capital of Assyria was Nineveh, where God had sent Jonah to urge the people to repent for their sins. Sadly, after Nineveh's wide-spread repentance in response to Jonah's prophetic ministry to them, they lapsed back into sin and idolatry (2 Kings 19:10-13; Isaiah 10:7-13; Nahum 3:1).

Hoshea. He was the last king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, reigning for nine years. Initially, he became a vassal of Shalmaneser V, the king of Assyria, and paid him tribute. However, Hoshea later refused to continue paying this tribute (2 Kings 17:3-4). When the king of Assyria learned that Hoshea had stopped

paying, he attacked Israel and laid siege to the kingdom for three years. Ultimately, Israel could not withstand the Assyrian army and was overtaken, leading to their captivity.

Background

The Israelites were chosen by God and called to obey Him and worship Him alone. However, throughout their history, they often strayed from the path God had laid out for them. They served other gods and looked to other nations for rescue instead of relying on God. When God brought His people out of Egypt, He warned them that if they turned away from Him and followed other gods, they would face the same calamities that had befallen the Egyptians. After hundreds of years of warning them through prophets, the time had come for God to judge His people for their failure to obey Him.

At-A-Glance

1. The Fall of Samaria (2 Kings 17:6)
2. The Sins of Israel (vv. 7-16)

In Depth

2 Kings 17:6–16 (KJV)

1. The Fall of Samaria (2 Kings 17:6)

Assyria, Israel's enemy, launched a third and final invasion of Israel. The first two invasions served as warnings. If Israel had fulfilled its obligations and not rebelled, the Assyrians would not have returned for a third time. However, Israel chose to ally with Egypt, which angered the Assyrians and displeased God, who had liberated their ancestors from Egyptian bondage. Essentially, Israel was seeking help from one enemy to fight another. While not all calamity is a direct result of sin (John 9:1-3), it is important to reflect on our own possible contributions to the problems we face.

2. The Sins of Israel (vv. 7–16)

Clearly, God was not unjust in judging the people (vv. 7-8), as the Israelites worshiped other gods. By doing so, they became like the other nations, serving multiple deities. This does not imply that they stopped worshiping the Lord; rather, they worshiped Him alongside the gods of other nations.

Verses 9–12 illustrate that the Israelites' worship was not centralized at the Tabernacle. Instead, they practiced their faith on high hills and engaged in secret sins. They also used idols, such as Asherah poles, to represent other deities. It is significant to note that the Tabernacle was located in Jerusalem, which is in the South, but the first king of Israel, King Jeroboam, did not want the Israelites to travel to the South because he feared they would rebel against him, so he set up golden calves in the North for the people to worship at Dan and Bethel.

Still, the people refused to listen to the prophets (vv. 13-14), highlighting their unwillingness to heed God's words and their desire to follow their own paths. They even rejected their covenant with God (v. 15). Consequently, the Israelites fully assimilated into the surrounding nations. It is profound that God was never unfaithful to Israel. Have you ever invested your best efforts in someone only to have them reject you and downplay your support?

Search The Scriptures

1. Who captured Israel? (2 Kings 17:6)
2. What had Israel done? (v. 7)
3. What had the prophets told the Israelites? (v.13)

Discuss The Meaning

1. Why do you think the Lord allowed Assyria three invasions before Israel finally fell?
2. God warned Israel because of its public and secret sins. Why are secret sins just as destructive as public ones?

Liberating Lesson

In the 1980s, the U.S. government commissioned a study on race relations in American society. This study resulted in a report known as "The Kerner Commission Report," which stated, "Our society is moving toward two distinct separate societies, one black and one white—separate and unequal." The report warned the government and society of the devastating consequences that a divided America could bring, including poverty, crime, segregation, drug abuse, and child abuse. The report did not fully capture how the church would begin to mirror the nation, becoming increasingly divided along political lines, class, ethnicity, and race. As believers, we should strive to model a world aligned with God's word, seeking justice and peace rather than division. How do the problems of communities outside ours impact our communities?

Application For Activation

Reflect on your relationship with God. Remember that God knows and loves us and desires to have a relationship with His creation. It's important to be honest with God, as dishonesty can hinder your walk with Him. Therefore, confess your sins to God and seek His mercy and forgiveness.

More Light On The Text

2 Kings 17:6–16

6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

This passage indicates the relocation of the Israelites from the land promised to them to a land belonging to another king. The Israelite prisoners were likely transported like other captives, walking, feet and hands shackled and in some cases stripped of clothing to humiliate them before other nations.

The Assyrians were eager to exploit any skills their new captives possessed to build up their empire. Assyria's policy when conquering another country was to forcibly relocate and spread the new population throughout its wide empire. That way, ethnic minority's cultures would soon be forgotten as tiny, widely dispersed communities could not hold out against the dominant culture. A similar tactic saw the loss of many different, rich West African cultural practices and traditions among their populations who were kidnapped away to the Americas and enslaved in plantations from Brazil to Virginia.

7 For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods.

The text explains the reasons behind the enslavement of the Israelites. It states that the Israelites had sinned. The Hebrew word for sin is hata (khaw-TAW), which can also be translated as "offend" or "harm." The text references the land of Egypt because it was there that the Lord God demonstrated His supremacy over all other gods. He commanded the Israelites to remember their past deliverance so that they would remain faithful to Him and recognize that He could, and would, subdue all their adversaries.

8 And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.

God had given his people His law and commanded them to walk in His law, statues, and decrees (Deuteronomy 11:22). However, the Israelites chose to walk (Heb. yalak, yaw- LAK), which in this context means to live their lives, by the statues of the heathen. The Israelites had no reason not to trust God—yet they still turned away from Him. This shows how sin can cause God's people to make ill-informed decisions.

9 And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.
The Hebrew word for "secretly" (khapa, KHAW-faw) appears only once in the Old Testament. In contrast, another word, "dark" (Heb. hosek, kho-SHEK), is used in Ezekiel 8:12 to describe actions that people attempt to conceal from God. The Israelites' efforts to act secretly reveal their lack of understanding of God; they mistakenly believe that their God is like other deities who are not always present.

10 And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: 11 And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger:
The presence of images throughout the land reflects the people's level of suspicion and highlights the weight of following other gods. The Israelites conquered their Promised Land to have a place to worship God, but then the Israelites abandoned the worship practices God asked of them and adopted the practices of the people they overthrew. Also, verse 11 illustrates that their actions provoke the Lord to anger, as indicated by the use of the Hebrew word for "anger" (ka'as, kaw-AS), which also can be translated as "wrath."

12 For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.
The Hebrew word for "served" is 'abad (aw-BAD), and is sometimes translated "worshiped." Interestingly, the same word is used in Moses' constant refrain to Pharaoh to let his people go "that they may serve" God (Exodus 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7-8). The entire point of leaving Egypt, and of defeating the Canaanites and Hittites and other peoples living in the Promised Land, was so the Israelites would be able to worship God in peace. But when they finally had that freedom, the Israelites enslaved themselves to idols, despite being explicitly commanded not to do so. Their actions represent a clear act of rebellion, indicating that they have little regard for God's word or His laws.

13 Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants, the prophets.
God had given the children of Israel many warnings in various forms. One significant way He warned them was through prophets and seers. Prophets and prophetesses receive a direct message from God through the Holy Spirit and deliver this message to the people. In Hebrew, there are several words to describe these individuals: ro'eh and rozeh, which are translated as "seer"; and nabi, which is usually translated as "prophet," meaning "one who has been called to speak." Additionally, God provided many warnings to the children of Israel through commandments, statutes, and the laws given to their ancestors.

14 Notwithstanding, they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. 15 And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. 16 And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

The Israelites are accused of not listening to God, failing to obey and understand His will, and choosing to follow their own desires instead of believing in the Lord their God. Unfortunately, the Israelites have not obeyed God's commands. The rejection of God's statutes and covenant is significant because these elements define the Israelites' identity as the covenant people of the Lord God (2 Kings 17:15). By turning away from God, they have distanced themselves from their true selves.

The text notes that they followed "vanity" (Heb. hebel, HEH-bel), which can be translated as "empty," or "vapor," and since they followed after "vanity" or "empty," they became "vanity" or "empty." In contrast, had they followed God, they would have been conformed to His image rather than the image of ungodly deities. This is a poignant example of how we reflect what we worship.

This verse highlights the Israelites' active participation in idolatry; they created images, such as calves and groves, and worshiped these man-made objects that cannot save them. The gods they served, like Baal, were not known for their care for humanity.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY
Deuteronomy 28–29
Psalm 40:9-17

TUESDAY
Deuteronomy 30–31
Psalm 41

WEDNESDAY
Deuteronomy 32–34
Psalm 42

THURSDAY
Joshua 1–4
Psalm 43

FRIDAY
Joshua 5–8
Psalm 44:1-13

SATURDAY
Joshua 9–11
Psalm 44:14-26

SUNDAY
Joshua 12–15
Psalm 45:1-9