



The Fall of Israel: God's Final Judgment

Lesson 16

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night ...

2 Peter 3:9-10a

Do you ever find yourself wondering if God is ever actually going to deal with evil like he says he will? In 2 Peter, Peter is addressing people who laugh at the coming of the Lord. "Where is he? Nothing has changed since the beginning of time! He's not coming back." Peter warns people tempted to think this way that God is not "slack" or "slow" concerning his promise to send Christ and deal once and for all with evildoers. God is waiting to give as many people as possible a chance to repent. However, he will not wait forever. Eventually the day of the Lord will come, and when that day comes it will be too late.

Sometime around the year 931 the nation of Israel split in two and became a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah). In the north, king Jeroboam set up two golden calves to worship, and those calves were never taken down. About 150 years later another king named Jeroboam takes the throne. Under his reign things go extremely well, but dark clouds are forming on the horizon. Syria ceases to be a problem for the country, but only because Assyria is coming. After Jeroboam dies, it's only 30 years until Israel as a country no longer exists.

In this lesson, we will see that God's judgment might delay in coming, but it will certainly come. God waited patiently for Israel to turn from her sin for almost 200 years, but when they continued to follow after their sin God eventually brought judgment.

Jeroboam II¹ (2 Kings 14:23-29)

- I. Summary of Jeroboam's reign (2 Kings 14:23-24, 28-29)**
- II. Summary of Jeroboam's success (2 Kings 14:25)**
- III. God's compassion on Israel (2 Kings 14:26-27)**

¹ Jeroboam is never called "Jeroboam II" in Scripture, however, since he was the second ruler in Israel to have this name, theologians will sometimes use the "II" to help people keep the different Jeroboam's separate.

Jeroboam is named after, you guessed it, Israel's first king Jeroboam! Jeroboam II continues the sins of his namesake, and yet surprisingly we read here that God brought a prosperity to the land of Israel and gave them military victories. Interestingly, there is a prophet named Jonah who prophesies during this time, and not surprisingly doesn't want to bring a message of warning to Nineveh, the capital of Israel's main political enemy.

Why would God allow military success right before he brings judgment on the nation?

Zechariah and Shallum (2 Kings 15:8-15)

I. Zechariah (2 Kings 15:8-12)

II. Shallum (2 Kings 15:13-15)

Jeroboam's son Zechariah has a short and insignificant reign: only six months. This fulfilled God's message to Jeroboam that his sons would rule until the fourth generation (Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam, Zechariah). At this time, however, one of Zechariah's generals, Shallum, took him out and had an even briefer reign: one month.

This begins the revolving door of assassinations, intrigue, and treachery that will cover the last few years of the kingdom. Under the reign of Jeroboam, things were good, but things take a pretty steep decline as soon as he dies.

The revolutions of Israel are recorded pretty objectively, but what do you think God thought of them?

Menahem and Pekahiah (2 Kings 15:16-26)

I. Menahem (2 Kings 15:16-22)

II. Pekahiah (2 Kings 15:23-26)

Shallum is overthrown by Menahem, much like Zimri who confidently overthrew the king only to realize his power wasn't as consolidated as he thought. Menahem becomes the king, and he is a cruel and wicked man who reigns for 10 years. He is subjugated by Assyria, and is forced to pay a large sum of money to keep from being destroyed.

Pekah and Hoshea (2 Kings 15:27-31; 17:1-6)

I. Pekah (2 Kings 16:27-31)

II. Hoshea (2 Kings 17:1-6)

Pekah led what was likely a large, discontented group that wanted to see the country break free from Assyria. Apparently it didn't go well because Assyria took a bunch of land from Israel as a result. Some of the details of Pekah's will be covered in a future lesson when we cover Ahaz. Unfortunately, Pekah got squashed by Assyria, and Pekah's failure led to Hoshea executing him and being set up by Assyria as a loyal subject. But after Assyria has a change of kings, Hoshea decides to try his luck by hiring Egypt as an ally and trying to get them to fight against Assyria with and for them. Egypt never shows up, Assyria finds out, and after a brief nine-year reign Assyria comes in and destroys Israel once and for all. Her king is removed, and her people are sent to a foreign nation and foreigners are brought in to replace her and mix with the remaining natives.

Why was there so much turmoil during Israel during these last few years? What led to all this uncertainty and violence? How might we be warned about this today?

The Fall of Israel (2 Kings 17)

Pro-Assyrian and anti-Assyrian kings traded assassinations in a revolving door of ever-changing administrations. Heavy taxes, constant military threats, and a crumbling criminal justice system (see the book of Hosea) had led to a weak, fledgling, powerless country. Not sure if Egypt was the better master or Assyria, Israel tried to play both of them and got majorly burned in the process. In the end, the religious sin of idolatry led to the moral sins of injustice, murder, and treachery, which led to the death of the nation.

The author of Kings slows down to meditate with us on why all of this happened to Israel. In fact, he takes half a chapter to explain, remind, and challenge us with the example of Israel. As we study why it was God allowed Israel to be destroyed like it was, we find that there are warnings for us that we should take with the utmost seriousness.

Consider asking the group to look through the passage and answer the question "Why did God allow Israel to be destroyed?" before going through the main points.

I. Israel became like the nations around them (17:8, 15).

Whenever you are reading in your Old Testament and find the author describing how Israel related to "the nations" think in your mind "the world." The concept of Israel's relationship

to the nations is very similar to the New Testament concept of believers' relationship to the world.

Israel wanted to be like the nations, much as believers struggle with wanting to be like the world. The nations enticed Israel to be unfaithful to God by following idols. In the New Testament, idolatry is connected to covetousness and sinful desire, and believers are warned that if they follow their sinful desires like the world they will be unfaithful to God (cf James 4:1-4). God sets up an absolute choice in both the Old and the New Testament: "You can be a follow the ways of the nations or you can love me, but you can't do both."

As we look at the sad state of Israel, the author of Kings begins by saying this all started when Israel decided she was going to follow the customs of the nations around her. Many of the sins that would follow (idolatry, vile behavior) flowed out of this first wrong choice.

Why do you think Israel so badly wanted to be like the nations? What does this teach us about believers and their relationship to the world?

II. Israel worshipped pagan gods (17:9-12, 16-17, 21-23).

Not surprisingly, the major theme that surfaces in this section is the idolatry of Israel. This connects with the previous theme, as it was the desire of Israel to be like the nations around them that in part led them to worship idols.

Why would worldliness lead to idolatry? What might this look like today?

Israel began to put their hope, time, and money into Baal, Asherah, and likely other deities. They never stopped worshipping the Lord necessarily. They just worshipped him and the gods of the nations around them. This wasn't a small ordeal, either. The idolatry of the nation became pervasive; it wasn't limited to a city or two, you could find idols everywhere in the land. What likely began as a problem overlooked here and there soon became dominant.

Why do you think idolatry became so pervasive? What warning is there in this for believers today?

III. Israel ignored God's prophets (17:13-15, 23).

Sadly, God warned Israel over and over. He gave them years to repent and sent discipline and sent the prophetic message. Both were ultimately ignored. But the people resisted and rebelled. We are told they "hardened their necks, like to the necks of their fathers." The reason for this? They did not believe God.

What is the relationship between unbelief and idolatry here? What is the end result of their stubbornness in verse 15? What is the result of their stubbornness in the grand scheme of the whole chapter?

IV. Israel participated in vile practices (17:17).

Sadly, the sinful practices of the idolatrous nations around them led them to participate in vile practices that Israel likely never saw herself participating in. When we choose to follow after the things of the world and to live for our desires, what we find is that such a lifestyle leads to a lower level of sin than we would have thought possible. As the old saying goes: “Sin always takes you farther than you wanted to go, keeps you there longer than you want to be, and leaves you far dirtier than you’d ever thought you’d be.”

V. Israel led Judah into sin (17:18-20).

Sadly, Israel’s example led Judah astray. Our actions have consequences that radiate out beyond our own immediate circle. Israel’s sinful behavior was a bad example that Judah would eventually follow to her own destruction, as Scripture emphasizes elsewhere (cf Ezekiel 23).

VI. Israel followed the sins of Jeroboam (17:21-23).

The first recorded act of the first recorded king of Israel was to set up sites of worship that were 1) not the sites given by God and 2) had golden calves for the worshippers. This “original sin” of the nation never went away and was the initial act that turned the people away from God.

It took almost 200 years for the sin of Jeroboam to finally result in its ugly fruit. In what ways do our sins today sometimes day years if not decades and centuries to result in fruit?

God’s judgment delayed for quite a long time. Almost 200 years of nonstop rebellion against God is what it took for God to finally bring an end to the northern kingdom. But when God’s judgment did come, it came swiftly and severely. As we look at Israel, God’s chosen people, to whom God sent prophetic messengers over and over, who watched firsthand as God saved them, delivered them, and cared for them, we are left asking the question, “How could this have all gone so wrong?”

This is an important question to ask because what happened to Israel could just as easily happen to us. We like to think that we are spiritually invincible and that we will never turn away from obeying God. Sadly, the halls of church history are lined with many people who thought that very

thing before they apostatized. We all must be on guard, and we must never reinterpret God's patient mercy with a wink and nod to keep going down our sinful paths.

When God's mercy is ignored, we invite God to address our sins in a more dramatic (and far less pleasant) way. God in His goodness will not allow sin to continue to fester. And so the challenge is to each of us to confess our sins early and often; to deal with them as God brings them to our attention; and to listen and tremble when he brings a message of rebuke rather than angrily cast off what he says.

The message of Paul in Romans 2 sums this truth up quite well:

And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; (Romans 2:3-5)

Why is it that the goodness of God is designed to lead to repentance?

According to this passage, what happens when we despise God's goodness?

This passage is primarily talking about salvation. How should believers apply this principle in light of the forgiveness that has already been won for them in Christ?