

How Did We Get Here?
A Biblical Assessment for the Problems of our Current Culture
2 Kings 17:33-41

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Text Introduction: Our text is an unusual one in that it addresses those who came to live in the land of Israel after the people of Israel were brought into exile. I pray that you will see the importance of this text in helping us to see the problems of our own contemporary culture as well as that of our own hearts.

Text: They feared the LORD, but they also worshiped their own gods according to the custom of the nations where they had been deported from.

³⁴ They are still practicing the former customs to this day. None of them fear the LORD or observe their statutes and ordinances, the law and commandments the LORD commanded the descendants of Jacob. He had renamed him Israel.³⁵ The LORD made a covenant with them and commanded them, "Do not fear other gods; do not bow down to them; do not serve them; do not sacrifice to them."³⁶ Instead fear the LORD, who brought you from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm. You are to bow down to Him, and you are to sacrifice to Him.³⁷ You are to be careful always to observe the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandments He wrote for you; do not fear other gods.³⁸ Do not forget the covenant that I have made with you. Do not fear other gods,³⁹ but fear the LORD your God, and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies."

⁴⁰ However, they would not listen but continued practicing their former customs.⁴¹ These nations feared the LORD but also served their idols. Their children and grandchildren continue doing as their fathers did until today.

Introduction: In order to see the impact of this text today, we need to remind ourselves of the basic outline of Israel's history again. Israel's first king was Saul, followed by David and Solomon. With Solomon, the kingdom reached the zenith of its existence in regards to wealth and power. With the death of Solomon, there is a struggle for control, which eventually leads to a divided kingdom. After Solomon, we then refer to Israel as the Northern Kingdom comprised of 10 tribes and Judah as the Southern Kingdom made up of just 2 tribes.

Because each kingdom's continued rebellion against God, each kingdom eventually falls into the hands of the Assyrians or Babylonians. Israel's fall was first. Judah's came second. Second Kings 1-17 tells the story of the final days before Israel's fall.

The Biblical narrative in 2 Kings 17 is telling one more time of Israel's failure to obey God. The story is being told to make plain to all subsequent readers that the fall was due to their rebellion and sin against God.

Our text today, again, tells a bit of the detail of that period in Israel's history that doesn't often get told. This text tells us that as Assyria moved some of the people of Israel out, they moved others in to take their place. There is a mixing of people. These people bring their gods with them.

Here is where the story really gets interesting and even ironic. Because of the continued practice even among these foreigners to worship pagan gods, God (Jehovah God, the one true God) sends lions among the people (v. 25). The settlers cry out to the Assyrians about these lions. Here comes the irony. The Assyrians sent back for some of Israel's priests to come and "teach them the customs of the God of the land." You could say that the Assyrian king was more fearful of God than were the Israelites he had just uprooted from the land.

Thus, we read verse 33, "They feared the Lord, but they also worshipped their own gods." Thus, we read verse 41, "These nations feared the Lord but also served their idols."

The Problem Identified

Brothers and sisters, our nation has a problem. Our culture has a problem. Our churches in America have a problem. And, yes, many of us have a problem. And, our problem is the same as the problem identified in our text today. Forgive me if you think I am trying to make the complex problems of our world today so simple, but our text helps us to do that. Here is our problem:

We fear or worship God but we serve idols.

Worshipping God and serving God, by virtue of this text, is not the same thing. It should be, but obviously it is not. Let me see, if by using the text, if we can make sense of it.

1. Worship of God that attempts to appease God is not true worship.

The first thing to note about the worship described in this text is the motivation to worship. They wanted to get rid of the lions. A lot of so called worship today is to get rid of the lions. "God, if you will do this, I will worship you." That kind of worship will never lead to authentic worship.

2. Worship of God that does not result in obedience to God is not true worship.

The second thing to note about the worship described in this text is the seemingly conflicting language of verses 32, 33, and 34. In verse 32 and verse 33 they are said to fear the Lord. In verse 34, they are said to "not fear the Lord." If worship is words, one could say they gave lip service to God. If worship is obedience to His commands, they did not worship.

3. Worship of God with a divided heart is not true worship.

The third thing to note about the worship described in this text is the obvious feeble attempt to worship two gods. Look at verse 33. Can't you just hear the words of Jesus: "No one can serve two masters. He will either love the one and hate the other or be devoted to one and despise the other." (Matthew 6:24)

Legendary NBA star Michael Jordan was visiting in the home of friend, Fred Whitfield. Whitfield, himself, was the president and chief executive officer of the Charlotte NBA basketball team. Before they left for dinner that evening, the weather had turned cooler prompting Jordan to ask to borrow a jacket.

Whitfield pointed him to a closet and told him to pick out what he wanted. Jordan returned with an armful of jackets and other items—all with the Puma brand. Jordan, of course, represented the familiar Nike brand. Jordan then went to the kitchen and got a butcher knife and commenced to slashing all of the Puma merchandise.

Of course, Whitfield protested, “What are you doing?”

Jordan said, “Hey, man, I will call my Nike representative tomorrow and get all of this stuff replaced, but don’t ever let me see you in this stuff again. You can’t ride the fence.” (Kyle Idleman, *Gods at War*, Zondervan, 2013, p. 41-42.)

That story might make us uncomfortable, but the story makes a valuable point. In fact, Jordan’s actions show us a good picture of idol smashing.

You can’t ride the fence. We can’t be neutral. In this cultural war that is taking place in our country, we cannot sit on the fence.

So, the question is not one of who do you say you worship. The question is “Who do you serve?” Who are you sacrificing for?

The Problem Multiplied

Now, the problem is identified in the first sentence of verse 41. The problem is multiplied or magnified in the second sentence of verse 41. This is a scary verse to me. Now, understand, the “until today” represents to the day that 2 Kings was written, not to our “today.” However, it could be said “until our today.”

You see, what scares me about this text is that every subsequent cycle of sin and hardness of heart against a holy God moves us farther and farther away from God. It also reminds us that our generation is paving the way for the generation that comes after us.

The Problem Personalized

To this point, this is a sermon that for the most part is easy for us to “Amen!” It is easy to say, “You’re right. That’s the problem with our nation. That’s the problem with this culture. We have a lot of church going, Bible-thumping, song-singing people who fill up churches on Sunday, but don’t serve him the rest of the week.”

But, what about when we personalize this text? What evidence is there to say that we serve Him? Consider verses 36-38.

I can’t do anything about some things in our world today, but I can do something about me. We must be a Hezekiah. Read 2 Kings 18:1-6

In the third year of Israel’s King Hoshea son of Elah, Hezekiah son of Ahaz became king of Judah. ² He was 25 years old when he became king and reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. ³ He did what was right in the LORD’s sight just as his ancestor David had done. ⁴ He removed the high places, shattered the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He

broke into pieces the bronze snake that Moses made, for the Israelites burned incense to it up to that time. He called it Nehushtan.

⁵ Hezekiah trusted in the LORD God of Israel; not one of the kings of Judah was like him, either before him or after him. ⁶ He remained faithful to Yahweh and did not turn from following Him but kept the commands the LORD had commanded Moses.