



The Last Kings of Israel

A narrative about what happens when we rely on our own strength.

THE BIBLE

2nd Kings 15 - 17

Prepare for the Story

ICEBREAKER

No one likes to be in trouble or get punished. What was one of the worst punishments that you had to endure? What made it so difficult?

Rewind the Story

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Passing the Torch – Elisha’s Ministry
- Jonah – A big fish story
- Amos – A Farmer and a Plumb Line
- Undying Love – Hosea & Gomer

Hear the Story

Scene One: The Kings of Israel

After Solomon’s death and the division of the kingdom, the northern kingdom, Israel, had many kings. The first was Jeroboam, and he ruled for twenty-two years. Some of these kings followed ***Yahweh***, but many did not.

Over the course of nearly two hundred years, seventeen different rulers held the title of King of Israel. God sent prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea to warn these kings and the people to turn from their wicked ways and rededicate themselves to God. Sometimes, they listened and changed their behavior. But given enough time, it was clear that their change of heart was only temporary.

God had warned them of the consequences of their actions. He told them what would happen if they didn't change their ways, and it was a result that couldn't be avoided forever.

Scene Two: Regional Politics

Pekah was the nineteenth King of the North. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and caused the people of Israel to stray from the ways of the LORD. At that time, the King of Assyria was sweeping the region. He captured city after city, taking control of the area and deporting the people. This is how he built his empire.

During Pekah's seventeenth year as King, while facing the threat of the Assyrian Empire pressing against his kingdom - a new ruler was crowned King in the South. His name was Ahaz, and he became the king of Judah.

Pekah saw an opportunity to be proactive instead of reactive. So, he made an alliance with Rezin, the King of Aram. Together, they devised a plan to overpower the Assyrian Empire. In order to do this, they approached Ahaz, the new king of Judah, and asked him to join them in fighting against the Assyrians.

When Ahaz refused, Pekah and Rezin plotted to overthrow Ahaz. They brought their troops together and surrounded the capital city of Jerusalem. They didn't let anyone enter or leave the city. They wanted to overthrow Ahaz and install a new partner on the throne in Judah.

When Ahaz realized that he was surrounded and in need of help, he managed to send a message to the Assyrian King. It's not entirely clear how he managed to do this; some speculate that there was a secret entrance to the city that Ahaz was able to utilize, along with the message he sent the silver and gold from the temple of the LORD and the treasures from the royal palace to the King of Assyria. He also offered himself and the nation of Judah to serve the Assyrian King.

With this promise in place, Assyria attacked Aram and Israel, destroying their cities and taking many of the people captive. Rezin, King of Aram, was put to death, and those who were taken captive were deported from their homeland and taken to live in Assyrian cities.

Scene Three: Assyrian Control

Pekah remained King in Israel while the Assyrians continued to assert their control in the region. During this time, a man named Hoshea was a captain in Pekah's army; he aligned himself with the Assyrians who had invaded Samaria and assassinated Pekah. As a reward, the Assyrian King made Hoshea the new King of Israel. But He was more of a figurehead leader than a king ... because his loyalty remained with the King of Assyria, paying large amounts of money as tribute back to him.

Hoshea also did evil in the eyes of the LORD, but he was not nearly as evil as the kings who had come before him. But his allegiance was not with the people of Israel or the LORD ... He lived to serve the King of Assyria.

Scene Four: Hosea's Rebellion

During Hoshea's reign, the king of Assyria died, and his son became the new leader of the Assyrian Kingdom. Hoshea had grown tired of the arrangement he had made with the previous Assyrian king, so he decided to break away from Assyrian control. So, He stopped sending money to Assyria and approached the Pharaoh in Egypt to form a new alliance and break free from Assyria's power.

When the new King of Assyria discovered Hosea's treachery, he arrested him and put him in prison for his rebellion. Then the Assyrians invaded the entire land and put the capital city of Samaria under siege. Those who supported Hosea's rebellion tried to hold off the Assyrians, but after three years, the city fell, and the people of Israel were exiled to Assyria.

This disaster came upon the nation of Israel because the people worshipped other gods and turned their back on the LORD, who had brought them out of Egypt.

They did wicked things, and although the LORD warned them through the prophets, saying, *“Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, which are recorded for you in the laws that I gave your ancestors”*, they would not listen. They were stiff-necked and stubborn. They did what they wanted to do, and because of their selfishness and pride, the people of Israel were taken from the Promised Land and exiled to Assyria.

Scene Five: Lions in the Land

After taking the Israelites from their homeland, the King of Assyria took people from all over his Kingdom and relocated them to the towns in Samaria, replacing the exiled Israelites. They moved in and immediately made themselves at home. When they heard about Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, they treated Him like any other god. They didn't show Him honor or respect, so God sent lions into the towns and city streets.

A message was sent to the king of Assyria, *“The people you brought to this foreign land don't know what's expected of them from the god who resides here. He's sent lions, and they are killing people left and right.”* So the King of Assyria sent this order, *“Send back some of the Israelite priests who were taken into exile. They can go back and instruct the people about what the god of the land expects from them.”*

So, one of the priests who was taken was brought back to Bethel. There, he taught them how to worship and honor the LORD. Despite this instruction, the Assyrian people continued to worship their own gods, building shrines and altars to the many gods they worshipped in their homeland. They honored and worshiped the LORD, but not exclusively; they remained faithful to the old gods of the places they had come from.

To this day, their children and grandchildren continue to do as their ancestors did; while they worship the LORD, they continue to follow their other idols.

Retell the Story

- After Solomon's death, Jeroboam took over the Northern Kingdom; what kind of leader was he?
- What were the kings who came after Jeroboam like?

- What did God do to try and help the kings lead the nation in the right way?
- What happened to pit the nation of Israel and the nation of Judah against each other?
- Who did the king of Judah turn to for help?
- What happened to the Israelites after the Assyrians invaded?
- Who became a 'figurehead' king in Israel?
- Who did Hoshea turn to in order to break free from Assyrian control?
- What happened after the Assyrians broke the Israelite rebellion?
- What happened to the Assyrians who moved into the Northern Kingdom?

Discuss the Story

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?
- Why do you think the kings of Israel largely ignored the prophets that God sent to them?
- Why do you think Ahaz, King of Judah, turned to the Assyrians for help against Israel and Aram?
- When the King of Assyria died, Hoshea tried to break free from Assyrian control; why do you think He turned to Egypt? What significance might there be that He sought support from a nation where his people had been imprisoned instead of the God who had delivered them?
- Why do you make of the lions that God sent to the streets in the towns of Samaria?

- Did you hear anything that reminded you of **other** stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- What do you notice from this story about God's character or qualities?

Join the Story

1) LACK OF LEADERSHIP

The cycle of good kings and bad kings is clearly highlighted in Israel's story. What role do you think poor leadership had to play in the downfall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel? Have you experienced poor leadership in the local church? If so, what impact did it have? Where have you seen good leadership in the church, and how has that made a difference?

2) TRUST OR FALL

In the story, the global political scene takes center stage. We see the leaders of multiple nations game and scheme to get what they want. They make alliances and reject alliances. What stands out is that both the King of Israel and the King of Judah choose to place their trust in the strength of other nations instead of the LORD. In what ways do we do the same thing? What are some places that we turn to and place our trust in when it feels like things are getting out of control? Why do you think it can be so hard to turn to and trust God during difficult times?

3) ROARING LIONS

After the Israelites are taken from the Promised Land, the Assyrians move in, and something strange happens ... lions suddenly start roaming the streets and killing people. We are told the reason for this bizarre situation is that the Assyrians don't know how to worship Yahweh. In the end, they begin to worship God, but they also keep worshipping the other 'gods' that they grew up with. In what ways do we often do the same thing, worship God and give other 'gods' our attention and devotion?

(After answering the first part of the question)

Read 1 Peter 5:8. What should we take from Peter's warning in this passage? How seriously should we take worshipping God and God alone?

Pray

God,

When we look at the history of your people, we can't help but see how far short they fell. They turned to other nations and other gods to do what only You can do. We like to think that we are wiser and more advanced than the people who have come before us, but today we confess that we are not. The truth is we are just like those who have come before us. Too often we ignore Your instruction. Too frequently we have turned from Your ways. Tragically, we often wait until we have run out of other options before we turn back to You. God, break our rebellious hearts. Remind us of Your goodness and Your faithfulness. We want to put our trust in You and You alone. Amen.