

The Consequences of Idolatry vs. the Power of Trusting God



2 Kings 17 & 18

Key Bible Texts

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Key Bible Verse(s)

“But the Lord your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.” (2 Kings 17:39)

Background to the Study

Chapter 17 records how the Northern Kingdom of Israel was finally taken into captivity. Hoshea, Israel's last king, ruled for nine years over a nation already weakened by years of decline. He paid annual tribute to Shalmaneser of Assyria, but after six years he rebelled and sought support from Egypt. In response, Shalmaneser imprisoned him. With no effective leadership, Israel was left vulnerable. The Assyrians advanced through the land, besieged Samaria for three years, and eventually captured it. Most of the population was taken into exile, and foreigners were brought in to resettle the land.

The second half of chapter 17 describes how Assyria repopulated the land. Their strategy was to relocate conquered peoples so they could not unite and rebel. New settlers came from regions near Babylon and Syria. Over time, the remaining Israelites intermarried with these groups, and their descendants became known as Samaritans, who were later despised by the Jews. The new inhabitants tried to combine worship of the God of Israel with their own idols, resulting in a confused and corrupt religion that persisted for generations.

Chapter 18 explains clearly why this judgment came. Israel forgot God's mercy in delivering them from Egypt, adopted the practices of surrounding nations, and corrupted true worship with idolatry. They rejected the prophets, ignored God's law, and became like the idols they served. Their pagan worship included calf-idols at Dan and Bethel, Baal worship, astrology, child sacrifice, fortune-telling, and occult practices. Their hearts were completely turned from God.

With Israel gone, only Judah remained, yet Judah also drifted into the same sins. Because they refused to repent, they too were eventually taken into captivity, though this came more than a century later.

Chapter 18 introduces Hezekiah, king of Judah, who reigned for twenty-nine years and was one of Judah's most faithful kings. He worked closely with the prophet Isaiah and led significant spiritual

reforms. He also resisted Assyrian control. When Assyria, under King Sennacherib, invaded Judah and captured cities such as Lachish, Hezekiah attempted to buy peace by sending tribute taken from the Temple. This failed, and the Assyrians marched toward Jerusalem.

Their commander, Rabshakeh, stood at the same location where Isaiah had once confronted King Ahaz. He used intimidation and propaganda to pressure Jerusalem to surrender, mocking Hezekiah's reforms and claiming that God Himself had sent Assyria. The people of Judah were forced to decide who they would trust in the face of overwhelming threat.

TESTIMONIES FROM OUR DAY

When I was a child, I sometimes struggled to obey my parents. One memory has stayed with me for more than forty years. My mother kept a few precious childhood mementos in a cupboard above our kitchen stove. I loved those little treasures, and although my parents often let us look at them, they made it very clear that I was never to climb on the stove to reach them. They knew it was dangerous, and they warned me that disobedience would have consequences.

Still, the temptation was strong. When my mother was busy, I would pull a chair over and stare up at the cupboard. Once I even started to climb, but my sister caught me. One day, however, both my sister and father were outside, and Mum was in another room. Thinking no one would notice, I pushed the chair over, climbed onto the stove, and reached into the cupboard. I took out a small ceramic dog and admired it, completely absorbed.

Then I heard the front door open. My father's voice filled the room, and I knew instantly that I had been caught. The discipline that followed was firm but loving. Dad wanted to make sure I never climbed on the stove again, because he knew how easily I could have been burned or badly hurt. His correction worked. I never tried it again.

In today's passage, Israel repeatedly disobeyed God. They worshipped idols and ignored His commands, even though He had warned them again and again through prophets and through earlier judgments. Eventually, God allowed Assyria to conquer Israel and carry the people away. Their disobedience had real consequences.

There is a lesson here for us. Ignoring God's instructions always leads to harm. His commands are given for our protection and our good. Today, may we choose to listen carefully to His Word and obey Him wholeheartedly. Blessing always follows obedience.

A Closer Look

Question 1

Because of the sin of the Israelites, the Lord allowed them to be taken captive by the Assyrians. What specific sins are mentioned in 2 Kings 17:7-12? In what way did God show mercy to the Israelites, and what was their reaction? 2 Kings 17:13-17

Question 2

What are some modern forms of “idolatry” people struggle with today? How does repeatedly ignoring God affect a person or a nation spiritually? What practical steps can help us avoid falling into the snare of disobedience to God (James 1:22; Psalm 119:11)?

Question 3

What does it mean that the people “feared the Lord but served their own gods”? (II Kings 17:33, 35, 41) Syncretism involves blending beliefs or practices. In what ways might we be tempted today to mix something else with the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:6–9)?

Question 4

All the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were deemed evil. Among the kings of Judah, both good and evil, only Hezekiah and Josiah gained the praise, “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did” (2 Kings 18:3; 2 Kings 22:2). What actions resulted in this assessment of Hezekiah’s reign? 2 Kings 18:4-6

Question 5

Scripture records that Hezekiah trusted the Lord, clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him (2 Kings 18:6). He apparently did this in the midst of extreme political, military, and economic pressure to do just the opposite. Name some ways in which we also are pressured to depart from the Lord and explain how our trust in God can help us resist.

Question 6

What was the Assyrian King Sennacherib’s perspective on Hezekiah’s God? How did he try to influence the inhabitants of Jerusalem? (2 Kings 18:19-22) What can you do to ensure you are following God’s will when important decisions come your way (Proverbs 3:5–6; Psalm 25:4–5)?

Take Home

God wants full-time obedience from His people. Are we listening to His instructions today? We should beware that it is unprofitable to divert from God’s instructions.