

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 45 – Part 3

The Fall of Israel: The End of Ten Tribes

When my grandmother (Grandmother Katherine, a/k/a “Nenau”) passed away, she left us with an old (*very* old) suitcase loaded up with some pictures, cards, letters, and newspaper clippings. The suitcase belonged to my great-grandmother (“Grandmother Davis”) who had passed away about twenty years earlier. Grandmother Davis called the suitcase her “grip.” With Grandmother Katherine gone 18 months now, my sisters and I decided it was time to open the grip and see what was inside.

First, we had a company move the material onto a DVD for easy duplication, permanence, and ease of viewing. Then, with a big screen ready to show the pieces, my Mom, Aunt Penny (mom’s sister and only other child of Nenau’s), my sisters, a few in our respective families, and I gathered around a potluck dinner ready for the viewing. The goal was to access and write the associated memories of Mom and Aunt Penny so that the photos had meaning and the history was better preserved.

The copy process produced eight DVD’s. We made it through one! The process was like a historical jigsaw puzzle. Instead of setting down pieces on a table-top to coordinate into a picture on a box, we were faced with a puzzle that gave us no finished picture to work toward, and one where all the pieces were not necessarily there. To make it even worse, much of the puzzle dealt with moving time, so the picture was one that was, in a sense, moving and shifting with each piece.

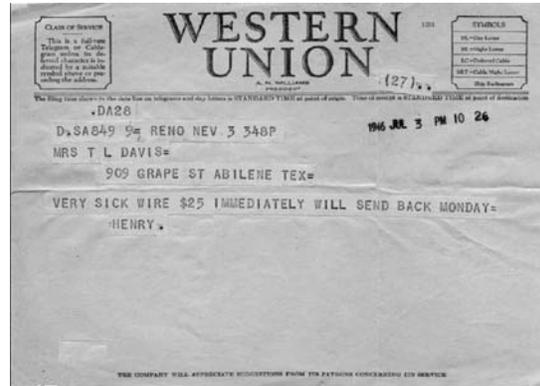
We had a few deadends, a few places where we had to go back and modify our previous findings, and a few things resigned to the category of “we have no idea!” We also had a blast! Some things were funny, others touching, and some rather bland. It turned out that my great-great grandmother, the mother of my Grandmother Davis who died in 1938 (we shall call her “Grandmother Bray”), actually had a good many of the articles in her collection before she passed away seventy years ago. So these were materials collected over almost one hundred years, over five generations behind me, and opened for our exploring.

Slowly but surely, we are assembling a historical portrait of this branch in our family. We are learning of not only events, but of people. We were all touched over my grandmother’s Monday morning, October 20, 1942 special-delivery letter to my great-grandmother telling her that she had been baptized at Sunday night services the day before. We are also still laughing at my great-grandmother’s relative “Henry” who sent her a telegram in 1946 from Tennessee on Wednesday

(she was in deep West Texas) asking for 25 dollars because he was “very sick”, then promising to *repay her on Monday!* Hmmm...

Our still incomplete work has already affected us. Aside from the great time and family fellowship, the putting together of history from the various sources gives a sense of grounding. It also reminds us of the important things that matter and the things that over time fade away in significance. Much of what we lose sleep over today, might not be worth it! With some of our daily moments, we need to slow down and appreciate them, letting them soak through us, absorbing and appreciating them for their unique place in life.

As we bring the lessons on the fall of Israel to a close, we are involved in a similar process. We are taking the pieces we have accumulated from past lessons, adding in more pieces from various sources this week, with a goal of assimilating an historical picture that informs, but even more so, gives a sense of grounding and appreciation that affects the way we live. With that goal in mind, we begin by piecing and further developing our study on Assyria, then plugging in the Biblical events, and ending with our Conclusion and our Points for Home.



ASSYRIA

We have already provided a good background to Assyria, so here, we will summarize earlier information and supplement it with additional history relevant to contextualizing and better understanding Israel’s fall. Looking first at Assyria, we focus first on the nation, its people, and aspects relevant to the Israel story. We then isolate the three Assyrian kings that played a role in the final days of Israel. While some of this material may seem irrelevant for our study purposes, our selections for inclusion here are because of the way they help us understand the Biblical account.

Assyrian Practices

The Assyrian Empire had stretched in time back over 1,000 years before King David and Israel’s monarchy. Unlike Israel, the Assyrians were not a race or genetically linked group of people. They were a smorgasbord of people assembled into a kingship ruled initially from Assur, a city on the western bank of the Tigris River. The city was named after its patron god, Assur (who was the

supreme god in the pantheon of the Assyrian people). The name “Assyria” also derives from the city and god.¹

The Assyrian people were both religious and superstitious. They believed that the gods communicated their will and instructions to people through signs. It was the responsibility of people to figure out how to read those signs. The major signs came either through the stars (astronomy) or through reading the entrails of animals (extispicy²). This created quite an industry for priests who specialized in such readings. The priests’ readings allowed them to regulate even activities of the king, telling him when he must eat, fast, travel, *etc.*³

The society was built around the king, who was considered Assur’s co-regent on earth. The king was not god, but was god’s representative. As such, the land and ultimate authority all belonged to the king, as it also belonged to the god Assur. The people and government took a pyramid shape below the king. At the bottom of the pyramid were foreign captives. These captives were lower than the peasants and slaves, and had to do the most demanding and demeaning jobs.

The people at large were “moral” by many standards of today. The crime rate was evidently low. Prostitution was accepted, but limited. Similarly, drunkenness occurred but it was frowned upon. Documentation leads scholars to think that crimes of violence and theft were rare. Grayson adds,

In general the picture we have is of a stable, secure, rather Spartan society in which men, other than the priests and scribes, engaged in the vigorous exercise of manual labour, arms, and hunting, while the women minded the children and home. The steadying force was the community, the tribe, and especially the family.⁴

To this we might add that many men were also involved in military ventures. While the Assyrians in the relevant time period had a standing army, the king, each provincial governor, and each ruler of the major cities had an ability to conscript an army as additional troops were needed.

¹ Because Assyria existed for such a long time, scholars divide their names for the culture into three eras. The “Old Assyrian Period” dates from before 2,000 BC to 1700/1300 BC, depending on the scholar. Around 1365 BC, the “Middle Assyrian Period” existed until 911 BC. The last era is known as the “Neo-Assyrian Period” and it dates from 911 to 612 BC when Assyria fell.

² **Extispicy** (from Latin *extispicium*) is the practice of using anomalies in animal entrails (especially the liver, intestines and lungs) to predict or divine future events.

³ See discussion and citations at Grayson, A. K., “Assyrian Civilization”, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, (Cambridge 2007), 2d ed., Vol III, Pt 2, at 224ff.

⁴ Grayson at 210.

When the people had legal disputes, they did not go to court the way we think of court. The people would go before the appropriate administrative official or authority that alone or with others would decide the legal ruling. If the matter is not so readily solved, then the official could send the matter to an “Ordeal.” While we do not know exactly how the Ordeal took place, it did involve the parties setting their matter before the appropriate god who would render a verdict, not subject to appeal!⁵

In the vassal states that were not direct provinces of Assyria, but paid homage and taxes in return for a measure of independence, if the local ruling families did not live up to the terms of their agreement with Assyria, the king would cast his judgment and punishment. At the times relevant in our study, the king kept officials in the foreign courts to monitor the actions of provincial officials.⁶

On an economic level, Assyria did not have any coinage. The metals that were the backbone of commercial transactions were silver and copper. The core of Assyria was an agricultural land, and trading provided access to metals, timber, gems, ivory, horses, camels, grapes/wine (the main drink for Assyrians was beer brewed from barley), spices, and aromatics.⁷ These products were also appropriate payment at times for those vassal states and provinces owing their annual taxes.

The main area where Assyria excelled was war.

Assyria developed military expertise far surpassing that of any other contemporary nation.⁸

Assyria used impressive tactics both to effect victory and to intimidate adversaries. A goal of Assyrian military might was to so impress and scare people, that no one chose to rebel and face the consequences. Assyria would use midnight attacks, battling at night (rare in that day). They took the modern equivalent of engineers that could build temporary bridges using goatskin floats and timber. They would also dam rivers



As this carving shows, the Assyrians also used goat skins as air tanks for swimming under waters.

⁵ Grayson at 212.

⁶ Saggs, H. W. F., *The Might That Was Assyria*, (St. Martin’s Press 1989), at 85.

⁷ Grayson, at 214ff.

⁸ *Ibid.*, at 217.



The battering rams were complex. They included towers for archers to hinder enemy efforts to attack the ram from above.

to flood the enemies' camp. Cutting off the water supply of a city, using battering rams on wheels for city walls and defenses, tunneling under walls, and more were used in military maneuvers. If a city was well defended, the Assyrians routinely found nearby towns and destroyed them totally, not simply killing the residents, but mutilating them, often displaying their skins in an effort to intimidate a city's surrender.⁹

With this general culture in mind, we consider now the direct actions of the three Assyrian kings relevant to Israel's fall.

Tiglath-Pileser III

Tiglath-Pileser III¹⁰ ("T-P") took the throne at a time when Assyria had been stagnant or even declining for decades. A good number of scholars think that T-P was a usurper, and not the rightful heir to the throne.¹¹ Regardless of how he came into power, T-P proved to be incredibly strong as a military leader as well as a government organizer. In his reign, which lasted from 744 to 727 BC, he changed the way kings waged war as well as the make-up of the Assyrian Empire. T-P was



Tiglath-Pileser from a stele kept at the British Museum.

⁹ *Ibid.*, at 220.

¹⁰ Tiglath-Pileser III was also known simply as Pulu (in the Bible this is why he is also called "Pul"). Grayson dismisses the scholars that think the name was a regnal name for T-P's enthronement in Babylon. Instead, Grayson speculates that "Pulu" may somehow derive from the "Pileser" part of T-P's name. Grayson, at 73.

¹¹ See, e.g., Grayson, A. K., "Assyria: Tiglath-Pileser III to Sargon II", *The Cambridge Ancient History*, (Cambridge 2007), 2d ed., Vol III, Pt 2, at 74; Olmstead, A. T., *History of Assyria*, (U. of Chicago 1951), at 175.

an imperialist. He readily and quickly assimilated key semi-independent vassal states into the empire, carving them up into provinces ruled by his assigned governors. Even these provinces, T-P kept intentionally small so the governors would never have too much power.¹²



T-P originated the original early Pony Express (maybe “Camel Express”!), setting postal offices at specified stages on main routes so that he could communicate efficiently and quickly with all points of his empire. T-P also set up trading centers in distant lands to assist in commerce and trade. One was set up in the Philistine city of Gaza, as T-P conquered up to Egypt’s border.¹³ Cogan sees this as

an important indicator of T-P’s drive to conquer lands as, in part at least, economically motivated.

The founding of a customs-house in Philistia, one of the innovations of Tiglath-Pileser III, clearly points to the strong economic drive at the base of Assyrian expansion, whose goal was the domination of international trade. Gaza sat astride the road that led from Egypt northward and its port served the export of goods from south Arabia.¹⁴

T-P was the first to instigate a policy of wholesale deportation of conquered people. His mass transportation was designed to break up ties with history, land and neighbors so that people were less likely to rebel in the future. T-P would send rebellious residents into forced labor while others would simply be transmigrated into another distant land.

While T-P began his reign in a time of decline, he readily used the military to reshape Assyria into the superpower of its day. His military prowess reorganized the army into a more efficient machine. He led the troops into battles against enemies in the north, south, east and west, going to war every year of his reign except one. In war, T-P’s tactics included leveling cities, destroying olive groves, and impaling people alive on display:

¹² Grayson, at 204.

¹³ Grayson at 77.

¹⁴ Cogan, Mordechai, *The Raging Torrent: Historical Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel*, (Carta 2008), at 64.

His chief ministers, alive I impaled, and had (the people) of his land behold them.¹⁵

We will see how T-P dealt with rebellious vassal states in more detail with the rebellion of Israel below. By the time of T-P's death in 727 BC, he had expanded the borders of Assyria far beyond what they had ever been in its over 1,000 year history.

Shalmaneser V

Shalmaneser V, who reigned just a few years (726-722 BC), followed T-P on the throne. Shalmaneser accomplished little, according to the Assyrian annals. His main accomplishment is the siege of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Among the many records of Assyria extant today, this is the only matter of importance recorded during Shalmaneser's short reign. Most scholars date the fall of Samaria to 722 BC, the last year of Shalmaneser's life. The actual deportation of the people occurred under Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II.

Sargon II

The accession of Sargon II is not clear in any records, leading a number of scholars to think he was a usurper to the throne rather than truly of regal lineage.¹⁶ One of Sargon's inscriptions reads that the gods deposed Shalmaneser because Shalmaneser wrongly imposed a tax on Assur, previously a tax free city. These same gods then allegedly set Sargon up as new king. This is likely historical speak for a coup d'état!

Sargon continued the expansionist aims of T-P, including the deportation of the Israelites and the resettlement of foreigners in the land of the Northern Kingdom. By the time of Sargon's death, Assyria had



¹⁵ Text translation by Cogan, *Ibid.*, at 74.

¹⁶ See, Grayson, at 87. Cogan cites some scholars who suggest that Sargon was at least of royal blood, even if not the proper heir to the throne. See, Cogan, at 81.

become,

...the largest political power the world had ever seen.¹⁷

Most of this, however, was the result of T-P's campaigns more so than Sargon's.

THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT

With this background information, we now turn to the Biblical account of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. As we have already seen, the Biblical account is written in narrative most fully in 2 Kings. There is a considerable amount of material also contained in the prophets of Hosea and Amos, both of whom prophesied about the fall. Isaiah also has references to the events surrounding the Assyrian expansion and fall of Israel/Samaria. We will use 2 Kings as our basis, supplementing as helpful from other Old Testament passages as well as the historical documents from Assyria.

Israel's relationship with Assyria begins over 100 years before its fall and its first mention in the Bible.¹⁸ Jehu, the general who took over the kingship of Israel in 841 BC, paid tribute to Assyria as a vassal state under King Shalmaneser III. This payment was likely made when Shalmaneser was attacking territories near Israel around 838 BC. We read in the inscription of the Black Obelisk (now in the British Museum):

I received the tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: silver, gold, a gold bowl, a gold vase (?), gold goblets, gold buckets, tin, a royal scepter (and) javelins.¹⁹



After Jehu, we read of his grandson also making payments to Assyria in the Assyrian records. "Joash of Samaria" sent tribute to Adad-nerari III somewhere around 805-796 BC. This relationship is likely the biblical reference to the Lord sending "Israel a savior [Assyria], so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of

¹⁷ Grayson, at 71.

¹⁸ We do not count here the three references in Genesis (2:14; 10:11; 25:18) to Assyria. They are geographic references, not points of contact between Israel and Assyria.

¹⁹ Text translation by Cogan, *Ibid.*, at 23.

Israel lived in their homes as formerly” (2 Ki. 13:5). Assyrian records show that Assyria warred Syria (Damascus) into submission at this time.

By the time of T-P, however, the strength of Assyria had weakened so that a number of vassal states, including Israel, no longer paid tribute. This was one matter that T-P set out to rectify. Assyria was incredibly diligent at record keeping, and this would certainly have been on the national radar.

We have studied in the build up to war that Menahem became king of Israel after striking down the previous king, Shallum, who himself had killed his predecessor Zechariah (2 Kings 15:8-22). Menahem then proceeded to pay Tiglath-Pileser (the text calls him “Pul”) 1,000 talents of silver (a talent was about 75 pounds!). Menahem raised the money by taxing all wealthy men in Israel 50 shekels apiece (a shekel was about 2/5ths of an ounce). Scholars vary on the exact dates for when Menahem made the payment but Assyrian records from 740 and 738 BC include Menahem among the kings paying tribute to T-P, although those may be additional payments beyond the 1,000 talents of silver.²⁰ Typically, vassal states made annual payments; it was not a one-time deal!

Reading through T-P’s records, we notice a difference in the records of 734 BC. At that point in time, both Samaria (Israel) and Rezin of Damascus drop from the list of vassal states paying tribute. Making an appearance on the list, however, is Ahaz of Judah (under his fuller name Jeho-ahaz). At this point, the records show that T-P spent 734-732 warring against Samaria, Damascus, and Tyre, three countries in rebellion to Assyria and no longer honoring their tribute obligations.²¹



T-P’s later records present a summary of T-P’s accomplishments in 734-732 BC. In these summaries, we read that T-P conquered lands from the rebellious states of Syria (Damascus), Tyre, and Samaria, setting up his own king in Samaria, Hoshea. This brought Samaria again into the fold as a vassal state with Hoshea ruling in place of the deposed and assassinated rebellious King Pekah.²²

²⁰ Cogan, at 52-53.

²¹ This same tablet records that T-P placed a usurping king (Hulli) on the throne of Tabal. What was the cost to Hulli for this “opportunity”? 1,000 talents of silver! This is the same price paid by Menahem for his “throne,” and must have been the going rate!

In this same time period, T-P destroyed Damascus, finally defeating its king Rezin and putting him to death. This did not come about until after a long siege and the destruction of orchards, other cities, and the impaling of officials while still alive, before the besieged city (referenced and quoted earlier).

This Assyrian recording supplements the Biblical account consistently, shedding a bit of light on several points. The Biblical text recording the perspective of the Prophet Historian responsible for Kings does not directly reference the earlier tribute of Israel to Assyria under the reign of Jehu or Joash. Once Menahem bursts onto the scene, however, the Biblical story corresponds with the Assyrian records. Menahem stole the throne and paid the standard amount to the Assyrians to be guaranteed his throne as long as he conducted affairs properly as a vassal state (2 Ki. 15:17ff). It was the heavy tax that apparently led to the rebellion against the house of Menahem. His son was not on the throne even a year before his assassination at the hands of Pekah. Pekah was fronting a rebellion against Assyria. Rather than pay the annual taxes, Pekah rebelled, joining forces with Rezin from (Syria) Damascus. These two tried to get Ahaz to join them in their fight against T-P, and failing that tried to replace him on the throne of Judah (2 Kings 16:4-6; Is. 7:1-8). Rather than join Pekah and Rezin, Ahaz paid tribute to T-P seeking his assistance.

In our last lesson, we noted the court charges levied against Israel by the Lord in Hosea chapter four. These charges are not unlike those that Assyria ultimately brought against Samaria for failing to fulfill the covenant obligations of a vassal state. Under Assyrian law, the charges are brought before a public official. If the official is unable to make a decision, then the Ordeal commenced with the gods making the decision. In this vein in Hosea 4, the Lord comes against Israel charging them with failing to live up to their covenant. The covenant was not simply one of a vassal state, but the more intimate covenant likened to marriage. Israel violated the terms over and over in blatant and atrocious fashion. The appeals to the governing officials by the Lord through Hosea (and also through Amos) were fruitless. The officials (kings) did nothing. The Ordeal then was commencing! The Lord himself was pronouncing judgment and the judgment was coming!

T-P came against Damascus, Tyre, Israel (“Samaria”) and Philistia. T-P wrought devastation as he conquered lands, leveled cities, and forced submission. T-P

²² Cogan translates the tablet and comments at 61ff. Another tablet that is missing a good bit of text was recovered citing the same information but adding the name of Pekah as the deposed king and citing payment in silver by Hoshea for his title. Yet another tablet discusses the first wave of conquering in the Galilee and Gilead areas, carving the land into provinces and appointing Assyrian governors. See Cogan at 76ff.

claims in his records that he replaced the Samarian King Pekah with Hoshea. The Biblical record contains the same fact, setting it out:

In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried the people captive to Assyria. Then Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah and struck him down and put him to death and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah (2 Ki. 15:29-30).

These are the lands of Galilee and Gilead spoken of in T-P's records. The "conspiracy" of Hoshea was likely his move in cooperation with T-P. We do know from other records that Assyria typically kept spies in foreign courts, especially those of vassal states. Likely T-P had people in Samaria during this time that would effectuate and further such a conspiracy.

Among the list of cities conquered by T-P set out above in 2 Kings 15:29, is Hazor. This city gives insight not only into the warring approach of T-P, but also the Prophet Historian's unfelt need to exaggerate what happened. Scripture simply notes the city was "captured" and the people carried captive. In 1955, Famed Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin began a five-year excavation of Hazor. Yadin's work not only corroborated the Biblical account that T-P "captured" Hazor, but also confirmed T-P's rendering that he "leveled" the city. Yadin found:

...a thoroughly destroyed level covered by thick layers of ashes and pottery ascribing it to the latter part of the eighth century.²³

Commenting upon the find, Yadin noted:

The Bible (II Kings 15:29) describes this tragedy very laconically: "In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and captured ... Hazor..." It is only through the archaeological excavations that we now know the meaning of the words, "Came and captured". Tiglath-Pileser razed to the very ground the city of Hazor, once a key stronghold of the northern kingdom of Israel. The site we encountered...is worse than any I can remember in archaeological excavations. The entire area was covered by a layer of ashes 1 meter thick and still black! Everything in sight was broken and scattered on the floors of the houses. We could visualize the Assyrian soldiers roaming about the houses, looting

²³ Yadin, Yigael, *Hazor, The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible*, (Random House 1975), at 147.

whatever they could and destroying the rest. The fire was so violent that even the stones were black...²⁴

For the next nine years, Hoshea reigned in Samaria as a vassal state of Assyria (2 Ki. 17:1). The Prophet Historian notes that the evil of the many past kings continued during the reign of Hoshea. Hoshea's involvement with Assyria, however, remained that of a loyal vassal state. The land, diminished by the earlier losses to T-P is not found to have caused any more trouble. After the death of T-P, however, that changed.

The time then arose when, not heeding the words of Hosea the prophet, the people of Israel/Samaria rebelled against the new king Shalmaneser V. Hoshea the king went to Egypt's Pharaoh So, and allied himself, ceasing to pay his annual tribute to the Assyrian Empire.

As history shows Shalmaneser to be a king who accomplished next to nothing beyond his war with Samaria, we might assume that Israel thought him too weak and inactive to bother traveling all the way down to war with Israel. We should remember that Shalmaneser's father T-P started warring his first year of his reign and warred every year but one while alive. Shalmaneser, however, never seemed to go to war at all until Samaria quit paying tribute under Hoshea. At that point, however, The Empire Strikes Back! Shalmaneser came and conquered Samaria, but apparently died somewhere in the process, at least before full deportation. Kings records it:

Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him. Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria. And Hoshea became his vassal and paid him tribute. But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison. Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it.

In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes (2 Kings 17:1-6).

Assyrian records show that the deportation and resettlement of Samaria happened under King Sargon II. Sargon recorded:

²⁴ *Ibid.*, at 175-176.

I besieged and captured Samaria. I took as spoil 27,290 people who live there; I organized (a contingent of) 50 of their chariots and I instructed the rest of them in correct conduct. I appointed my eunuch over them and imposed upon them the tribute of the former king.²⁵

The people had to pay the tribute anyway, but lost their homes, livelihoods, and lifestyle. As Hosea prophesied, the King took the rich first into captivity. The highest in life were brought into Assyrian culture with a lower status than slaves. Those that were left in the land were “instructed” in “correct conduct.” Cogan explains that this would include instructions to “revere god and king,” meaning “rendering homage to the imperial god Ashur and the reigning king as his earthly representative.”²⁶ We read in another extant text of Sargon that as part of his spoils of war he took the idols of the Israelites in Samaria:

...and the gods in whom they trust, I counted [as] spoil.²⁷

This would likely refer to the golden calf in the sanctuary at Bethel. Hosea had prophesied this very incident noting:

The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven [Bethel]. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests—those who rejoiced over it and over its glory—for it has departed from them. The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king (Hos. 10:5-6).

In Assyrian speak, as set up by the prophet Hosea, the Ordeal was declared by the Almighty. Assyria merely executed *his* judgment. The Prophet Historian recounted the ghastly sins of Israel, including burning their children, worshipping idols, using divination, abandoning the commandments, and more. The Prophet Historian then makes it unequivocally clear:

Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight (2 Ki. 17:18).

The Bible then identifies not only where the Israelites were resettled, but also who was brought in to settle Samaria:

And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities (2 Ki. 17:24).

²⁵ Translated by Cogan, at 82.

²⁶ Cogan, at 84.

²⁷ Translated by Cogan at 89.

There were likely a number of Israelites left in the surrounding countryside that stayed on in Israel. Similarly, a number of them likely fled into Judah. The incoming people populated the land in great measure but not without incident. Lion attacks became a serious problem that was attributed, quite rightly it seems, to the LORD (2 Ki. 17:25ff). The solution for the religious and superstitious Assyrians was to send back to Israel a priest who could teach the worship of Samaria pre-deportation. This became an abhorrent blend of Yahweh worship with foreign deities mixed in. This also, according to at least one major strain of scholarship, is the origination of the Samaritan people, who will become important again as we study the New Testament.²⁸

CONCLUSION

As we put together the stories told by the contents in my great-grandmother's "grip," I was impressed all over again that our daily lives are the pages of tomorrow's history books. Repeatedly, we make choices and live with the consequences. Sometimes life seems more like a rat's treadmill where we run without regard to destination, simply doing what comes natural. Yet the story of Israel should shout sense to us. Life is not simply a treadmill. We really do have choices. These choices are real, and they affect our lives and the world.

I am committed anew to assess my actions and attitudes.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. "...they used divination and omens" (2 Ki. 17:17).

In this the Israelites were no different than their Assyrian conquerors. It seems poetic justice the Israelites would be sent to Assyria, because they practiced the same superstitious religious rituals! Think of the absurdity of what this verse means. There were a people that God specially delivered from Egyptian bondage. In a miraculous rescue, he brought them to a special silent place in the Desert Mountains of Sinai where God gave his clear instructions to the people. These instructions came complete with warnings about disobedience. God spoke to the people clearly in the language of the people. He gave them the insight and directions they needed to live in a land that would flow with milk and honey. This was a precarious land that flowed not only from its own production, but from its vantage point as a trading/transportation nexus for much of the civilized world. The only way for the land to be Israel's, and the only way for the people to live

²⁸ Insert Jewish Encyclopedia cite.

productively in the land, was to follow the instructions of the Lord. He did not hide those instructions in the stars or in the entrails of a goat. He spoke and wrote them for the people. Yet these people sought to give direction to life through divination and omens.

Now, before we wag our fingers and shake our heads in disgust over the Israelites and their choices, we need to put the issue into our culture today. We are no longer tempted to read omens in the liver of a cow. But are we turning instead to the revealed word of the Lord for our direction? Do we find our friends as our first counselors? Are we looking for excuses or do we rationalize ways to do the things we think we should do? Paul wrote Timothy about the last days where people will be “lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:2-5). It is in this sense that Paul then points Timothy to the value of God’s revealed word: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God [and woman of God!] may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Paul called the Scriptures the “oracles of God” to the Romans. This is what we have—not some liver omen, but the real words of God. Shall we listen to them and let them guide our lives? Or will we dismiss them in favor of our 21st century omens, all the while disgusted at the practice of Israel before its fall?

2. *“The LORD removed them [Israel] out of his sight”* (1 Ki. 17:18).

We know from the gospels that we worship a God of love and mercy. We worship a God who so loved the world that he gave his only son so that those of faith might live eternally. How do we sort through a verse like this? Do we go into a heretical fit like Marcion (remember your church history?²⁹) and declare that the God of the Old Testament is different than the God of the new? Do we ignore these passages even as we have just read from Paul that they are breathed out by God to equip us for every good work?

Let me suggest that these Scriptures are not incompatible with a God of love and mercy. Paul told the Romans to have “genuine love” and to “hate evil” (Rom. 12:9). This is the prophets’ cry as well. Amos warned Israel to “hate evil, and

²⁹ If not, download or listen to the church history lessons on the class website at www.Biblical-literacy.com. We have a great lesson on Marcion!

love good” (Amos 5:15). The Psalmist urged the same, “O you who love the LORD, hate evil!” (Ps. 97:10).

Evil is corrupting; evil is destructive. Sin is not simply taboo; sin has horrid consequences. God loves what is best for his children, even more so than every good earthly parent does. That is why he gives us instructions, to equip us for every “good work.” We need to sharpen our awareness of the harm of sin. This is not a rallying cry to sit in judgment on others. This is a personal cry that says we have choices, we have God’s directions, and we need to realize that sin is serious to him. May it be so also to us.

3. *“And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD. Therefore the LORD sent lions among them...”* (Hos. 3:1-2).

After the newcomers were settled in Israel, God did not wash his hands of them. Even though they were not Israelites, but were foreigners, God went to work on them. He began to speak to them in ways that they understood to bring them into a measure of faith in him.

Some scholars dismiss this account as a polemic attack upon the Samaritans, showing that they are not true Israelites and supporting the later Jewish indignation against them. I see this as the opposite. This is written to show that even though they did not understand the ways of Yahweh, even though they were not of the chosen people, God worked to move them and grow them in a faith relationship. A hallmark of God is his desire to be known by his people. God repeatedly reaches out in an effort to reveal him and to reveal his will (i.e., what is best for us). He does so in simple and direct ways that communicate.

We later see in the gospels the roles that the Samaritans would play in the stories of Jesus (recall the Good Samaritan in Luke 10?), the actions of Jesus (the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4), the response of the people (the thankful Samaritan in Luke 17) and even the first missionary efforts of the church outside Jerusalem (Acts 8). God’s merciful hand works with people where they are trying to move them to where they need to be. In the language of our home church for these lessons, God wants us to “know, grow, and go!” We learn of him, then knowing him, we grow in him. Then we are fit for service and seek to go serve him. This is our hope and our goal!

WANT MORE?

Meanwhile back in Judah... Read the story of Hezekiah and send me your thoughts!

Email us your thoughts and questions at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com.