

BIBLE BRIEFING

“Don’t be Cowered by Cowardly Lions”

Second Kings 17:23-41

2 Kings 17:23 ...the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, *as it is* to this day.

2 Kings 17:24 Then the king of Assyria brought *people* from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities.

2 Kings 17:25 And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, *that* they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed *some* of them.

2 Kings 17:26 So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land."

2 Kings 17:27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land."

2 Kings 17:28 Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

Introduction

A quick review of Second Kings would be helpful right about now:

1. In chapters one and two Elijah completed his ministry and was taken into Heaven.
2. Elisha assumed the mantle of prophet and conducted a miraculous ministry from chapters two through eight.
3. Nevertheless the spiritual condition of both the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah progressively grew worse. The decline is documented in chapters nine through sixteen.
4. In our chapter (seventeen) the Northern kingdom has come to the end of God’s longsuffering.

In the opening verses you read that the Northern kingdom of Israel had been besieged by the Assyrians for three years then carried away captive to Assyria. The Assyrians made an attempt to repopulate the region with their own people but encountered a problem. Lions were attracted to Samaria at this time because of the unburied carcasses following the war and because of the depopulation of areas that had formerly been inhabited.

The settlers believed the lions to be a divine judgment from the God of Israel. They called for a Jewish priest to come and teach them the ways of Jehovah in order to eliminate the lion threat.

It sounds good and apparently it ‘worked’ because you don’t read that the lions continued to threaten the repopulation.

The problem was that the new population didn’t come to know the God of Israel. They were only trying to appease Him as if He were one of many possible deities. The result of their plan was the creation of a new religion that was a mixture of truth with error. This was the beginning of the people we read about in the New Testament called the Samaritans after the capital city of the Northern kingdom.

The Samaritans themselves derive their name not from this geographical designation, but rather from the term שַׁמְרִים (Shamerim), “keepers [of the law].”¹ In 2005 there were about 700 Samaritans, living mostly on the holy Mount Gerizim near the city of Nablus (Shechem) in the West Bank, and in the city of Holon in Israel.²

I want to focus on what looks to be an allegory within this historic account. By the way, the other night at one of our Cal-T.E.C. sessions someone asked me, *What is an allegory?* It is a figure conveying a meaning other than and in addition to the literal.

In this historic narrative the lions are very literal. But they also convey an additional meaning, one that is spiritual. When I see a lion or lions in the text I can’t help but think of the apostle Peter’s words

¹ The Emergence of the Samaritan Community (Lecture given by Professor Abraham Tal at Mandelbaum House, August 2001)

² Wikipedia article

that the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (First Peter 5:8).

You can get into trouble pressing allegories too far in the Bible. You always need some sort of biblical reference to build upon. In this case the verse about the devil being a roaring lion in our midst gives us justification to at least explore the allegorical possibilities. We just need to be careful to not press it too far. Every detail in the story won't be part of the allegory.

Lions were walking about seeking whom they may devour. The people didn't form hunting parties. They didn't capture the lions and open up the first Lion Country Safari theme park.

They correctly understood this to be a spiritual problem. They therefore sought a spiritual solution.

Many problems that seem physical are really spiritual. They have spiritual sources. In the Book of Ephesians the apostle Paul reminded us that,

Eph 6:12 ...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

He had just discussed life at home, and on the job, and in the world. Then he said that there was a spiritual warfare going on. It is in those literal places where the lions roam and roar.

If you are having trouble at home or at work you should meet it with spiritual resources and weaponry. The fruit of the Spirit, which is love, should be your strategy rather than some work of the flesh.

I would give kudos to the locals repopulating Samaria for recognizing the spiritual nature of the lions and for calling upon a Jewish priest to help them. It is what they do with God's help that is their problem and downfall.

2 Kings 17:29 However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put *them* in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, *every* nation in the cities where they dwelt.

They took the Word of God that was given to them by the priest of God and they mixed it with their own religions and philosophies. Some things cannot be mixed successfully. I was an adult before someone told me *not* to mix bleach and ammonia. Apparently it creates chlorine gas which was used as a chemical weapon in World War 1.

The world always has its religions and philosophies. There is a natural tendency to try to mix the supposed wisdom of the world with biblical truth. As an example I have often cited what is commonly called psychology. Over the past twenty years there has been such a concerted effort to integrate psychology with Christianity that most believers are no longer uncomfortable with it. Their first thought when they need spiritual help is to seek out a psych-trained 'professional.'

Christians who seek to integrate secular psychology with the Bible would have you believe that our soul care was deficient and ineffective for all the centuries up until our own, when certain godless men "discovered" the previously hidden principles to help hurting people. That's just nonsense!

Nevertheless, believers readily embrace Christian psychology. Pastor and author John MacArthur writes,

There may be no more serious threat to the life of the church today than the stampede to embrace the doctrines of secular psychology. They are a mass of human ideas that Satan has placed in the church as if they were powerful, life-changing truths from God...The result is that pastors, biblical scholars, teachers of Scripture, and caring believers using the Word of God are disdained as naive, simplistic, and altogether inadequate counselors. Bible reading and prayer are commonly belittled as "pat answers," incomplete solutions for someone struggling with depression or anxiety. Scripture, the Holy Spirit, Christ, prayer, and grace - those are the traditional solutions Christian counselors have pointed people to. But the average Christian today has come to believe that none of them really offers the cure for people's woes (Our Sufficiency In Christ, p. 60).

Secular psychology is not really a science at all – it is a philosophy. It is a worldly, man-centered philosophy that is completely at odds with the teachings of the Bible about the nature of mankind. Christian psychology – the attempt to integrate secular psychology and the

Bible – is really an effort to embrace the philosophies of the godless, Christ-rejecting world.

In Colossians 2:8 we read,

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Philosophy is man's way of viewing man and life and how to help and/or change people.

Empty deceit involves humanly contrived ways of thinking that originate in spiritual deception and therefore are not built upon true godly realities.

The tradition of man is another area of dangerous enticement, because it is merely man passing on to man that which seemed to be useful or desirable.

Closely related to these traditions are the **basic principles of the world** which represents the contemporary, conventional wisdom and accepted procedures of society.

We are to watch out for and sound the alarm about these perspectives on life. We are **not** to welcome them into the church. We are **not** to integrate them into our message and ministry. This certainly includes the psychological theories of man. We must **not** allow anyone to lead us into these directions. This warning and prohibition applies no matter how well educated, intended, popular, or influential in the church a leader may be.

Next take a look at the 'gods' mentioned in Samaria:

2 Kings 17:30 The men of Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima,

2 Kings 17:31 and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.

2 Kings 17:32 So they feared the LORD, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places.

[2 Kings 17:33](#) They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.

Succoth-Benoth was a Babylonian god that was shaped like a hen and her chickens. The first word, "Succoth," means "hen" and the second one, "Benoth," means "daughters" or "chicks." Nergal was a deity of the Babylonian netherworld and was similar to the Roman war god, Mars. It looked like a wild rooster. The god Ashima is of unknown origin, but the Talmud says it looked like a "hairless he-goat." Nibhaz was an unknown dog-shaped deity, while Tartak looked like a donkey. Finally, Adrammelech and Anammelech were, as their compound names suggest, Molech-like gods. Tradition says that they took the forms of a mule and a horse.³

There is a recent movement called the emerging church. At the heart of the Emergent Church movement - or as some of its leaders prefer to call it, the "conversation"- lies the conviction that changes in the culture signal that a new church is "emerging." Christian leaders must therefore adapt to this emerging (or emergent) church.

One of the big names in the emerging church movement is Brian MacClaren. He is the founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church in the Washington-Baltimore area and the author of two previous books on contemporary Christianity, including *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*.

- being changed to bring change -

Here is a sample of his thoughts:

"Certainty is overrated... History teaches us that a lot of people thought they were certain and we found out they weren't."

Talking about the substitutionary atonement of Jesus he asks how can punishing an innocent person make things better, then says, "That sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse" (*The Story We Find Ourselves In*, p. 102).

"I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts" (*A Generous Orthodoxy*).

³ E-sword, *The Preachers Commentary*

Our purpose tonight is not a discussion of the emerging church movement. I mention it only as an example of our tendency to mix the world and the Word. It is nothing less than Samaritanism.

The lion is in our midst. He's roaring, seeking whom he may devour. You rightly understand that the situation is spiritual and therefore requires spiritual solutions.

Don't stop there! Stick with the source! There is nothing wrong with the armor God has already provided. His defensive weaponry is sufficient. His offensive weapons – the Word and prayer – are powerful and unconquerable.

There **is** a sufficiency in Christ to overcome the lion and the world and our own flesh. Don't try to find a modern or post-modern solution.

Conclusion

The best conclusion is the warning that ends chapter seventeen:

2 Kings 17:33 They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods - according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.

2 Kings 17:34 To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel,

2 Kings 17:35 with whom the LORD had made a covenant and charged them, saying: "You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them;

2 Kings 17:36 but the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, Him you shall worship, and to Him you shall offer sacrifice.

2 Kings 17:37 And the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall be careful to observe forever; you shall not fear other gods.

2 Kings 17:38 And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods.

2 Kings 17:39 But the LORD your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies."

2 Kings 17:40 However they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals.

2 Kings 17:41 So these nations feared the LORD, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children's children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day.



