

THE SETTLEMENT OF FOREIGNERS IN THE CITIES OF SAMARIA: A CLEAR WARNING 2 KINGS 17:24–41

Introduction

Patience is one of the most important qualities a person can possess. Bear in mind that a patient person is slow to speak, not easily angered, not prone to overreact. A patient person is more likely to understand, to be merciful and compassionate; more likely to be gentle and kind, a better listener. A patient person is also more open to receive others, even when a mistake is made. But, in reality, it is sometimes very difficult to be patient. A family member or fellow worker aggravates us or moves too slowly or fails to do what he or she promised. A parent becomes impatient with a child or a child with a parent. In the workplace, a supervisor or employee becomes impatient with others. The list of scenarios is endless.

The great subject of this passage is the patience of God and the end of His patience with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The day came when God's patience finally ended and His hand of judgment struck. For over 200 years God's patience had endured Israel's sin. He had been long-suffering with their wicked behaviour, their turning to false gods and worship, and their rejection of Him. Imagine the patience and forbearing needed to put up with the sinful, rebellious Israelites of the Northern Kingdom for over 200 long years.

Because of Israel's wickedness and their rejection of Him, God had no choice. The people had reached a point of no return, a day when their hearts would never repent nor turn back to Him. Consequently, there would be nothing but evil and wickedness flowing out of their lives. This, God could not allow. If there was no hope of the Israelites' ever repenting and living righteous lives as a testimony to the only living and true God, it was time for them to face the judgment of God.

Sadly and tragically, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell under the assault of the Assyrians and the people were transplanted into other conquered nations. This is: *The Tragic Fall of Israel, Its Conquest and Deportation of the People by the Assyrians (721 or 722 B.C.): The End of God's Patience and the Execution of His Judgment*, 2 Kings 17:1-41.

- I. The reign of Hoshea, the last king of Israel: a picture of reaping what one sows (vv. 1-4).
 - II. The climactic fall of Israel: the end of God's patience and His final judgment (vv. 5-6).
 - III. The terrible sins that caused Israel's fall: a tragic picture of sin's consequences (vv. 7-23).
 - IV. The settlement of foreign refugees in the land of Israel: a clear warning to the reader (vv. 24-41).
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2 Kings 17:24–41 The Settlement of Foreign Refugees in the Land of Israel: A Clear Warning to the Reader

Sometime after Israel's fall, the Assyrians repopulated the land with foreign refugees from other conquered nations. A close study of this point needs to be made, for the point closes with a striking warning to the reader (see vv. 35-41). Under the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III, a policy was begun of transferring or transplanting the populace of conquered nations into foreign nations. By switching the inhabitants, the king hoped to break the loyalty of the people to their own land and to transfer their allegiance to Assyria. Moreover, the transfer or transplantation policy helped eliminate the possibility of any major uprisings. It also assured intermarriage between various nations and the elimination of distinctive nationalities, which helped weaken the allegiance of people to their homeland. With this as background, note the Scripture and outline:

1. In resettling the land of Israel, the Assyrians chose foreign refugees from five conquered nations to populate the territory (v. 24). Coming from the regions of Babylon and Syria, the refugees were scattered throughout the towns of Samaria, that is, the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Through the following generations, the mixing of these races with the few Israelites who had been left behind became known as the Samaritans, especially during the times of the New Testament.
2. When the settlers arrived in the land of Israel, they faced an immediate problem (vv. 25-26). Lions were roaming all over the land since the Assyrians had depopulated it. As a result, some of the new settlers were being attacked and others killed. Scripture says this was a direct judgment of God, a judgment being executed due to the settlers' false worship. No doubt, the LORD was attempting to arouse them to turn to Him, the only true and living God.

In their desperation, the new settlers appealed to the king for help. Being polytheistic — worshippers of many gods — the settlers felt that the god of this particular land was displeased with their worship. So they shared this fact with the Assyrian king, apparently requesting the return of a priest from Israel who could instruct them in how to worship the God of Israel (v. 26). Note how little help the Israelites were who had been left behind, how ignorant they were of the LORD. Obviously, they knew so little about the LORD and His Word that they were unable to instruct or point the new settlers to Him.

3. Granting the request of the settlers, the Assyrian king sent a priest back to help them (vv. 27-28). Although unnamed, the priest was an Israelite who had been taken from Samaria to Babylon during the exile. The priest, settling in Bethel, began to teach the people how to worship the LORD, the only living and true God.
4. Sadly, however, the settlers corrupted the true worship of the LORD (vv. 29-34). They committed four serious errors:

a. Each national group of foreigners continued to worship their own false gods and shrines (vv. 29-31). None of them worshipped the LORD, not as the LORD instructed and demanded. Rather, the settlers worshipped as they had always worshipped:

=> The Babylonians worshipped Succoth Benoth.

=> The Cuthahians worshipped Nergal.

=> The Hamath citizens worshipped Ashima.

=> The Avvites worshipped Nibhaz and Tartak.

=> The Sepharvites offered human sacrifices to the false gods Adrammelech and Anammelech.

Knowing any details about these false gods with any accuracy or certainty is simply impossible.

b. Being polytheistic (believing in or worshipping more than one god), the settlers had no problem adding another god to their agenda. They worshipped the LORD and even appointed their own priests to lead them in worship (v. 32).

c. Of course, their own priests combined the worship of the true LORD with the worship of their own false gods (v. 33). This led to a *religion of syncretism* — a religion of compromise, of accommodation — a religion that accepted the viewpoints of all religions. (Russell Dilday. *1, 2 Kings*, p. 423).

d. The settlers continued living sinful, wicked lives (v. 34). They had no fear of the LORD; consequently they did not worship Him nor obey His Word and commandments. They ignored the fact that God had given His Holy Word to the world through Israel.

5. With this verse, the author gives a strong warning to the reader (vv. 35-41). Four specific warnings are issued.

a. The reader must remember God's covenant, His basic commandment (vv. 35-36). What is the basic — the foundational, primary — commandment? You must not fear or worship other gods: neither bow down to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them.

You must remember that the LORD alone saved and delivered His people from Egypt (a symbol of the world). Therefore, you must worship the LORD alone, bowing down and offering sacrifices to Him alone.

b. The reader must always obey God's Word (v. 37). You must keep all of God's Word, heeding this commandment in particular: you must not fear, worship false gods.

c. The reader must heed and never forget God's covenant (vv. 38-39). You must not worship false gods, but must worship the LORD and Him alone. You must know that the LORD alone saves you from the hand of all your enemies.

d. The reader must remember Israel's failure: they would not listen, but continued to walk in their wicked ways (vv. 40-41). They worshipped the LORD, but they also

worshipped false gods. And sadly, to this very day, they have continued to follow this false and empty religion of syncretism (mixing the worship of the LORD with false gods.)

Thought 1. Note how all four of the warnings given to the reader focus upon the first of God's Ten Commandments. The first commandment says this: you shall have no other gods before me (Exo 20:3).

In this commandment, God is making a forceful declaration and demand: people are to know and acknowledge the only living and true God, the LORD God Himself.

(1) God declares that people who think there is no God are wrong (atheists). I AM the LORD God, the true and living God. Atheists may deny God, and agnostics may question if God really exists, but God is forceful in His declaration.

=> "I AM — I AM the LORD your God" (v. 2).

Psa 14:1 *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."*

(2) No other object and no other being are ever to be set up as a so-called 'god.' Taking ideas or objects and beings and calling them God is forbidden, absolutely forbidden.

=> The LORD Himself (Jehovah, Yahweh) emphatically declares:

Isa 42:8 *"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols."*

=> The great apostle Paul declared:

1 Cor 8:5-6 *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, (as indeed there are many gods and many lords), Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live.*

We make a god out of anything that we esteem or love, fear or serve more than God. Again, whatever the heart clings to, that is a person's god. It may be oneself. Frankly, many people focus upon pleasing and satisfying themselves. They live by their own values and are concerned primarily with their own feelings, comfort, desires and pleasures. They simply live like they want and do their own thing. They have exalted themselves to be their own god. Other people make gods out of...

- heavenly bodies
- images
- recognition
- family
- the latest fashions
- science
- money
- fame
- sex
- cars, trucks
- force, energy
- property
- a career
- food
- sports
- animals
- position
- power
- pleasure
- recreation

A god can be anything or any person. Man's first allegiance, first loyalty, first devotion is to be to the LORD God. The LORD God is to be first in a man's life; He is to be enthroned in the heart of man. Man is to know and acknowledge that there is one God and one God alone. The first commandment of the LORD is to be obeyed:

"You shall have no other gods before me." (v. 3)

Note several points.

⇒ The so called gods of heaven and earth are nothing more than the creation of man's imagination and hands.

Rom 1:22-23 *Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

1 Cor 12:2 *You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.*

Psa 115:4-8 *But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.*

Isa 40:18-20 *With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him? As for an idol, a metal worker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot; they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple.*

Isa 45:20 *Gather together and come; assemble you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save.*

Jer 10:2-5 *This is what the LORD says: "Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the heavens, though the nations are terrified by them. For the practices of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good."*

⇒ There is only one true and living God, the LORD Himself (Jehovah, Yahweh).

Mark 12:32 *"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him."*

Mark 12:29-30 *"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'"*

1 Cor 8:4-6 *So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, (as indeed there are many gods and many lords), Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.*

Eph 4:6 *One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

1 Tim 2:5-6 *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

Deut 4:35 *You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other.*

Deut 6:4-5 *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

2 Sam 7:22 *“How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears.”*

1 Chr 17:20 *There is no one like you, LORD, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears.*

Psa 83:18 *Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD — that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.*

Psa 86:10 *For you are great and do marvellous deeds; you alone are God.*

Isa 43:10-11 *“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no saviour.”*

Isa 44:6 *“This is what the LORD says — Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: “I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.”*

Isa 45:18 *For this is what the LORD says — he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited — he says: “I am the LORD, and there is no other.”*

Isa 45:22 *“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”*

=> There is only one sovereign Creator who meets the needs of man.

Acts 17:23-31 *For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To an Unknown God. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’*

Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

Heb 11:3 *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

Gen 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

Neh 9:6 *You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.*

Job 26:7 *He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing.*

Psa 33:6 *By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.*

Psa 102:25 *In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ■*