

BaptistWay Bible Series for May 4: Death of a nation

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Death of a nation

- 2 Kings 17:1-18, 21-23

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“Having brought Israel from bondage to glorious freedom, God had every right to expect them to walk in newness of life, as befitting a redeemed people”—Expositor’s Bible Commentary.

As we read this week of the final fall of the Northern Kingdom, I am reminded of how different (and not so different) our times are. Every four years, our country elects a leader. The change of leadership might or might not reflect your personal convictions. But the leadership changes nonetheless. There are no riots. No military uprisings. No assassins in the oval office taking the place of their mark.



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Israel had asked for a king to rule over them. They had charted a course God had not desired for them. They were in the final throes of God keeping his promises. They were reaping the consequences of their spiritual adultery.

The instability of leadership was examined last week. The ascendancy of Hoshea was brought about by conspiracy and murder (see 2 Kings 15:30).

The evidence of Hoshea's treachery lies not only in the murder of Pekah, but also in his dealings with the King of Assyria. Hoshea tried to gain an advantage during the changing of kings in Assyria (to whom Israel was paying tribute). But his desire to "have his cake and eat it, too" backfired. The new king of Assyria decided enough was enough. He launched an all-out assault on the upstart king and his insignificant rebellion.

The historian recording the details of these events notes in verse 2 that although Hoshea had done evil in the sight of the Lord, he was "not like the kings of Israel who preceded him." The implication is that although he was bad, there were others who were worse. But of course, the standard of righteousness is not those who had held the throne before. The standard was God's covenant—Hoshea had failed miserably at holding on to the importance of God's demand for spiritual faithfulness.

The role of the people's sin in what happened cannot be ignored. We find in verses 7-18 the charges leveled against God's covenant community. They forgot God's power that had brought them out of Egypt. They conformed to

the customs of foreign nations rather than adhering to the law. They openly worshipped idols. These examples of unfaithfulness were accepted, practiced and promoted by the leadership.

Verse 9 demonstrates how widespread the apostasy had spread: “From watchtower to fortified city they built themselves high places in all their towns.” The watchtower usually referred to a tower built to protect livestock out in the country. It was mentioned here as the most lonely of places in the nation.

The fortified city was the metropolitan area of its day—where everyone gathered together. From the largest gatherings of people to the lonely outposts in the countryside, the people of the Northern Kingdom had distanced themselves so far from the covenant that they had lost touch with precisely who the covenant was with.

Note the mention of doing things secretly against God. Did they really think they could keep secrets from the one who never sleeps? Or were they keeping secrets from each other—maintaining an outward appearance of the official worship while continuing to bow and burn incense and offer sacrifices to statues of calves?

The evidence that was being presented really was insurmountable. The list is complete. The law is clear. The consequences are the logical result of the abandonment of God and his covenant with Israel. Not only was the written code of conduct always available for them to refer, the continuing voices of the prophets condemned the actions of king and commoner alike.

They also spelled out what was coming—so there should have been no shock when Assyria began deporting the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom to foreign lands: “Samaria and its king will float away like a twig on the surface of the waters” (Hosea 10:7).

Sowing and reaping are a familiar theme in Scripture. Again and again, the

promises of God ring true. Keil & Delitzsch note in their commentary on this passage that “Whatever man sets before him as the object of his life apart from God is a worthless idol and idolatry, and leads to worthlessness, to spiritual and moral corruption.

Having been warned again and again, Israel was brought to its knees by their blatant disregard for the kindness of God. Mistaking his patience for complacency, they gave up their rights to the blessings of the covenant. Their stubbornness would have to give way to repentance to show they had indeed learned the lesson God was teaching them.

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